

STEP TWO/ L.A. D R A F T 10/30/88

N O T F O R R E L E A S E

"WE CAME TO BELIEVE THAT A POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES
COULD RESTORE US TO SANITY."

Our work in Step One prepares us for Step Two. We've admitted we have a progressive and fatal disease and that we've never been able to call any power into play to stop or reverse it. But coming to a deep acceptance of our inability to help ourselves means that there had better be some help from beyond us, because otherwise there is no hope for us at all.

And hopelessness is so natural to us. Our sick pride and self-centeredness tell us that if we can't do it on our own, we're out of luck: "Okay, you're right! We admit we have a disease, and it's only getting worse," our sick thinking goes. "We admit that nothing we've ever done to fix ourselves has worked. And we also admit we've made a mess of managing our own lives, because our disease is running our lives for us. Well," our disease tells us, "that's that. If we're powerless over this mess, we might as well finish the job off. It's no use."

But the message of the Second Step is the exact opposite of this sick thinking: There is hope. There is help. The First Step is not the last step.

Step One says we are powerless over our disease. But Step Two continues that there is a power even greater than our disease.

Step One says we cannot manage our own lives. But Step Two adds that there is a power far greater than us that can help us manage our lives.

Step One teaches us we have a disease of self-deception, self-delusion, and self-destruction. But Step Two says we can in fact be restored to sanity.

It is the personal experience of addicts in Narcotics Anonymous who are practicing the Second Step and living it in our lives every day that WE DO RECOVER.

-0-

For many of us, the Second Step may look like a brick wall, rather than a door we step through along the path to freedom. It certainly is an unnatural way for us addicts to think -- in terms of hope and help, faith and recovery. It runs counter to our ingrained sense of isolation and despair. Step Two is so unnatural that when many of us see it, we turn off -- or because of our fear of change, we want to run. Our normal addict attitudes kick in: resistance, defiance, rebellion. That's when our sponsors often point us to what it says in N.A.'s Little White Book:

"There is one thing more than anything else that will defeat us in our recovery. This is an attitude of indifference or intolerance toward spiritual principles. Three of these that are indispensable are honesty, openmindedness, and willingness. With these we are well on our way."

It takes honesty to begin investigating and applying Step Two -- honesty to admit that just perhaps we are not the prime force in the center of our universe, honesty to admit that maybe we have been thinking and acting insane, along with doing a generally bad job of living. We need to be openminded to the idea that just possibly there are solutions to our problems and that the solutions may come from beyond us. And we need the willingness, in spite of our fear of the unknown, to reach out for these solutions -- willingness to be restored to sanity, willingness to be helped.

As we look around Narcotics Anonymous, we see plenty of evidence that there is help. At N.A. meetings, we see addicts who talk as if they've done what we've done and been where we've been -- and above all, felt the way we feel. We can see that they, too, are powerless over their addiction. But they seem to have found a way out of what we

thought was the inevitable downward spiral of the disease. And it's not just that they're clean. It sounds as if they no longer are lost in the labyrinth of isolation, self-pity, and despair. They hold their heads up. They seem to be moving forward. They sound optimistic. In fact, they seem to have found some answers -- answers that have produced results unlike any we've ever been able to come up with for ourselves.

Our sponsors and other recovering addicts tell us it's simple. Not easy, but simple. They tell us it is possible to live life, not die one day at a time. They advise us to continue taking the Steps down the road opening up right before us. They urge us to begin -- just begin -- to come to believe there is a Power greater than ourselves that can restore us to sanity.

That is our choice: We can die -- or we can come to believe. It's very simple.

-0-

Coming to believe is the beginning of living the spiritual principle of faith.

Having faith and trust in anyone or anything outside of ourselves is very difficult for us. Our self-centeredness tells us that trust is at best foolish, at worst dangerous. We are quite sure everyone else either wants something from us or is out to get us. So we cultivate the illusion of self-sufficiency -- or we manipulate others into taking care of all our needs. Either way, our ability to trust withers, and our isolation deepens. In the end, many of us are devastated by the realization that we couldn't even trust our own selves to look after our best interests -- that we, too, have failed us. So when the N.A. program asks us to "come to believe" and have hope, it may seem impossible.

