

WORLD SERVICE CONFERENCE  
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FOR WSC '87

Narcotics Anonymous,  
**It Works:**  
How and Why



World Service Conference  
Literature Committee  
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For WSC '87



Narcotics Anonymous (often referred to as N.A.) is a Fellowship 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. The Program of Narcotics Anonymous is based on spiritual principles, principles that are incorporated in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of N.A. Thousands of addicts have achieved total abstinence and ongoing recovery through the application of these principles.

In 1982, the book, *Narcotics Anonymous*, was first published. In its pages, the disease of addiction was described by recovering addicts who shared their personal experiences, strengths, and hopes. This book outlined a new way of life, and became known as the Basic Text of recovery. It provides general information and discussion about the principles of recovery found in the Narcotics Anonymous Program.

*It Works: How and Why* is intended to provide an in-depth explanation of the principles of the N.A. Program. The experience of countless recovering addicts has demonstrated that the N.A. Program works. These addicts have shared, through their collective experience, that the answer to *how* it works is the Twelve Steps. The answer to *why* it works is the application of the Twelve Traditions. Appropriately, this text is entitled *It Works: How and Why*.

(Continued on back)

*Narcotics Anonymous,  
It Works: How and Why*

**Narcotics Anonymous,**  
**It Works:** How and Why

Part One

*A Guide to the Twelve Steps and  
Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous*



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*This book is dedicated to the entire Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous—to its newest and yet-to-be members, without whom there would be no opportunity to share the miracle of recovery; and to its older members, to whom we are gratefully indebted for showing us the way to a new life—in order that no addict, anywhere, need die from the horrors of addiction.*



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## E P I G R A P H

**T**he principles of the N.A. Program are the keys to freedom from addiction. Our experience has shown that there are no boundaries on that freedom, as long as we practice those principles and stay clean. May a loving Power greater than yourself be with you as you learn to apply the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. As you practice these principles in all of your affairs, you will find a freedom and joy you never knew existed. These spiritual truths are the Narcotics Anonymous Program, and it is through them that *It Works!*



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## A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

The information for this text was drawn from the experiences of recovering addicts throughout the world. Particular effort was made to solicit participation from N.A.'s earliest members, who shared valuable knowledge and perspective, especially with regard to the Twelve Traditions. We are grateful to the many contributors for this book who are too numerous to list, and who in fact decline special mention in the spirit of anonymity. We would also like to express our appreciation to A.A. World Services, Inc., who granted permission to reprint and adapt the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. This book is offered, in a spirit of humility and gratitude, in the hope that all addicts may find recovery through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous.



## I N T R O D U C T I O N

**T**his book contains twenty-four chapters that discuss and explain the principles of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. These principles form the basis of the Narcotics Anonymous Program. The Twelve Steps are the basic framework by which our lives change from active addiction to recovery. The Twelve Traditions provide for groups what the Twelve Steps do for individuals. The widespread growth of Narcotics Anonymous and the recovery of thousands of addicts point to the beneficial necessity of holding to these principles.

Because addiction is a threefold illness, affecting us physically, mentally, and spiritually, any discussion of the principles of recovery necessarily involves discussion of a Power greater than ourselves. Throughout these pages, you will find reference to *God*, *Higher Power* and *God as we understand Him*. We use these terms interchangeably, to mean only one thing—a Power greater than ourselves who does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The Fellowship of N.A. encourages you to search out and discover for yourself a God of your own understanding. In using the term “God as we understand Him” we do not mean to imply male gender or any specific religious concept. Some of us believe in a Power greater than ourselves which is based on our religious beliefs, and some base their belief on the power of the N.A. Program. For others, it is the power of the people in the group. It does not matter what we call this Power greater than ourselves, only that we come to believe in it and use it. We use these words only for the sake of simplicity, and acknowledge that each of us is entitled to develop and believe in our own personal concept of a Higher Power.

The Twelve Steps offer us a solution to the disease of addiction, and an alternative to the miserable existence we have known before. Through practicing and applying each of the Twelve Steps,

we discover the gift of recovery. This miracle is a gift in every sense of the word: it is freely given and unconditional. Even though it is a gift, the recovery process also involves a lot of work on our part. We believe this action is necessary in order to hold on to the gift that we have been given. Our ongoing recovery is a result of some combination of our own hard work and God's grace. We are not necessarily more deserving or more virtuous than other addicts who still suffer. We are just more fortunate, and we must work very hard to apply these spiritual principles so that we don't carelessly lose the gift of recovery. As we stay clean and practice each of the Twelve Steps, we realize that it is truly a privilege to apply these principles.

Before beginning the steps, an addict must have a desire to stop using. With the willingness to avoid the first fix, pill, or drink, total abstinence and recovery become possible. Living the Twelve Steps enables us to stay clean. In this way, a miracle happens: The obsession with drugs is lifted, and we experience recovery.

Never before were we able to go beyond the areas in our lives where fear stepped in and we stopped short. There were always times when fear and terror would overwhelm us, and we knew we could not go on. We all experienced a quitting point. However, most of us, even in the depths of our active addiction, wondered what was on the other side of that imaginary line we could never cross.

The Twelve Steps initiate the process of being restored to sanity. A Power greater than ourselves takes over. At the points where we always retreated before, we become able to go on with the help of this Power. Through this Power, we are given a healing surge of life which carries us through our fears and anger. It ignites in us the will to live and the desire to know the truth. We seek the spiritual truth about ourselves, about our fellow human beings, about God, as we begin to understand Him, and about the universe in which we live.

Addiction is a lonely disease of isolation. Through the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous, however, we find that we no longer have to be alone. When we examine the steps, we see that each of the first eleven begins with the word "we." This tells us to

seek counsel and companionship as we embark on our new path. We find it helpful to use a sponsor or another experienced N.A. member in working the Twelve Steps. We draw on the experience of those who came before us to guide us in applying the principles. These addicts freely share with us what was freely shared with them—recovery from addiction. They guide us and teach us, through example, how to live by these dynamic principles.

In the process of working the steps, we may view them as a privilege or as a problem. As long as we apply them, our viewpoint is not important. We may cry; we may complain or feel sorry for ourselves; we may even get angry. However, from the experience of addicts who have held both postures, relating to the steps as a privilege rather than a curse is infinitely more helpful and constructive. Viewing the steps as punishment leaves us unnecessarily critical of ourselves. In this misguided attitude, we may inadvertently torture ourselves with the spiritual tools which were meant to heal us. However, if we gratefully and willingly grasp the opportunity to apply these principles, we find more energy and peace with which to live the Twelve Steps.

When we come to Narcotics Anonymous, many of us want to recover in our own way. By the nature of our disease, we are close-minded and distrustful, and most likely find it difficult to take suggestions. We may try to apply some of the N.A. principles, while disregarding those which are more demanding or uncomfortable. Through painful experience, we find it is absolutely crucial to abandon our familiar, self-centered ways and begin accepting direction. This is the only way we achieve the open-mindedness and humility necessary to begin recovering. As we surrender self-will and begin concerning ourselves with our groups and other recovering addicts, we find that the wisdom of accepting direction is practical in applying the Twelve Traditions as well as the Twelve Steps.

The traditions exist in order to keep the N.A. Fellowship true to its purpose of recovery. In this way, the philosophy of N.A. is not distorted. Adherence to the principles of the Twelve Traditions ensures the growth and continuation of the Fellowship. When problems arise, we apply the Twelve Traditions exactly as they are written—not the way we think they ought to read. If we faithfully



follow these principles, the N.A. Fellowship grows in an atmosphere of love and acceptance; we are able to assist other addicts in recovery. We therefore avoid chaos, controversy, and disruption, which could threaten the recovery of addicts everywhere.

When any one of the Twelve Traditions is violated, tact and diplomacy must be utilized in addressing these sensitive matters. Most addicts have been wrong so many times in the past that we become self-righteous, and thrill at the opportunity when we are right for once. We may be tempted to rush into a discussion, hurling accusations and demanding judgment. However, this attitude is self-defeating and frequently causes more harm than good. If we have applied the Twelve Steps in our lives, we have begun to develop a basic understanding and compassion for ourselves and others. We have seen that the need to always be right rarely leads to contentment or beneficial solutions. We must learn to be tactful in approaching these difficult situations. While we acknowledge the need to protect our Fellowship through application of the Twelve Traditions, it is also important that this vigilance be balanced with diplomacy and understanding.

In resolving actions which violate the Twelve Traditions, we keep in mind that no N.A. member ever intends to harm the Fellowship. Since our very lives depend on the N.A. Program, imperiling N.A. is, in effect, imperiling our own existence. Most of us realize this on an intuitive level and may react violently or fearfully to events which we perceive as threats to the welfare of N.A. It is very helpful to remember this concern when we see mistakes. Just as we did not consciously choose to live miserably in active addiction, we understand that no recovering addict consciously chooses to disrupt the N.A. Fellowship. With this perspective, we approach each other in a spirit of helpfulness and cooperation. We avoid antagonistic confrontations, striving instead for cooperative efforts in solving our common problems. We allow ourselves time to think over suggestions, being careful always to treat others with respect and dignity.

If we are unable to solve problems using sincere tact and diplomacy, we look to the experience of other members lending advice and guidance. Just as we utilize a sponsor in practicing the Twelve Steps, it is also helpful to solicit the advice of experienced

members in questions of the Twelve Traditions. We may prepare a factual, objective letter for our area service committee or region, if necessary. However, it is always best to resolve problems before this level if possible, keeping foremost in mind the welfare of the group and N.A. as a whole.

The principles of the N.A. Program are the keys to freedom from addiction. Our experience has shown that there are no boundaries on that freedom, as long as we practice those principles and stay clean. May a loving Power greater than yourself be with you as you learn to apply the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. As you practice these principles in all of your affairs, you will find a freedom and joy you never knew existed. These spiritual truths are the Narcotics Anonymous Program, and it is through them that *It Works!*

## S T E P O N E

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

When we first came into Narcotics Anonymous, many of us believed that our problem was a specific kind of drug. We thought we would be able to use other drugs, maybe smoke some weed or drink a little bit. Many of us acted on this idea and continued to use anything we thought we weren't addicted to. A lot of us continued to drink because we didn't think of alcohol as a drug.

From our own experiences and from those of other members of the Fellowship, we soon came to see that the use of any drug released our addiction all over again. We began to see that we couldn't put any mind-altering or mood-altering drugs into our system without starting that monster going again.

Then we began to see what the First Step was really saying to us. It was telling us that our problem was bigger than any individual drug or group of drugs, that our problem was addiction itself. We suffered from the delusion that we could take something and put it inside ourselves, and that this "something" would make us better. We thought we could get away with that. We saw we couldn't put anything into our systems without paying the price.

Working the First Step was a matter of admitting and accepting our addiction. The way we lived and all the things that went on in our lifestyles with the drugs were all part of our addiction. We just had to accept it, and that acceptance didn't come all at once. The First Step didn't come all at once; it was an awful surrender. We came to see that we could no longer use drugs



to sustain our lives. It was a surrender to the cold, hard truth that we were drug addicts.

"I am a drug addict." We didn't want to admit this. We didn't even want to say it. Most of us thought it and knew it in our heads, but we didn't want to say it. This was because we didn't want to close the doors on all the options, because we thought we still had some options left, a tranquilizer here, or a joint there. We were such drug addicts that we thought we couldn't be expected to stay clean just like that. We just couldn't. But we found we could take the First Step. It was piece by piece. We just surrendered. And we just accepted it.

We found that most of us had to get the program a little piece at a time, by listening at lots of meetings. The First Step involves honesty and avoiding denial. Gradually the honesty we heard in other addicts' stories broke through our denial of how we lived and what happened to us. Little by little we came to see the unmanageability of our whole lives. It seemed as if our lives had always been unmanageable, starting when we were children. And then our lives gradually got worse and worse. Some of us were suicidal. We may have been violent. Yet we didn't want to face these things. But once we saw that the way we had lived was part of our addiction, it was so much easier to forgive ourselves.

We went to a lot of meetings and we listened and went home and cried or sat rapt in thought. We sat in meetings and we shook. We probably hated people. We shook our heads a lot. We nodded our heads a lot. We realized how unmanageable our lives had become as we went to more and more meetings. Something inside of us knew that this was it. There was no place else to go. There was no place else to run. There was no place else to hide.

As much as we didn't want to look, we needed to look. We saw. We saw it piece by piece. We felt the shame. We felt the remorse, all the despair. We were willing to feel clearly, but it hurt. Inside ourselves we began to feel we had found something. We were tired of hurting. We were tired of being lost. And we felt we had found something because there was the feeling of joy and the feeling of coming home in those first meetings. This gave us the willingness to look, and the willingness to be where we were. Our willingness gave us hope. We became willing to do anything. The pain began to stop because the feeling that we had found something was stopping it.

The joy of finding a solution, finding an answer, opened up a whole other world of wanting this new way of life. When certain people would speak, we would hang on every experience they shared. The more they talked, the more we got. And then, the more truth we got, the more honesty we got. The more we opened up, the more our lives opened up.

Yet at the same time, how we hated those people. We hated to hear what they were saying. We would get angry and we would want them to shut up. But we were getting fed. We wanted them to shut up because this was hurting. It was breaking through the denial that we lived in with our addiction. We hated them and we loved them and we needed them. And we weren't going to go back next week. We weren't going to be there. But we would be there.

We have fought against this thing called addiction and lost for many years. We were like the prizefighter who had been getting into the ring day after day, week after week, year after year. Every time he would get beat up, only to crawl right back into the ring again. Finally the answer came to him, "Don't get back in the ring." We saw that we always hoped the results of our drug use would be different. But it wasn't different. It was always the same. Finally we had to admit that this thing had whipped us, that we shouldn't "get back in the ring." We got whipped. When we finally admitted that to someone, we took part of the First Step.

Up until then we always told everybody around us that we could handle drugs. We told them we knew exactly what we were doing. "I know I can handle it," we said. We really felt like we could handle it for a long time. We knew we had failed at many other things in life, but we felt with drugs it was different. We really knew them. We felt we knew what we were doing with drugs, they were our friends. We had spent a lot of time with them. We and all our friends were experts with drugs. How could people who didn't use drugs know anything about them? A lot of us thought that using drugs was the one thing we were good at.

When we got to the point where we had to face that we couldn't even handle drugs, it was a big blow. We just felt ruined. But we finally admitted we did need help and we couldn't handle what had happened to us because of drugs. It was a big step to admit we needed help, but some of us still had reservations about alcohol and some other drugs we thought weren't really



drugs. Alcohol was a particular problem for so many of us because we never thought of alcohol as a drug. Besides, many of us felt we never had a problem with alcohol, that it wasn't our thing. But it didn't matter that it wasn't our thing. There were a lot of drugs we didn't use out there because they weren't out at the time, or weren't available to us, but if we took them today, they would have the same effect on us as the drugs we used before we came into N.A.

We came to believe that was why Step One was written this way. We are powerless over our addiction, not just drugs, but addiction. When we saw it this way, we realized we didn't need to try to zero in on different drugs. It didn't leave anything out. When we say addiction, it covers everything: street drugs, prescriptions, alcohol, cough syrups, any drug that changes our thinking. We believe that we really have to do this step as perfectly as possible. We really have to know deep inside us we are powerless over our addiction.

Some people came into N.A. but had trouble really seeing their powerlessness. They talked about having to "get powerless" over their addiction. The First Step doesn't really have anything to do with getting powerless. It has to do with admitting that we are powerless. It is something that we were a long time ago. This step is in the past tense. We admitted something that already was and that had been for a long time. All we did was just finally admit, "Yes, that's right. I'm powerless." We were reviewing something that had already happened. We just admitted to that which was. Then it was time to get on with the rest of our lives.

It is this powerlessness, physical and emotional pain, unmanageability, and many more kinds of trouble that first bring us to Narcotics Anonymous. Taking the First Step is where we can finally admit complete defeat. Until we can fully accept that we are powerless over the disease of addiction, and that our lives have become unmanageable, we are incapable of finding any meaning in the rest of the Twelve Steps.

Another problem a lot of us had in facing our addiction was that it was so woven into our lifestyle. Most of us used drugs in just the normal course of affairs. Drugs were so built into our lifestyle that, when we began to have trouble, we thought it was our complete lifestyle that was to blame. That was the only way of life we knew. It was hard to see that it was just one piece of

our way of living—the way we used drugs—that was causing all our problems. We used drugs and they made us feel good. It didn't matter that drugs ruined our lives in every area. It didn't matter that we were late with our rent and couldn't pay our bills. It didn't matter that we pushed people away from us or that we ended up in prison over and over again. It didn't even matter that we overdosed with the drugs. We still couldn't see that the problem was our drug addiction. We thought it was just part of our lifestyle.

How did we find our way into this lifestyle of ours? A lot of us started using so we could fit in with the crowd. But why did we want to fit in with those people? What did they have that lured us? For many of us, it was the sureness they seemed to have: they knew who they were and where they were going. That was attractive to us.

Others of us started using to avoid people. We couldn't feel comfortable in a crowd, so we used drugs to feel better. At first, when we started using, our drugs gave us the same feeling we saw others have. Our drugs gave us the feeling of knowing who we were and being able to be what we wanted to be. But, we see now, that was not a choice we made. We had to have that feeling before we found the drugs. That was what addiction was. We already had the need for that feeling before we started using drugs. We had the need for something outside ourselves to give us the feeling we wanted.

We didn't know then that the answer wasn't outside ourselves. That's what made us addicts when most of the people around us weren't addicts. If they had a problem with how they felt, they seemed to be able to do something within themselves to find peace with that problem. They didn't search for the answer outside themselves in some substance. But we couldn't do that. We had a hole in our guts, and we couldn't bear to face it and work it out.

Our using may have determined who our friends were. Some of us only associated with people who understood our using and who used too. If what we were doing was illegal, we banded together to protect ourselves from the law and from society.

We found we had formed a secretive group with its own separate lifestyle. All of our friends had the same problems we had. Many of our friends couldn't stay in school. They couldn't keep jobs. They couldn't sustain relationships. But we couldn't see any



problem in that. These were the only people we wanted to be around and who wanted to be around us. It had been that way from our earliest days. We felt these were the only people who really understood us and who saw the world as it really was. What could those other people outside our little society possibly know about us and the special world we had built for ourselves in which drugs were just a part? Our addiction was using drugs and a whole way of thinking and acting and looking at the world.

We could see that our way of life was not looked on favorably by others. We felt it was just that they didn't understand. We could see that our lifestyle often had many unfortunate consequences for us. But we were willing to accept those consequences because it was the only lifestyle we knew. It didn't matter how bad things were; our lifestyle had the comfort of familiarity.

We were living in a world that ruled out any possible correction, because we were right and the world out there was wrong. What did they know about what we felt and wanted and believed? Because our system had no self-correction built into it, no feedback from the world outside, we got ever further away from reality and into our delusions. We gradually came to have a whole set of delusions that led us progressively further and further away from the ideals and beliefs and hopes many of us had before we met drugs.

That was the progressiveness of our addiction. There was another kind of progressiveness we confronted, the physical aspect of our disease. At first, most of us had the strength inside that allowed us to quit using drugs for a period of time when things got too bad for us. We had the willpower to stop using for days, weeks, or months. By being able to stop using for these periods, we thought we had the strength to manage and control our lives and our addiction. But finally we passed that hidden line. From then on we could not stop. Or, we came to the point where a part of us wanted to stop, yet another part of us felt that we could not live life without our drugs. For some of us, this is when we put away our last bag of dope or our last bottle of pills and gave up. We were brought to our knees and we cried out for God's help.

But some of us had to go even further down. We kept on using even though we knew we were addicts. The people around us were telling us we were addicts. We admitted they were right, that we were hooked. But we kept on using. We couldn't see that we had any way out. We got to the point where the drugs stopped

working. We were sick when we used and we were sick when we didn't use. It really didn't make any difference. We had all kinds of unusual things going on inside our bodies and our heads. We had seizures, facial grimaces, arms or legs that jerked. We were paranoid, living in constant irrational fear. We were hallucinating. Sharks were chasing us down the street.

Some of us got so far down we felt we were beyond hope. When we were offered the idea that Narcotics Anonymous could be a way out for us, we tried to pass it off. We believed we had too much brain damage to ever come back from it. But even some of us who felt we were too far gone were able to make it to the program before we died or went crazy. Even we bottom-of-the-barrel addicts found that most of our symptoms went away after we went through our withdrawal and got some clean time. We came in wondering if we were crazy because we used or if we used because we were crazy. We found it didn't make any difference. If we stopped using and went to meetings and worked the steps, a lot of our problems dropped away. Any little problems that remained were easily worked out. We found we could lead healthy, productive lives.

Many of us found we really benefited from writing out the First Step. Others of us found we were people who had to hear things over and over again in the meetings in order to understand our disease. We had to hear people talk about a concept from many different perspectives before we could really get hold of the ideas of the program. But most of us found that writing things down on paper helped us get out of our confusion. We found we could see patterns in our lives and in our powerlessness and unmanageability we hadn't seen before. Written down on paper, we would see insights into ourselves that we didn't even know we knew. We found the only way we could find if writing about this step was something that was helpful or not, was to try it.

Those of us who did write, put down on paper how we saw ourselves before our addiction. We wrote about how powerless we were. In our writing, we saw how easy it was for us to blame others or justify or rationalize or make excuses for the way things were in our lives. But seeing it all written down helped us reflect on what we had written and see it more clearly.

We came to see that we really didn't have any control over our addiction. It affected every area of our lives—the way we thought and felt and behaved. We were powerless. We gradually got



grounded in the truth that never again would we have any control over our disease. Despite the gains we made, our rebelliousness and the need to feel we had some kind of control died hard. We didn't want to face our powerlessness.

When we finally admit our powerlessness we are forced to admit that we have the disease of addiction. This stops our denial and allows us to recognize our true problem. Powerlessness is our inability to control events in our lives. At times in the past, temporary abstinence from using was forced on us in different ways. We got too sick to use, or our fear made us stop for varying periods of time. Some of us had to quit for days or weeks because we lacked the money to continue and many of us were institutionalized. Most of us viewed these temporary periods of abstinence as meaning that we could control or quit our use of drugs if we had to. We told ourselves repeatedly that we could stop if we really needed to, yet it was very difficult for us to be aware of all the times we wanted to stop—and couldn't.

Most of us were also convinced that we could stop using if something "out there" would change. We'd stop if we had a better job, if our families understood us, if our loved ones would get off our backs, if we had more friends, or any of the hundreds of reasons our crazy minds had in lying to us. But these changes weren't the answer. When we came into Narcotics Anonymous, we realized that by our own power alone we couldn't do what had to be done in order to save our lives. Our powerlessness was shown to us by the way we continued to use in spite of our own will and desire to stop.

Eventually, our addiction swallowed us up to the point where all we could think about was how to get more drugs. Many people we knew used drugs but all their thinking wasn't centered on drugs. Non-addicts just didn't think about drugs all the time. All we ever thought about was how to get more drugs. We neglected everything else in life. That was why our lives got more and more unmanageable. Our powerlessness over our addiction meant that our lives became more and more unmanageable.

When a plant is neglected, it wilts and dies. Our lives were like neglected plants. We neglected our lives and our spirits because we were living in the drug world. We put all our energy into getting and using and finding ways to get more drugs, the whole

lifestyle. It wasn't reality. It was our escape from the real world. We liked the escape drugs offered us so we put all our energy into our drug lifestyle. Our lives just wilted and died.

Our relationships with people got to the point where we couldn't even carry on a conversation. We had no self-love and we had no concept of who we were because most of us were so young when we started using. We never really developed a personality of our own. We were always trying to be somebody we weren't because we didn't know who we were. Even when we did have an idea of who we might be, we didn't have enough guts to be ourselves. No wonder our lives were so unmanageable.

Of course, as we kept on, our lives got worse and worse. It happened to all of us. One thing after another disappeared from our lives: relationships, jobs, lovers, families, personal belongings. Looking back we saw how much had been given us and how we just disregarded it. Nothing but drugs were important, so we didn't hold on to anything. We didn't care about people. We didn't cultivate friendships. We were only interested in what we could get from someone. That was the way we saw things. We didn't believe anybody could really care for us. We couldn't accept love because we didn't love ourselves.

The way one woman described addiction and its relation to our unmanageability was that our addiction was like a tunnel. There was nothing else there except us and the drugs. There were no kids, no husband, no home. There was nothing there that was manageable except getting the drugs. That was manageable, most of the time. But for each of us it was just the tunnel. Me and it. It and me. One. Connection. That was all we saw. That was all we wanted. We knew that needs were met, but not out of any real concern on our part. We didn't manage to do that.

Addiction is a very simple word for a hideous thing that was happening to us because it was such a progression. It was a terrible progression. It just took from us. It never gave. It stole everything from us. And we had to look at both our addiction and our unmanageability. For some of us, our lives didn't *become* unmanageable. That would mean that at some point they were manageable. At what point? By who? When we were infants, how could we have managed? Could our folks have managed us? Many of our folks suffered from the same disease we do. Some of us perhaps crossed the line later on in our addiction from socially

using into a full-blown addiction. But for those of us who were addicts from the start, how could there have been a manageable addiction?

Seeing our unmanageability helped us learn more clearly what addiction meant. Our addiction determined the way we saw things, the way we looked at ourselves, the way we judged other people. We began to see that everybody else wasn't to blame for the way we were living. For the first time most of us started taking responsibility for making things better for ourselves. In the beginning it meant not to use. Not using meant we automatically had to stop most everything we had been doing. Everywhere we went and all the people we were with had to do with drugs. For us, breaking away from that lifestyle was what worked.

The admission of powerlessness and unmanageability is central to recovery. It is not a sign of weakness to be powerless, but simply a recognition that when it comes to drugs, power is not something we possess. The term "willpower" had no meaning for us when we tried to control our using. Every time we tried to stop using on our own, we failed. We began to realize that we really could not stop on our own.

Many of us were led into the program after a lot of attempts to fill a void in our lives. But we just never made it. Probably it was because most of those ways never made us face our addiction. So we ended up in Narcotics Anonymous. We saw that we were addicts through the lives and the stories of all the people in the group. We had to see that we were not alone before we could tolerate finding out what we had to do about ourselves.

As we looked more closely at our unmanageability, we came to the realization that everybody else had been managing our lives. The probation office managed our lives. Institutions like jails, prisons, or military service managed our lives. Drugs managed our lives. So our lives had been managed, but not by us. We had no control over our lives. We got up in the morning and we used. Everybody we hung out with used. The only thing we talked about was drugs, getting them, using them. If you didn't use, we didn't have time for you. We didn't want anything to do with you. Right here in the First Step that started to change.

There are many of us also who only used prescription drugs for many years. From those we progressed until we were prescription junkies in our own homes. How many of us had a small purse,

filled to bursting with assorted pills, hidden underneath the underwear in our second dresser drawer? How many of us went from doctor to doctor getting medication for assorted ailments only to find that we needed the medication long after the ailment was gone? How many of us couldn't leave our homes for more than an hour or two without our "fix" tucked in a corner of our purse?

This pattern of addiction can also progress into suicide attempts, insanity, and death. Fortunately there were many members in our groups who helped us to get over our denial and understand that our lives too were unmanageable because they had suffered as we had suffered. We came to see that all addicts are wanted and welcomed into the N.A. Fellowship.

As we looked back on Step One, we saw that this step, like the others, was designed to change our thinking about ourselves, the world, and everything and everybody in it. The step was designed to start changing our whole belief system. Our problem was that our perception of the world and everyone and everything in it was very, very distorted. It was so bad that, by the time we got to N.A., we didn't know the difference between what was real and what was not real. As we looked around the room in our meetings, we could not deny the truth. The answers were there. These people had found a better way.

In N.A., we address the cause of the problem, addiction, not just the apparent symptoms, drugs. We get and stay clean so we may recover from the disease of addiction. The way we are able to be clean and to stay clean is by practicing the Twelve Steps. Our goal is not just simple abstinence, it is recovery. We learn to live by these steps. We accept these steps as our way of life.

We finally accepted the First Step without reservations. That started a process that, for many of us, gave us the miracle of being freed from our obsession to use again. That obsession was part of the illusion we gave up in the First Step. We gave up the illusion that we could handle drugs, that we could use. There were some who wouldn't give up this illusion. They pursued their illusion to the ends: jails, institutions, and death. What freed us from the illusion was the spiritual principle in the First Step, the spiritual principle of honesty.

Honesty means to evaluate and accept conditions as they are. Our problem was that we didn't know what the truth was. We had so distorted our views of ourselves and our lives that we couldn't



distinguish between what was real and what was not. The honesty freed us. We faced the truth about ourselves and the truth set us free. We didn't learn this by reading it or saying it. We learned it by experiencing it. Once we experienced it, many of us experienced the miracle of being freed from the obsession to use again.

Many of us received a beautiful gift from working the First Step. The gift was the realization that there was a great joy in being powerless. Once our desire for power over ourselves, others, and events around us finally died down, there was a great relief in being powerless. We didn't need to try to run things anymore. We didn't need to sleep with our feet in the air to keep the sky from falling. We were able to retire from the job of trying to control ourselves, other people, and the world. We were free. We never needed to go back to doing that again. So instead of being filled with sorrow and remorse about the past, we learned to look with a great joy at these precious "now moments" we had been given. What a gift! And with the joy of our powerlessness helping and steadying us, we were ready to start working the Second Step.

## S T E P T W O

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

Most of us couldn't see how this step applied to us at first. We had done some crazy things when we used, but we didn't think we were really crazy. So we wanted to skip right over it and go on to the Third Step. Probably one of the craziest things was that we couldn't see our own insanity.