But our experience in recovery has shown us it's not impossible. Our sponsors tell us to take it easy. This Step calls on us just to enter into the process -- to come to believe, not to come to know, not even to believe all at once in one day. It's a gradual coming to believe, an unfolding faith that matures throughout our recovery. We

practice having faith. For many of us, that means practicing blind faith at first, because faith is too new. Since working at spiritual principles is the opposite of working at our disease, practicing blind faith is practicing recovery.

The idea of faith seems alien to most of us at first. Our self-deception and sick pride tell us we are super-realists -- street-smart cynics from the school of survivors. Our self-obsession, disguised as intellectual superiority, tells us, "If we can't see it, we don't believe it." But is that really true? Is it really true that we're too hard-core to have faith?

How about the hard-core faith we had in our drug dealers? How about the absolute faith in our drugs? How about our unshakeable faith that if we took enough of the right drugs or the right combinations, we'd get loaded? And if one drug failed us or was unavailable, look how quickly and easily "we came to believe" in another one. As a matter of fact, it's hard to imagine an addict who doesn't have perfect blind faith in drugs. Such an addict would run precision chemical analyses on the drugs before taking them every single time. We never have heard of such an addict.

So much for our intellectual superiority and the illusion that "if we can't see it, we don't believe it." As practicing drug addicts, we certainly did know about faith, trust, and coming to believe. What the N.A. program is asking us to do is to believe in something that will help us, not hurt us. Now that is not normal behavior for addicts, and it takes work.

-0-

The Second Step tells us what it is we need to come to believe. Our First Step pointed the way, by showing us how strong our disease of addiction is. If we are to experience recovery, we must come to believe that there is something more powerful than us and our disease -- what we've come to call our Higher Power.

The Second Step tells us only two characteristics of this Power. First, it ought to be greater than ourselves. And second, it ought to be capable of restoring us to sanity (which we will discuss later). To take the action of the Second Step, we work on coming to believe that such a Power exists.

That's easy for some of us. Our disease has so beaten us up by the time we get to N.A., we're relieved to grab onto the lifesaving idea that there is help for us, another way to live. For others, the very fact we still are alive after all our best efforts at self-destruction seems proof enough that some Higher Power has been at work.

But for many of us, Step Two is a struggle. The idea of faith may bring up our childhood memories of a wrathful and punishing God. Our Higher Power may top the list of those we blame for our lives: "If there were a God, none of this would have happened to me." We may remember with guilt our old let's-make-a-deal kind of faith: "If you bail me out this time, I promise I'll be good!" Our sponsors may ask us to write about faith, to help bring some of these obstacles to light.

In N.A., we find out that the Second Step is about spirituality -- about faith and hope, not religion. Narcotics Anonymous proposes no dogma or theology or religion at all. Agnostics, atheists, believers, the devoutly religious -- all of us are subject to the disease of addiction, and all of us eventually develop a concept of a Higher Power we are comfortable with.

Many of us focus on what we see at Narcotics Anonymous: rooms filled with clean addicts. We come to believe that there is something at work in these rooms, something we don't understand, but something that's causing profound changes in people who are just like us. We decide to make that "something" our Higher Power. Many of us decide that whatever it is that helps us to have one single day clean -- when we thought we'd never be able to stop using -- we will call that our Higher Power. Some of us conceive of our Higher Power as the creative principle at work in the world and in

ourselves. Others say our Higher Power is the body of spiritual principles found in the Twelve Steps.

It really doesn't matter what our personal concept is. Finding and figuring out our own Higher Power is one facet of our journey through the Twelve Steps. Coming to believe gives us hope. Hope fuels blind faith. When we are willing to see evidence of a Higher Power working in our lives, blind faith evolves into a more robust, confident faith. The roads are many and wider than we may think to a belief in a Power greater than ourselves.

-0-

Coming to believe there is a Power greater than ourselves is a potent force for change, because it directly contradicts our nature as addicts. Opening up our minds just a crack with the beginnings of belief in a Higher Power unleashes powerful spiritual principles to work in us. These are the principles that help us combat the messages of the disease. These are the principles that make our recovery possible.

The spiritual principle of faith in a Higher Power is the opposite of our self-centeredness. In our active addiction, we saw the world only in terms of the way we wanted it to be, which is the way we thought it should be. But no matter how well we fulfilled our needs and wants, we ended up empty inside. The Second Step teaches us that we are not alone, that there is more to the world than what we need and want. Our faith begins to occupy the spiritual void inside of us. It says the world does not revolve around us. We don't have all the answers, but we aren't supposed to have all the answers either. What a relief!

Our faith enhances the spiritual principle of humility, which is the opposite of our sick ego and pride. Sick pride tells us we are the Higher Power in our own lives and gives us permission to manage, control, and manipulate people and circumstances. The First Step shows us that the manageability of our lives is a fiction. With the Second

Step, we see that it's okay not to be a Higher Power, because there already is one, and it's greater than we are. Accepting this reality fosters humility: we not only cannot be in charge of our recovery, we don't have to be in charge of it. Humility combats our sick pride -- the illusion that we have power over our disease -- and helps us reach out to a Power better able to deal with it.

Faith and humility ignite the spiritual principle of hope, and that is the opposite of our despair. Despair is the end result of relying on sick ego and pride. It's our sick pride that tells us our way is the best way and the only way. So when our way fails, we think we have no other options. No wonder we despair. But when we come to believe there is something more and better than our way, a Power greater than ourselves, we get a way out of despair. Open to the idea of help, open to the evidence we see all around us in Narcotics Anonymous, we dare to have hope -- hope that we can change.

Working on these spiritual principles does not come to us easily or naturally. At the beginning, we may have to intellectualize them to put them to work in our lives. With patience and practice, we come to live by them. And ultimately over time, they are internalized and integrated into our thoughts and beliefs. With these principles, we challenge the disease.

-0-

The Second Step tells us that what our Higher Power can do for us is restore us to sanity. This assumes that we've been insane. Some of us readily agree, because we have spent time in mental institutions, often with drug-induced insanity. But we don't have to be candidates for the straitjacket to qualify for the label.

Most of us don't want to admit to insanity, because it doesn't quite square with our image of ourselves -- controlled, calm, cool. But our disease uses our self-image to keep us blind to the truth of our insanity. This is why many of us say our self-image

almost killed us. Our sponsors may ask us to write examples of our insane thinking and behavior, because bringing the evidence into the cold light of day helps us overcome our denial. Honesty is the antidote for self-deception.

When we examine our drug use, we begin to realize that active addiction and sanity are incompatible with each other. We're already getting a glimpse of our insanity in Step One by looking at how we are utterly powerless over our addiction and yet continue trying to control it. This qualifies for insanity. Now we look at more specifics.

Our ability to rationalize and justify our own warped view of reality is amazing. Our self-deception and self-delusion are insane. We actually paid people money to sell us drugs so that we could die from them. That is insanity. Our behavior was controlled by obsession -- getting and using and finding ways and means to get more. We put our drug use ahead of families, jobs, lovers, life. Over and over we made choices that were harmful to us and to others, each time expecting it to turn out differently. That is insane. Time and again we bought into the insane notion that we could "handle it" and that "handling it" was an admirable way to spend a lifetime. And our disease told us our thinking and behavior were okay, even normal and acceptable for us. That, especially, is insane.

We see that we have had an unfriendly relationship with reality. We couldn't accept the world the way it was, so we took drugs to change the way we perceived it. We couldn't accept our regular human emotions, so we took drugs to make them disappear. We experience the ordinary people and pressures of life as irritants and annoyances interfering with our own comfort and ease. This is an insane belief. The insanity we share led many of us to have the same fantasy: being stranded alone on a desert island without any of the world's irritants and annoyances, but with an endless supply of prime-quality drugs. Our warped thinking told us this would have been a perfect life, when in fact it is a prescription for death. The insanity that is our disease always told

us that behaviors that led to our self-destruction really were acts of self-protection, even self-preservation. Overall, our judgment was determined by our obsessions and compulsions, which tended to exclude us from the realm of rational thinking and behavior.