It wasn't long before we saw our insanity very clearly. Our insanity was the way we kept repeating the same harmful thing over and over again. We kept thinking it was going to work out differently, or have some different effect on us—and it never did. And we kept thinking we were going to be able to handle it this time.

We went on like this for five, ten, fifteen, or more years of using, always thinking we would get a different result. It was crazy the way we thought it was going to be different this time when it wasn't different any other time. Later in our using, it might have taken us a little longer to get going but the end result was always the same. Still, we kept trying to make it different. That is the insanity we are talking about here. It wasn't the crazy things we did when we were under the influence of our drugs. The really crazy thing we did was to go ahead and use drugs again thinking it would be different the next time, and it never was.

This part of the Second Step was a big problem for a lot of us because we related the word insanity to a mental institution. We thought being insane meant being like the people who rammed their heads against a wall or people who just sat there babbling or people who were completely out of touch. We knew we weren't like that, so we had trouble seeing we needed to be restored to

something we didn't think we had lost. But in this step we were face to face with the denial of our disease. We had a disease that told us we didn't have the disease.

In our disease we were always great at pointing our finger at someone else—someone who was the “worst kind of addict”—and saying only people as bad as that were addicts. In our minds, you had to be a junkie running around in the slums with a needle hanging out of your arm or you weren't an addict. Some of us knew we weren't that so we didn't think we were addicts. We told ourselves, “If I ever get as bad as that, I'll do something about it.” Some of us finally got as bad as that and still didn't do anything about it. We just switched to some new kind of denial.

When we came to Narcotics Anonymous, we didn't know the difference between what was real and what wasn't real. We had lost contact with reality, and we were insane. We believed that those illusions we were holding onto were real. But the power within N.A. and the Twelve Steps, that Power greater than ourselves, opened our eyes. It turned on the light. When we first came in, we angrily defended our sanity. Before too long, we were laughing at the funny stories of our insanity.

How were we able to come to see our insanity? We started listening to other people talk about their insanity in meetings. We realized we were just like them. We started relating and talking to our sponsor and writing on this step. As we began to get things down in black and white, a clear picture of our insanity emerged. Our insanity was that we thought we could handle drugs. Our insanity was what our addiction led us to do to get drugs. Our insanity was our inability to see ourselves or our lives clearly. Our addiction made our whole lives insane and irrational. We saw that where our disease was involved, we never acted on any rational basis.

We saw our insanity in the way we would put using before anything. We put our drug use before our family, before our job, before God, before everything. When we wrote down all the things we had done and looked at them in our First Step, we finally began to see how insane it was that we would put our using before everything else in our lives.

Another problem we had with understanding how insanity applied to us, was that we thought what we did was natural. We

thought what we did was just a normal thing that came with our lifestyle. It was all the people out there who were abnormal. While we were in the middle of it, it was hard to see our own insanity. We were too close, too involved in an insane lifestyle. We totally accepted it as a part of us.

We were always amazed, in our own self-deception, when people would say, “Gee, you're sure crazy,” or, “Boy, you're a crazy person.” We would resent that because we were so convinced that what we did was really normal and justified. We see now that we had to think this way. We had to have an iron-clad justification to do what we did.

We thought everything we did was right. If we robbed somebody to get drugs, it was okay. We thought other people had more than we did anyway. Most of us thought we never had anything. It seemed perfectly normal for us to argue that, if they had it and we thought we should have it, taking it from them was all right; it was justified. If we robbed somebody, it was justified so we could get our drugs to make us feel good. We thought we deserved to feel good all the time. That was a large part of our insanity.

For some of us, even going to prison was worth it. The only thing we thought about when we were going out and getting drugs was that we had to have the drugs. We hoped we wouldn't get arrested before we could get the money to get the drugs. Then, we went through the whole ritual of getting the drugs and hoping we could get home and get the drugs in us before we got arrested or something else happened. Then, after we got the drugs in our bodies, we didn't care anymore. This was the continuous type of ritual we went through.

And throughout it all, our insanity was that we thought we could handle it. Even the worst that could be thrown at us, terrible family catastrophes or long prison terms, couldn't stop us. Some of us served long sentences in tough penitentiaries and suffered through horrible experiences there. Then, we would come out and go right back and use again. That was insane.

Some of us knew intellectually that drugs and our addiction were causing our problems, but that intellectual knowledge didn't help us to stop using. Every time we went to jail, we knew why we were there. We knew that our addiction was the thing that drove us to do the things we did that put us in jail. If it



wasn't for our need for drugs, there would have been no sense in stealing. We could have gone out and got a job like any normal person. Each time we ended up in jail, we would make a solemn resolution to ourselves that we were not going to use drugs anymore. Then we would get out of jail and stop at the first bar we came to. We would sit there, having a couple of beers, contemplating our lives and how we were not going to use drugs anymore. This was another form of insanity—using while we were thinking about not using! The next thing we knew we were right back in jail.

We began to recognize that we had the disease of addiction and that was where our insanity came from. It was insane to do a lot of the things we did that made us feel such shame. We didn't do those things because we chose to do those things. We didn't do those things because we wanted to do those things. We did them because our disease compelled us to do them. Then we felt guilty about the things we did. That guilt set up a whole, vicious cycle. The more guilty we felt, the more we felt compelled to use to relieve the guilt. That was a pretty insane way to live.

The disease of addiction was not something we chose. We did choose to use drugs, but nobody chose to be an addict. How many of us said in the very beginning, "I'm going to go out and use all the drugs I can possibly use. I'm going to run over everybody in my life. I'm going to break the law. I'm going to hurt myself. And I'm going to hurt everybody else."

That's just not the way it worked. Addiction was just something that happened to us. If we could have stopped our addiction, we would have. We didn't want to use like that, but we were compelled to because of this disease. It was a disease that wasn't of our own choosing. We saw it was like a lot of the other parts of ourselves. We didn't choose to have the eye color we had. We didn't choose to have the intelligence level that we had. So it was something in us. Once we used drugs, we became addicted.

A few of us knew right off that we were insane. We wondered at the others in the meetings who couldn't see they were insane. We who knew we were insane sometimes had a different problem. We kept looking for a way to pursue our insanity. We toyed with the idea that it might be easier to keep on being insane. We knew how to do that. But here we were in the meetings

with a lot of fear, feeling like we were brain damaged. We couldn't finish our sentences. We couldn't remember. Some of us couldn't even speak, so we couldn't share. We tried, but it was a real hardship for us. We were sure God was playing a dirty trick on us by putting us in a Fellowship where we had to share, because we thought that was the last thing in the world we were going to be able to do.

We had always had an overwhelming fear of sharing about ourselves, and now we were being asked not only to share but to connect with people. We had taken the First Step and admitted we couldn't use drugs anymore. But why did we have to be tortured and tormented like this? Why did we have to share? Why did we have to make eye contact? Why did these people keep calling us on the phone and talking to us? Why didn't they just leave us alone? We told ourselves it might be easier to be crazy, it was a lot less work.

We thought about the psychiatric institutions where some of us came from. We were comfortable there. We had music lessons and made rugs and belts. It was very easy. We had somebody else taking care of us. But after we came to Narcotics Anonymous, we learned about the First Step. We found we needed to take responsibility for ourselves.

Facing our insanity was the beginning, the beginning of taking some responsibility. We were responsible but we were not guilty. We were insane. So it was our responsibility to ask for help or to do anything else we needed to do to be restored to sanity. And since we had done such a good job of messing up our lives, it was going to have to be something besides us restoring us to sanity. Look how we had spent our entire lives before we came to N.A., trying to restore ourselves to sanity and failing. We saw that what happened to us was just this progression of insanity, insanity, and more insanity. But all the time it was really the disease showing itself.

We had to find a way to get past the intensity of the feelings we brought in with us. Those feelings were still so close behind us. If we didn't get past them, we would have scared ourselves right out of N.A. We couldn't and wouldn't believe it was possible and necessary for us to connect and identify with other people who had the same emotional deterioration and bankruptcy we had. But we had to learn to identify with those people so we wouldn't feel like

we were different anymore. This was why we needed to find people in the Fellowship we felt close to. We had to ask one of them to sponsor us as soon as possible so we could be guided through the early, perilous times.

When we see new people coming into the Fellowship, all caught up in their delusions and insanity, we hope they can hear in our stories that we used to feel like they do. So many of them feel they are incapable of sticking around, yet they can. We were just as crazy as that at first, yet we were given a way to stay. If we could stay clean, they can too. Identifying with each other in this way gives us our first real hope. It is the hope that we can be restored to sanity.

This was a whole, big complicated knot we were untying in the Second Step. To help us see our situation more clearly, some of us wrote it all out. We saw our insanity by going back to some of the stuff we talked about in our First Step. We identified the insanity in that. As we put our lives down in black and white, we saw patterns we couldn't have seen from just talking about things, because our words just went round and round. Once the words were written down, they stayed put and we could see them and reflect on what they said.

All this work helped untie the knot of our insanity. But we had another big knot to untie in this step. That was facing the issue of some Power greater than ourselves. There was no way we could be restored to sanity unless we came to believe in a Power greater than ourselves. We had spent our whole lives being locked up inside ourselves. So when we came to N.A. it was hard to consider anything else in the world. To think of the idea that there was any other power greater than us was almost incomprehensible. Our own power was the only power we had depended on and trusted all those years. Now we were being asked to come out of ourselves and throw away all of those old ideas. We didn't want to throw them all away, but we had to because our lives depended on it.

When we first heard about a Power greater than ourselves, most of us associated it with religion. Many of us had some very bad experiences with religion. We had looked there for answers. We hadn't seemed to be able to find any that worked for us. It wasn't until we came to Narcotics Anonymous that we began to

get a different picture of a Power greater than ourselves. Our first contact with that Power was not from talk but from the warmth we felt in the presence of people who made us feel welcome. We saw the honesty when they shared their stories, that showed us they had been where we had been. From their faces we could see that they had found a way out, because their faces didn't look like the ones we were used to seeing.

By the time we started working the Second Step, we had already experienced through the lives of others, and to some degree within ourselves, the power that is contained within the spiritual principles of the Twelve Steps. Unlike some of our previous approaches to spirituality, we didn't feel we had to pretend to be good and hide what was bad. The more we hauled out the honest truth about ourselves and the things we did, the closer we felt with everyone else. We couldn't believe the honesty in others and the emerging honesty we saw in ourselves. That honesty was one of the fundamental principles of our new way of life.

We had always figured spirituality and religion were the same, but we began to find out differently. We began to see that spirituality was seeking a Power greater than ourselves. It didn't necessarily have anything to do with religion as we had understood religion. We found that even our members who had the most trouble with religion were able to come to believe in a Power greater than themselves. So, as near as we could see, our questions about religion could be put aside for each of us to deal with in whatever way and at whatever time we saw fit. All we had to deal with here was finding a way of life that gave us hope that there was some Power greater than us that could work for us and restore us to sanity.

For some of us the idea of being restored to sanity meant becoming a different person. We thought it would be nice to be comfortable, animated and outgoing, no longer painfully shy. But we learned that the Second Step meant we would become better at being ourselves. We would be more outgoing than we were, but we might not ever have all those qualities we admired in others. We did find that being restored to sanity made us better at being ourselves. We found the ways to express ourselves in meetings and in our lives that were appropriate for us.

As we stayed clean and tried to practice the N.A. Program, it began to happen to us. We didn't know it then, but everyday we



stayed clean was a step in the direction of being restored to sanity. Being restored to sanity meant we began to experience some spiritual principles. We began to experience surrender and hope and honesty and acceptance. These were some of the principles contained within the Twelve Steps and we began to experience them right away as we practiced the N.A. Program. A lot of us in the Fellowship were able to use the principles contained within the steps without paying much attention to exactly what those principles were and how they worked. Others of us were faced with terrible personal problems in our recovery, and by practicing the steps through those situations, we came to a deeper understanding of the principles within the steps.

There are no doubt countless spiritual principles in these steps, and we came to understand that being restored to sanity meant putting these principles into action in our lives. As we struggled to learn this new way of looking at things, there were some we found ourselves referring to often in our meetings. The principle we found we referred to most was honesty, which is the ability to evaluate and accept conditions as they are. When we first came into Narcotics Anonymous, we didn't have much honesty. We had steadily moved away from honesty in our lives. We got so far away from honesty that we didn't know the difference between what was real and what was not real. The longer we stayed clean the more we learned to accurately evaluate conditions as they were. Through this we increased in honesty.

Too often it was only after we found ourselves in a state of total despair that we found the honesty to become willing to accept help. The First Step told us that self knowledge and willpower could never bring us recovery, but many of us still had to do the research. We admitted our powerlessness in Step One, yet still resisted the spiritual help promised in Step Two. If we persisted in this long enough, we were eventually faced with a choice—believe or die. When we finally saw that clearly, we grabbed onto the most feasible concept of a Higher Power and hung on. Once we stop resisting the concept of a Power greater than ourselves, the door to faith can be opened.

Some of us, on the other hand, had not yet lost complete control of our lives when we admitted our powerlessness. We may still have had families, material possessions, or friends. The pain we

felt on the inside that brought us to Narcotics Anonymous was often enough to bring about complete surrender. We faced a simple, clear principle: If the disease is progressive, and we have it, then we desperately need a Power greater than ourselves to restore us to sanity before our addiction devours us.

We had to be humbled to become willing, to become willing to accept the truth. It took many, many years of beating our heads against our addiction before we finally hurt ourselves enough so we were humbled. Only then were we willing to know the truth about ourselves and about life. But we had to get to that point where we realized that our best methods, our best wisdom, our best everything was killing us. At that point we finally became willing and came to the principle of humility.

There was also the principle of faith. When we came to N.A. we didn't have any faith in ourselves, any faith in God, any faith in any kind of system. It wasn't until we began to see other people recovering right in front of our eyes that we started to have some faith in N.A. If they could do it, maybe we could do it, too. Faith gave us the courage to take chances and live a life of new meaning and opportunity. As our days, months, and years of being clean began to grow, our faith also grew, because we witnessed and experienced things we had never experienced before. We had gone through things that we couldn't have gotten through without a Higher Power helping us, a Power greater than ourselves. We didn't get faith because we thought we should get it. Instead, our faith grew naturally in us as a direct result of a whole set of experiences we had and saw other people having.

This process of being restored to sanity also put us in touch with courage. We found courage that enabled us to face whatever we had to face without using drugs. Sometimes, when we were short on courage, we had to go to another principle, gratitude. No matter how bad things were, if we really searched our lives, we could always find a little something to be grateful for. And we wanted to put that gratitude into action. This was why we were grateful when we were asked to do something for our Fellowship. In the beginning, this may have meant talking at meetings, helping set up chairs or making coffee. Service to ourselves and to others was, for us, a very important part of these steps.

For some of us, the spiritual principles that were embodied in these Twelve Steps could be our Higher Power. At first we were

just able to intellectualize these principles. With time, we began to believe them. And gradually we began to live by them. When we began to live by them, we began to experience the change. We realized that we were being restored to sanity and were coming to believe in a Power greater than ourselves.

We found this was a program of action. We could sit and talk about these things forever and it wasn't going to do anything. It was only when we began to apply these principles to our everyday problems and see them work that we began to find out what the truth was.

Some of us really fought this step and hurt ourselves by fighting it. We needed the help of a Power greater than ourselves to restore us to sanity. But we were often so turned off by our past experiences that we hated to look at the issue. We couldn't see until later that we were still so caught up in our own little selves that it was hard to give up our puny power and admit there was a Power greater than us. Yet, when we looked back on our lives, there were so many things that were powers greater than us. Our addiction was a power greater than us. It controlled our every waking moment, our every thought, word, and deed. When we finally faced our addiction, we saw we had been on the tail end of a power greater than us. We tried to put that power down but couldn't. That addiction was a very negative power in our lives.

A lot of us have an understanding now of a Power greater than ourselves as the force for good we see working in our lives and the lives of the other people in the Fellowship. No one told us what to believe or criticized our belief. All anyone wanted for us was that we be restored to sanity. Any power we found that would work for us was just fine with the people in our groups. This freedom to find a Higher Power of our own understanding was totally different from what most of us had ever experienced before. It was just one more example of the love and acceptance we found in our N.A. groups and in working the program.

The freedom that we found in N.A. was a great help to those of us who were lost in self and so far out of touch with reality. We needed plenty of time and patience before we could start to get out of ourselves. When we first dimly heard people talking about some power outside ourselves, we knew that they were serious, but we couldn't figure it out. We started looking for some power

that was greater than us. Then we began to look at things like trees and realized since we couldn't make a leaf, there must be some Power greater than ourselves.

Maybe the only Higher Power we could admit to was N.A., and even then we were so reluctant to believe, we were so distrustful. Some of us came to meetings for months before we got clean. We would just come and we would sit there without speaking and just watch. We wouldn't give up our old ways. We didn't really believe it was going to work. We had to be convinced. After we were convinced, then we believed in the truth about it, because we knew the people at N.A. were addicts like us. We listened to them talk and we saw them changing. That's how we began to believe in N.A. and a power that could restore us to sanity.

So here, in Step Two, we were faced with believing that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. Having already admitted personal powerlessness, we were now opening our minds to the possibility that a Power greater than ourselves could do it for us. Even though we may have been unable to see it at first, we needed to overcome the feeling that we were different, to quit isolating ourselves. We needed to see that we were not self-sufficient. We needed to "come home" and join the human race. These things, these pieces of sanity, we could not get on our own. We had to learn to trust.

One of our members talked about his "magic magnifying mind." He said that whatever he focused his mind on seemed to grow and become larger. We find this is true for many of us. If we concentrate on our hopelessness and helplessness, we start feeling worse and worse until finally we become overwhelmed. But, if we turn our attention to a Power greater than ourselves, and the bit of faith we are developing, we find that our faith also grows and becomes stronger. The more we exercise and practice what limited faith we have, the more we seem to get.

Here in this step some of us found our obsession to use was removed. Some of us had a heavy, heavy obsession to use for the first six months or more. It was a horror story. Our obsession to use would almost overwhelm us, especially when we thought of everything that had happened. We just wanted to use. We thought that using would give us relief.



But we decided to go to one more meeting, to stay clean one more day. We prayed the Serenity Prayer and just kept hanging on. Our sponsors and the other people in the Fellowship helped us to stay clean a day at a time.

And then one day we thought, "When was the last time I thought about using? It's been a month or so and I haven't thought about using." It was like a wave receding. And we realized, "This really works." Putting our program into action had helped us get through some hard times. It was then that our faith really started building.

Lack of faith had always been our problem. We always questioned. But then we began to quit questioning. We saw inside ourselves that if a Power greater than ourselves could remove this horrible obsession, then it could make us sane and restore us to sanity. That's when we started, little by little, to be restored to sanity. We saw, too, that it was working the First Step as thoroughly as we could that made us spiritually fit to work the Second Step. It was only when we fully took the First Step and accepted that we were powerless that it seemed as if our recovery shifted gears and we became spiritually fit to go through what we had to go through in the Second Step.

While we were doing this step, all of us saw dramatic examples of the program working in the lives of the people around us or in ourselves. Then we could start understanding the concept of a loving God. If it hadn't been for that loving God, we wouldn't even have found N.A. We wouldn't have been able to start listening. We began to see that we were the ones who put God on hold. God hadn't put us on hold. So we started to believe, which for us was a miracle in itself. We began to have some faith. That led us on to the Third Step.

It wasn't as if all of a sudden we finished Step One and went into Step Two. We didn't know intellectually when we were ready to go on. It was a sort of spiritual thing. It was like an automatic shifting. That gear went as far as it could go and then it shifted into the next gear, which brought us into the Third Step.

## S T E P T H R E E

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

Why did we have to face such a hard step so early in recovery? We had only worked two of the steps and already we were being asked to turn our will and our lives over to something a lot of us didn't want any part of. And to make it even harder, we were hearing people talk about God as if He were their next-door neighbor.

Some of us came in believing in nothing, especially ourselves. We had prayed to God all through the years and as far as we were concerned, never had a single prayer answered. We began to believe that there was no God. Then we came into Narcotics Anonymous, and immediately the Third Step asked us to make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God. It was a hard thing to fathom. But after we fought with the idea for a while and maybe even had some times of going back to using, we saw we really wanted to stay. We finally figured it out—if we were going to stay clean, we were going to have to do what they told us to do. We were told to try to clear our minds of all the garbage we had brought in with us so we could get down to praying. We were told that we didn't have to believe in praying. If we acted like we believed, we would come to believe.

We would sit down and try to meditate and pray. For some of us, this brought back memories of a religious upbringing. We may have tried at first by repeating one of those old familiar prayers, and about that time we'd think of somebody we would like to kill

or someone we would like to go to bed with. We would think, "Isn't it ever going to end?"

But then, over a period of years, as we worked at clearing our minds and learning to pray, we gradually came to believe. Most of us got to the point where, sometime during the day, there would be a period where we would know, without any reservations, that there was a completeness with the universe, that there was a God. At those moments we didn't have any doubts whatsoever. That sense of certainty was there. In those moments, all things came to focus in that sense of oneness with the universe.

Looking back, we saw clearly that we had absolutely nothing to do with anything good that had happened to us, other than being clean and available. It had to have been an act of God. What else could have taken us from what we were to what we finally became? It took time to come to believe. None of us came in here believing, least of all believing in ourselves.

At best we came in here believing in nothing. Most of us were far worse off than that. We had resentments and blamed God for all kinds of things. If there was a loving God, what were we doing in Narcotics Anonymous? If there was a God, why did He make us addicts? If there was a God, why did He give us all these other problems we had?

This Third Step was ego deflating for all of us. When we were new it was difficult for us to see how hard it had been for those with a lot of clean time. It was difficult to see that they too had gone through this process some time ago and were now more at peace with it. Often our stories didn't show the agony we had gone through with this step because we had already forgotten much of the agony. But there were always some people who still remembered clearly and vividly how hard it was for us even to think about this surrender step, let alone take it.

We were faced with relinquishing our ego and pride, our powerfulness, and turning it over to something we didn't even know or were afraid of, or were even angry at. It didn't make much sense when you looked at it that way. And that's the way most of us looked at it. Why, then, did any of us take the Third Step?

It was simple. Many of us took this step hating it and not understanding it at all. We took it at the point of a gun. The gun was our fear that if we didn't take this step, we would go back to using. By

the time we came face to face with this step, most of us had some time in the program. We had heard a lot of people in the meetings say that our will was to use drugs. We didn't want to live in our will anymore if that meant we would go back to using.

For some of us, it wasn't God we turned our will and our lives over to at first. We couldn't face the word God for a long time. What we put in the place of the word God were the words "Higher Power" or "our group" or "the Twelve Steps." The people around us saw the trouble we were having. They told us they had had those troubles too, even though it was hard for us to believe that they had because of the way they talked about God so easily. Some of us felt we wouldn't ever again be able to even say the word. And for some of us, that was the way it worked out. We continued to use the words Higher Power instead of the word God. But the words Higher Power worked just as well for us as the word God worked for others. We found that it wasn't the words that we used that made the difference, it was what we did and what our attitudes were. We found that if we just identified some Power greater than ourselves and used that power throughout the steps, we could recover.

We later saw that when we first came into Narcotics Anonymous, we were already believing in a Higher Power, yet we didn't realize it. We were believing that here was a group of people that could help us. If we didn't believe that Narcotics Anonymous was a Higher Power that could help us, we wouldn't have kept coming back to the meetings. Behind our belief in the power of the meetings was our Higher Power.

When we first thought of turning our will and our lives over to the care of God, we thought it would mean we would become nothings. Or it would mean that we weren't going to have any fun anymore because we weren't going to be able to do the things we liked to do. Some of us were afraid that if we turned our will over to God, He would make us a nun or a priest, or send us to Africa to be a missionary. And we didn't want anything like that for ourselves.

Our concept of God or any power greater than us was rigid and limited. But why shouldn't it have been? What real experience had any of us had with God? All we knew about God was what we had heard. We had been living in our will and in our addiction all our lives. Of course we would see God as a force that was opposed to



us. How could it be possible for God not to be opposite the hell of our addiction?

It was our fear of that hell of our addiction that finally forced us to act, forced us to make a decision. We grudgingly took this step because we wanted to recover. It was easy to see in the meetings that the people who continuously fought the Third Step were the ones who dropped out and went back to using. The ones who took the step, no matter how great their reservations were, were the ones who were staying clean. We wanted to get on with the process our fellow members were involved in, working the steps and staying clean.

We didn't realize it at the time, but the fact we were even able to think about making such a momentous decision showed the changes that had already taken place in us. In the process of coming to meetings and doing our First and Second Steps, we were learning how to think differently and look at situations differently. We were really changing. Things outside of us, in our lives, were changing because we were being more responsible. We had found some people we could talk to and ask for help with the Third Step. And by now most of us had a sponsor to help us.

We were still really lost, but we did believe that N.A. was the right place for us to be. This was where we belonged. We were also seeing so many of the new people who came in go back out and use. We saw that our best protection was to keep on working the steps no matter how hard they were for us. If we didn't keep on, we saw we had only one other choice. We could go back into all the negative things we did and we thought and all the self pity and all the resentments. If we went back into all that, we would really be going backwards and we would end up back out there using again.

There was another reason some of us saw for taking the Third Step. We often found that when we put our belief in other people, they disappointed us. They let us down. But we did need something, somebody. And we wanted to have more faith. We wanted to have faith that if we did the basic things that we were told to do—to go to meetings, to call our sponsor, to read the literature, to work the steps—that we wouldn't use. And yet, even with all of these good reasons we tried to come up with for doing this step, some of us still didn't believe. Down deep, we had the

sick feeling we were really just buying some time. We thought it might not be possible for us to be around too much longer. But we did want to stay around. We did want to stay clean.

So we had to face the Third Step. We had to face it without being able to count on someone else telling us just exactly what it meant. The words sounded simple. What did it mean to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God? People couldn't really tell us what that meant. Even those of us who had been around a long time still didn't know for sure what that meant. But we found that we didn't have to know exactly what it meant, we just had to make the decision.

So we took the step. Some of us were scared to death. Some of us shook. We were afraid what someone as bad as us might be in for. When we told God that we would put our life into His care, we were also afraid because we didn't honestly believe that God could give us the strength to meet the challenges put before us. We were afraid those challenges would be put in front of us and we were going to fail. We didn't understand that the power would come through us and come in us from God. The only power we had ever experienced was our own power and that was nothing. We didn't trust God. We really didn't have much trust when we first made that decision. That's why we had to keep reminding ourselves we had made that decision. And that's why all of us in this Fellowship were faced with making that decision over and over again, every day of our lives.

We found a good insight into this step by looking at the words *care of*. When we first looked at turning our will and our lives over to God, a lot of us worried we would be nothings or that God would come into our lives and turn us into robots. Later we realized that wasn't what the step was saying. We began to see it was more like the analogy of taking our kids to a babysitter and leaving them there. We were leaving our kids in the *care of* that babysitter. It wasn't that those kids couldn't continue to act on their own and think on their own. They could still do just about anything they wanted to do. But the babysitter was there to guide them and to show them the right things to do.

It was our experience that in the Third Step God did not take over our thinking. We did not become nothing. It was as if God gave us the maps while we did the driving.

Before we came to N.A., it was as if we only had one-track thinking. We were right and everybody else who didn't agree with us was wrong. We could rationalize anything that we did. After taking the Third Step, it was as if we got two-track thinking, the right and wrong thoughts in our heads. We could go either way. We began to see that the right thoughts came from a Power greater than ourselves and the wrong thoughts were the disease. That's one of the things the Third Step did for us.

When we began to understand that the words *care of* were key words in this step, we also began to realize that God did not want our wills and our lives. It was our will and our life. We saw we couldn't hand them to God and expect Him to do everything. If we decided to lie in our beds and wait for God to put food in our bellies, we would have died, rotted, and our bones would have bleached white in the sun before God would have stepped in and brought us breakfast in bed.

Part of that *care of* was being given back the freedom to follow our conscience. We had grown up hearing those funny little sayings like, "let your conscience be your guide." We didn't know if those sayings had a root in the steps or vice versa. But that truism and a lot of others pointed in the direction of spiritual living. We came to believe that a part of Step Three was having a conscience. Once that happened to us, we no longer had permission to be sick. We had the disease of addiction, but it had been arrested. Now we were in the recovery process. We could no longer behave like a using addict. We could no longer do the things we used to do because now we had a choice.

When we were in our first months of being clean, we could rationalize and justify behavior that we couldn't later. Those things weren't okay anymore. In the Third Step we became willing to have God's will for us revealed to us. This was not a step to be taken lightly. Once we took it, we became ready to listen to God's will for us. Once we took this step, we knew there was a way out. We couldn't go back out and use drugs again in ignorance. The step screwed up our using because we knew we no longer had to do that. And that was what happened to us in the Third Step. We saw there was a difference between right and wrong.

All of us still did a lot of wrong things. We were still learning and growing. Sometimes we acted out of ignorance, but more often we acted out of self-will. We did wrong things out of self-will. Generally speaking, we acted with the full knowledge that there

was going to be a price we would have to pay. We would think we were prepared to pay the price, but almost always, when the price was later revealed, we were not as prepared to pay the price as we thought. As we became more aware of our unwillingness to pay the price, we became more responsible.

We saw that we didn't really have a choice anymore. We had to pay the price for our actions. Using drugs and running away were no longer really options. We saw that using was really a form of running away and running away was no longer an answer because we had to take ourselves along. And now we had a conscience, too, that would tag along with us. We came to see more and more that drugs hadn't been our only problem. We tried using drugs as a solution to the problem. Our problem was our inability to live life on its own terms. Our developing conscience and sense of responsibility helped us see that.

How were we to know, in each situation, what was God's will for us? We found we did have a conscience telling us right from wrong. But that spark of conscience we were born with had been so smothered by the way we were living that it was a very tiny, weak spark by the time we got clean. Many times we couldn't tune in that voice. How did we find God's will in those situations? Since we hadn't yet heard from our conscience, we asked God to tell us what His will was for us. That asking was a prayer but we didn't know that then. We didn't know anything about prayer. And a lot of the people around us didn't either. Most of us still don't know a lot about prayer. We just know how to do it a little better. It was like our television sets. We learned how to turn them on and fine-tune them for a better picture, but we still didn't know much about how television worked.

We would hear somebody talk about God a lot. We would muster up enough courage to go up to them and ask them how to pray only to have them tell us they didn't know how to pray. We couldn't understand that. But then we would say to God or our Higher Power what we needed to say and we found that it worked. That's how most of us learned how to pray for knowledge of God's will for us.

The trouble many of us had with prayer was unlearning some of our old experiences. We had prayed, or attempted to pray, many times. We thought we weren't praying right because we weren't getting what we thought we should. But here in the Third Step we



my job, but God takes care of my life. So it's okay. God will send another job along pretty soon." Yet that person wasn't even looking for a job. That was extreme fatalism. We don't think that's what this step is all about. In some stages of recovery, some people misinterpret the Third Step this way. They just sit back and ask that everything come to them.

We found we had to take a very active role. We did the footwork but then left the results up to God. We could have a problem at work and tell our boss that we felt he was loading us down with more work than we could handle, that we couldn't see how we could get it done, and then walk away and do our best. We had done what we needed to do. If the boss lightened the load or didn't, it was all right. If we didn't get all the extra work done or surprised ourselves and did get it done, that was all right. We did what we could do and left the outcome up to God.

We started the day off by saying the Third Step prayer. We told God we knew this was His day. We turned our wills and our lives over to His care. We hoped we wouldn't take it back too many times. During the day, when things didn't go our way, when we weren't willing to share center stage, when the world did not meet all our expectations, we had to remember we were not running the show. We weren't in control of all this. Sometimes, the very worst things that happened to us had the most positive benefit over the long run. That was very hard to realize at the time, but our experiences showed it to us over and over again until finally even we were convinced.

We learned through the years that this was the step that would keep us sane on an ongoing, daily basis forever. No matter what happened, we had to realize that we were not in control of things. We didn't manipulate the world. We didn't run the people around us. All we had to do was turn it all over to God as we understood Him and everything was all right. And we were all right.

Before, we would just drive ourselves crazy trying to manipulate various people. We were wasting our time. We had been powerless all along and hadn't seen it. We were just making ourselves sick. Now we finally saw what we had been doing and we learned to let it all go. Over and over we learned to just let it go.

As we practiced the Third Step, all of a sudden things became different for us. It was different to believe in God and to turn our will and our lives over to our God. We started getting freer and freer. Some of us still had our old terror of God, but new things were happening. We had new ideas about God. We felt God forgiving us and teaching us a tolerance for ourselves. We felt worthy to be alive, to be human beings. It was as if we were just starting to wake up, to be a human being, something other than what we thought we were. We started feeling some self worth. We saw we were really worthy of life, any life other than the one we had lived. There were all these little awarenesses of coming alive. One person looked down at the grass of a meadow on a hilltop in the spring and saw the little wild flowers she had never seen before in all her years of being blind from using drugs.

We also realized that it helped us to work and practice the Third Step when we looked at each of the other steps we worked. We needed to free ourselves so that new things could come into our lives. Each of us saw that we were always the biggest obstacle standing in our own way. We got to the point where we had to just give up. We saw that in order to go forward and to learn some new things about ourselves, we had to have some emptiness before we could be filled up. Only after we decided to turn our lives over to a Higher Power could we approach the remaining steps with the assurance that we would be successfully guided through. We had to let go of some of our old, negative ways of looking at the world before something better could take their place. We were getting rid of the old ideas to make a space for the new ideas.

As we worked with our will, or call it ego, we found that there was a strong pattern in the way it worked. Our will thrived on fear. Our will believed in shortage; to get something, we had to take it from someone who had it. It believed that we were in danger from every side from assaults, diseases, accidents, wars. Our will believed that to be happy we had to have a good job, money, and a beautiful partner in a beautiful relationship. But no matter what our will got, it was still unhappy and lonely.

As we learned to surrender, and sought to align our will with God's will for us, we found there was a whole new life out there that we had never before dreamed existed. Some of us would have argued against the idea of this new life with every fiber of our being before we came in the Fellowship. But as the steps forced us



to live a life of the spirit instead of a life of the ego, it slowly dawned on us how crazy our old ideas were. Our own new experiences showed each of us that there was this other life. And that life had been waiting inside us all the time.

When we looked back, we saw that was why we were able to come into N.A. It was our spirit that played a big part in helping us get fed up with the way we were living so we could look for a new way. Our spirit was that little spark of hope within us. It was such a small, still voice that we hardly heard it at first. But as we worked the steps, especially the Third Step, that voice grew stronger and stronger. We began to see that there was a whole different world out there than we had thought. It let us know that everything was okay. We didn't really hate people. We loved them. And they loved us, even if we didn't know it at that time. And we were not separate and alone. We were all one.

That was the strength of the N.A. Program. It showed us this deep spiritual system, this deep spiritual truth about ourselves. Once we saw this clearly, it didn't matter as much that we couldn't live this way all day, every day. It was enough for us to have this new vision and new understanding of the way things really were. So we kept going to meetings as we had done for five, ten, twenty, or thirty years. No matter how much time we had in recovery, we were moving ever more steadily towards this spiritual way of life the Third Step had forced us to start practicing.

We had all seen that there were lots of times when we were still hypnotized by our egos and went off into our own wills. We finally saw that we didn't simply have a drug problem, we also had an ego problem. But in very fundamental ways we were totally different people than when we had come in. As these new experiences of a new way of life happened to us and to the people around us, we became convinced without doubt that there was a Supreme Being, a God, an Allah, a Buddha, or whatever. And it didn't matter if it was a male, or a female or a spirit. It was ours. We had a personal God. Until it happened to us, we had a hard time believing. But after being a member of N.A. for a while, it happened to us all. And we now had a God that worked for us.

We were also different in many other ways. We weren't the same men or women we were when we came in. We didn't think like that anymore. We didn't talk like that anymore. We didn't live like that anymore. We didn't even look like that

anymore. We were different people. We had been damaged physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually when we got here but much of that damage was gradually being repaired. And we had the rest of our lives to keep getting better.

We found a big part of getting better was to say the Third Step prayer each morning out loud by ourselves or together with a partner. This was our dedication to live in God's will as much as we could each day:

"God, I am now willing to put my life into your care.

Align my will with Yours and help me to recognize and carry out Your will.

Open my heart so I may be a free and open channel for Your love.

Take away my fears and doubts, that I may better demonstrate Your presence in my life.

May Your will, not mine, be done."

Although we may not use these particular words, it is the expression of this idea to the Higher Power of our own individual understanding that makes it possible for us to develop a working relationship with that Higher Power. Making this decision revolutionizes our lives.

Our belief in a Higher Power and our decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of this Power enable us to experience personal growth and freedom. This decision is the key that opens our hearts and minds to let this Higher Power enter. Through the trust and faith gained in this step, we begin to fulfill a spiritual need. We come to rely on something other than ourselves. It is upon this spiritual fulfillment that a foundation for recovery is built.

We have found that God's will is really quite simple. It is that we do the best we can at the tasks put before us, not comparing our best with another person's best. It is that we experience a calmness or peace within, and freedom from the inner turmoil which signals self-will. Our faith has led us to believe our Higher Power wants us to be creative, spontaneous, vital, joyous, cooperative, loving, and free; not to be burdened by overreaction to the everyday ups and downs of life, but to ask for God's guidance and strength, and to follow our hearts. Most importantly, we believe that God's will for us is that we stay clean, and that we share the joy of recovery with other addicts.

## S T E P F O U R

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

Step Four was a step to freedom. It was here that we began to take a look at ourselves. We did this in order to identify our liabilities or defects of character. All the reasons we thought we had to use needed to be put behind us. In this way, for the first time in our lives, we could avoid turmoil and step aside when trouble came our way.

Everyone thought of this step as the big one, the big killer. But we found it was thinking about doing our Fifth Step that made the Fourth Step seem like such a big one. For most of us, it wasn't really that hard to write things down. But one more time we had trouble with faith. We had come to some faith in God. But here we had to learn to have faith in other human beings, and that scared us to death. Now we had to trust human beings.

Now there was a human factor that came in. Now we knew that if we did our Fourth Step, we would have to do the Fifth Step and share it with another human being. Many of us got so worried about that that we stopped. It inhibited us from doing our Fourth Step. It was here that we came to see the true benefit of having a good sponsor. Our sponsors were not dismayed or put off by our pain, anger, or fears. They reminded us that we had come to believe in and trust a God of our understanding in the first three steps. We had come to believe in a Higher Power who could give us the strength to walk through our fear.

Most of us were forced to do our Fourth Step because we were sick of the way we were feeling. Nothing was going right in our lives and we were willing to do anything to get better. Or, we did



this step because we were working our way through the steps with some goal in our minds such as doing our Fifth Step by the end of six months or by the end of our first year clean.

A few of us looked at doing this step as the beginning of an exciting thing. We had hesitated looking at the things we had been trying to run away from all our lives. We got to the point where we wanted to see ourselves and get comfortable with ourselves. We wanted to know who we were. What kind of person were we? Once we were ready to begin, we prayed that the God of our understanding would give us the honesty, strength, and power to complete Step Four.

All of us found our first Fourth Step was the hardest one to do. We made countless false starts, or we filled up countless pages with writing that had nothing to do with this step. We read all we could find on doing the Fourth Step and talked to everyone who said anything about their Fourth Step at meetings. A lot of what we did was procrastination. We were just putting off getting started. But partly what we were doing was giving ourselves the time we needed to figure out what a Fourth Step was all about for us. This was a new and strange experience for us, this writing a moral inventory.

What is a moral inventory? In a moral inventory, our goal is to get a true picture of ourselves. What happened with us? What are we like today? Our sponsors shared with us that in order to get a true picture of ourselves, we had to take a look at every area of our lives. We had to look at sex. We had to write about relationships. We had to look at crime and things we hurt people with. We had to write about our inadequacies, our insecurities. What kind of moral person were we? Were we giving persons? Or, were we takers? Were we loving persons? Or, did we have a lot of hate in us?

As we began to write down the answers to these questions, we began to get a pretty good picture of the kind of person we were morally. We saw there were a lot of things wrong with us. Many of us couldn't give. We couldn't share. We didn't know anything about how to love. Our conception of love was really not love, it was lust. It was the only thing that came close to love and it was not love. We found we didn't love ourselves. We didn't love anything, anyone.

A way some of us looked at this step was to look at all the things we felt guilty about and all the things we felt good about. And we

wrote out our resentments. Some of us couldn't get a good hold on what resentments were, so we wrote about the people we hated. And there were lots of those. We wrote about the people we loved. We didn't love too many people, but there were a few.

Some of us saw sex as the one big sin. So we spent most of our time writing about our sexual experiences. And we didn't get much relief. We finally realized that what we saw as our sexual misdeeds didn't have that much to do with anything. It was our controlling and manipulating we had to look at. We had to sit down and take our moral inventory. What made us so lustful? What made us emotional misfits, social misfits? What made us all these things? We had to come to terms with them. It took a lot of searching and praying to get to the bottom of our mess. For some of us, there was so much work to do here because we had some severe psychological and emotional problems. For us, it made this step the hardest to do.

A few of us saw the Fourth Step, at first, as a way to finally talk about all the things that had been done to us. We wrote page after page about how they did this and they did that. And we were victims, and poor us. But then our sponsors would look at that and say, "Okay, now what did you do?" And our minds would be a blank. We couldn't remember. And we had to pray for honesty because our sponsors told us we weren't being honest. So we asked God to give us the honesty to see and write down what really happened. We found it was very different to look at our side of what had happened. We had to start learning to take a little bit of responsibility for our actions and the consequences of those actions.

We finally saw we had played a part in the things that had happened to us that we thought were so bad. We egged people on, we taunted and challenged them. And sometimes they were abusive to us in return. But we had often given them good cause to act that way. We manipulated people and then were surprised when they didn't do everything the way we had planned for them.

We really had to tell our whole story. We found it was very important to get all that down. We had to be searching and fearless, looking carefully at ourselves. Our sponsors told us to search within, as if entering a dark house with a single candle to guide us. We had to be willing to illuminate every corner of every room of our minds as if our lives depended on it—because they did. Our sponsors also told us that we needed to write out our Fourth Step.

Writing it was important, and that just thinking about it was not enough. We found that we needed to write a lot. We found it was a mistake to write too little. And we tried not to think of the Fifth Step when we were writing things down.

We only had to share these secrets once, so the more we wrote down, the better it was for us. It was important to put everything down that gave a true picture of us. This was the first time we had to really face ourselves and what we had done to others, so no wonder it scared us to death.

A lot of us got concerned with the format. Should we write in columns or paragraphs? A simple solution was to use the N.A. Fourth Step Guide, *Working the Fourth Step in N.A.* But there were some of us who were still having a hard time reading and remembering what we were reading, so we couldn't use something that had a lot of explanation to it. We found that that didn't matter. What mattered was that we needed to be as honest as we could be. That wasn't easy. We found we had to stop and search to get down to how we really felt. What part were we playing in our own lives today? That was the whole point of what we were doing, to help us change.

We needed to have a turning point in our lives. We needed to be able to look at the past, accept it for what it was, and let it go. What happened, happened. If we didn't do that, our past kept hurting us. A lot of old feelings influenced how we lived in our today. So getting our past out in the open and accepting it clearly could set us free. It would let us start on new, clean ground. And we wouldn't be dragging the past around with us anymore.

Once we had gone through all our turmoil about what a moral inventory was, we were faced with the problem of starting to write. We did lots of procrastinating here, too. We would sit down to write and we would forget a pencil. We would get a pencil and find we had the wrong paper. We would get the pencil and paper together and then we would have to get our coffee. Then we would have to get our cigarettes. And then we would remember we had to unplug the phone. And then we would think, maybe we shouldn't write it here. Maybe we should go to the library. Or, maybe we should go to the beach or go to the park. Or we should get a box of Kleenex or a roll of toilet paper because we would be crying. There was so much pain and guilt that would be coming

out and we knew it. So there was almost no end to our procrastination.

The best way most of us found to start writing our Fourth Step was to pray and ask God to help us. We prayed about it and then we started writing. A lot of us started our inventory off with words like: "Dear God, help me be fearless and thorough," and then just started writing. As we wrote our inventory, our Higher Power was usually the only one in the room with us. We wrote in confidence and privacy. For some of us, God as we understood Him took control of the pen and revealed what we were prepared to see and deal with. Since God helped us through the madness we were now writing about, we didn't have to be afraid of putting it down on paper. Nothing that we wrote on that paper hurt us. It was all a benefit to us. There was something revealed we needed to see, something that allowed us to grow and be free. We soon realized that greater freedom lay ahead for us as we got braver and more honest in our Fourth Step inventory.

How did we know when we were through writing? That was a question many of us asked a lot of the older members. They told us you just know when you're done. When you're done, you're done. That seemed pretty strange to us at the time. Then we found through our own experience it was true. There wasn't any conclusion. We just had to get our story down on paper so we could see a true picture of ourselves.

One of the most painful things about that first inventory was confronting all the lies that we had been telling our whole lives. It was so hard to sit down and finally tell the truth. What we felt was, "Oh, you mean I have to give all this up? You mean I have to be completely vulnerable and admit I don't know who I am?" That was scary and painful. We finally got away from all the terrible things we thought had happened to us. We saw we had manufactured a lot of that. Those were our reactions. It was our disappointments at being let down because we didn't get what we wanted. We were just like three-year-old children stamping our feet and saying, "Give me my own way!" Seeing that clearly was the whole crux of the Fourth Step for many of us.

One of our members had procrastinated on this step a lot. He finally called his sponsor and made a date to do his Fifth Step. He knew he had to do it because if he didn't, he would come to the point where he was going to use. So he got his paper and a pen,



instead of a pencil, because he was scared he might start erasing things. At the step study meetings he had been to, he was told not to reread what he had written. He had been told to write about his relationships and the following defects of character: pride, gluttony, sloth, greed, envy, anger, and lust. And that there should be something positive in there if he could find anything. And definitely don't reread it. Because if he reread it, then he would have doubts and then he would be thinking about what he was going to do with this in the Fifth Step. So just sit down and write.

But he didn't think he could do that because he was too scared. So he got down on his knees and asked God for help. Then, the most amazing thing happened. All of a sudden he started writing. He wrote and wrote. All of a sudden it was time to quit for that day. And he went about his activities. And then the next day, at a certain time he had set, which was his best time of day, he wrote again.

He continued this process for several days, and he never reread anything. And when he finished, he realized he didn't know what was on the paper. He was a person who had prided himself on having total recall but he couldn't remember what he had written. He had just written as honestly as he could because he was convinced that what they said about the inventory was true. This would not give him the guarantee that he would stay clean. But he knew that people who did do their inventories had a chance.

As we watched other people do their Fourth Steps, we came to see that there was no wrong way to do this step. We came to see that there were different approaches to this step that worked. Each of us had to find a way to work the step that gave us a true picture of ourselves. Our sponsors were usually able to provide the guidance we needed. A few of us worked this step from a somewhat different perspective than most. We looked at our lives and what it was we wanted from them. We saw we all had needs that, for the most part, we deserved to have met. All of us had needs for love and affection and approval and productive work. All of us had certain basic financial necessities. And all of us wanted some luxuries.

Those of us who took this approach to the Fourth Step saw that it wasn't our needs that got us into trouble. It was the ways we were going about meeting those needs. If we needed approval and the way we tried to meet that need was by bullying people and monopolizing conversations trying to be the life of the party, that

defeated the purpose. If we wanted financial security and we were running up a bunch of bills we couldn't pay, then that need wasn't going to be met.

If we wanted to feel comfortable with ourselves yet we were jumping into bed with anyone who asked us, we couldn't feel very good. If we wanted an education but didn't do anything to work towards that, what did that mean? What did that say about us? If we wanted a good relationship, what were we doing to get it? If we were fighting with our partner all the time, obviously that was no way to get it. What were we willing to do differently? Maybe we needed not to have such high expectations. Maybe we needed to be more tolerant, more patient.

That was a method that worked for some of us to see our lives as they were and find the ways we were defeating ourselves. We wanted things to be different. But we wouldn't look at how we wanted them different and what responsibility we had to take. We just sat around hoping God would do something about our lives. If we waited long enough, maybe that would happen. But we found things worked better in our lives if we took responsibility for what was happening to us and changed the things we could change.

Some of us really didn't want to write our inventories. We were told we had to do that, but we refused. Those of us who felt this way usually managed to find someone who told us you didn't need to write out this step. When we were looking for it, we could usually find bad advice. One of our early members was told by another N.A. member that he hadn't written a moral inventory and never would. One week before that man's twentieth clean birthday, he used. So our member decided that man was wrong. By then he had about five or six years clean. He decided he had better take a written inventory like he was told. He took it and didn't feel better; he felt sick. But a sense of relief set in as he realized how fortunate he had been to stay clean for so long without working a Fourth Step. He felt a sense of accomplishment, at last he could go on.

Most of us found that the first Fourth Step we wrote out was just the beginning. We knew that ideally, if a person could do this step perfectly and completely, it would be a one-time job. But for us, this was not so. We worked it to the best of our ability at



the time but that was not as good as our ability was a few years later. Although the Tenth Step talked about continuing to take a personal inventory, we also found we had to go back and write Fourth Steps again when our past started boiling in our stomachs. If we could have worked the Fourth Step perfectly the first time and really cleaned ourselves out, we wouldn't have needed to do a Fourth Step again. But that would have meant we would have been able to get at all our resentments, all our angers, all our character defects, all the feelings about people in our lives and all the shambles of our lives. Who could have faced all of this when they first came into N.A.?

There was so much going on inside us when we first got clean. There was all the pain and anger and resentment. We were unaware of it. It took years for it to be revealed. And it was revealed piecemeal. We believe that it was because our loving God as we understand Him knew our capabilities and knew when we were ready. So something we would hear at a meeting or a convention would trigger some old feeling or event that we had forgotten all about, and that piece of our life would come rushing back to us for us to work on.

One member was at a convention and heard a speaker saying that if you are too hip for God, God help you. He related to that and saw the speaker was talking to him. His pride was getting in the way of his relationship with God. It was like a bolt of lightning. That defect of character was shown to him and he saw he needed to write about it in a Fourth Step. He quit being too hip for God, and started praying on his knees, not up in his bed. He found that for those who suffered from terminal hipness and were too hip for God, talking to God on their knees was the way it had to be.

We learned that when something deep like this was troubling us, we usually needed to go back and write on it in a Fourth Step. That's what our sponsors told us to do and we found it really helped. Every time we did this, we got relief eventually. Something was revealed to us, something that would allow us to grow and be free. We got a new freedom we never had before.

One member was sent to a foster home as a child by his mother. In the foster home, he was slapped and he was molested. Some really terrible things happened to him. He went home on a weekend pass and told his mother what had happened to him. And then he had to go back into the foster home to be molested and

slapped some more. And he never was able to put together why he was very angry and very resentful at his mother. He never connected that all up. Then he was at an N.A. convention and heard a man talk about an experience where he had lost an eye. He came to his mother with his eye hanging out and she told him, "Well, there, good! That serves you right for playing with Johnny So-and-So."

A light bulb turned on. He saw that was just like his mother sending him back to the foster home. And he went home and wrote another Fourth Step inventory. And he cried and he wrote. And when it was done, it was not necessary for him to go back to his mother and say, "Why did you do that?" He came to understand that his mom was doing the very best that she could. She didn't know any better. That was the best that she could do. She didn't for one minute sit down and say, "Gee, what can I do to screw up this little guy's head? I know, I'll send him back so he can be hurt some more." He knew his mother didn't do that. Once he was able to process that, write that down, look at it, and deal with it, his relationship with her completely changed.

Now he had the freedom to accept her as she was and sometimes to criticize her. He didn't have that freedom before. He had the freedom to be himself and be comfortable with himself. He didn't have that before either. In her home, he could be himself. If he disagreed with her, he could say, "Hey, you are wrong." It seemed funny at first that getting free of an old experience would work that way, but it did. The changed lives of all the people around the circle at the meetings showed us that was so. And it was here in the Fourth Step that all that work on getting a true picture of our past and of ourselves had to be done.

We always found that some story we heard, or some situation we were in, made us aware of the pain and hurt inside that showed us there was some more work on the Fourth Step that needed to be done. Sometimes we knew about some problem and held on to it as our secret. We didn't want to tell people all our secrets. Sometimes our secrets weren't known to us yet, they were still buried too deep inside for us to see; they needed time to surface. But those secrets all needed to go. We were as sick as our secrets. Holding on to our secrets was saying we were separate from others and they couldn't be trusted to know us. So that was why Step Four asked us to be searching and fearless. How else could

we have ever hoped to get at the secrets that were keeping us separate and alone, away from the real connection with our fellow human beings and God?

We found another big value in writing additional inventories later in recovery. Most of our early inventories were written on what was wrong with us. We couldn't see much good in ourselves. Some of us found in later inventories that it helped to make a commitment to ourselves and our sponsors that we would spend as much time searching and meditating and thinking about strengths as we did about things that we wanted to change or improve. That made a big difference to us. By this time we were beginning to have some feelings of self worth so we could stick to that commitment.

We saw that humility was truth. So we searched for the truth about ourselves. Humility about ourselves was discovering the truth about our weaknesses and our strengths. So we tried to write down the truth, to tell the truth about ourselves. This was usually our first attempt at letting somebody else know the good things we felt about ourselves. After a couple of years in N.A., we had learned to share about all the crazy things we did and the way we lived. We even managed to make each other laugh about it instead of crying about it, which was a blessing.

For some of us, it was really difficult for us to see the good. And even if we saw it, we weren't going to tell anybody about it. And it was interesting for us to find how a lot of people perceived us. But it wasn't until we started working on the good in ourselves that we would go and ask the people around us. We saw a lot of things we admired in other people. It wasn't until some time later we were able to see we had early signs of the same qualities even if we didn't have them fully.

We found that it really helped us to force ourselves to spend some time writing about our strengths, not only our weaknesses. This wasn't something any of us could do at first. Some of us had to have three to ten years clean before we could do much writing on our strengths.

It took time for us to see that we weren't going to be the persons we had been before coming into the Fellowship. We weren't living that way anymore. But being the extremists we were, we were afraid that if we started talking about the good things in us, we

would have to start living those things fully. We would have to be those things. Sometimes we were and sometimes we weren't. But the fact was that we had some strengths. We had some things we liked about ourselves, some things we considered good.

We also made the mistake of thinking that the people who were guiding us and who we looked up to were all good. We kept thinking that the people who had acceptance and kindness and love for other people were pious and holy. It may seem hard to believe, but it took some time for us to see the people with more time than us were just recovering addicts who had made some big changes in their lives. We were finally able to take these people off the pedestals we had put them on. We faced the fact that we were just like them. We didn't have as much clean time or experience with the Twelve Steps, but we were just an earlier version of where they were now.

Our first Fourth Step was a drastic one. That was why we were afraid at first to take it and why most people were when they thought of it: searching, fearless, and moral, taking your self-inventory. There was something threatening about it at first. Of course, after we had taken it, there wasn't anything threatening about it anymore. We looked forward to challenging ourselves by recognizing something that we didn't particularly like. We became aware of our defects. We just wanted to let go of them and have them replaced. We learned that if we let go of them, many of them would be taken away in God's own time. We also found that the things we asked for would be given us in God's time and way. That's what led us up to taking the Fourth Step again, over and over. So it wasn't the same burden as it was the first couple of times we did it.

What is the purpose of the Fourth Step? It is to take a look at ourselves. To really see. To search through ourselves to find God. To be free. To let go of the garbage. To learn how we have put ourselves in the way of doing what God would have us do in working or living. To get ourselves out of the way. To learn how we can best serve or help our fellow recovering addicts.

The Fourth Step was simple. It was a lot easier than living the way we lived before. That was a hard life. Hustling, running, lying, hospitals, suicide attempts. Getting ripped off by the dope. Ripping off other people to buy the drugs so we could get ripped off. It was madness. The Fourth Step looked inviting compared to that.



When we do the steps, we get results. In our addiction we did something and never knew what we were going to get. Here we know what we are going to get. We are breaking out of the isolation. We are no longer alone. We are with the God of our Third Step. And now we can be sure we have really taken the Third Step. Because, as one of the oldtimers was so fond of saying, we know we have taken the Third Step when we finish up with the Fourth Step, because it sure wasn't our will to take a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. So now that we have taken Step Four for the first or tenth time, we are ready to do Step Five.

## S T E P F I V E

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

This was the humility step for us. It was a really tough one. The things we had done in our past weren't usually as hard to admit to ourselves and to God, as they were to admit to somebody else. That was really tough.

But we had to do the hard thing, much as we hated it. We had to share our inventory with somebody else. We knew that. Over a period of time we saw that if we wanted to recover, we had to work the steps. We saw we couldn't go on and deal with the next step until we dealt with the one we were on.

The issue was always more than just staying clean. We saw from our experiences that we could stay clean a long time on many different things. We saw other people stay clean on sex, resentment, hate, or love. We heard of people being two-steppers, doing only the First Step and the first part of the Twelfth Step. But we saw there was no serenity and peace in that approach to the program. This program has twelve steps. We found we had to work each one of them to the best of our ability before we could go on to the next step.

We saw that for the long haul there was only one way that we could stay clean continuously—that was by working the steps. And that's what we did after much devastation. Some of us got right down to the edge of falling off the deep end and using drugs again. That forced us to take our inventory out from under our bed and take it to our sponsor.

A key word in Step Five is "admitted." We saw that word also in Step One. The first admission we made was of powerlessness. We

went on with the steps, and we began to recover. Now we have discovered some new truths about ourselves by writing an inventory. We need to admit these things in order to continue with our recovery. "Admit" is a potent word which usually brings ego deflation with it. None of us likes to admit anything unpleasant about ourself. It can be a very humbling experience. But we found that the humility we gain through humbling ourselves before God and another human being is exactly what we need to counter the self-justification and rationalization we have lived with for so long. In Step Five we admit to God, ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs, because it is the *only* way we can continue in our recovery.

Some of us had a real problem with the Fifth Step because we weren't willing to trust someone else. We worked on this step, read about it, thought about it, maybe even wrote about it, and looked at the first four steps a long time before we finally were willing to share our inventory with someone else. We weren't that close to people at first. Even after we were clean a few years, trusting was still very difficult for some of us. There were still a lot of things no one else knew about us. Sitting down with someone and telling them things about ourselves was not something we were willing to do. We were even embarrassed to tell God, and we knew He knew about it anyway. But to tell God out loud and tell another human being, that was just too difficult.

We found that if we did not go on with Step Five and reveal our inventory to God, ourselves, and another human being, the process of self-justification came back. Our recovery stopped and our egos took over. The longer we held on to our Fourth Step, the longer the insanity went on. Luckily, for most of us, the pain finally became too great. We realized that once we had done Step Four, it was best for us if we went right on to Step Five.

We did finally make the appointment; we called our sponsor and we met. We walked in the park or went for a ride in the car and told our story. Some of us sat in rooms and talked. Our sponsor looked at us and smiled and made us feel comfortable and shared some things back with us. We read to our sponsors exactly what was on our papers. But that alone wasn't enough. Our sponsors wanted us to share, to go through the feelings, because some of us could write more easily than we could talk. So we needed to

take the words we had on the paper and transfer them into feelings and then talk about the feelings.