As a matter of fact, when we examine our thinking and behavior, we see that we were not only irrational, but unpredictable, irresponsible, and unreasonable. We used drugs to "tide us over" until we could stop using. We used drugs to get up the courage to stop using drugs. We held onto our drugs when they no longer masked the pain. We held onto our isolation when we were dying of loneliness. We held onto our self-loathing as if it were self-worth. This is the portrait of our insanity.

Just getting clean may clear up some of our insane thinking. But even when we're off drugs and well into recovery, we still have our disease. Our sick ego and pride may tell us it's humiliating to have to turn to some mystery Power for help, because we can't do it on our own. Our denial doesn't want us to know that there is anything besides ourselves running things. Our self-deception cultivates our isolation, blinding us to our ability to reach beyond the limits of our disease. Our very fear of change keeps us paralyzed, telling us we are in control and can find our own way out of the pit of self-induced misery. We see proven recovery right in front of our eyes in the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous, and still we think we're different and have to look elsewhere. This is insane.

-0-

What the Second Step tells us is that we can be restored to sanity. Many of us experience ourselves as never having been sane to begin with. We feel that our Higher Power restores us to what we were supposed to be, before our disease got in the way. It takes faith to let this happen, to uncover the self many of us fear is too horrible or

worthless to contemplate. We begin to trust a Higher Power to guide us into fulfilling an image of who we truly are, an image we don't comprehend in advance. That takes faith.

What does it mean if we believe a Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity? It means we believe we can change. But we have to cooperate in the process. Believing we can change means we no longer think we must repeat insane behavior over and over again. If we stop acting out destructive behavior, our Higher Power can go to work and restore us to sanity.

That is the action we take in the Second Step: we stop acting insane. It is scary and difficult for us, and it requires practice. Yes, we are powerless over the mental processes of our disease, and we have no control over our obsessions. But we are free from having to act out on our insane thoughts. In the area of drugs, we stop using drugs. We are able to live sanely -- to live through the obsessive thoughts of using, for instance, without living them out compulsively.

Sane behavior sets the stage for sane thinking. Stopping acting out on the insanity sets us up to be restored to sanity. We may not understand why and how we have behaved in destructive ways, but with the help of our Higher Power, we are able to stop the behavior anyway. We don't wait until our obsession to use drugs is gone before we stop using. We take the action. We stop using. And then somewhere down the road, the obsession to use loses its power over us or is removed. That is a job that we can't do for ourselves, because we are powerless over our own disease.

We take the action -- we practice saying no to our disease -- and we watch our self-worth and sanity develop. Sanity is admitting we are powerless over our disease. And sanity means recovery is the most important thing in our lives, because without recovery we have no lives. Sanity is knowing that an addict alone is in bad company. Sanity is giving up our painful isolation to be a part of, rather than apart from, the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

Sanity brings clear thinking and peace of mind, a rest from the restless searching and questioning, from the belief we need to be fixed in order to be all right. Sanity is embracing our humanity -- looking at ourselves realistically as addicts and people, no more, no less. Sanity is having a relationship with reality and coming to accept life just the way it is.

It is sane to have spiritual principles operating in our lives. It is sane to have faith in a Power that will give us the strength and courage to recover. It is sane to harness the principle of honesty and begin to examine the reality of our lives. It is sane to regard ourselves with the realism we get from humility, to know that we need help to do what we can't seem to do for ourselves. It is sane to work on accepting ourselves and our lives exactly the way they are today, just for today. It is sane to surrender to the program of Narcotics Anonymous, because through the Twelve Steps, recovering addicts are learning how to live.

Working the Second Step means working on accepting that we cannot do all this for ourselves. In spite of what our disease tells us, we cannot restore ourselves to sanity. Step Two says we need a Higher Power to help us pull it off.

-0-

Sanity is not a one-shot deal. We do not go sane all at once. The nature of our disease is such that we are subject to insanity -- twisted or distorted thinking. It's just the way our minds work. For instance, although we admit we're powerless over our addiction in the area of drugs, we may think that getting clean means getting cured. We may feel quite sure that we're doing a fine job of managing, controlling, and manipulating relationships and other areas of our lives -- not powerless at all. We may believe that unlike the rest of the human race, we're supposed to feel good all the time, immune to pain, anger, or fear. We continue to look for ways to fix bad feelings by

working, dating, consuming, spending, or doing anything else to excess. We may try to "busy" ourselves into numbness. None of this works for us, but that doesn't stop us from the insane frenzy to fix ourselves -- or the insane thinking that says we have to do it.