When we were done, we felt so good about having finished it. A few of us felt so good about finally having all that relief that we wanted to go back to Step One and go through the whole process again. But that wasn't the direction to go. Our sponsors pointed out that we couldn't keep using the same steps over and over again just to get a feeling of relief. That wasn't much different than when we used drugs again and again trying to recapture a feeling. We couldn't be sure anyway that the results would be exactly the same if we were to go back and start again. So we learned that we needed to work all Twelve Steps to recover from our addiction, not just to feel good, and we went on to the next step.

Some of our Fifth Steps went smoothly, but a lot of them didn't. Many of us went through a lot of agony to do that first Fifth Step. One of our members was so afraid of this step that he went to a different city. He found somebody at a group there who couldn't hear very well. He went off with him and read him his inventory. That was the end of that. Some people went to clergy and others went to therapists. These are some of the ways our members worked the Fifth Step, but we found there were added benefits we gained by doing it with another recovering addict.

Usually, we found it was best if we went to somebody who knew us personally. The person who knew us best and who had worked with us most was our sponsor. Most of us found that we got a lot more out of doing this step with our sponsors. They were people we really knew and had developed a level of trust with.

We found it was really important to have somebody who understood us, somebody we could feel comfortable with discussing all areas of our lives—even our deepest secrets. Of course, this was easier to say than to do. As addicts, we spent years in building walls around ourselves. Our drug abuse was just one of the means we used to keep people out of our lives. If we did allow anyone into our lives, it was strictly on our terms. All of our relationships were conditional. We just couldn't trust people. After years of shutting people out, we have to make an enormous effort now to let someone in. We usually start with just one person—our sponsor. Some of us have had the same sponsor for many years. We have shared most of our inventories with that one person. We did



this because our sponsor knew what was going on in our lives. That helped our sponsors have a better perspective on us so they could be of more help to us. It wasn't that we didn't want someone else to know about us. It was that sharing our Fifth Steps with the same person helped to build a deeper and trusting relationship.

When we have the three of us—God, ourselves, and another human being—in one room with our Fourth Step, we begin. Sometimes we start by saying a prayer together to ease the tension. This is also a good time to turn our fear and anxiety over to our Higher Power. We gather up all of our honesty and courage and begin to share our Fourth Step inventory. We discuss everything in the inventory, leaving nothing out.

We move steadily forward, trying to ignore our pride, ego and fear. As we continue, we find a new kind of humility—not a groveling, embarrassing confession, but a deep sense of relief. As we reveal our past, we usually feel genuinely accepted.

As we began to relate in an honest way to another person we found that they could see a lot more about us than we originally told them. This didn't necessarily mean our specific actions, it was more about our emotions. They could see in our faces how we felt when we spoke of certain individuals. They could also see when we were upset, even when we tried to hide it. As addicts, we have always had trouble admitting our feelings. Being secretive was a big part of our denial. Our addiction had made us emotionally sick. Now we need emotional healing in our recovery. In Step Five we find that admitting our feelings is a vital part of our recovery. Being entirely open with another person is a big step in the right direction. Sharing our Fourth Step inventory with a God we are willing to trust, with ourselves, and with a carefully chosen human being is a safe place to begin opening up.

If we leave something out of our inventory because we are afraid to tell our sponsor, we are the ones who suffer. The other person is not affected by our omissions. For some of us, it was easy to walk in, read the Fourth Step inventory, and walk out. But that didn't make us face the exact nature of our wrongs or the feelings and the pain we had about our addiction. We all felt the pain of facing what we had done when using. Now we had to face that pain without using to take it away.

We had turned completely against the values we had learned in our homes as children, against our religious beliefs, and even

against basic human morals. In our addiction we went the opposite way, so we felt immoral. Feeling immoral meant we still had some values or we wouldn't have felt guilty. Doing our Fourth and Fifth Steps helped us recognize what was going on in us. But we also saw that the morals we had felt bad about going against weren't always the ones we were going to stick with now that we were clean in N.A.

From practicing the Twelve Steps, we began to see that there was a different set of morals than the ones we had been able to understand as children and in our growing up years. Only as our connection with God as we understood Him grew in strength and meaning were we able to act in a truly moral way. Our old idea of what was moral was often based on how well we followed certain rules and regulations. We came to see that morality was simply finding God's will for us and following that.

Another problem we got into with our old way of moral thinking was judging ourselves. With morals as rules, we judged ourselves harshly when we broke a rule. Once we realized that we needed to find God's will for us in all things, there was no more basis for us judging ourselves. We weren't living by fixed rules anymore, but by a higher rule, God's will for us.

We saw we would spend the rest of our life learning morality. But we had to go through this pain in Step Five to clean out our old behavior and our old thinking. We had to clean out the old so we could find the new. When those old things were out in the open and put aside, then we could go beyond the things we had to talk about in Step Five to our relationship with God. And from that relationship, our new morals came.

We found talking to another person about what we had done was humbling. Oddly enough, we found it was easier to talk about some of the bigger things we had done than some of the little ones. They were so petty. It was really humiliating to talk about stealing money out of our mother's purse to buy drugs. Or to tell how we had stolen food stamps out of the purse of some woman we had lived with to trade for drugs. She and her children went without food because we had to have our drugs.

We had to share a lot of sexual things, things we were very embarrassed about and humiliated by. They were things we would never have told another human being if it weren't for this

program. Again, we did that for the freedom it would afford us. Once those secrets had been told, they were no big deal any more. We were free of them and the fear that people would know that about us. Now someone else did know that about us and they didn't think any the less of us, they still loved us.

When we were finally able to tell these things about ourselves, we felt a wave of relief. We felt as if we had lost a lot of weight that had been burdening us down a long time. One member was horrified at all he had done. Hearing it said out loud and all together, he couldn't really believe he had done all those things. Then he started to cry. He said it was the first time in his life he had cried when it wasn't out of self-pity. It was as though a dam broke. His sponsor put his arms around him and said it was okay. And it was.

Some of us though, hadn't felt this big relief right afterwards. We had heard others say how they had felt such great relief. Even though some of us didn't feel that relief, that was really not why we took the step. We didn't take it to feel good. We took it because we needed to take it. We needed to let somebody else know the way we were.

When we did this step with our sponsors, we found that most of them shared back with us things they had done that were similar to ours. They shared how they had judged themselves so harshly before doing the Fifth Step. This helped us ease our own judgment of ourselves. They talked to us about getting our minds off our old ideas of what was moral and getting our eyes on God and what His will was for us. They shared the experiences that they had gone through.

And then they shared with us how they had gone on to the next step. Some of us were counselled by our sponsors to take an hour after doing our Fifth Step, rest, and then get down and do our Sixth and Seventh Steps. Others of us were told not to hurry to the next step, to take our time. We were asked to reflect on what we had found out about ourselves in this step. We saw that what we needed to reflect on here were not the wrong things we had done, it was the *nature* of those wrongs. We saw that there was a difference between the *nature* of our wrongs and our wrongs themselves.

In the next two steps, it is the nature of our wrongs that we are dealing with. So we have to be clear on the nature of those

wrongs. We could list in a day's time all the things we have done that we consider wrong. But the nature of our wrongs is different and harder to identify. The nature of our wrongs is the opposite of the principles of the program. The nature of our wrongs are things like being self-destructive, headstrong, self-willed, or fearing failure. Those are really the nature of our wrongs. Much of what we did that was wrong stemmed out of those defects of our character.

After we had written out our Fourth Step and taken our Fifth Step, we began to see the patterns in what we had done. Those patterns revealed the nature of our wrongs to us. Also, we saw those patterns were still affecting the things that happened in our recovery. It was still pretty much the same pattern. We were still self-destructive and we were still self-centered and unkind. It wasn't yet our nature to love people and extend ourselves. We found that those weren't things we were capable of changing in ourselves. So we talked with our sponsors about acceptance of ourselves. The Fifth Step and learning about acceptance carried us through this early stage.

Many of us stayed in that state of acceptance and relief for a while before we went on to Step Six. We found we really needed the space to breathe and feel good and experience the steps. Some of the things we learned about ourselves here in the first five steps we put into practice in our daily lives. Just having some acceptance made us feel more comfortable about being a servant in N.A. It was not being a servant in the sense of being a group service representative or on some committee. It was greater than that. It was being a servant in the sense of wanting be of some service to everybody, everywhere. We started to feel some goodwill in our hearts.

This step was a big turning point for so many of us. It made a big difference in the way we did and saw everything in our lives. More and more we were doing what we had to do. We often couldn't see the virtue in that. Often we didn't see that there were principles we could gain from doing things, not because we were going to get something back by doing them, but because it was the right thing to do.

And we grew in trust. After we had taken this step that demanded some real trust from us, we grew in our ability to trust. For the first time we had someone we trusted. For the first time we had risked being totally honest with someone. We had revealed



the exact nature of our wrongs and developed a bond with another person. It was a bond that was based not on manipulation and self-seeking, but on honesty and trust. It was a bond that would grow stronger over the years. When we had done our Fifth Steps with our sponsors, we couldn't stop talking about them. We told people about what we had gained from our Fifth Steps and the trust we had found in another human being. That was really important because we had thought that somehow people were out to get us. We began to experience goodwill and trust and some of the other principles that everyone talked about. We could see those positive changes in each other's faces in N.A. The spirit of Narcotics Anonymous started to become more than real; it started to become a way of life.

Another way we saw our improvement and the improvement of others in the Fellowship was in relationships. Most all of us had trouble with relationships because we were looking to gain something from our relationships that didn't really exist. We were looking for someone who would fill up that void, that loneliness. We looked to get something from the relationship that was going to fill it. And it just didn't happen that way.

We felt lonely before we came to the program. After a while, we weren't lonely anymore, whether we were alone or in a relationship. We stopped being lonely because we finally found out who we were. We didn't have to look to people, places, and things to fill our loneliness. But in the beginning we didn't know that. We were very possessive in our relationships. We always wanted to be loved. We wanted that feeling of love. We thought that the only way to get it was to find a person who would give it to us. When a relationship stopped giving us that feeling, we looked for a new relationship. Some of our relationships had been so short, they only lasted the night.

After we had done this step, we started to make a real connection with other human beings. Then we were able to realize that the only way we were going to feel love was to give it. We saw the truth that to give was to receive. Giving and receiving were synonymous. They were the same thing. We saw this by seeing in others and then ourselves that the more we gave, the more we received because of the way love expanded.

Looking back on the relationships in our life, we began to see that there had been some people in our lives who had really loved

us. We just didn't feel it. They felt it. They felt the love. We didn't. They were giving love. We wanted to get it but we couldn't get it. The only way we could have felt the love was to have given it to them.

So this is another thing we find out in Narcotics Anonymous. The more we give, the more we have. We have to give the program away to keep it. Not only do we keep it, we expand it. Before we had always thought that to give was to lose. If we gave away something, we didn't have it anymore. We thought giving was a loss of something for us. That was one of our old ideas which we found didn't work. We gave it up for the new idea that to give was to gain. We saw that did work for us and those around us. The only way we could experience this was to live it. We had to live these principles, we had to live this program in order to experience it. Once we experienced it, we knew it was the truth with a quiet assurance that went beyond any logical arguments.

We saw that we didn't need to extend our will to get anything. We just let God do it. We did the footwork and God handled the results. We let God be God. We let God's will be done and we were provided with everything we needed. We saw that was what was meant by "Let go and let God." We let go of our will, our desires, our wants. We saw that there was no need to be obsessed with our wants and desires, because everything was taken care of with any problem we had in the world. The program has answers to any problem. We are powerless over our addiction and how it affects every area of our lives. Here in Step Five, we made a real and honest connection with the world as it actually is. We gave up much of the old, false world we had believed in so long.

Not everybody saw all this the first time they did this step. But we came to see that this was where we started making the real connection. This was where we began to come home to God as we understood Him. Because we could see this, we were able to tell the people we sponsored that we didn't care what they had done. Nothing, nothing that they could have done was so bad that they needed to die of this disease. This slow, insidious disease not only hurt them, it hurt everybody around them. No matter what anyone did, they didn't have that coming to them.

The Fifth Step helped us gain more freedom. It allowed us to clear away the shambles of our lives. Now we were able to hold up our heads and be human beings again. We no longer had to settle

for second best. We were worth more than that. The only way we could get the best was to give the best, to do the very best job we could do. That meant we had told all our secrets. We were only as sick as our secrets. Now our secrets were gone and we were ready to do the Sixth Step.

## S T E P S I X

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

This was a big step for us. We were faced here with living a new way of life without our character defects. The idea staggered us. How could it possibly work for us? And if it did work, what would we be like with no defects of character? That was a confusing, frightening thought.

By taking our Fifth Step we became aware of our defects. We had never before really understood the exact ways in which our personality was defective. We were great at thinking we were worse than a lot of people and better than a lot of others. But until we did our Fourth and Fifth Steps, we had never gotten down to the specific things that made us defective. These things had become deeply ingrained in us from the way we had lived in our active addiction; they had become an accepted part of our lifestyle. And the Sixth Step was asking us to be entirely ready to have God remove these defects. So one more time the steps were presenting us with a real challenge.

As we began to wrestle with which of our character defects we wanted removed, Step Five took on a new light. We saw that it was much easier to admit we had our defects than it was to face the prospect of life without them. Our fear jumped back into the picture again. We saw that this step meant what it said. God was going to take away our defects of character. But many of us felt that we were one hundred percent defective. If God took our defects away, what would we have left? That really scared us. We thought we wouldn't have anything left. What would we be? What would happen? We thought we might just shrivel down to



nothingness. We thought we might lose our manhood or womanhood. We began to see this step more clearly. Walking through all those fears with all those thoughts churning in our minds, and being entirely ready to go on to the Seventh Step with real conviction, that was what was asked of us in Step Six.

Then, one more time, our addiction started talking to us. Our disease told us that we didn't need to go that far with this step. We didn't have to go all the way. We didn't have to give up everything. But we knew we couldn't listen to the voice of our addiction. We had to listen to our sponsors and the other recovering addicts in N.A. They told us we had to be ready to have our defects of character removed so we wouldn't go back to living and feeling like we had before. So we got out paper and pencil and started to write down the defects in our attitudes and in our personalities that we had found in our inventory. We were faced again with our gluttony and sloth and greed and envy and lust and anger and pride. It was almost like taking another inventory, except that here we were preparing to say goodbye to the most familiar parts of ourselves.

We attached these defects to things that had happened in our lives and how they affected our lives. It was amazing how hard this was for us. We were fighting our way out of the fog and blindness of our addiction. Our disease had told us that, with the help of drugs, we could see things more clearly than people could who didn't use drugs. Now we had to face that lie. We saw how blind we had been to ourselves and to our lives. We found we didn't have much understanding to help us do the hard work Step Six requires. The words and knowledge and things we had prior to our addiction were all washed away by our drug use. Even the word "defects" was new to us as it applied to ourselves and our addiction. So we had to look it up in the dictionary. We made a list of our defects so we could ask God to remove them.

There were others of us who didn't have much trouble with this step the first time we did it. We were entirely ready to have God remove all our defects of character. We had done the best Fourth and Fifth Steps we could do at the time, and had faced and admitted a lot of things from our past that we had kept inside us for years. Those were all the things we definitely wanted to get rid of. They were the things we hated in ourselves and hoped we

would never have to admit to anybody. But once we had admitted them and they were out in the open, we really wanted to get rid of them.

Those first inventories, if they were "searching and fearless," freed us to go on with the rest of the steps, unburdened by the dark secrets of our past. We had peeled the first layer of the onion. But as our clean years went on, we began to gain a greater insight into ourselves. As we took more inventories, we got down to the real core of it. Then it became harder to let go of our defects. Although we saw how even our more subtle defects limited our freedom, being entirely ready to let go of them really got tough. They were so much a part of who we were.

The hard ones to let go of were defects we knew were wrong, but we were comfortable with. We didn't want to get rid of them. A part of us wanted to get rid of them because of their consequences in our lives, but it was hard for us to let them go. That was where it got tougher for almost all of us. We found that as each inventory took us deeper and deeper into the truth about ourselves, the surrender required in Step Six got harder. But those of us who did surrender and go on with the steps once again always found that we gained more and more freedom with each surrender; more and more inner peace as we peeled each new layer of the onion.

A lot of the defects we weren't ready to give up were the ones we enjoyed. Or, at least, we thought we enjoyed them. But we really didn't enjoy their consequences. It was the same thing we had seen when we first came to N.A. We thought we were going to lose something by giving up the drugs. But we didn't lose anything. Then, when we decided to surrender to our Higher Power, we thought we were going to lose something. But, once again, we didn't lose anything; in fact, we gained something. So we knew, logically, that when we gave up our character defects we would not really lose anything. We would gain something else that was better for us.

As we work the program, we see that being entirely ready is a piecemeal thing with us that goes on as long as we live. All of us still have some defects today that we have been hanging on to. They are so familiar to us, so much a part of our identities, even though we know we would have more freedom if we would

let them go. But they are still comfortable, familiar, a part of who we are—that's why we have procrastinated with them and not gotten ready to have them removed yet. But we know now that the steps work, and that we don't have to live with the limitations of these defects. So once again, on yet another level of honesty, on our way to yet another level of freedom, we are becoming entirely ready to have these defects removed too.

We were confused at first about how to become entirely ready. We wanted something to happen like a bolt of lightning or a big sign that told us we were entirely ready. Some of our sponsors helped us through this by reassuring us that it wasn't the big deal we were trying to make of it. N.A. is a simple program for complicated people. Some of us needed to have its simplicity pointed out to us so we wouldn't get all hung up in complications. Those of us who needed this kind of help got it—if we were willing to listen to our fellow members with an open mind and heart.

It was easy for most of us to see that our defects of character couldn't be removed by any power we had. But some of us had problems of another kind. First, we didn't think that God was all that powerful. And then we didn't know what defects of character were. We didn't know what pride was. We knew what fear was. We had terrible confusions about sex. Most of us had judged ourselves as very perverted human beings. We didn't think we had any character. But we also saw the healing magic that was starting to happen in us and in others. We were getting a new strength and love and forgiveness.

One big spiritual lesson we learned in trying to become entirely ready to have our defects of character removed was that we couldn't judge others by the defects they had. Maybe they were as willing as they could possibly be right now to be freed of some defect of character, but it hadn't been removed yet. Maybe they were in as much agony about their behavior as we who were watching. We have found that we are not always the best judges of our own recovery, to say nothing of judging anyone else's recovery. All we can do is be as entirely ready as we can be to have God remove our defects of character and go on with the rest of the steps.

We looked at our past attempts to exert power over our defects. How many times have we tried to change, and how often has it

worked? Most of us tried again and again to fix ourselves, to apply willpower to change our addictive personalities and overcome our obsessions with people, places, and things. But just as we failed to solve our own drug problem, we failed in trying to remove our own defects. It was only after experiencing complete emotional defeat that we became willing to turn to a Higher Power for help.

We are simply unable to remove our own defects. That realization again brought us to a deeper understanding of our First Step—we are powerless over our disease. And those defects are part of that disease. We have to do our part by carefully practicing all the steps and all the traditions and rendering service. But then we have to leave the rest to God. It is by the grace of God that we are here in Narcotics Anonymous anyway. The progress we have made is some combination of our hard work and God's gift. And nowhere is that more clearly illustrated than here, in the Sixth Step along with its companion, the Seventh Step. We strive to become entirely ready, and then God removes the defects of character, we don't. God restores us to sanity, we don't. And nothing we can do will give us control over what God does or how fast He works. We concern ourselves with our readiness, and we let God take care of the rest.

We finally came to see that some members who still had some glaring defects of character might really be working the program. And some of us who had had most of our defects of character removed might not be working the program as well as we could. We saw there was no place for judging in the spiritual process. If we attempted to judge ourselves or others we were revealing a serious character defect, our judgmental nature, which we would need to become entirely ready to have removed.

We realized that we couldn't know when or if a defect would be removed. But we did see enough to know that the Higher Power we were dealing with wasn't capricious; God didn't play tricks on us. There was a deeper logic going on in us than we could figure out most of the time. But if we did our part, and yet a defect was slow in being removed, we learned that there was great good in that for us. And we learned that we always ended up with more freedom and more peace. We could always be sure of that.

The whole process we went through in Step Six was part of learning what our will was. We had to learn what self-will,



our will, was after we got clean. Through our defects, through our self-centeredness, through our pride, through our selfishness, we learned what our will was. Without a spiritual awakening, our will was to have constant gratification without paying the price.

As we worked on the Sixth Step we kept seeing it at a deeper and deeper level. As we became more willing to have God remove our defects of character, God started showing them to us more clearly. When we started to do something, a defect that had previously been hidden from us would be magnified. When we got angry, or jealous or envious, we had the words for them, so there wasn't the excuse of ignorance. We thought, "Wow, look at that good-looking blonde. What is she doing with that jerk when she could have me? Boy, that's envy, you idiot. You can't do that."

And when we got lazy, it was called sloth. And when we overate or if we saw an extra lamb chop and tried to maneuver to get it before someone else did, that was gluttony. And somebody would tell us what to do and revenge and anger would come in. We would recognize it. That was revenge and anger. We couldn't do that. We were learning to label our defects, to get in perspective what it was that we were going to ask God to remove.

What this awareness of our defects did was to get us to the point where we realized we could no longer afford the luxury of our defects. This helped us develop our conscience. It was the strangest thing for us when we saw we had started building something that many of us lost a long time ago—we started establishing a conscience.

Honesty was what we needed so desperately in this step. Yet most of us found that honesty was the virtue our addiction had taken away from us the most. Without it we couldn't work any step very well, and certainly not Step Six. We found it was a slow battle, winning our way back to honesty. We first got a little honesty when we saw we needed the program. We gained more honesty when we told God and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. Here we needed to get some more honesty so we could see the depth of each of our character defects, so we could be entirely ready to have God remove them.

As we reached each new level of honesty in the Sixth Step, one way that many of us actually worked the step was to actively demonstrate our readiness to have God remove the defects we saw in ourselves. In the case of dishonesty, it helped to stop in the

middle of a lie, or a rationalization or some other kind of "half-truth," and immediately admit that we were doing it. It was embarrassing enough for us to do this that we were soon entirely ready to have God remove our dishonest nature. As we proceeded on with the steps, we found ourselves telling the truth in our conversations. This was a step in our progress toward honesty where it counted most—honesty with ourselves.

Our pain was the whip in this step. We needed to give up our defects of character, but too often we hung on to them as long as we could stand the pain they caused us. One problem with pain was that we were so callous when we came into N.A. that we couldn't feel pain unless it really hurt us a lot. This was why we could feel comfortable with some of our defects of character. It sometimes took years to get rid of the callousness to develop enough sensitivity so we could feel the pain some of our defects were causing us.

Many of our defects had gotten painful enough that we were aware of them right away. That was fine. We had to have something to motivate us to find a new way, another way. Through the inventory process we identified some areas of pain. We came to some conclusions about some character defects that were causing us difficulty. We saw traits we had that were hurting us and hurting other people. And we saw that when we hurt other people, we hurt ourselves. Therefore, we didn't want to do that anymore. So we saw that our pain was the whip that made us face our defects. Facing our defects opened us up to honesty, tolerance, compassion, humility.

Then we came to a point where pain wasn't our main motivator. We wanted something more. We wanted to feel that clear connection with our Higher Power. That was what we wanted. We wanted to be in the flow of life, feeling the peace that was greater than any understanding.

When we got to this point, we were able to see that the people we were having pain over were an instrument that helped us. It seemed as if they were put there just so we could learn—about us, about them, about life. But to feel and see that clearly, we had to come through and out of our selfishness.

A lot of us used to think that everything that happened to us was intended to hurt us. Once we got out of that self-centeredness,

we were able to see that everything that happened to us could benefit our recovery. A big part of our recovery was learning to love others. We learned to ask God to show us how to love others because we didn't know how. We didn't even know how to love ourselves. So we said to God, "You have shown me how You love through the way other people love me. Now show me how to love them."

And somehow we did learn to love others. We have a lot of gratitude to God for this, because in our previous attempts at love, whether for family, friends, God, or whatever, our disease had always defeated us. We had all these growing character defects, and there was nothing we could really do. We were powerless over a disease that cut us off from the source of our own ability to love.

We wanted to go get professional help or something and fix ourselves, make ourselves better. And some of us did do that. We tried. We learned all those psychological terms and explanations. We found out how mentally ill we were, and how emotionally sick we were. But it was in N.A. that we really saw we needed a spiritual solution. We had our old ideas about love, but now we needed to learn how to love. That was our spiritual solution. And we saw how the defects in our character were keeping us from understanding or truly experiencing love.

So we went back to the Twelve Steps. They offered us the solution—a spiritual awakening. Part of that was Step Six, where we became entirely ready to have the defects removed that were preventing us from experiencing love. Our readiness was aided each time we saw the defects being removed from other people who had been judged hopeless cases. And just like them, as we gave the steps a chance, we saw them work for us and do what we had thought was impossible. Our defects were being revealed to us, and we were getting ready to have them removed.

Honestly facing ourselves, admitting our faults, and getting ready for some real changes in our lives felt like a strange way to live at first. And here in Step Six we were able to see that if we were really going to change, then having these unfamiliar feelings was necessary. At first we didn't want to face our defects of character. Then we wondered why we had so many. Then we found we had defects we had been blind to or comfortable with for years. And we found that some of our defects we thought we

had been entirely ready to have removed were still around twenty years later. We saw all this was necessary as a preparation so we could learn something very important that we needed to have in our lives to pass on to others by our example.

We had to be willing to learn from our defects. We had to be willing to let go of them. We had to realize we were human. In the beginning we damned ourselves a lot. We got to the point where we damned ourselves much less. Our selfishness and pride had made us want things that were not good for us. Those needed to be removed so that better things could come in and fill up that space.

We found that if we were going to get something better in our lives, there had to be some emptiness before that something better could come into our lives. We were the kind of people who wanted to know what lay ahead. If we were going to have our defects removed, we wanted to know what was going to take their place.

At this point it helped us to go to our sponsors and ask them what they had experienced with this step and the next one. Of course, we wanted to know that what happened to them was going to happen to us. We got the reassurance we needed. And we were told that all our defects of character weren't going to be removed. That was what we thought. If all our defects had been removed, that would have left us perfect.

This step helped us see our humanness. We saw the ways in which we needed others. And we saw that some of the things that were weak about us, God had always intended for us to have. That way we could see how we needed to depend on the strengths of other people in those parts of us that were weak. Some of us had the strength to be up at the front of the room talking. Others of us who were weak in that area could listen and appreciate them and benefit from their strength. Then we could turn around and be able to listen to someone quietly, hear what they were really saying and show them they had been heard. The person who had been at the front of the room could be thankful for the strength we had that they didn't have. So if there were strengths that we had, someone else might have a weakness in the same area.

There was a harmony and balance in all of us helping each other. There was also some comfort in knowing that getting ready to have our defects removed didn't mean that we were going to



have to be *the* example in the Fellowship. We weren't going to be *the* one who had overcome all the obstacles that there were to overcome. We would never be *the* perfect example of a recovering addict. We just weren't ready for that.

In Step Six we came to believe in God more and trust that we weren't going to be left hanging with this big hole in our stomach. God wasn't going to have us wander around feeling unsure about ourselves and losing all the things we had gained so far. We saw, in the difficulties we had with this step, that God intended for us always to be associated with other recovering addicts. For this to be clear to us, we very much needed to have our defects removed so that we could see more clearly why we needed those other people in our lives. We depended on different people for different things. That was what we needed to do to be able to grow spiritually.

The first five steps give us emotional and mental strength. They help us recognize the need to become honest and be responsible in fundamental ways. But here, in Step Six, we are again faced with the need for God acting in our lives, so we can get down to the specifics of what we faced in only a general way in Step Two. By being entirely ready to have God remove our defects of character, we are discovering more about the process God will use in restoring us to sanity.

This wasn't something that was easy to understand. We were taking a big step in the direction of spirituality. We had to have some strong faith to be able to do it. And it wasn't just faith in people. It was faith in God, and we had to look at what that meant.

At first we tried to look at everyone else's interpretation of God so that we could be at peace with taking some action. But there wasn't an easy way out for us here. We had to find our own understanding of some Higher Power before that Higher Power could do much for us in our lives. Step Six was a scary step. Each step was, the first time we came to it. But this one was especially scary because it was tapping into the part of us that was always the hardest for us to tap into our whole lives.

We had to face and accept our powerlessness. We couldn't change our own personalities. We had to let our Higher Power do what we couldn't do. But if a Higher Power was going to change our personalities, what were we going to be like after the

operation was over? We would have to trust God in this. Before, we hadn't even trusted other human beings. And we weren't trusted by them. We didn't even know what being trustworthy meant. It was a long way from that to the trust in God we needed for the Sixth Step.

Finally, we felt the powerfulness of God. And we had to accept with all humility and all honesty that we had no choice in the matter. We couldn't put it off. We couldn't find another way around it. It took a lot of searching to get to this point. And it took a lot of the surrender of Step Three. In the Sixth Step we particularly needed to turn it over, because there was so much we couldn't understand. And turning it over was turning us over.

The only way we could have freedom from ourselves was to give up our self-obsession. We couldn't worry about what was going to or not going to happen or what was going to be. The surrender gave us that readiness to have our defects removed. It gave us freedom for ourselves, a lot of freedom for ourselves.

There was a lot of growth on our part at this point. We gave up our old ideas of what sanity was or which character defects should be removed, or which strengths and assets we should keep, or what direction our life should go in. We got as close as we could to saying, "Here I am. I'm open to whoever I turn out to be because I trust you, God." That was a simple way of putting a confusing, complicated step that was so hard for us to understand. In saying those words, we became entirely ready for God to remove our defects of character and to go on to Step Seven.

## S T E P   S E V E N

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

**F**or us, the key word in this step was "humbly." Most of us hadn't been humble very often. We had spent most of our lives in defiance. Some of us didn't even know what the word "humbly" meant, and others of us thought it meant being lowly, groveling, and subservient. Now we were at a crucial turning point in our lives and we had to be humble. We saw that gaining some humility was necessary if we were going to live a drug-free life and walk a spiritual path. But where was that humility going to come from?

The first time we worked through the steps, we did the Seventh Step right after the Sixth Step. We asked our Higher Power to remove the defects of character we had uncovered within ourselves. When we took this step in sequence like that, we could be fairly humble because of what we went through in working the steps up to this point.

But after that first time through the steps, we often came to this step in a totally different mood and frame of mind. We didn't ask to have a shortcoming removed until it was really making us crazy. We had to really suffer from all the bad effects of a defect of character before we would ask to have it removed. By then we often weren't very humble when we were asking to have it removed, we were pretty indignant.

Some of us found ourselves yelling, "Hey, I've been staying clean and doing all this good stuff, come on! I want to be better able to do this thing. It's obvious to me that this shortcoming is in the way of me being productive, come on!"



In most cases our defects of character were not removed under those circumstances. Some of them were removed when we humbly asked to have them removed. For a lot of us, humbly meant on our knees in quiet communication with God. When we asked God to remove our shortcomings, we asked for freedom from any shortcomings which limited our recovery. We asked our Higher Power to help us be better persons and to help us continue to live drug-free. We asked for help because we could not do it alone. And we asked to have them removed because they were keeping us from being an effective servant.

Sometimes we heard people say that N.A. was a selfish program. But most of us couldn't see how it was selfish. To us it looked more like a program of service. Nowhere in anything that we read or in anything that we were taught were we shown that N.A. was a selfish program. That was never our experience. The steps told us to carry the message. The N.A. literature told us to share our experience, strength, and hope. We didn't find where it told us to be selfish. Most of us felt that this program was selfless. We realized that what they meant by saying N.A. was a selfish program was that we may apply the program selfishly. We put our recovery first before anything else, and we learn to be of service because it helps us. But the Program of Narcotics Anonymous is one of selfless service. For us, to be in a selfless frame of mind, there had to be a humble kind of approach to people and to the Seventh Step. We weren't real good at that. Ego mania was probably our biggest problem, so humility didn't come naturally.

Most of us found that the most common way for us to get humility was through humiliation. We were on the receiving end of a lot of humiliation. It was all self-created, self-imposed, self-perpetuated. It was nothing that anyone did to us. It was all stuff that we had done to ourselves. After enough humiliation, we would humbly ask God to remove the shortcoming that was causing us all the trouble. And we believed that God would remove it. As we looked back on where we had come from, we saw that we hadn't yet become perfect, but we were much better. We were changed in the ways we needed to be changed in order to render service to our fellow addicts. Our own lives were totally changed in the process.

We found we couldn't try to measure our recovery with someone else's ruler. If we did, it came out we were either less than or

better than. We found we couldn't measure ourselves with any ruler other than our own ruler to see where we were now and where we had come from. Following this idea, each of us was able to see that, considering where we came from, we had grown quite a lot. We saw that some of our selfishness, self-centeredness, and other defects that used to make us absolutely crazy didn't make us as crazy anymore. And we didn't stay crazy as long.

This whole thing about being humble was puzzling. At first we thought it was pretty self-negating. But then we found that humility was as much an admission of our assets as it was of our defects. So we found that we couldn't confuse humility with false pride anymore. That was just our self-centered way of attracting attention. A lot of us had belittled our own good points by saying, "Oh, it was really nothing," when we did a job well. But we realized that it wasn't truthful and it wasn't appropriate to degrade ourselves and deny our true abilities. Using and strengthening our God-given attributes was part of being restored to sanity and was "really something." When we denied our strengths we were denying the power of God in our lives. So we found that we couldn't be falsely proud and take Step Seven. We had to be humble in order to walk a spiritual path. Knowing that God was with us, we got willing and did our best. We thanked God for the opportunity to improve our attributes and let Him start weeding out the defects from our lives.

We found that being of service was a great benefit to us in the Seventh Step. While we were of service and while we were trying not to be selfish, God made the most moves with our defects of character, with our shortcomings. We changed slowly, day by day—not all at once, and not without help from God and our friends in this Fellowship. But we did the best we could, remembering who we were and where we came from. We knew we would never be perfect, but we were recovering.

Some people thought there was a difference between a defect of character and a shortcoming. Most of us didn't think there was a difference. We thought they were the same thing. As we looked back through the steps we saw a clear line from the first step all the way to the Seventh Step. It was our will that was the common thread. In Step One, it was living in our will that made our lives so unmanageable. In Step Two, it was following our will

that led us to such insanity. In the Third Step, it was our will that we turned over. In the Fourth Step, our moral inventory helped us see what our will had led us to do. In Step Five, we admitted what we had done with our will. And in Steps Six and Seven, we became entirely ready and asked God to remove the defects of our character that we had from following our will. So, it seemed to us that our will, the nature of our wrongs, our defects of character, and our shortcomings were four different sets of words for the same thing. These words throw a new light on the consequences of self will in our lives.

Some of us thought that once we took Step Seven everything was automatically going to be removed and we would be in great shape. We had done some things, and thought God would just remove our defects and we would never have to think about them again. That's what we wanted to take place. But that's not what happened.

We still knew exactly what happened and exactly what we had done. Those things weren't erased but they weren't able to hurt us anymore. Those were the things that we had never wanted anybody to know at first. But, after taking this step, it was as though they weren't there to affect us anymore. They were gone. They weren't gone from memory but they were gone. We still had some defects. We guessed that God would remove those when He saw fit.

We found we had to do some footwork too on getting a defect removed. We found we just couldn't expect to have God come in and zap us. One member had always had a real problem speaking in front of groups. He wanted God to raise his hand, march him up to the podium and do the talking for him. Nothing happened. He kept praying about this and praying about it but nothing happened. He finally realized he needed to raise his hand and walk on up there. God would help him out once he was up there, but God was not going to do anything about raising his hand. That just wasn't going to happen. He had to do the footwork.

We had to ask God to remove our shortcomings by acting differently than our addiction would have us act. Our active demonstration of willingness was a powerful prayer. We believed we could become new people and act differently, but only a Power greater than us could change our nature. As we realized we could change only our actions, we became humble. And the God of our

understanding often removed our defects and shortcomings, when we humbly asked through our actions and prayers.

One of our members had a terrible problem with hatred. When he finally got to the Seventh Step, he asked God to remove his lust and his stealing and his hatred. It was at about this time that his father had a stroke. He had hated his father all his life. When his mother died, his father walked off and left him and his sisters. He went back home to help the sister who was looking after his dad. The woman who ran the nursing home his father was placed in was preaching a lot of benevolent stuff, and he listened to it as long as he could. Finally he told her, "Look lady, I don't give a damn about that old man up there. All I want from you is the bottom line, how much is it going to cost?"

So he and his sisters went upstairs. His dad lay there in a diaper crying, "I want to go home." The member thought, "Yeah, you want to go home but you never had one for me to go to." But just then forty-two years of hate went down the tube and he didn't hate his father anymore. He didn't think of him as a father, but he didn't hate him anymore.

A wave swept over him of all the time that he had wasted hating, not just his father, but the whole world, hating. All of a sudden the hate was gone. He didn't hate anybody anymore. He still got angry from time to time. But it just lasted a few minutes and it would be gone. Then he started working on his anger because every time he got angry, it hurt him. But the hate was gone.

God had to do this for him. The member had to come to believe. He had to ask God and had to pray about it. And he kept on praying a lot in his own way. He learned through painful experience that he could not live on his own power and became willing to ask for help. He let go of his false pride and resentment and turned toward a life of spiritual growth and progress.

Like this man, we all had to experience humility. For most of us it took a lot of pain to finally get to the point where we became humble enough to ask the God of our understanding, or a Higher Power, to help us. And for some of us, the N.A. Program was our Higher Power. We were willing to turn our will and our life over to the care of it and allow it to do the correcting that needed to be corrected. We didn't really know what needed to be corrected. But



we knew that there had to be some kind of change. And we knew that we could not do the change. We became willing to ask God to do this change for us.

And we had that change. We didn't think like the person we had been. We didn't talk like that person. We didn't live like that person. There had been a change in us. And it was because we had given ourselves to this program, to our Higher Power, to the God of our own understanding.

One of our members found this step didn't mean anything to her at first. Then she was at a conference that had been going on for five days. She was surrounded by people she didn't know who were antagonistic to her. They fought like cats and dogs. Each night she would go back to her room and take her own inventory. She was aware of her character defects so she thought the struggles and the fact she didn't like what was happening was perfectly understandable, it was her ego and her pride that were the problem. And she found herself literally screaming at God to remove her ego and her pride because they were causing her so much pain.

Then, the next day, she managed to get away from the crowd and go off in the woods. She got quiet and got in touch with her Higher Power. What an awakening she had. She realized first that we don't scream at God, we don't demand He remove our character defects. She saw she didn't know anything about being humble. She saw what she needed for this step was to humbly ask Him. And she found a couple of sentences that had a lot of meaning for her. They said that if we asked God to remove our character defects and they didn't magically disappear, it was usually because we had more work to do, that we weren't really willing to let them go or else we hadn't asked Him humbly. She realized that she wasn't being punished; it just meant that she had to work a little harder on some of the earlier steps.

Like her, we found that being humble meant that we could accept ourselves the way we were. It didn't mean groveling or putting ourselves down. It was an honest recognition of ourselves. It was making peace with our assets and our liabilities, the sum total of what we were with our strengths and weaknesses. It wasn't being grandiose or taking inordinate credit for our accomplishments or the good things about us. We knew that was

God's manifestation through us. Any power that we had was God's power. We found that humility was the root of faith, hope, and tolerance. Through humility, all of our spiritual principles were fortified and reinforced.

We had to ask for a lot of help when we came up short. We came up short on love for others. We came up short on tolerance for ourselves and on love for ourselves. We came up short on the way we saw the world, on the way we saw the pain in the world, the hungry people. We came up short on the deaths that we saw clean. And we came up short in our lack of understanding of why it was that drug addicts still had to die with the message on their lips. We asked for the strength and courage not to need to know, not to need to understand.

Our shortcomings were in the way we looked at things as if they were just six inches from our face because of our self-centeredness. Then, when we asked God to help us with our shortcomings and short-sightedness, He took our old view down. God gave us almost a full vision of what we needed to see rather than what we wanted to see.

We got tired of being angry at God when He didn't help us with our shortcomings with people, when we came up short with a little less love than we would have liked to have. Or when we would have liked to have had a little more kindness and we didn't feel we had it. There began to be many ways we were seeing we trusted God more. Part of our trust came from seeing how deep our need was and acknowledging that only God was big enough to meet our need. We saw how deep our short-sightedness went. We saw all the mental twists we had from the drugs and the addiction. And we saw the emotional disconnection from other people and ourselves that needed to be mended by God. We saw that we were powerless to do this ourselves.

As we worked this step over and over and humbly prayed this Seventh Step prayer over and over, the step became part of us:

"God, I am ready for You to take me as I truly am, and do with me as You will. If it is Your will, I humbly ask that You take away all the shortcomings that prevent me from being of use to You and others. Please give me the power to follow the path that You set for me. Please guide my steps."

Once this step was a part of us, inside us, it became a natural thing. It just happened in us when the awareness was needed. It became automatic for us. We began to have this help instantly available to us so we could know how God would like us to behave and what God would like us to do. We prayed that our will would be aligned with God's will for us. And we prayed that we could constantly be aware that God was in control and not us.

Sometimes we got some real deep awarenesses of people or life. Sometimes those awarenesses were so deep and so clear, they terrified us. We became frightened. We didn't think we were supposed to know those things. Well, why not? God gave them to us. We had to trust that it was possible for people as frail as us to be inspired and have a real intuitive sense. We found that the more we lived in God, the more we could be inspired. It was awesome and frightening at first to see ourselves being used as a channel for God to speak to others, but it finally wasn't as scary to us as time went on.

We saw that a lot of our self-doubt had been taken away. It had always bothered us the way we would give up on things. We couldn't understand how we could be so determined and confident one minute and give up on ourselves and everybody else the next minute. When we saw that defect in us being taken away here in the Seventh Step, it made us feel more confident and comfortable about having it replaced with something that was good.

A big part of the Seventh Step was acknowledging our powerlessness, and our inability to remove our defects of character. We had to let go and let God take them. But we couldn't just sit on our hands and wait. We had to do something, too. There was a fine line between what we had to do and what God would do for us. We asked God to remove our character defects. But if we were asking God to remove our character defects at the same time we were stealing everything that wasn't nailed down, that wasn't going to work very well.

We had to work over and over again on our willingness. We had to become willing to have our defects removed. It was a two way street. We were going to have to do some things and God was going to have to do some things. One thing that got in our way was our lack of trust. We didn't trust that God would remove our defects of character. But even worse, even if God could change our

personalities, we didn't trust that God knew enough about what He was doing that we would end up a better person once our defects were removed.

When it came time to humbly ask God, everybody asked in their own way. Some of us did it on our knees. Some of us said a prayer similar to the one in this chapter, and others just asked in their own words. Some of us might have done it while we were driving in the car. Or, we might have been talking to somebody and realized we had done something that was pretty awful. So right there we would ask God to remove our defect of character. When we were ready, we all found the way that was right for us.

Most of us took the Seventh Step on an ongoing basis. Some people talked about just working the steps once and then only doing Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve from then on. We did find that those steps were something we needed to use in our everyday dealings with other people. But there was all the stuff with ourselves that kept coming up through the years. We found we needed the spiritual principle of the Seventh Step in order to stay clean. As addicts, we needed a change of character in order to live clean. The only way this could happen was by practicing Step Seven on a daily basis. And we humbly asked our Higher Power to keep our defects as they were taken from us. It worked better for us if we went through Steps Four through Nine on anything that stood in the way of our being of service. So year after year, we found ourselves working our way through the steps again, each time at a deeper level. And each time we gained more freedom.

One of our members had a rather unusual defect removed. It was a defect that seemed to be such a good thing. And it was one she had worked so hard to gain for herself. The shortcoming she found needed to be removed was one that became apparent in her N.A. service work. She was shocked to see as a defect in herself some of the things that, at one time, she thought were really good. She thought this defect was good for her, good for N.A., good for her recovery, good for other people's recovery, and good for the Fellowship.

She found she had to be willing to cut herself loose from some of her service commitments. It wasn't that they were negative, it was just that she was neglecting her program of recovery. Also, some of her duties and some of the people she was involved with were bringing out the negative things in her. She would allow



herself to entertain discussions of other people's character when she was doing some kinds of service work. And she would allow herself to hold grudges or judge other people because of things they said or did that affected her or somebody else. It was all her fears and other defects coming back on her.

She recognized that there were times and places and people that would bring out those negative things in her, and that it wasn't really a reflection on others at all. It was her lack of willingness to let those things go. And different situations would bring out her defects. She had to humbly ask God to remove those defects of character.

All of us in the N.A. Fellowship found that developing our relationship with a Higher Power was going to take a lot more work than we thought. Most of us were getting over our early fear of that relationship. We knew that was what was going to take us further into compassion, love, friendship, and positive regard for people, for ourselves and God. Those were things everybody wanted. We knew that we wanted them and that most people did. They seemed at one time unattainable but we saw other people in the Fellowship who obviously had them. We knew that there was a way for us to get them.

Some of our defects were now truly gone from our lives. As our recovery was progressing, we gained more and more freedom and a lot more willingness to talk about God in our recovery. Increasingly, it was a personal relationship that we had but we were willing to share that more with people when often we hadn't been willing to share it before.

Working Step Seven had given us a new freedom and a new strength that we would need when we got into the next step. We had begun to realize that there were some things from our past that we needed to set right. So now it was time, and we were ready to go on to the Eighth Step.

## S T E P E I G H T

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

Our experiences with the Eighth Step were varied. Some of us had an easy time writing our list, because we were looking forward to all the pats on the head we were going to get. Others of us had a hard time finding names to put on the list because we didn't see that we had hurt that many people. Some of us couldn't think of who we had harmed or in what way we might have harmed them. We went back to our Fourth Step and looked for names but still didn't find that many. We found though, as we hung around longer, names of people kept coming up, and we realized we had to make amends to them.

Others of us wrote voluminous lists that went back to childhood. We figured we had harmed everyone we had touched. Some of us found we had people on the list we had burned in drug deals, and we later saw that they were just part of the great escapade. We had to take our lists and weed out the names that didn't belong there to get to the ones that did.

Some of us had been especially destructive and had done so much stuff that was so awful we couldn't force ourselves to think about it. We were overwhelmed with the awesomeness of making the list and couldn't force ourselves to start. We knew the damage we had done, and it was staggering. One of our members in this category was finally driven by desperation to fall to his knees and ask God to show him who should be on his list. He then found his pen moving on its own, writing out his list. When he finished, there was his list with all the people who belonged there. At the

top of the list were his folks, then all the women he had hurt, and last, all the people he had taken advantage of.

All of these varied problems that blocked us from getting a good list showed the immense difficulty of this step. Each of us sensed this difficulty, and a part of us tried to escape the responsibility we faced, as had been our pattern through life. But we knew we had to start the best way we could. And we knew that only the God of our understanding would carry us through. One member was struggling with trying to write this step and was asking his sponsor how he could do a good job on it. His sponsor told him to trust his Higher Power for guidance.

The only way a lot of us could begin was to ask God for help and then get a pencil and paper and start. The first name on the list was one most of us missed, and that was ourselves. We had hurt ourselves very much over the years. The way one member put it was that he could kill a guy who had done to him what he had done to himself and no jury in the world would convict him. We had really abused ourselves and we didn't even realize the harm we were doing. We thought we were having fun at first, and later we thought this was just our lifestyle, and that there was no other way of life open to us. Now we saw differently and we saw how we had wasted so much time and money and so many opportunities to be a good part of people's lives. All those lost years couldn't be regained. But if we faced our past clearly in this step, we could get the most out of our experience and benefit from it all the rest of our lives.

Our families were usually at the top of our list. We felt a lot of guilt and remorse about the things we did to our families. We couldn't erase the memory of a mother finding her son lying on the bathroom floor the color of blue jeans. That happened. We couldn't take back the tears that were shed for us. We couldn't take away the fear our parents had when the phone would ring in the middle of the night. We couldn't take away the shame and embarrassment our brothers and sisters felt as they saw our names in the papers or came to bring us things in jail. What most of us could do, just for today, was see that this kind of thing didn't happen again.

Many of us had family amends we didn't even know about at first. One of us had a sister who seemed solid as a rock. She was used as a stop-over for a quick shower and a few days rest, or to

bring cigarettes or soap to jail. All the time this sister seemed so steady and gave no sign she was bothered. It took years before she was able to admit how hurt she had been. It wasn't until this happened that the harm could finally be seen and the amends could be made. In another case, a woman had given her sister's address in an arrest, and it was then published in the paper. It was eight years before that sister's anger at what had been done to her came out, so that our member knew that an amend needed to be made.

A part of us wanted to see this step as something we could do and then be done with it, but it didn't work that way. The longer we worked the program, the deeper we saw into this step and the more insight we gained into the way we lived our lives. One member was years into her recovery before she saw that one of the harms she had done to her father and mother was to cause her family to be so obsessed with her when they had their own lives to live. Another member had fifteen years clean when he ran into a person he realized had to be added to his list.

One important thing that our sponsors helped us with was to focus our attention on the first part of the Eighth Step. At this point, all we were being asked to do was to make a list of people we had harmed. We needed to stay away from jumping ahead to the second part of this step where we would face whether we were willing to make amends or not. Our willingness to make amends was not the issue in the first part of this step. All we had to do here was make a list. Another way we jumped ahead at this point was to go on into Step Nine. How could we make amends to a person who had died? That was not the issue here either. What if making amends to someone meant we might go to jail? That was not the issue either. What we were to do here was just make a list of people we had harmed, being careful to include each person's name and indicate exactly what we did to cause them harm. We examined our feelings to see if fear or pride were clouding our judgment, and often had to surrender when we saw that they were. Each amend we would make would be one more stepping stone to spiritual freedom. We did not want to sell ourselves short.

At this point, we also needed to see that we couldn't make a complete list. We just made the list as complete as we could. The enormity of all we had done couldn't be faced in a single sitting



with pen and paper. The whole catastrophe of our lives couldn't be faced the first time we worked on this step.

One member had a guy on her list of people to make amends to, but she couldn't figure out why he belonged on that list. What harm had she done him? As she continued to practice the different steps over the next four years, that same name kept coming up on her list of people to make amends to. Finally, one day, it hit her. She owed him an amend because she stole his guns and gave them to a motorcycle club. She became so sick as the memory finally surfaced that she curled up in a fetal position on the floor. Even though the pain was tremendous, she had become willing to make the amend. She wondered how much she would have to pay him for what she had done. Then she wondered if she could possibly locate him. She called back East looking for an address and was told he was some place in California. Two hours later she parked her bike outside a meeting and there he was, jogging down the street. So it was easy to see that when we were ready to work this step, we would have plenty of help from a Higher Power.

When we heard stories like this, we saw that there was no way most of us could make a complete list the first time we did it. But when we saw someone writing a name down again and again for four years yet not knowing why, it inspired us. It helped us see that the Eighth Step was a process just like all the steps. All we needed to do was pray for God's help and ask for our sponsor's help and we would get the strength and the knowledge we needed to go through the process. Also, we found that working the other steps helped develop us spiritually so that we were stronger and more able to work this step. This happened as we went back and forth through the steps. We got an insight or understanding on one step that helped give us a deeper understanding of another step, so we needed to sit down and make the best list we could.

The names we found hardest to put on our lists were the names of the people we had harmed in recovery. A man in the Fellowship had a wife who used to be somebody else's wife. She and her husband were not getting along well. This member looked at the man's wife and wanted her. He approached her before she and her husband were apart. He had all kinds of socially acceptable reasons for socially unacceptable behavior. But at home where he lived, in his gut and his soul, it was not okay. He was

eight years clean before he could make amends to that man. That amend was so hard for him to put on his list and make. He no longer had the excuse that he was hooked and that was why he did it. He did it because he wanted that. And he didn't care enough about the other man's feelings to behave differently. His pride also kept him from becoming willing to make the amend. He did finally make the amend and was able to share it. Some of us who had learned of his experience were able to take something from it that allowed us some more freedom.

The word "amend" was not clear to all of us at first. Were we just to make a list of people we needed to apologize to? To most of us, that seemed pretty empty. How many times during our active addiction did we wallow in remorse after glimpsing the results of one of our destructive runs? How hollow were the words, "Man, I'm sorry. I really screwed up." For most of the amends we needed to make, especially to the repeated victims of our continuing insanity, "I'm sorry" just wasn't enough.

When we looked in the dictionary we found out that amend means to change, to modify, to make better. Nowhere does it say that amend means apologize. We came to realize that getting willing to make amends meant getting willing to make some real changes in our attitudes, in our thinking, and in our behavior towards those we had harmed. Most often an apology was a necessary start in making those changes, but there was so much more. Then our amends have their full impact, not only in those relationships, but in our lives and our ongoing recovery.

When we finished our list, we went over it with our sponsor to help fill in names we had missed or weed out names that didn't belong on our list. Then, and only then, were we ready to look at our willingness to make amends at all, and our willingness to make amends to certain people who we felt had harmed us much more than we had harmed them.

In many cases, the only way we became willing to make these amends was through some praying and through realizing that, by making these amends, we were opening the door to a real freedom for ourselves. Making these amends didn't have that much to do with the other person's reaction. They may or may not have gotten something from the amends. But we always got a lot from it. We got a new freedom that meant we didn't need to be enslaved by the disease of addiction.

We were reminded again at this point that the disease of addiction was much more than just using drugs. If that was all it was, we could have written out two or three pages on the unmanageability of our lives and we would have seen that we needed to quit using. That would have been all that would have been necessary. We would have just quit using and our lives would have been fine. But it wasn't that way with us. There was a whole lot more. That's why we had to go through a complete cleansing and rebuilding process. Cleaning up the wreckage of the past was part of it. Sometimes it was humiliating and sometimes it was embarrassing but we had to become willing to go through that.

One obstacle we faced was our own denial. Denial is one of the more subtle symptoms of our disease, and it takes thoroughness and honesty to overcome it. To avoid any part of Step Eight because of our fear or embarrassment or false pride is to slip our necks willingly back into the noose of addiction. As our Basic Text says, "although we are not responsible for our disease, we are responsible for our recovery." Step Eight is an important way for us to take that responsibility. We cannot change what we did or what we were, but today we are clean, and today we are able to take responsibility for our behavior that has harmed ourselves or others.

When we thought about making amends, we were eager to make some of them because we thought we would get pats on the back for how good we were doing. When we contemplated the possibility of that not happening, we became angry or afraid. It was then we saw we had the wrong attitude. We had to become truly willing to make the amends. Our attitude had to change towards those people. At first, we may have wanted to make amends just to make amends and get it over with. But that didn't work. We had to come to the point where we were really sorry for what we had done. Only when we could come to see that it was a wrong thing that we did to them could we become willing to make those amends.

We saw this principle work especially when someone had died. If we came to see our wrong clearly and were sorry we did that wrong to them, the work was mostly over. The fact that some people were dead and we couldn't face them didn't hurt us. Most of the release we could get from these amends came from really

seeing how we wronged them, being truly sorry for what we did, and being completely willing to go to any length to make amends to them.

Some of us had to look especially hard at the issue of willingness. There were a few of us who would have faced a lifetime in prison if we made direct amends for everything we did. Others of us would have faced a lifetime of making financial restitution. One member estimates he used a million dollars worth of drugs and most of that money wasn't his. What were we to do here about being willing? The key here was doing what we needed to do to stay clean. We needed to be willing to do anything it took to stay clean and continue on with our recovery. The person with all the crimes didn't make direct amends because it would accomplish nothing for him and his family. He has quit that kind of behavior and is no longer a threat to the people around him. But that person was willing to go back to the penitentiary if going was necessary to his staying clean. The person who stole all the money didn't steal anymore. He made the financial amends he needed to make that were necessary for his recovery. He was willing to make any other financial amends that would keep him from going back to using. So the issue was willingness, a deep willingness to do whatever was necessary to stay clean.

Some of us, especially at first, had a lot of trouble with willingness. We felt so much anger and resentment and hurt that we didn't feel any willingness to make amends; we thought we could skip over this step, or at least the willingness part of it. But the steps were like a ladder with rungs three feet apart. If we stretched as hard as we could, we could make it from one step to the next. But if we tried to skip a step, then we were faced with a six-foot step on the ladder and we couldn't make that.

One oldtimer asked this question of people who came to her and said they weren't willing to make amends: "I know it's hard for you to be willing to make those amends, but would you do it if you knew your recovery depended on it?" When the question is put that way most people said they would make the amends. The ones who still said they wouldn't make the amends were quickly told that they were seriously jeopardizing their recovery.

This pair of steps, Eight and Nine, are the last of the steps dealing with our past life. Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve deal mostly with our day-to-day living of the program. And actually, it



was here that we did the hardest part of the work to be done in Eight and Nine. Getting through to the willingness to make the amends, to where we were truly sorry, represented a far bigger spiritual growth than we realized. We started out at the First Step all locked up in self-will and blaming everyone and everything around us for our troubles. Now, here we were in Step Eight, taking responsibility for all our actions. That was a lot of growth on our part.

In the earlier steps we recognized the effects of our disease on ourselves. In Step Eight we recognized the effects of our disease on other people. In some ways, the Eighth Step was a reaffirmation of the First Step. Usually the First Step was a recognition of the effects of the disease on ourselves. We were the ones who were feeling all this pain. We were the ones who were experiencing it, therefore we recognized it. But we didn't realize how other people were affected. In Step Eight, we saw how our disease had affected other people by identifying our part. We had to come to see how we had a negative impact on other people, just how we had hurt them. When we saw that, then we became truly willing to make amends; we even wanted to make those amends so we could be free from the guilt and shame we felt for what we had done.

When we were not willing, we couldn't cross over this step. We were stuck at Step Seven. We could make a list but we had to become willing. Being willing didn't mean we had to actually make the amends, it just meant we were willing. We were willing if it was causing us pain. We were willing if it was going to cost us our recovery. Those selfish reasons were enough at the start of being willing. But there were further stages we came to. Through doing these steps, we developed some awareness of how others around us felt.

If we said that we could see we'd done some harm to this person, but we were not willing to do anything about that, we were really robbing ourselves of some recovery, and we were blocked. There was an enormous spiritual benefit and emotional growth to be gained here. If we made a list of people we had harmed and were not willing to make amends to them, that meant we didn't have compassion; that meant we didn't have empathy; that meant we didn't have the ability to feel, otherwise we would be willing. We realized, through working this step that if we didn't have

compassion and empathy for the other person, what were we? The only way we could answer that question was by taking a good look at ourselves.

Here we faced that we'd made a mess of our lives, and that we knew we had hurt a lot of people. Here we were willing to take responsibility for that and to take responsibility for our actions. If we didn't take responsibility for our actions at this point, when were we going to take responsibility for them? Were we going to continue to go through life not taking responsibility for our actions? We have seen people in this Fellowship who psychologists said were incapable of seeing their responsibility for their actions, even they have learned through the steps to develop that responsibility. There is always hope for anyone with an honest desire to work the steps.

Part of our difficulty was our inability to relate to other people, to understand them, to have empathy, love, and affection for them. As we learned to love and forgive ourselves and others, we found we could be loved and forgiven in return. By taking the Eighth Step, by shedding all the old thought processes and allowing the change, we could attain the ability to feel what others were feeling.

This then was the depth of the change that could come about in us as we worked the Eighth Step over and over again. We did this by writing our lists, praying for a deeper and deeper willingness, working with our sponsor, and talking to the people in our groups. We needed all the support we could get so the new people that we truly were could emerge and spread their wings in the love and warmth and safety of the group. Gradually our growth became more and more solid, and we began to see ourselves taking that growth to the world outside the group. One of the first ways we had a chance to do this was in the Ninth Step.

## S T E P   N I N E

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

Most of us had a fair amount of clean time before we got to the Ninth Step. We had looked at it right from the start and it scared us. Our sponsors told us that our actions on this step would affect other people. So we weren't to do anything about it until we had talked to our sponsors. Some of us didn't hear this in time. Others of us heard it and ignored it. We went ahead on our own and did some harm.

A common example to avoid in this step was going to a husband and telling him we were sorry we had an affair with his wife. We thought no one would be so foolish. But a few of us were that foolish and did just that. One of our early members had been going out with his best friend's wife for quite a while. He really felt guilty about it. He told his friend he was sorry for what he had done. Of course it was a disaster. So then he went to his sponsor and told him what he had done and what had happened.

His sponsor pointed out that he had wanted to clean up his own guilt and wasn't thinking of his friend's feelings. The Ninth Step is not about us being able to sleep well at night when we have caved in some other person's world. Our sponsors felt that amends like that should be made in front of the mirror to ourselves and to God. We realized that there were many cases when we were going to have to learn to live with our guilt if we had destroyed somebody's life.

We began to realize that a part of making amends for many of the injuries we had caused others was simply to not do it anymore.



To do the same thing again to someone else would be like slapping somebody in the face and saying, "I'm sorry," and then turning around and slapping them again. We saw that we shouldn't make an amend in such a way that we needed to make a new one.

It was very important for us to hear stories like this because it showed us how blind we could be in our relations with others. So one of the first things we learned was that we had to check every move we made on this step with our sponsors. This was especially important the first time we did Step Nine. If we didn't check with our sponsors, we found we rarely saw the ways we would hurt somebody else by making our amends.

We were still self-centered people. A lot of times all we were thinking about was how we could feel better. We had to be taught that a lot of the people we would be making amends to were people we had very mixed emotions about. We probably still felt a lot of anger and blame towards others. We had to find a way to make our amends without causing a new problem for people where we would have a new amend to make. Our sponsors told us, "You're involving other people now. You can't run on self will anymore."

To protect us from acting on self will, many of our sponsors asked us to go over each of the amends we were planning to make. We told how we had harmed each person and what we were planning to say to them. We needed to work closely with our sponsors and follow their suggestions. Most of us got good direction from our sponsors. Those of us who followed our sponsor's suggestions were more protected from harming others again.

We learned that we were making our amends because they were supposed to be made, not simply to make us feel better. At first, the only reason many of us saw for making amends was to make ourselves feel better. We soon saw that was not what the Ninth Step was saying. The step was saying we were to make the amends because they were supposed to be made, because it was the right thing to do. We had to see that the point was to be tougher on ourselves, and easier on other people, and, if it was going to hurt somebody, we weren't supposed to do it.

Many of us found that our own names were at the top of our amends list. We saw that we had hurt ourselves very much. The

way we had to start making amends to ourselves was to stop abusing ourselves. A big part of our amends to ourselves was staying clean and working this spiritual program. It wasn't until we practiced this program and worked the steps that we were able to see how much we had abused ourselves, and it was then that we were able to stop doing it.

One member had always felt badly about the way he treated his wife when he was using. He made amends to her, but he had never really made amends to himself for it. He had never really forgiven himself. It took him over twenty years to see that. Just recently he said to himself, "It's all right, I forgive myself for that. I'm sorry for that."

There were some people on our lists who we needed to leave alone. In some cases, this was the best way we could make amends to them. This was an essential lesson for some of us to learn. One of our members stole a lawn mower from a neighbor, an old man. The mower was worth a couple of bags of dope. When the member got clean, he went to the old man, made amends, and bought him a new lawn mower. After a while he went back to using. One of the first things he did was to steal the new lawn mower he had bought that old man, and once again sell it for dope. When our member returned to N.A. and got some clean time again, one of the first things he wanted to do was to make amends to that man. He felt terrible about taking the lawn mowers. He went to see the old man. When the old man saw him coming he yelled out his door at the member, "Just leave me alone." He wouldn't even open his door. He wouldn't let our member near him, he wouldn't even let our member buy another lawn mower. "Just leave me alone," was all he wanted.

The N.A. member felt badly and went to his sponsor. His sponsor told him, "Just leave him alone. Don't do him any more favors. He doesn't want another lawn mower so you can take it again." That was a harsh truth to learn, but it was one a lot of us had to learn. "Just leave him alone."

Another place where leaving them alone applied was some of the women and men in our lives. Many of us went to make amends to women or men we had harmed while we were involved in relationships with them. All too often, we found we ended up right back in bed with them or we got into a fight. So now we owed them another amend. We went back to make that

amend and ended up back in bed again or harming them again in some way. We were caught in a cycle where we kept incurring another amend. The bottom line, once again, was to leave them alone. The best amend we could make to certain individuals was to just leave them alone. We had to quit doing them all those favors so that we ended up owing them another favor. That was a real tough one. We had to learn to leave some people alone.

Some of our amends lists hadn't been weeded out carefully enough in Step Eight and we had to watch for that here in Step Nine. Some of us still had some names on our lists that no longer needed to be there. We wanted to do the steps thoroughly and really clean up our lives. We had the idea that the more we put in, the more we would get out. But we didn't know that it was also true that the more garbage we put in, the more garbage we would get out. Our sponsors helped us here by teaching us that some amends were unnecessary, and they guided us in weeding out any names that didn't belong in the amends process.

Some of the people we took off our lists were the people from our past lives who were still using. Some of us tried to make amends to these people, and what a dangerous adventure that was! Most of those people had been just waiting for us to come back. So it was no surprise to them when we showed up again. We had to find out the hard way that we didn't belong anywhere close to them.

One woman went back to make an amend to a man she used to live with. They wound up in bed and the romance started all over again. He was still using. She started reading him N.A. literature and telling him about the meetings. He would promise to go to the meetings, but he never went. It was a fiasco, all from wanting to make an amend. He had no intention of getting clean. She finally realized that an amend was an amend, and to just leave it there. She didn't owe anyone her blood anymore.

Making amends to our families was another area where we had to be careful. We had to consider that being too direct might hurt them more. Step Nine told us to make direct amends "*except when to do so would injure them or others.*" Even though we wanted to be as honest and direct as we could be, we couldn't bring up situations that would hurt or injure others. We couldn't cause unnecessary pain by making people aware of situations they knew nothing about. Once again, we couldn't inflict more harm on others simply to relieve our own guilt. We had to be considerate of other

people's feelings and lives, and avoid creating new harm or unnecessary pain in their lives. We had to exercise caution in making amends to our families and the people closest to us.

One of the greatest amends we could make was to quit using. Some of us could never replace all the money that our families and others had spent on us. And there were times when we couldn't have replaced all the money we stole from others. We probably would have been penniless the rest of our lives. There was no way we could go back and make deals with all the people we had emotionally manipulated and raped.

We found the most important way we could make amends to all the people who were still in our lives, and to society in general, was to quit using, to face our addiction, and to live the Twelve Steps so we wouldn't go out and use again. This seemed to be the most important with our families. When we got clean and worked the program, we were finally able to be the son or daughter, brother or sister, father or mother we had never been before. Our actions spoke more loudly than any words or money ever could.

As addicts, some of us had a thin line to walk in making some amends because of their affect on us or others. Some of us could have spent the rest of our lives in jail by making amends. We had to work with our sponsors to see where that thin line was drawn. Most of us found it wouldn't have served any purpose to go to prison, but we saw that we had to be entirely ready to do so if it was necessary to maintain our recovery.

In Step Eight we had worked on becoming entirely ready to make the amends. But when we started making the amends in Step Nine, many of us found that we hadn't done a very good job of getting entirely ready. We found we wanted a pat on the back for making the amends. We wanted to look good. After we had made a few amends, a lot of fear came up in us. We saw we had the wrong attitude. We were going around and making amends to people because we wanted them to praise us. "Gee, what a great thing you're doing. We're so proud of you." Then we were surprised when that wasn't what we got. There were some people we made amends to that didn't really care. They didn't want to hear it. As far as they were concerned, we were intruding on them once more.

Then we realized that there were many, many people we were not going to be able to talk to. The important thing for us was to become willing, to become entirely ready, to make amends to



them. We found our attitude had to change about many people. At first, a lot of us made amends without feeling sorry for what we had done. We had to ask ourselves, "Am I making this amend for the pat on the back, or am I doing it because it was a wrong thing that I did and I am admitting that wrong?"

We realized that was the key. Making amends meant facing our wrongs, looking at them realistically, and correcting them. We had to do our part and be willing to put ourselves in a situation where we could be humiliated and not let that stop us. We had to forget about our ego. We had to put our ego aside and do the thing that was right, making the effort. We couldn't just think about how sorry we were, we had to take action. We couldn't be vague or brush over certain issues, because that wouldn't help us. We had to show ourselves and God as we understood Him that we were truly sorry. Even though some of our wrongs could never be fully corrected, we had to take some responsible action towards the well-being of ourselves and others. Once we had made amends to these people, we told ourselves we would try to never harm them again. We were facing our wrongs and we weren't going to repeat them anymore.

When approaching the people we had hurt, we acted on a spiritual basis. But that didn't mean we thrust our spiritual principles in their faces. Instead, we utilized our Higher Power to give us the strength to stand face to face with the people we had harmed. We explained our situation—that we were practicing a set of principles to recover from addiction, and that to do so we had to make restitution for harm done. We were honest about our regrets and told them that we were willing to do whatever was necessary to make the situation right.

It took a lot of courage to face some of the people. Some of those people we had really, really hurt. We knew there was no way in God's world that they were going to be happy to see us. It took some courage for us to arrange to see them, go make the amends, and say we were sorry for what we had done.

We explained to them that amends were something that we had to do for ourselves, for our own peace of mind. It was our way of showing ourselves and the people we had hurt that we were truly sorry, that we had changed. As much as was humanly possible, with our Higher Power's help, we stopped messing with people. We helped out where we could and we minded our own business.

We even saw that gossip, which seemed like such a little thing, was harming others. And when we harmed others, we harmed ourselves.

Where did we start on our amends? Being addicts and good manipulators, there was a lot of variation in the way we went about them. A lot of us looked at our lists and searched for the easiest ones to do first. We may have figured the emotional ones would be easiest, financial ones would be tough, and some of the others would be impossible. Making an easy amend gave us the courage to go on and make the harder ones. And there were some of us who needed to take the amends just as they came on the list. We saw that if that was the way they came out of us in the Eighth Step, that was the way we were going to have to do them in the Ninth Step. If we just took them as they were on the list, there was less chance of our disease taking over and deciding for us, and we were able to make amends in a saner way. We also saw more clearly how working on amends was a process too. Whichever way we chose to follow, we trusted that God and our sponsor would guide us in making our amends. Working one step had made us more spiritually fit to work the next, and in the same way, making one amend made us more spiritually fit to do the next one. We also had to realize that when we made amends, some would be accepted and some wouldn't. Here in the Ninth Step we were finishing up dealing with our past. We had to make sure we were doing a good job of it so we wouldn't be carrying the past over into the last three steps which were about our present and our future.

Some of us found we had to make the hardest amends first, because having a hard amend to make paralyzed us. Some of our hardest amends were the family amends we had to make. We wanted all the past trouble with our families to be over. We wanted to call up our families and tell them we were well now. We wanted to tell them that we understood all the terrible things that we did to them and that we were sorry. We wanted them to say, "Okay, that's fine. We accept you and love you; welcome back into the family."

That's not the way it was for many of us. Our families didn't believe we were clean at first. We had conned them and lied to

them so many times that they were suspicious that this was just another one of our lies. They were busy with their own problems. They had built a life and a family without us for all these years, and they were happy to finally be rid of the hassles we had caused when we were in their lives and using. Why should they let us back in?

And they didn't want to talk about our addiction. Some of them would have had to look at any part they might have played in our addiction, and they didn't want to be reminded. This was particularly true when they themselves were addicts and were still using.

One of our members had turned her own sister on to drugs. When she called that sister to make amends, her sister was still using and she told her, "I don't want to hear it. You're crazy. Don't ever call me or write to me." That really hurt our member. She was hoping that they could have the closeness that they had shared in their addiction. She wanted that closeness in her recovery. She also felt guilty and responsible. She wanted to turn her sister on to recovery just as she had turned her on to drugs. "Just follow me again and we'll go to meetings and we'll live happily ever after." But that was not to be just then, so she had to give up communicating with her sister for a couple of years.

It took two years into recovery for one member to be able to see how she had harmed her father. It took that long to get rid of all her anger and resentment against him. So, when she could finally see how she had harmed him, she wrote him a letter and then he called her. They cried and shared on the phone. It was emotional, and it seemed wonderful to our member. She loved the feeling they had and was determined it would go on forever that same way. But the next time she called her dad all he could talk about was his boat and his new stereo.

She was devastated and wondered where all the closeness had gone. It took her a long time to see that their closeness hadn't gone away. Her father wasn't able to talk at the level she wanted every time they talked. Her fantasy that they should be able to do this was causing her problem. So she was able to come to some acceptance of him as he was, and an acceptance of the way he showed his love.

Another member had to work through a lot of terrible anger at his mother. He finally realized that the purpose of Step Nine was not to take his mother's inventory. She had put him in an

orphanage, and he had been physically injured there. That had hurt his life, and he had a lot of rage. He had to put all that aside. He went to his mother and told her he was doing his Ninth Step and had to make amends to her. His mother told him, "Oh, that's not necessary. You don't have to. I forgive you." He felt more rage for a minute.

Then he told her, "Well, that's not the point. I have to make amends to you for everything I put you through all the years of my addiction. I'm here to tell you that I hope I can work my program and I'm sorry for what happened." This was what he did instead of going to her and telling her that because of her he was injured for life, and that she didn't love him as he thought she should have loved him. And so, instead of dumping that on her, he was able to do things differently by understanding the Ninth Step. He said it was the most beautiful thing in the world. His mother just looked at him and said, "I understand."

A woman in the Fellowship had to make amends to her children. She had abandoned them and hadn't seen them for ten years. She did what was suggested to her by her sponsor. She wrote each one of them a letter. She told them that she was sorry that she abandoned them and that she was an addict. She told how she was recovering. She said she was sorry for all the pain she had caused them in their lives and asked them to forgive her.

In making these amends she had to face all the years of her active addiction. She had lived a lie to justify using drugs and to disguise who the problem really was. When she used, she always thought her problem was her husband, or God, or her mom or her dad. But they weren't the problem. It was her. And she needed to clear that up with them. So she wrote the letters.

As she was writing the letters, something happened to her. She felt like she was a baby chicken inside an egg. The egg had just cracked and it was a spiritual cracking in her soul. She felt shattered, cracked right in two, when she was writing them the truth. She was taking responsibility for the person that she was and the life that she had lived and what had happened. It was very real. And she was trying to clean it up. After all those years, she was still alive, and she could write those letters, and begin to feel restored. It was very painful, but also a very healing, experience for her.

Another amend she made was to an old aunt who had helped her all through her addiction and had never given up on her. Her



aunt gave her money to go to school many different times. She flunked out of school over and over again. There were times when she didn't even use the money to start school again, she just spent it. The way she made amends to her aunt was to go back to school and finish on her own. Then she sent her diploma to her aunt and told her the diploma really belonged to her.

One woman made financial amends to her father. She paid him back some of the money he had spent in bailing her out of jail and for apartments and cars. He told her not to complete these amends after she had paid him several hundred dollars. She didn't pay him any more than that because he didn't want her to. He just felt so good that she was clean. He hadn't wanted her to pay him at all, but he was really pleased that she did. Her payment was a token, but the amend was very real.

Financial amends can really be hard for those of us who spent money foolishly. In our years of active addiction, we lined up a whole army of debts: child support, alimony payments, car payments, overdrawn credit cards, and overdue rent payments. Some of us lied about payments "in the mail," or refused to answer the phone without a special signal or code. Our addiction humiliated and embarrassed us until we finally saw how hopeless we really were. When we came to the Ninth Step in our recovery, some of us froze at the aspect of making financial amends. But our sponsors reminded us that we had to be responsible for our past actions. Thank God, they also told us, that in the N.A. Program we live just for today. Just as our recovery began one step at a time, so could we begin by taking the first steps in repaying past debts.

Just like all of our other amends, it was important to discuss our financial amends with our sponsors. Here again, we had to consider the words "except when to do so would injure them or others." In some cases, our families were financially dependent on us and we had to be careful not to threaten their livelihood in our attempts to clear our conscience. Some of us had to budget our money very carefully to start making financial restitution for our past wrongs. We informed our creditors of our intention to make good on our debts and arranged a reasonable pay-back system. For some of us, it took several years to clear our debts, but the small amount we paid each month added up, until one morning we woke up and realized that we had completed the amends.

From our experiences with making amends, we came to believe even more clearly that there was a loving God. Some of us saw

that in working the Ninth Step we could go into really heavy martyrdom. But that was just our addiction and self-pity and self-centeredness talking to us. It was a voice we were learning to ignore more and more, recognizing the lies it was telling us.

When we asked our sponsors what we should say in making our amends, they told us they didn't know. But they did tell us what they had said. Often we didn't want to say their words. They didn't sound good enough. But when we came to make our own amends, somehow we found the proper words. The words we used weren't as important as how we felt inside. If we had done our work well on this step, we felt right about it on the inside and the words came out on their own.

So many of our amends involved people we couldn't ever hope to find. One man used to knock derelicts on the head and take their money. So he put money in an envelope and sent it to a local mission. That was one way of making amends. The most common way we made amends to these unknown people was by putting it in the basket at meetings.

Some of the people we had to make amends to died before we got to Step Nine. One woman wrote her amends letters to her mother and dad who were both dead. She put the letters in two envelopes and mailed them addressed to "Dear God." We wonder what the post office did with those letters. Another member went to the grave of his father, made his amends, and left a flower on the grave.

Some members found interesting ways to make amends in such situations. One woman told her sponsor how hard it would be to make amends to her grandmother. She had hated her so, and now she was dead. Her sponsor told her that she would find a way to make amends to her grandmother. She did. There was an old woman in the meetings that this member wanted to choke because she reminded her so much of her grandmother. The woman realized she wasn't going to be free of her feelings about her grandmother until she learned to love the old woman at the meetings.

So she kept going back to the meetings, week after week, until she learned how to tolerate the old woman. Then she learned, almost, how to laugh with her. And then she really learned to care about that old lady. When she got to the point where she could love her, she finally realized that her hate for her grandmother had been a very powerful force in her own life.

Her grandmother was a powerful old woman who lived a long life. She had a lot of hate and a lot of love. Our member hadn't seen the love, just the hate, but it helped keep the member alive. It kept her going. Her hate gave her a spite for life. When she was feeling hate, it was a powerful, powerful strength. The hate had given her a kind of power, but soon she saw she didn't need that anymore. She realized that at some point she had to let go of that negative power in her life.

When she did her amends, she started seeing her grandmother's true value to her. She started seeing her as a spiritual being, as a loving woman with as much love as she was capable of. She started asking about her grandmother, and she was more willing and open to hear about her.

We began to see that the amends process is never over. We found that through the years people who had disappeared showed up, and we could make another amend, or an amend we hadn't realized needed to be made became apparent. So we had to be willing to make amends to them all. But we couldn't just do it in a block. There wasn't just one time to make our amends, and if a person didn't show up then, we forgot it. When the people showed up, no matter how much clean time we had, we still did our Ninth Step with them if it was appropriate.

One big pitfall we found in this step was saying we were sorry too much. It was so easy for some of us to say we were sorry. We were sorry all the time. But then our sponsors or somebody who really loved us would tell us, "Hey, if you were all that sorry, you'd stop. All you're doing is manipulating by saying you're sorry to get off the hook and get some cheap gratification." It was true.

For many of us the principle behind the Ninth Step was forgiveness. We said "I'm sorry" very easily, and we said it all the time. It was a way of life for us. Because it was so easy for us, some of us couldn't make our amends by telling people we were sorry. Instead, what we had to do was to ask them to forgive us. There was a big difference in that for us. It was very humbling for us to ask for forgiveness. It was not easy for us to say, "Will you forgive me?" At first we couldn't even say it. We choked on it.

Asking other people to forgive us was hard, but it was even more important to forgive ourselves. And we had to forgive the other person too, because sometimes we had blamed them. We thought we were right and they were wrong. But when it came to

making amends it wasn't a matter of who was right and who was wrong. It was really a question of us being bigger than the situation. We didn't have to think so small and feel we had to win every argument or always make our point.

We saw this applied particularly to the people who loved us. We couldn't afford to take them for granted anymore and expect them to automatically forgive us and accept us the way we were. We had to see that we weren't easy people to live with, and some of the people we lived with weren't easy people to live with either. We found we needed to talk to each other when we made a mistake. And not only did we need to apologize, but we needed to learn about forgiveness so that what we did could pass.

We found that the ability to forgive ourselves and ask other people to forgive us was something that was really important. There was a lot we gained from it because it carried through into all the different areas of our lives. It helped us come face to face with ourselves. We could look in the mirror and know if we were doing something that wasn't right for us. And we found we didn't end up being unfair or unjust with ourselves. We didn't need to carry the old feelings around with us anymore and have all the world on our shoulders.

After we had made our amends, we began to walk straight. It was as if we had grown six inches. We could stand tall, and we felt a complete physical change. We could look people in the eye. We felt connected. We felt free. We felt that never again would we have to betray ourselves. We could trust and be trusted. We would no longer be betrayed by our own thoughts and emotions and actions. We were recovering. We talked to people. We felt light. A lot of our nightmares left. We were no longer tormented, waking up in cold sweats in the middle of the night and having flashbacks to our old way of life. We had done these nine steps as well as we could this time through, and we had a new freedom, a new peace.

In rectifying our errors to the best of our ability we found freedom from the shackles of our past. We were finally free to live in the here and now without fear or guilt. We began to feel good about who we were and where we were going in our recovery. Nothing we had done in working the Ninth Step had harmed us at all. We felt free. And we had the last three steps to help us stay free.



## S T E P T E N

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

**W**e have worked the first nine steps as well as we could, and we go back to them as often as we need. We have been relieved of a lot of the problems of living. In order to maintain that relief and grow in the program, this step is important to us.

We need the Tenth Step to maintain a fit spiritual condition. We know that it is only through contact with a Power greater than ourselves that we have been given recovery and a new life. To keep that new life on a daily basis, the Tenth Step is indispensable.

As we worked this step we came to love it. We found that taking our personal inventory daily made our lives a lot easier. That way we avoided the need to frequently get into the lengthy inventories, and we didn't have to carry all that heavy stuff around with us. Most of us had a lot of trouble admitting we were wrong before we came here. We had to learn how to say, "Hey, what I just did was wrong, and I'm sorry." That was a big lesson for us, and it sure made life a lot easier.

Some of us switched from never telling people we were sorry to telling everybody we were sorry. We wanted to get very, very honest, so we never told any little thing out of place. We became obsessed with it. If we felt we told anything out of line at a meeting, we would go back the next week and say, "Hey, I was lying at the meeting. It wasn't six months I was talking about, it was five months." We corrected little details like that. We swayed that far the other way.

But that was all right. Most of us needed to go completely the other way to get some balance. Each year we got a little more bal-

ance in practicing this step and in our lives. And each year we saw the balance we received from this step was more important. When we were first in the program, we used to go to meetings all the time. In fact, nobody could stop us from going to meetings. This was often a problem for those we were living with.

They would say, "Why don't you slow down on those meetings? You're not spending any time at home." We would say, "I've got to go to the meetings. That's it." And that was what we needed then. But later we saw we needed to balance life out, to go to a certain number of meetings and stay home a certain amount of time. To us, that was part of taking inventory each day. "Hey, am I really spending enough time with my family? Am I spending too much time involved with the Fellowship? Am I doing a good job at work? Am I messing around too much?"

It kept us in balance to check ourselves like that. We are compulsive people. We get going on one thing and get stuck on it. Sometimes we would either be going to too many meetings or getting into the Fellowship too much or getting too obsessed with work. So it was important that we practiced the Tenth Step.

If we did something wrong, it was important for us to take care of it right away. No matter what it was, we had to take care of it promptly, as the Tenth Step says. It seemed if we didn't take care of it right away, we got crazy. We kept thinking about it and thinking about it. If we took care of it right then, there was no more thinking about it. It was done. If we put it off, then it ate us up.

But how long do we continue to take personal inventory? How often should we do it? Is it necessary to write the inventory, or can it be done verbally or mentally? These are some of the questions frequently asked by members approaching Step Ten.

We found we did this step in all of those ways. We spent some quiet time and took our inventory. We went over our day's activities. Had we had trouble with people, been in arguments, or had any of our defects come up? Or, did we do something dishonest, or did something give us a funny, uncomfortable feeling in our guts? We found when we were most healthy, we were doing Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve on a daily basis. We were grateful that we continued to take inventory. At first we did it because we were told to do it. But then, when we did what we were told, we found that we gained freedom. We found we didn't have to build up a whole, big bag of garbage to have to deal with. We took stock of situations as they came up.

When we were clean for several years, it was much easier to admit we were wrong than it had been before. Eventually it got to be something we couldn't keep ourselves from doing, and the only reason it got easier was that we were becoming more aware of the price that we had to pay by not admitting when we were wrong. Ultimately, we were going to have to do it anyway, so the sooner the better; we knew we had no choice. We would have to pay the price now or later. That encouraged us to promptly admit we were wrong and avoid having to owe amends or be reminded to do so. If we didn't, part of our day was going to be taken up with feeling miserable about ourselves because we knew we were not doing the best that we could. We had learned that working the steps would make us feel more comfortable.

Through working the program, we got rid of a lot of those old feelings of guilt and low self-worth. We grew out of feeling that we deserved to suffer. We learned that we didn't owe ourselves that suffering. We still kept on making mistakes—we saw that we would make mistakes until the day we died—but if we could catch them and admit them promptly, we were spared from clogging up with all those old, bad feelings about ourselves. That old stuff just opened the door for a lot of rationalizing and justifying, and let all that soul sickness move back in. That was why we felt the daily inventory was so important.

This was a step all of us saw we should do daily. But even after many years of clean time, most of us hadn't worked up to where we were doing it every day without a miss. Since we were not perfect, we didn't always do it on a daily basis. We prayed daily, but many of us still didn't do an inventory daily. Our ideal was to do it every day, but like other ideals, we seldom fully realized it. The more consistency we showed, the more freedom we gained, so we kept striving for more consistency.

We thanked God we were aware enough to do it regularly. God had washed the film from our eyes. We were able to see and know what was going on. And we knew what we were up to. We didn't con ourselves as we used to con ourselves, and the daily inventory kept us from doing that. We wrote down what had gone on. We took a look at where we had taken advantage of someone, where we had overreacted, where we had hurt somebody.

The thing we saw that was miraculous for us was that when we were self-centered and hurt somebody, we could catch it and clean it up within a matter of minutes. That was miraculous to us



because that wasn't how we used to be. We used to feel, "That's on them, and that's just the way it is. They probably had it coming." Or, "They were weak anyway." We had every kind of rationalization, every kind of reason for why they deserved what they got from us. But those rationalizations weren't working for us anymore.

So now, when we did people wrong, we were aware of it. And if we didn't want to hurt, if we didn't want to feel lousy about it, we went and cleaned it up. That was one of the miracles of healing we saw within us.

Some of us found that the hardest thing for us to say was that we were sorry. One of our members told how, in the nearly twenty clean years he lived with his wife before she passed away, he could never tell her he was sorry. He would take her out and buy her a diamond ring or he would go out and buy her a dress or take her out to dinner, but he wouldn't tell her he was sorry. It just wasn't in his vocabulary. Those were hard words for him to come by. "I'm sorry." But he finally learned.

His recovery grew to the point, when he made a mistake, it wasn't too hard to say, "I'm sorry." He found out how much freedom that gave him in his life. In his business, when he made mistakes in the machine shop, he used to hide them. If he messed up on a piece, he hid it and tried to deny it. But he found out that once he quit trying to hide his mistakes, he didn't have to worry about all the lies he was going to have to tell the next day as to why something happened. It made his life so much simpler.

When we first started doing Step Ten, some of us would write every day, and then go over what we wrote with our sponsor. Sometimes we used the N.A. Tenth Step Guide, *Living the Program*. We learned about the process of Step Ten by doing that. We learned to evaluate the day, to look over the things that we were happy about and the things we weren't happy about. With the things that we weren't happy about and in the situations where we didn't like the way we had acted, we used the same process we had used in the Fourth Step. We took a look at our actions to see where we were wrong and what we could have done better, so we would have an ideal to strive towards the next time.

We also did spot check inventories. When we found ourselves in a situation and didn't feel comfortable, we did an inventory

right away. Maybe we were in a discussion with some people and it started getting heated, and we were right in the middle of it. We learned to stop mentally. We didn't necessarily have to leave the room. But we stopped mentally and just took a minute out from that discussion and asked ourselves, "Where am I at here? Am I getting caught up in the heat of this? I'm a fighter. I'm argumentative and sometimes I can jump right into the middle of something and just start arguing away and it's not even really what I mean."

And so we stopped ourselves and asked ourselves if this was partly our problem. Were we telling the truth? Did we contribute to the trouble? Did we start the whole trouble? How important is this, anyway? Is it really worth acting like this? By doing a spot inventory, we broke up what we were caught up in. And if we were wrong and caused part or all of the trouble, we could step right in and admit it so we could start over with a clean slate.

The Tenth Step gave us perspective on each day. It helped us live just for today. We didn't carry everything over into the next day and the next day. When we did an ongoing inventory throughout the day, promptly admitting when we were wrong, and a final inventory at the end of each day, we could then say, "Well, that day is over with, and here's the tally sheet; let's start again tomorrow." It helped put a finish on the day. And it helped us keep in touch with ourselves, our progress, where we were at.

We learned to be gentle with ourselves. We saw areas where we fell short every single day, so not being perfect became no big deal. And we saw things to be grateful about each day. Once we learned the process, we didn't need to do a written inventory every day anymore. Some of us still did it when we felt we needed to. We used that process we had learned through all the writing to review our day, each day, when it was over.

Another way we used the inventory was with a particular area in our lives. When one problem area showed up in our lives over and over again, most of us went back to the Fourth Step and took an inventory in that area. Then we continued on with the Fifth Step and on through the rest of the steps again.

One area we might have had problems with was our personal relationships. Some of us saw we were not going to have close relationships because they come mostly from relating with each other on a feeling level. If we couldn't do that, then we couldn't have close relationships. We recognized this and understood this

and saw we really needed to start talking about our feelings. We made some decisions about where we were going to start. We started someplace where it was easy, such as meetings or with our sponsors. Then we kept following up on that in our daily inventory, looking for how we were doing and what was happening.

The most telling indicator was how we felt in our guts. We learned to recognize that sick feeling deep inside that alerted us to the fact that something was wrong. Once we were alerted, we could check ourselves out to see how much and in what ways we had contributed to the problem.

One example of how this step works was shared by a woman who was a member of N.A. Her Tenth Step inventory helped her realize how much of a problem her smoking was to the man she lived with. Her smoking had given her a bad cough. One day her friend told her, with tears in his eyes, that he wanted her to be around for a long time and that when she coughed like that it really scared him. It hurt her so much to hurt someone she loved and cared about that she quit smoking. Then, after she had quit for a little while, she started to experience the benefits of not smoking. She ended up staying off cigarettes for herself, not for him. But initially it was for him, because something she was doing was hurting another person she loved. She realized that her behavior was pretty selfish and self-centered and was harming her because it was hurting someone who was really important to her. Once she saw that she was harming another human being, she was able to admit it and stop doing it.

One of our members pointed out that the Tenth Step didn't say "daily." She had taken daily inventories morning and evening for a long time just to learn how to write, to talk with herself, and to talk with God. But she had periods when she really slacked off on that. Then her sponsor would step in and tell her to get caught up on some of the choked-up stuff between her and God. So she wrote to clean up the wreckage she had made. Where there were resentments, she wrote about them. When she had been wrong, she wrote about her wrongs. And she wrote about her confused feelings and where she had broken trust.

Earlier in her recovery, when she first started doing the Tenth Step, it just seemed like so much. It seemed to her it would be

impossible to learn all these new things and still go ahead and live. But finally, it just became fairly automatic to her. If the question of what was going wrong came up, right away the answer was there. If a resentment cropped up during the day, she could see where some defect of character or some person or event from her past had triggered that feeling. So she could put things into perspective and go on about her life.

When she came into N.A. she had absolutely no self-worth. She was almost devoid of any kind of pride. She was so beaten down she was no longer afraid, because she'd quit caring. Through the process of getting clean, she learned human dignity, and gained some self-worth. She received these gifts from being clean because before she felt she was an animal. More and more she saw how important it was to admit she was wrong. But she felt that she didn't admit she was wrong out of any virtue, it was all a gift. She saw that there was no way the old her would have done it, no way. If she had been in charge of her own development, she knew that there was no way she would have gained as much as she did in her recovery.

One problem some of us had was with too much writing on this step. We just got into self-destructive nit-picking. We just hassled ourselves over every little thing that we did. When that happened we were told by our sponsors not to write anymore. We found there was a tendency for us addicts, and probably every other human being, to expect more of ourselves than we were really capable of. We would really beat ourselves over the head for every little thing that we did. We ended up making mountains out of molehills. The steps were designed to free us from self-obsession, not to promote self-obsession. We had to learn to quit taking ourselves so seriously. So if our writing was turning out to be self-obsessive, it was best not to write until we could regain perspective on ourselves.

We really watch for such self-centeredness as we do our Tenth Step. This characteristic seems to typify addicts more than any other. By the time we reach Step Ten, we no doubt realize how desperately we need to be rid of self-centered, self-seeking motives. Self-centeredness leaves no room for God's will, and leads only to grief and active addiction. When we identify



self-centered motives underlying our actions or feelings, we return to Steps Six and Seven immediately, and ask humbly to have these defects removed. Once we have asked, we must proceed confidently in the direction of God's will. We are sometimes asked to do things we'd rather not do, but we quiet our self-centeredness by forging ahead, trying as best we can to act unselfishly and be of service to our Higher Power.

Another thing we learned to watch carefully in our personal inventory was our own thinking. Self-defeating thinking would creep in without us being aware of it. We would find ourselves thinking, "If only I had this much money or if only I could do this." "If circumstances were different, if situations were different, then I would be okay." Finally we would catch what we were doing—we were giving importance to external things. Then we would tell ourselves, "Hey, that's distorted thinking. There isn't anything out there that can correct what's in here." So we would find a little spot where we could stop and meditate. We took some time to think about the things we had learned in Narcotics Anonymous—some of the things we had experienced since we got clean. And the fear and the emptiness started to go away.

The "promptly admitting" part of this step was really hard for most of us at first. We had spent so much time in a way of life where the ends justified the means. We carried a lot of that over into our life after we got clean. If we trampled over somebody in getting what we wanted, we just went back to them and said, "I'm sorry." We expected that would be all right and they would just forget about it. But we had to be confronted by people telling us that wasn't good enough. It didn't do any good to say we were sorry when we didn't really intend to change and stop doing it. So a lot of us had to be careful about misusing apologies.

We found this step called for a lot more than saying we were sorry. Promptly admitting we were wrong meant risking looking like a fool. We would take a stand we felt strongly about and then see we were wrong and had to admit it. When we began to see it that way, it got harder, especially at the public level. But we were growing in humility because we were able to admit when we were wrong and to do it promptly.

As we practiced this step, we saw we were learning more responsibility. When we messed up, we took responsibility for it. We came to the point where we weren't comfortable when we had

hurt another person's feelings. There was a time when it really didn't bother us. We had thought, "Well, that's too bad, that's their problem." We didn't feel that way anymore. Now it bothered us to know we had hurt another person's feelings. Somehow we had to make that right.

The only way we could make it right was to say, "I stepped on your toes yesterday and I'm really sorry." Or, "I was very impatient with you and I'm sorry about that. I need to tell you that I wasn't feeling very good and what I did didn't have anything to do with you." That got to be easy to do. It wasn't easy at first. We were the kinds of people who lay in bed at night thinking, "I'm right. Dammit, I'm right." We were miserable, but it was so important to us to be right.

We saw that was absurd. That changed for us once we were on the program and we learned about being wrong. We didn't necessarily remember working on that specifically but it changed through working the steps of the program. We finally came to realize that there was another way of looking at the situation. We had always thought we were right. When we were into thinking that we were right, that was our way of imposing our will on the world. That power didn't belong to us, it belonged to God. It wasn't up to us and finally we didn't want it.

Responsibility became a big word for us in this step. As we became more and more responsible for ourselves, we took responsibility for our actions. It wasn't our past or our parents who were to blame for what we did—we did it. We took responsibility for the good stuff and the bad stuff. Through the help of our Higher Power we were able to do that. If we were not responsible for ourselves, if we were not responsible for our actions, we were saying that everything that was wrong was outside of ourselves, and wasn't really ours to change. Continuing in this way was really going to alienate us from ourselves and everyone else.

For most of us, loneliness and feeling we were separate and apart from everyone else was the core of our old way of life. Our old way of thinking was so much a part of us, we could slip back into it without even knowing it. All of a sudden we would be feeling so lonely inside and really lost. Then we caught ourselves and realized there was something wrong. What was it that was keeping us from feeling close to other people? What was it that

was causing the loneliness that we always felt? When we finally tracked it down, it was always caused by what we were doing or thinking.

This step was our way of keeping things straight. The first nine steps had gotten the past cleared up and in perspective for us, and this step helped keep it that way. Without this step, the consequences of our remaining defects of character would have built back up to the point where we really had a lot of garbage in our lives. This step kept us from that. It kept our recovery clean, and that doesn't mean just not using drugs, it means feeling clean inside—feeling good about ourselves and about the world. We feel a part of the world rather than apart from the world. We are not in isolation and loneliness anymore. That isolation and loneliness was part of the disease of addiction.

The more that we got into our disease, the more we used drugs, the more isolated we got. It was us against the world. We needed to guard against the return of those attitudes in recovery. They sometimes came back upon us, even when we weren't using drugs. Ultimately, if we let those attitudes continue long enough, they would lead back to active addiction.

The Tenth Step also reminded us of our humanness. It showed us our need to accept other people and accept ourselves. It forced us to really pay attention to what we were doing in a day's time. The deeper we got into the program, the more we found that our Higher Power was with us every waking and every sleeping moment. That deepening awareness helped us to try not to waste too much time each day. We tried to pay more attention to what we were doing, what we were saying, what we were thinking, and what we were feeling.

We found we had to be just as aware of what was going on inside ourselves when we were by ourselves as when we were with somebody else. We saw that our thinking would reveal the negative things in us.

Too often we got off course in a day's time. Maybe we woke up and forgot to pray. Then we were late in getting to work. We got to work and then lied about why we were late. We found ourselves on the phone with somebody in the Fellowship but felt we didn't really want to talk to them. There was just a whole chain reaction of things that we did. We knew what we were doing was wrong. We didn't feel particularly good about it. But we often didn't break

the chain until we finally hurt ourselves or somebody else badly enough so that we woke up to what we were doing.

We found that working the Tenth Step meant that we were aware of what we were doing and that we were willing to pay attention. We found we had to leave enough room for error because we would always be human. But at the same time we needed to have the realization that when we made an error, we needed to catch it as soon as we could, and we needed to correct the error.

We needed to get right with God and get right with ourselves. If we didn't do that each and every day, our lives would soon be all messed up. It took us a long time to understand the depth of "just for today." At first we only used that idea when it was convenient, or when we were forced to. At first we needed it when we were just barely able to hang in there and could only get through a day at a time.

Then, finally, the meaning of the Tenth Step became clearer to us through the practice of it. We found we were living just for today, and we made the most of every day. We did an inventory each night to clean it all up before we closed our eyes. We didn't do that every day, but it was something that we became more aware of with each year of living the steps. We saw it was something important for us to understand and share with the people we sponsored and in meetings. It was something that had taken us so long to even figure out—what was a day of time anyway? We came to see that each day of time was really our whole life wrapped up in that one little package. And we saw how immense a day was once we were really living it.

We had come face to face with ourselves and we couldn't get away from us anymore. That's what the Tenth Step means to us. It is taking responsibility for living in the here and now in this one day, the only day we ever really have. The rest of our days are either gone or aren't here yet. So the Tenth Step wraps up our day. Have we lived on God's terms or our terms today? That was our experience with the Tenth Step. Then we went on to the Eleventh Step which became one of the most powerful steps for many of us.



## S T E P   E L E V E N

*"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."*

**W**e came to love the Eleventh Step. The program we'd been practicing so we could stay clean suddenly seemed to come alive and have more meaning. We came to see that this step was the motor that powered our recovery. It was one of the main keys we needed to find peace and have a joyous, contented life. Through practicing Step Eleven, we got the help we needed not only to stay clean but to grow spiritually.

Our experiences with the first ten steps cleared the way for the Eleventh Step. We had to go through a lot of hard work with the earlier steps, and it took a lot of practice, but we worked our way through these early problems. We found ourselves changing as we continued to practice the program. One of the things that was very hard for us at the beginning was to have a God to believe in and pray to. But by practicing the Second Step and the other steps, we gradually came to believe in a Power greater than ourselves whom we could trust and rely upon.

We had to throw out a lot of our old ideas. Before, most of us had thought of prayer as begging. "God do this for me. God give me this. God give me that." A lot of us tried that in the beginning, until we began to feel we were saying the wrong things. Whenever we had difficulty with prayer, we tried to remember that the Eleventh Step says "praying *only* for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." We checked our prayers to see if they were consistent with that part of the step. It didn't matter how we

worded our prayers, but we found that they were always more effective if they fit with that part of the Eleventh Step. So we found that the word "only" did not limit us. In fact it kept our prayers in harmony with the spiritual principles that were making us free. So we needed to practice prayer and meditation to maintain and improve our conscious contact with God.

Most of us found we needed to keep this step very simple. We found that the simpler we could keep all the steps, the better off we were, especially with Step Eleven. The depth of the steps can sometimes overwhelm us. But the Eleventh Step is simply a tool for us to use in our recovery, just like all the other steps.

In order to keep it simple, we focused on the basic things. We got up in the morning and asked God to guide us for that day. We usually said some simple words like, "God, grant me the honesty, open-mindedness, and willingness to accept Your will, and give me the power to carry that out." We tried to have a little quiet time for ourselves, just a little time we spent being quiet with our Higher Power. We tried to do a little reading in the morning. It didn't take that long, but it seemed to make our day go a little better.

The main thing we asked of God was to help us with our self-centeredness. We asked that we would do His will not our will, and that we would be guided that way. At night, we just said, "Thank you." And when we went to bed at night, if we had messed up in something, we didn't have to lie there and think about it a long time. We knew it right away. We gave it to God so we could let it go.

The more we improve our conscious contact with God, the more we find ourselves using spontaneous prayer throughout the day. There are many, many times we find ourselves praying. Often we find ourselves pausing during the day and asking for help. "God, I don't know what to do. Please show me which way to go." It feels good to ask for this direction and guidance, because it brings us some peace of mind and restores our confidence and strength. It helps us to let go of our fear and distrust and live a life of faith. This is what the Eleventh Step means when it says "praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." Over a period of time, as we pray for guidance and really mean it, we begin to find peace. We begin to feel a calm joy. And

we begin to experience an awareness and empathy with other people that we never thought possible.

We found it really helped us to have a special spot where we could go to meditate. We also found it was important for us to keep communicating with God all the time. It was not just in the morning and at night, it was all throughout the day. If there were things that came up we had a hard time with, we asked God, "Please help me through this," Or, "Your will, not mine, be done."

We tried to develop an attitude of always looking for God's will for us. Instead of wondering why things happened to us the way they did, we started asking to be shown what the lessons were in these situations. Throughout our daily lives, it was easy to see when we were forgetting to keep things simple—we built our problems into unmovable mountains. Most of us weren't very patient people. We wanted everything settled to our satisfaction on our timetable. Sometimes we got so frustrated, we lost all perspective. But when we consistently practiced the Eleventh Step, it gave us the inner strength we needed to deal with the problems of the day.

As we practiced accepting conditions as they were and trusting that they would improve, our conscious contact with God improved. We kept on practicing our prayer and meditation until they became a routine part of our lives. Then we could begin to face life on life's terms, and we found the peace we wanted and needed to live clean successfully. We began to know God's will for us, and we received the spiritual power necessary to effectively carry out that will.

It amazed us how well the Eleventh Step worked, even though some of us had seen it work so often. Every time we did it, it worked. Relying on God worked so well for us that it amazed us that we didn't do it more often than we did. We found that if we could try to stay with God at all times, our lives went a lot smoother.

Most of us, in the beginning, didn't understand prayer, or said we didn't need it. But our sponsors and the people at the meetings told us to try it. We said we didn't believe in prayer. We were told to pray anyway. They said we didn't have to believe in it for it to work. It was like gravity. Even if someone didn't believe in gravity,



they still fell when they jumped off a rock. We found it was the same with prayer.

We prayed because we were told to. A lot of us didn't believe in it, but we did it anyway. And it worked for us. The results of prayer started coming into our lives. Before we came to N.A., we might have prayed for a raise or a new car. But now we were told to pray for the person we resented. We thought that was absurd. We couldn't stomach it. The best some of us could do was pray that the people we resented would get what they deserved. But after praying that way for a while, we found ourselves praying that good things would come to them. As we prayed that way, we found our resentments beginning to lift and forgiveness coming. As we started getting results like this, we found our attitudes about prayer were beginning to change.

We wondered when was the best time to pray. Most of us didn't have any trouble praying when we were afraid or worried. But what about when we were content and happy? The Eleventh Step talks about improving our conscious contact with the God of our understanding. So, in order to improve our contact with God, we found we had to seek Him in good times as well as bad.

It took us awhile to see that we could never pray too much. Praying relieved us of the need to worry over our problems and control the outcomes. When we prayed, we felt reassurance, because we were acting on our belief in a Power greater than ourselves. We found that prayer, coupled with meditation, was one of the most powerful tools we had.

We learned to use the Serenity Prayer. And, more often than not, we talked to God in our own words. That was because our own words seemed more real to us. And we felt closer to our Higher Power when we talked to Him in our own words.

In the beginning, some of us yelled and screamed at God and denied He existed. We've even been sarcastic with God, saying, "You sure have a strange sense of humor." But we saw that it was important for us to talk to God any way we could. We needed to build a personal relationship with our Higher Power. We needed to practice the Eleventh Step. So we needed to learn how to talk to God in our own words and not somebody else's.

Some people felt a little more comfortable using prayers that they had learned as a child. That was fine. The important thing was

finding a way to contact some Power greater than ourselves that could work for us in our lives. We had to find a new way of life to replace our old way of life. That old way of life hadn't worked for us and we had needed drugs as our answer for the problems we faced. We couldn't count on staying clean unless we could find a new way of living where using was unnecessary for us.

We found ourselves praying a lot in desperate situations. If we were harried or running late, or if we had really gotten upset, we would just stop and quietly say the Serenity Prayer. It helped us get things in perspective. All of a sudden we would understand that it wasn't the end of the world if we were late. It wasn't the end of the world if we had this traumatic experience that we were having. We would live through it and we would be okay.

We found that using the Serenity Prayer or our own words helped us get centered. It helped us find some acceptance for situations. Many times, when we asked for the power to carry out God's will, we realized we had already been given the resources. We simply needed to put them to use. When we consistently used the gifts and the abilities God gave us, we were amazed at the things we were able to accomplish. When we found ourselves blocked by fear or doubt, we asked our Higher Power to give us the courage and strength to go on.

When we honestly make an effort to practice the way of life we learn in Narcotics Anonymous, we receive guidance in our lives. Then it is up to us whether or not we choose to follow that guidance. When we live the program, we have a choice. We are not perfect and we will make mistakes. But by making them, we learn to rely on our Higher Power's guidance, and work just that much harder to benefit from our experiences, and accept ourselves just that much more.

Everywhere we went, people who had what we wanted talked about prayer and the necessity for prayer. Gradually, as we stayed clean and practiced the steps, we began to experience the benefits of prayer. We began to experience the peace inside that it brought us. We began to experience the calm. As we stayed clean, and started to pray and meditate, we started to change. We started to get a real contact with our Higher Power. We started to get a little calmer.

We found it especially helpful to pray about things that had to do with the Fellowship. When we would go to meetings, or when we were asked to be speakers, we learned to pray: "Dear God, let me be as honest as I can be. Don't let me intellectualize, don't let me philosophize, don't let me hurt or offend anyone. Please let me have humility. Let my ego go. Let my pride go. Guide me in what I say and do. Help me to do your will." We found it helped us to do that anytime we did anything that was involved with the program.

One member talked about prayer this way: "When I do something I'm ashamed of, that's a time when I really need to pray for help in letting my ego and my pride go. There are times when I have to get on my knees because of my ego and my pride. Just kneel down. Because there are so many things that I don't know and that I can't handle.

"Sometimes I go over the St. Francis of Assisi prayer. 'God let me understand rather than be understood. Let me love rather than be loved. Let me give rather than receive.' St. Francis is one of my favorite personages and I never attached his prayer to a religion. I just like the prayer so much because it points out the fact that I need more humility."

A few more of us got into prayer easily. We liked talking and we liked the idea of talking to our Higher Power. We liked having a Higher Power. And we liked the idea of having God with us wherever we went and having somebody to talk to. It was a personal thing, like a best friend who was with us all the time. We found prayer was so good for us when we were troubled. We would go off in a quiet corner someplace where it was just us and God. We knew nobody was going to eavesdrop.

We could just pour out our hearts and not monitor what we said. We didn't have to be self-conscious, we just let it flow. And we felt it was well received because we knew our Higher Power honestly and deeply cared for us. We felt better; it was a purging. We felt it opened us up to God's healing power. We felt God's power and love was just flowing out all the time, but before we hadn't been open to receive it. By praying, we found ourselves opened to receive it.

As our faith grew, we encouraged the people we sponsored to develop a relationship with God and prayer. We found

that was important for us, and the only solutions we had to share were those that worked for us. Even if a person didn't believe in God, we still shared our experience. A Power greater than ourselves was a big part of our recovery. It was too important to be passed over just so some people could be spared hearing about God and prayer.

Sometimes we were told not to talk about God around certain people. And we went along with it for a while. But too often we noticed that those were the people who went back out and used, or had lots of trouble working the steps, or felt like committing suicide. So we saw it didn't do any good for us to soft-pedal God. It was the God of our understanding who had freed us from active addiction and was restoring us to sanity and helping us find a new freedom in recovery. A lot of us had trouble with God at first, but we all eventually worked through our difficulty and came to believe in a Power greater than ourselves. If we took the spiritual principle of a loving God out of the program, we wouldn't have a program.

During our early days in N.A., some of us thought there were two parts to the program. We saw there were certain things we had to do as one part, and we saw the spiritual things as another part. We thought we could do the things we needed to do such as staying clean and carrying the message. We figured we could worry about the spiritual part later. Once we did look at the spiritual part of the program, we saw it wasn't a separate part. There was no other part of the program. It was all spiritual.

We couldn't stay clean without our Higher Power's help. We couldn't carry the message to another addict or continue our recovery without a Higher Power putting the words in our mouths that we needed to say. So it was all spiritual. It was all an increasing awareness and closer conscious contact with God as we understood Him.

As we developed the ability to pray, we were developing our conscious contact with God. As another of our members put it: "In the beginning I tried to clear my mind to pray and I couldn't get it together. But now, over a period of years, I have learned to pray. I don't have any ritual. I pray at any given time. I may be driving down the road and my wife will look over and tears are in my eyes, tears of gratitude. For a long time she couldn't understand it but now she's beginning to.



"I pray now mostly for the feeling of oneness with my God. I pray that the feeling will grow. I think that we are all looking for the feeling of being in complete harmony with God, with nothing to disturb it. I pray that the sense of oneness will keep getting stronger and stronger as time goes on. It's a feeling I would like to have last all the time. It doesn't. But I think that the more that I have attended to my program and the way I live my life, the more I have received on the other end. It just seems like it's gotten easier and easier. There's no problem for me to pray today.

"I'm not the kind who does something for nothing. I pray because the more I pray, it seems like the more I get. I'm not talking about material things. I'm talking about more peace of mind and more understanding of my fellow human beings and learning to let them live. I find that one of my greatest prayers is that I can let my fellow human beings live their own lives. I think to accomplish this we just have to keep on praying or pretending, or whatever we are doing. And the more we do it, the easier it becomes and the better our lives get. That's the payoff in the end, that we get a better life to live."

The Eleventh Step says we are to pray *and* meditate. We believe it says prayer *and* meditation because when we pray to God we are talking and when we meditate, we are listening. And it is important to do both, to be able to talk and to be able to listen. That was a distinction that helped us. It was a little oversimplified because we couldn't help but do some listening when we were praying. And we couldn't help but do some talking when we were meditating. But, by and large, the distinction guided us in our thinking about prayer and meditation.

Basically what prayer and meditation means is communication. Our experiences with prayer and meditation have been beneficial, because we have been rescued from some serious lapses in good judgment by simply asking for guidance. We learned to talk to God just the same way we talked to N.A. members at meetings—openly, honestly, and directly. Our God knew what was going on with us. It was a very unique and a very personal relationship. After accepting our powerlessness and seeking and finding a Power greater than ourselves, we found that doing the Eleventh Step was a way of actively using that Power in our lives. It opened up direct lines of communication with our Higher Power. And

God found plenty of ways to communicate with us. We became very aware when we weren't doing what we were supposed to be doing. That sick feeling we had in our stomach at those times was one way God communicated with us.

Another way God communicated with us was through people who came into our lives as teachers. They might have been our students one minute and then switched to become our teachers the next minute. We had some of the most important messages delivered to us by some of the most unlikely teachers.

One member had an old friend fly in to visit him. The friend got off the plane loaded and got loaded again that night. The friend was told he would have to go back home. As they were driving to the airport to send him home, our member told him that he was sorry he had to do that. His addict friend was so loaded he could hardly move. Yet in a very clear, purposeful voice, he turned to our member and said, "You must never be sorry for doing what you know is right."

Some of us became aware of the times when we had been screaming to God for help and completely blind to one of God's children standing right in front of us trying to help us. In our self-centeredness, we weren't paying attention to them. We wanted God to appear in person and help us with our unique pain. We didn't realize that God had so many different ways of helping us and communicating with us until we'd been in the program for quite a while.

Sometimes we noticed God helping us through the absence of someone in our lives. Many people who used to be in our lives didn't belong in our new lives and they gradually dropped away. And, though we may not have noticed it right away, soon after we prayed for some kind of help, there was some new person who just popped into our life. And we saw, through repeated experiences of this kind, how God very clearly and strongly spoke to us through those people.

As one woman put it: "In the last year or so, I'm seeing some people come into my life who represent really high standards of caring and commitment and compassion. I've been hearing a lot about compassion and I'm not asking any questions. It's just that people are coming around talking to me about compassion. And I think that when I pray and meditate and I try to sort out what it is

I'm supposed to be doing, the guidance usually comes through the actions of another person. And I'll either follow them for a while, or they'll say something that will make a difference in something that I'm doing. And I may change my course or my direction and feel okay about that."

Meditation was the most uniquely personal part of the program for us. There are many different forms of meditation. Each of us came to a very personal way of meditating that worked for us. The whole purpose of meditation is to quiet the mind and rejuvenate the spirit. When we became open and receptive to the Higher Power, or voice within, we found our conscious contact with God improving.

One member said about her meditation: "I struggled with meditation for a long time. I wanted to meditate because Step Eleven said to meditate. I didn't know how to do it, and I would ask people how to do it. I would try the different ways I heard about. It took me a long time to find something that worked for me, but I finally did, and I got to see a lot of stuff about myself right off the bat.

"I found out that, for me, meditation was just being quiet with myself. I didn't need a lot of esoteric philosophies. I find that just being quiet, with me, is all I ever need to do. I spent so much of my life looking for exotic answers when the answer was right in my back yard. I need to be quiet with me and listen to the voice of God.

"Sometimes, I feel as if I get insight. But it's not a thinking kind of insight. It's just a deep knowing. If I have a question, I don't necessarily get an answer. I'll get some kind of feeling in my heart that it'll be fine. That it will just be.

"And what I like so much about the meditation is that it balances me. I love it. It just allows me to live in this world and not be stirred by all the little things happening around me. I can just go about my business and hold my head up with dignity. And I know that I'm God's kid. It's kind of a simple thing. It's like centering, allowing you to put your feet down on the ground and just be."

No matter what method we chose, we all found that meditation was a journey to that place inside us where we could listen to the whispering of spiritual wisdom. It brought us the peace and comfort we needed to go on with faith and hope.

We all have the capacity for meditation. We don't need to learn a lot of sophisticated methods or postures. The important thing is

making the time and being willing to allow it to happen. Some N.A. members sit or lie quietly and concentrate on listening to environmental sounds, to their breathing, or to their heartbeat. Other members focus on phrases from the N.A. literature or prayers, allowing the deepest meaning of each phrase to penetrate their consciousness. We realized that there was no right or wrong way to meditate, and that no one method was necessarily better than another. Each of us had to experiment and discover the method that worked best for us.

One member had a number of deep personal tragedies in his life after he became clean. He went to the program for help with those problems as well as for help in staying clean. He had this to say about meditation: "Many times I meditate on what it means to be an extension of God. And it's very hard for me, really, to talk about it because it isn't something that I intellectually understand.

"It is something that I have experienced. And to explain or talk about a spiritual experience is very, very difficult. You know, I don't know the meaning of God. That is something that is beyond what can be taught in this world. But I have experienced being with God because I am a part of God. I know that. I have experienced that. I have found that through meditation.

"I know it is very hard for some people, and it was very hard for me in the beginning, to meditate. What I did was I began to search. I began to search in religions. I began to search in literature. I began to make a search to try to find something I could connect with. Eventually I found my niche. I found my thing.

"What works for me does not necessarily work for somebody else. We all have to find our own way in this world. The path I chose is a path that I have to travel by myself. I cannot travel it with anybody else. A bunch of people could be traveling the same path, but individually we are all on certain levels. We are never at the same point.

"It's a thing that has to be done by ourselves. I sort of look at it in that way. I'm on a journey but it's a journey that's different from any other journey that I've ever been on. It's unique. It's a journey without distance back to a home which, in truth, I've never left. I only thought I had left it.

"I try to find what God's will is for me. By trying to follow it to the best of my ability, it introduces me to reality, to the truth. Step Eleven is one of the most beautiful steps in the whole program. It helps us in those times when we are completely defenseless, not



only from that fix or that drink or that pill, but other things too. Sometimes we are completely defenseless with our desires, and it is our conscious contact with God that will determine what's going to happen to us. Our personal relationship with our God is what's going to determine whether we fall or we make it."

The Eleventh Step is such a big step for us. We have spent a lot of time and had lots of experiences in the program getting here. Some of us have spent years before we even got hold of the program, so it took even longer for us to get to Step Eleven. But we all eventually made it. And, in getting here, there was so much that we learned about life and about ourselves and about each other.

In seeking God's will for us, we had to come to some understanding of what our purpose was. We had to have a general sense of what it was that God wanted us to do. And we saw how that purpose changed for us and how our sense of it changed. In recovery, our sense of our purpose was different from what it was when we first walked in the N.A. door. It was different from what it was when we were clean five and ten years. We really couldn't tell you how many mistakes we made trying to interpret God's will for us. We sought through prayer and meditation and we got some idea of what God's will for us was. But each year God's will for us became clearer and clearer as we sought that will in a deeper way and benefited from the mistakes we had made earlier.

Some of us came up with some unique purposes for ourselves. But this step helped us gradually correct our mistakes. It seemed to us that working the steps took us all to the same place, but we didn't all take the same path to get there. We were so glad about that, because we were all different. It would have been impossible for us if we had found that we were required to be like everybody else.

We found it was important to have a conviction about what it was we were supposed to be doing. We weren't wandering around anymore, changing who we were from minute to minute and day to day, dependent on who we happened to be around, or what group we were involved with, or what project we were on. Because of this conviction in us, there was a clearer path for us to follow. At different times our paths had to do with service work, making a commitment to our group, or to area service. Sometimes

our paths led to things that didn't have anything to do with the Fellowship. It might have been working with people on our jobs or some other thing that seemed our special lot in life.

We found we had to be very careful about the question of what was God's will for us. We weren't always sure we knew. One woman at a meeting had this to say about knowing God's will: "I don't really know what God's will is for me. I ask for it and I try to be quiet and listen. And, to the best of my ability, I try to lead a productive life. I try to be sensitive to my own needs and sensitive to the needs of other human beings and hopefully do God's will. But I don't know for sure what that is. Sometimes, after the fact, I can look back and see I was running on self will. After I get into trouble, I know that. And sometimes, after the fact, I can look back and see that God was working in my life."

That same woman gave an example from her life. The man she was living with got cancer and was dying. She had five years clean at the time but she felt as if her recovery just fell apart. She was screaming at God, "Why?"

It was very hard going through her friend's final days and death. Afterwards she was driving down the freeway one day and she thought, "You can be grateful that you had him in your life as long as you had him because he brought so much to you." And she started crying. It was a spiritual awakening for her.

Like this woman, all of us have had those little spiritual awakenings. And we know that thoughts like that don't come from us. We will have a perfect thought that brings exactly the comfort or the knowledge we were seeking, and we know that we couldn't have thought of that by ourselves.

The Eleventh Step guided us through so much turmoil about God and prayer and meditation. At first we wondered what was the difference between a Christian God and a Jewish God and a Muslim God, and no specific religious God. We began to see that the idea of a particular God worked for those who used it. We saw that the common thread was that God loved us all. And God wasn't even asking us to love Him back.

We saw that it was too big an order for any of us to fully understand. We understood that we were blessed and that we had the gift of our recovery. Some of us had a lot of other gifts too. But we saw it was all way beyond what we could understand.

When we utilized prayer and meditation on a regular basis, we found a new relationship with our Higher Power. Oftentimes, we

felt surges of faith, with the courage and strength to undertake whatever tasks were put before us. We felt a new sense of calmness deep within, which allowed us to face adversity with serenity. And even though some of us still had thoughts of using from time to time, they passed quickly from our minds.

Our commitment to total abstinence and this Twelve Step way of life became stronger and stronger as our conscious contact with God improved. We found that God had a wonderful plan for each of us which brought us more happiness, fulfillment, and joy than anything we had conceived of before. We didn't need to concern ourselves anymore with self-centered wants and desires, because instinctively we knew that we had truly been given a new life. Step Eleven was our final preparation for carrying the message of Narcotics Anonymous to other addicts. Now it was time to go to the Twelfth Step.

## S T E P T W E L V E

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

The Twelve Steps are a path to a Higher Power. The Twelfth Step was the one that opened us up to living. In living the steps, we began to let go of character defects. With the help of a Higher Power, we began to lose the fear of facing ourselves and of facing other people. Eventually, when we sincerely use this program of action in our daily lives, we are able to face our Higher Power, ourselves, and our loved ones. We develop a solid base from which to work and live. We find that we can go anywhere and do anything, with complete assurance that we can handle whatever situations come up. With this new attitude, we are able to help the addict who still suffers, and have a real basis for living and enjoying life.

The first part of the Twelfth Step describes a process, a spiritual awakening that is the result of living these steps. Our effort in practicing the steps has been a process. In the Second Step, we gradually came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. We who were hopeless, found hope. In time, we became willing to make amends to those we had harmed. The result was that we found freedom. We went through a process and we grew. We began to experience the elements of a spiritual awakening—hope, gratitude, faith, humility, and freedom from addiction.

We came to see that we had been spiritually awakened as a result of working the steps. Some of us thought a spiritual



awakening would be sudden, like a "bolt out of the blue." Many of us had awakenings like that. But as we continued to stay clean and work the steps, we realized that the spiritual awakening we all shared was simply an awakening to our own spirituality. It was a slow, gentle reviving of spiritual awareness. We had developed a spiritual way of life and found some peace of mind in the process. We were different people because of working the steps, going to meetings and carrying the message.

Our spiritual awakening changed our lives. We can't see how anyone could have worked these steps without having experienced a changed life. Most of our lives had been altered for the better early in recovery, when our obsession to use had been removed. We knew then that we were still addicts but we didn't have to fight the obsession on a daily basis.

By the time we worked our way through all of the steps, we discovered that our whole lives were different. We now had the ability to care about another person's feelings. We had the ability to enjoy a child's smile. Before coming to N.A., we didn't have time for anything other than going out and getting drugs. But it wasn't that way anymore. We had been awakened to the spiritual side of ourselves. Now, more and more, we were able to live a balanced life. Our bodies, minds, and spirits were in harmony, and our lives showed the difference. As we looked around the circle in the meetings, the members who had worked the steps were totally different people than they had been when they first got clean. Their eyes were opened to life as it was, not as they wanted it to be.

Part of our spiritual awakening was thinking along a higher plane or a higher consciousness. Practically anything different than what we used to think about was a higher consciousness. Before, we were always thinking about drugs. Most of us had been raised with a consciousness of God, but we didn't have time to think about or deal with Him when we were using. We didn't have time to think about any of the other spiritual principles. For many of us, our lives were all about drugs from the time we got up in the morning until we went to bed at night: getting drugs, using drugs, and then finding somebody who had some more.

We saw that any addict who worked the steps would experience a profound change. Usually, the greater the effort a person made, the more profound the change was. We knew people who were able to stay clean by just working the First Step, or Steps One and

Twelve. They were often miserable people. There is nothing more miserable than one of us addicts without drugs, unless we have found something else to fill that void.

There had been times before coming to N.A. when we were forced to abstain from drugs. We had been locked up or had sworn off or couldn't get a supply. We were absolutely miserable.

We saw this in the Fellowship too. The addicts who were abstinent but did not have a conscious contact with God or a set of steps that they were working were miserable people. Working the steps taught us an acceptance of life. The ability to accept life on life's terms was an essential part of our spiritual awakening. Nobody said we had to accept it. We had a choice. We could either accept it or we could stay miserable.

Life just was the way it was. That was reality. Things didn't always seem fair but they were always real. Our problem had been our unwillingness to deal with life on its own terms. We wanted life to be the way we wanted it to be. But one day at a time, as a result of the Narcotics Anonymous Program, a relationship with our Higher Power began to strengthen and grow. Each of us came to a unique relationship with God. It resulted in a life that wasn't miserable anymore, it was terrific.

We began to believe we had been spiritually awakened as a result of practicing the Twelve Steps. We believed that anyone who honestly tried to work the steps would be spiritually awakened. Sometimes we even took it for granted. It was only occasionally, when something reminded us to look back, that we were aware of how far we had come and how much we had been changed by our awakening.

We came to see that a spiritual awakening was being aware that God was there. We loved seeing our Higher Power everywhere we went, especially in meetings. We were told that meetings were really special because that was one place where God worked miracles. When we all stood together and prayed at the end of the meetings, we loved that because there was so much power there. We looked in everybody's eyes because that was where we saw our Higher Power. That was what moved us. The steps had changed us and they would change the newcomer.

Our spiritual awakenings came in God's time. In our early recovery, we heard people talk about their spiritual experiences and

we got greedy. We wanted ours. "Where's MY spiritual awakening?" But looking back we saw that there was no stopping it. We would be awakened spiritually. We couldn't avoid it as long as we continued on, working the steps to the best of our ability.

Some of the people we sponsored would ask us when their spiritual awakening was going to occur. It was too soon for them to see that they had already had some little awakenings, and that they would have a lot more. Later they would look back and see it, but when they were asking questions like those, they were still caught up in their old ways of thinking. It was hard for them to see all the progress they had already made.

We saw that having had a spiritual awakening meant we now had the knowledge and acceptance that it was God's power working in us and through us to make a difference in other people's lives. We didn't make the difference. God made the difference. But God worked through us. The same way other people had been put in our lives, we were put in other people's lives. And we needed that. We had always needed that.

We saw we had a need to be a part of new things. We had always been looking for excitement and high energy. Now we got a new kind of excitement every time we talked to someone about recovery who hadn't heard about it before. Now we could see our primary purpose was to stay clean and help other addicts to get clean and to stay clean. The spiritual principle that was working was really our Higher Power working through us.

We knew our Higher Power was working through us when we saw ourselves making a difference in other people's lives. Later they would tell us that they had been attracted to us when they met us because we didn't bog them down. We didn't make a lot of demands or have any expectations of them. We really gave them credit. We allowed them the integrity to believe that they could get clean too. We weren't saying to them, "You can't do this and you can't do that. You shouldn't do this and you shouldn't do that." We could believe in their recovery because we believed in God. We realized that we had gotten clean and been able to stay in the N.A. Fellowship because something greater than us was looking out for us.

We saw that it took a deep understanding of all the steps and the principles of the program to be able to show that awareness to somebody else. We saw that we didn't have to have a lot of clean

time to do that, but we did have to believe that it was not us that would make the difference in somebody else's life. It was God.

We saw that doing the Twelfth Step was putting love and commitment into action. Carrying the message was as simple as telling somebody our story, and then following up with whatever came next. We backed up our message by putting into action what we were saying. What we were saying to them was that recovery was possible and that it didn't come just through individuals. It came from all of us together. No one was better or more deserving than anyone else. There was room in Narcotics Anonymous for all of us.

At first, we had felt a tremendous responsibility to make sure the message was received. We took it personally when it wasn't, when somebody went out and used again. We felt it was our fault or somehow we hadn't done what was right. Our own sponsors set us straight on that. They pointed out we didn't have that kind of power. Contrary to what we wanted to believe, we saw we had to admit they were right.

One member said that he had never made an unsuccessful Twelfth Step call. At first we might have thought this sounded arrogant, but then we had to look at what the word "success" really means. Regardless of whether or not the person stayed clean, our member had stayed clean and had planted the seed of recovery. He knew what his limitations were and had no expectations for the other person to do or be anything.

All of us can learn from that. We can neither get somebody clean nor make someone stay clean. All we can do is carry the message. We *are* the message. We might be the only example of N.A. recovery that someone ever sees. Our recovery speaks for itself.

It took us some time to learn that carrying the message meant more than talking to addicts who needed the program. There were many times after we had come into N.A. when we were still suffering. Our fellow members carried the message to us, the message of hope and recovery. Sometimes we would see people who were much newer than us struggling with problems and getting through them. In many cases, they were happier and had a better understanding of what was going on in their lives. By their example, they carried the message to us.



It was the same way with people who had been clean longer than we had. When we saw them in the quagmire and yet saw their faith, it strengthened our faith too. They knew they would be all right, and it gave us the faith to continue our path of recovery.

The longer we practiced the program, the more critical we saw it was to carry the message to others. What we learned to do was to watch how other people worked the program. Early in recovery we watched the people who were sticking around. What did they do? All the people we had seen who had been able to have long term clean time got into some kind of service work. They got involved in institutional work or working with other addicts. They helped out at the group or area level. The people who were willing to be of service seemed to be the people who stayed clean. We watched them and we realized how important that was. We found that when we were having a really hard time, the best thing we could do for ourselves was to go work with somebody else. That took us out of our self-obsession.

It was the old saying we had heard so much, "When all else fails, work with another addict." We came to see how true that was. If we helped other people, we helped ourselves. Working with them renewed our program in us. It kept us clear that we were powerless over our addiction.

One member had a hard time when he lost his dad. His dad was a practicing addict who committed suicide. Our member had a hard time going through that. What brought him relief was working with other people. That had always been the thing that helped him. Whatever he was going through, it really helped him to work with other people. The Twelfth Step had a lot of importance to him. That was why he tried to stay involved in some kind of service.

When he first started recovering in N.A. he was told, "If you can't talk at the meetings and you're afraid to do anything, help out in some way. Do those dishes or clean the ashtrays. That's a form of Twelfth Step work. Whatever you do, get busy. Don't just sit there and do nothing. Get into doing something. The best thing to get into is to work with other people. That's going to pull you through. You've got to get out of your self-centeredness. You don't just stay home and do nothing and hope that your addiction will go away. You get out there and do something."

Another member spoke of his experience with Twelfth Step work this way: "I can't give something if I haven't got it. I can't work just the first half of the First Step and the carrying the message part of the Twelfth Step. I have to experience the steps and the traditions and the other benefits the program can give me. I think that once we've had what we consider a spiritual awakening, it puts a new concept on working the step. For me, it took away a lot of the ego. I was going to give a talk and I told a friend with a lot of clean time, 'I hope I say something that they can use.' He told me, 'Fool, if you say anything that is worthwhile, it isn't you talking now, it's God.'"

"So I came to believe that anything good that comes from anything I say, will be God's will, not mine. And it's worked that way. I find that I don't know whether I'm doing the newcomer any good or not, I really don't. Sometimes I feel out of touch with the newcomer. I feel a generation gap, an age gap. I feel out of touch with him until he takes my hand and tells me he needs help. Then I feel a oneness with him."

We found that working Step Twelve really brought the program all together for us. All the work and all the effort, everything we had put into the other steps, we used to the fullest in the Twelfth Step. We found all the steps were joined when we started practicing the spiritual principle of service. It was service to ourselves, to our God, and to our fellow human beings. This helped us see again how beautifully the program was set up with all the parts working together smoothly to help us.

One member expressed it this way: "Our program shows itself at its best when we are working with other addicts. We give of what we have. Sometimes we share our food or our home with them. God gave this world and everything in it to all of us. And it is our responsibility to share this with everybody because it is in sharing that we enrich ourselves."

We found that it was easier to understand the spiritual principle of sharing than it was to practice it. We still had some of our disease operating. Some of us found that we weren't truly sharing with newcomers, we were just creating a new dependency in them, on us.

One member put it this way: "We have to give the message. But so much of what happens is that everybody has such a need to do Twelfth Step work because they are looking for some kind of

absolution. So they take the First Step and then they jump right into helping others.

"What I found out in my experience was that working all the steps made me spiritually fit to be able to help somebody and not pass on the disease. I think working the Twelfth Step is giving freely of what one has received.

"When I help others I'm not a do-gooder. When I help others I realize that this is what I have to do to save my life. But being insane people, we make a lot of mistakes in Twelfth Step work by trying to give something away before we have it. Then we may do more damage than good. About all I did in my early days of trying to give the message away was give away my disease, my insanity.

"But I think that Twelfth Step work is to give the message, not enable the person to stay sick. And sometimes Twelfth Step work is not necessarily taking people into your home, getting people jobs. I think that is personal. I think the purity of the Twelfth Step is giving the person the steps. That's sponsorship.

"How can you sponsor somebody unless you've worked the Twelve Steps? I think it's easy to get very confused and try to get people jobs. People think sponsors are their mothers and fathers. They think they are an employment agency, they are a bank, they are a chauffeur. I think that there are things we personally choose to do to help people. We personally choose to do those things, but we can't confuse those things with Narcotics Anonymous Twelfth Step work.

"Twelfth Step work can be helping a person get to a meeting, or sponsorship on the steps, sharing the security of the Twelve Steps. I know in my Twelfth Step work in my early days, I would give people money. If there was an easy way out rather than working with an individual, I had a tendency to take it. Sometimes it was more convenient to do that than other things. And I have to keep checking what I'm doing. I definitely believe that you can only give what you have. There are no shortcuts."

There were so many ways we saw we were carrying the message. As one member put it: "I remember that whenever I carry the message, the only message I have was given to me from God, through other people. God allowed me to hear it and God allowed them to deliver it.

"And we have to meet some kind of qualifications in carrying the message. I need to take care of my own self, to clean up my

own house, to take that personal inventory, and make sure I get an opening to that connection. After I've cleaned up on this level then I can carry some kind of message. Sometimes the message is hope. Sometimes the message is my experience with the disease. I like to carry the message of hope because that's what I'm learning to feel. Other times I'd share a pain and then I'd share my experience about the pain. And people get strength and I get strength.

"When I'm in it, I share the pain. And it is a catalyst for personal growth. Pain is not growth, but it is the thing that touches me inside and helps me to grow spiritually. Whenever any of us shares a hurt, it always triggers some kind of pain in us which frees us even more. It creates a love between us. And a deeper meaning with each other."

Much as we came to see we really had to work all the steps to be spiritually fit to carry the message, we saw there were exceptions. We saw people very new in recovery who could help others easily. We even saw relapsers carry the message effectively to others. They couldn't seem to hang onto the program for themselves but they could carry it to others. This was the exception rather than the rule. But we saw it happen often enough that we knew we couldn't think we were too smart about just what it took to carry the message. We saw the whole thing was God's work and we couldn't and didn't have to always understand.

There was another thing we had to watch, too. There were always a lot of warnings we heard and passed on about not carrying the message to people unless they were ready. We saw that a lot of times we would try to carry the message to someone who wasn't ready. We were really wasting our time and bothering the other person. But we couldn't get too smart and know it all.

We found it was important to let God guide us on who we should go and see and when we should go see them. We saw that it was important not to *always* wait for the addict to reach out for help. We needed to hear a cry for help most of the time but not all the time. We didn't always need to wait until an addict called screaming in agony and was ready.

We found one of the most important parts of carrying the message was sponsoring our own members. N.A. members need good sponsorship to help them grow in recovery. The best Twelfth Step work is usually done by people who have grown in



the program. When we first came into the N.A. Fellowship we heard a lot about, "Get a sponsor, get a sponsor." They talked a lot in meetings about the importance of having a sponsor.

Once we got a sponsor, we usually found they were really friends to us. They had something we wanted. They got along well with people and we liked that. They were happy. They had good relationships with their families and their fellow members. We wanted what they had so we asked for sponsorship.

We came to believe that a sponsor was a good friend who could guide us through the steps, somebody who had practiced the program longer than us. Sometimes our first sponsors just had a year or so on the program. It was better to have somebody who had longer clean time than that, but they were good for us at the time. Most of us eventually found sponsors with a long time clean. That was important to us because we needed as much stability in our programs as we could get. Our sponsors helped us go to a lot of meetings that we probably wouldn't have gone to otherwise. We called them, they called us, we called each other. They got us into doing a lot of things that we normally wouldn't have done if we were by ourselves. Part of our disease was that we tended to isolate. We definitely would have isolated ourselves. Our sponsors would call and say, "Come on, let's go to a meeting." And we would get in the car and go to a meeting.

If we hadn't had the sponsors we had, there would have been a lot of nights when we were just too tired to go to a meeting. We would have lain down and watched TV or something. We saw that sponsorship was a two-way street. We found that the people we sponsored helped us more than we helped them. We helped each other. We saw that the members who didn't get sponsors were depriving somebody else of the benefits of sponsoring so it worked two ways.

One of the big values for us in having a sponsor was that this person really knew us. There was a part of us that spread things around and just shared a little bit of ourselves with a lot of different people. Then each person would know a little bit about us, but none of them knew the whole thing. But our sponsors knew all about us. They usually heard our Fifth Steps. So when we went to them, we didn't have to run down a big, long list of our background. They could just tell us right away what they saw. They knew what was going on, and we couldn't bluff them. They

knew the truth. Sometimes they wouldn't even sympathize with us, but they always showed us how to work the steps.

So we planned, as long as we were going to be around on this earth, to have a sponsor, somebody we could go to. We didn't think that was something we were ever going to grow out of. We would probably always need a sponsor. We would need that person that we could always go to. If something should happen to our sponsor, we would find somebody else. We figured that was always the way it was going to be for us. We felt it was important that everybody had a sponsor, no matter how much or how little time they had on the program.

Each of us eventually found that right person for us, a person who demonstrated what they believed. This was the most valuable of all qualities we sought, the person who lived the program, who believed in spiritual principles. We developed an ongoing relationship with that person and we learned to trust. It happened automatically. We found that man or woman we needed. It was someone we could really communicate with, really be honest with. There was something about this spiritual thing we had in this program that everybody who was supposed to meet each other, did meet. And we were in the right place at the right time, so it happened for us.

Most of us were staggered when we were first asked to be sponsors. We didn't think our recovery was that strong, and we led busy lives. But as we got more experience, we realized it didn't matter. We did the best we could knowing that the end result was really up to God. If our sponsors were ready to hear the message, they were going to hear it, no matter if it came from our mouths or somebody else's or out of a book or wherever. If they were not ready to hear it, it didn't matter how eloquent we were, they were not going to hear it.

One woman saw this because a woman she was sponsoring went out and used. As she said: "This was the first time that this had happened to me. I was devastated. I thought it was my fault and that I was a bad sponsor. She had called me the day before and said, 'I've made up my mind. I'm going to go out and use.' And I said, 'Oh, you can't do that.' I must have regurgitated the entire N.A. book to her vocally over the telephone. I'm telling her everything about why she shouldn't go out and use. But she had already made up her mind that was what she was going to do."



"And of course she went out and did it. She called me the next day. She was loaded. And I was crushed. That's when I realized I was absolutely powerless. I could have said anything and she was going to do what she was going to do anyway. So then, what I started doing was every time these women would call me, I would pray. I would ask God to help them. That's how I think God works through us. And that's how I work with others. I just let God do it. And I just pray that I can be an instrument of God's will."

Over the years a custom has grown up in the Fellowship that men sponsor men and women sponsor women. We were very grateful for that protection. Very seldom was there a valid exception to that custom. Many times we tried to tell ourselves that there was a certain situation in which we were the only ones who could really sponsor someone of the opposite sex. Or someone would feel that only someone of the opposite sex could be trusted with certain secrets and feelings. Most every time we did this, we ended up getting or giving poor sponsorship. And, looking back, we saw we were just continuing on with some self-hatred that showed itself in our distrust of people of the same sex. This was a problem that had to be faced, not evaded. We needed good sponsorship, and we saw that men had to go to men and women had to go to women.

If we didn't follow this custom, we ran the risk of hurting our recovery and jeopardizing our clean time. But even worse, we often ended up in a relationship with a lot of sexual feelings that mixed us up and set us back. In the worst cases we ended up in bed with each other and that produced a lot of guilt. We had taken the deep trust of sponsorship and abused it, twisting it to our own purposes. What we had done was jokingly referred to as Thirteenth Stepping but there was nothing funny about it. We had used the program for our own selfish ends and abused a precious trust. So we learned it was men with men and women with women even if we were in a small or new group with few members and it was the only group in town. We could still get sponsorship by phone from someone of the same sex in a nearby city.

As for practicing the principles in all our affairs, that would have been perfection. And we weren't perfect. "Practicing

these principles in all our affairs" was such a simple little phrase, the last few words of the Twelfth Step, but we found those words were such a big order. As we grew in recovery, we found we practiced these principles in more parts of our lives than we used to. We came to see that the steps were made to be practiced to the best of our ability. We were not perfect. We would never be perfect at working the steps. We could do them better today than we used to do them. We applied the principles in the different areas of our lives better today than we used to. But we saw that was a tribute to God, not us.

We tried to set aside our old ideas so that we could become more familiar with the new ideas of the program. We believed that our old self-destruction and self-centeredness could only be replaced with spiritual principles. But we had to take the action and apply the spiritual tools we learned from studying and practicing the steps. Praying for guidance, making choices, and accepting the world as it was were some of the ways we applied these principles.

We saw that it was all of the steps that helped us practice this last part of Step Twelve, but mostly it was Steps Ten and Eleven that allowed us to do Twelve. If we didn't do a personal inventory, pray, and meditate, we wouldn't know if we were practicing the principles in all our affairs. We wouldn't be in touch with reality. We needed to do the steps on a daily basis. They kept us in tune with the principles. They also kept us in tune with ourselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We found we could really feel it when we were out of harmony with the program and the people.

Then we would use Steps Ten and Eleven to get back on the track. So each time there was a situation in our lives where we felt we were out of balance, we did an inventory and found which ways we were at fault. The answer to our defect was one of the principles of the program. We were falling short because we were not practicing one of the principles. Step Ten and Step Eleven would tell us what we had to do to put ourselves back in line with how we wanted to live our lives. So practicing the principles in all our affairs meant applying the Twelve Steps as needed in our lives. It was just that simple.

The Twelfth Step says "in all our affairs." We found that meant that we had to take what we had learned in the meetings and



practice it outside the meetings, too. We learned to put this way of life into practice with the people we worked with, our families, and our friendships with people. We did the best we could each day, sometimes improving just a little bit at a time. Sometimes we would make big jumps in practicing the principles in all the different areas of our lives. It might have been learning to stand up for what we believed in by being able to say "no" when something wasn't right for us even if it was important to someone else. Or it was learning to work and take care of ourselves. We learned not to blame anyone if something was not going right or if we failed at something. It wasn't anybody's fault. It was just another opportunity for us to practice the principles and grow.

We learned to ask for help. We needed to remember to ask for help all the time, to ask for help with the steps and with the things that we needed for our own personal growth. But even more, we needed to learn to ask for help just to be a better person. We learned that there were going to be times when we would feel we were doing the best we could, but that was really us giving up on ourselves and not taking any risks anymore, not going any further.

We knew we had to learn to ask for help more often, not just when we were in trouble. This was still one of our biggest shortcomings. We needed to put aside our ego and pride and ask someone to help us, even when we couldn't give anything back. We had to learn to ask for and accept help when we wanted it or needed it.

"In all our affairs" means our whole life. That means all the things that we do from day to day. Here we come face to face with having to take all the things that we have been learning in the program and living in the program and be willing to share those things with others outside of the Fellowship. It was very hard to become willing to practice these principles in all of our affairs. Often we were willing to do this with people in the Fellowship but found that it was different with people outside N.A. We had to come to terms with our resistance in order to work the last part of Step Twelve. When we made a commitment to do this, we couldn't know what the outcome was going to be. We didn't know where all that love and kindness and compassion and attention for that person was going to go. They weren't bound by the program to pass it on. We didn't know if they were going to pass it on or give it back to us or what.

We saw that this was something like our parents had done. They loved us the best way they knew how with no thought of love in return. What this lesson did for us was to teach us to trust more in the spiritual principles of the program. We had to learn that love couldn't be a bargain with people. We had to learn to love with no thought of return or of its being passed on to other people. We learned that if we loved with strings attached, it wasn't really love.

We soon saw we couldn't love in this way if it was left up to us. In our recovery, we had gone from being people who were screaming at other people to love us to being concerned about whether we would be able to love everyone in a warm open-handed way with no thought of return. The growth it took to get to this point had come from being awakened spiritually by working the steps. The power we needed to love everyone was coming from the conscious contact we had made with God. It came from the surrender we had made that allowed God to work through us.

So these things happened to us. We watched ourselves become able to love others. We heard the people around us telling us we were practicing spiritual principles and we believed them. We came to see that an open-handed love for everyone was probably one of the basic principles of the N.A. Program. But we said "probably" because we had learned not to be sure about anything, it was always subject to change. The unconditional love we learned in the Fellowship was one of the most solid things we had experienced. We saw a need for it in all of our affairs.

As we learned to practice spiritual principles in our daily lives, we saw many positive results. But the most wonderful feeling we found was that of being a part of humanity after so many years of isolation. We learned how to love ourselves and others.

The most important part of our lives is Narcotics Anonymous. It may be a very small part of our lives, in terms of the actual time spent, but it is like our hearts. It's one of the things that keeps the rest of our body functioning. Narcotics Anonymous keeps us functioning out there in that world that used to be so frightening to us that we needed our addiction to quiet the fear and the pain. But now we see that it isn't a horrible, frightening world out there. The warm, loving world we found in the N.A. meetings allowed us to accept the world as it had always been. Our perceptions were changed and we could experience a new love, joy, and fulfillment in our lives within and outside of N.A.

What we have today is the wonderful reality of our recovery and all that it means to us. Each day we live clean awakens us to the freedom we had all along but failed to realize. We succeed now, when we had known only failure before. Many of our dreams, forgotten and obscured by our addiction, return and help us regain the sense of wonder and excitement at the miracle of living clean. A great many things become possible for us. As we live clean and grow, we are able to take our place in the world. The steps do not end here; they are a new beginning.



*It Works* was designed to be used as a supplement to the Basic Text. In conjunction with the Basic Text, it is hoped that this book will furnish addicts who have the desire to stop using with a practical means of achieving total abstinence and ongoing recovery.

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