We are masters of denial and excuse-making, especially when it comes to self-destructive patterns. We are experts at rationalizing and justifying the decisions we make, keeping ourselves blind to the consequences. Our fear of change keeps us stuck in attitudes and behavior patterns that cause us great pain. Yet we often resist recovery, resist working the Steps and taking the actions our sponsors and the N.A. program ask us to take. We may continue to isolate, even after we know we don't have to anymore. All of this is insane. In many ways, we still have an unfriendly relationship with reality.

Our collective experience has taught us never to underestimate the power of our insane thinking. Our disease has nothing whatsoever to do with our intelligence. Our ability to understand, explain, and analyze make no dent in it at all. As a matter of fact, our disease will use our intelligence to make its insane case for hurting ourselves and others. Our disease will tell us that insight is enough. How many times have we had a stunning revelation and finally come to understand some aspect about our insane behavior? How many times have we then waited for a lightning bolt to strike us and change us, even as we're repeating the same insane behavior over and over? We will think and wait and think and wait -- anything but stop doing the action that is keeping us sick. We've learned in N.A. that action, not insight, is an instrument for change. Only applying and living the Steps has ever opened us up so that a Higher Power could come in and change us on the inside.

As our recovery unfolds and as we share with our sponsors and other recovering addicts, the denial peels away to reveal different aspects of our lives. We come to see how we've been insane in a specific area, acting out the disease, refusing to admit the reality of our powerlessness, trying to manage people, situations, and our feelings the

way we want them -- trying to force square pegs into round holes, regardless of the destructive results.

Just as we believe a Higher Power has helped us stay clean when we've never been able to stay clean on our own, we come to believe that this Higher Power can restore us to sanity in other areas where we act out on our disease. Over and over, we work on allowing ourselves to have faith in that Power to restore us to sanity. It is a continuing process of surrender to the Second Step.

We apply the spiritual principle of honesty and catalogue our insanity: What is our obsessive thinking in this situation, and how are we acting on it? How is our behavior hurting ourselves or others? How are we trying to control our feelings by acting out compulsively? How are we behaving and thinking as if we were the Higher Power? In what way do we think that we know exactly how everything and everybody should be? How are we trying to manipulate and control the way people perceive us and treat us? How is our version of reality different from reality itself? Are we bringing old reactions to new situations? What are our unrealistic expectations of ourselves and others? How do we feel and behave when we don't get our way? How do our denial and self-delusion operate in this situation?

To work the Second Step means to stop acting out on the insanity. Applying the faith in the Second Step, we stop practicing the behavior that we've seen is so destructive to our health or our jobs or our relationships. We stop so that our Higher Power can restore us in this area.

This is a new ballgame for us. Our disease will always tell us we are different, that we are doomed to stay sick in some aspects of our lives, because we've never been able to change our ways before. Our disease fills our heads with a barrage of criticism and negativity, shrieking that nothing is any good, especially not us. Our negativity has been our self-fulfilling prophecy. Defeatist attitudes have usually caused our best intentions to go down in flames.

That's the way it is when we live out our disease. It does not want us to recover. It will tell us whatever it takes for us to rebel and resist change. That's okay. We're powerless over that. What we're doing about it today is keeping on working at the Second Step just the same. We turn to our Higher Power again and again. Every time we enter back into the process of coming to believe that a Higher Power is there for us, we open ourselves up to be helped. With that help, we can speak back to our disease when it justifies and rationalizes insane, destructive behavior. We stop the behavior. Just as it is with drugs, stopping is freedom.

We apply the spiritual principles that work in the Second Step. Honesty begins to open our eyes to the way the disease has been running some aspect of our lives. We plug back into humility, which lets us know that our sick pride and self-centeredness have sent us faulty data about how we are supposed to feel and behave in this situation. We allow ourselves to experience hope -- the hope that our Higher Power can restore us to sanity in this area. We re-apply our faith, which soothes our fear of allowing change in this part of our lives. Our faith in our Higher Power assures us that if we give up our insane thinking, the illusion of control, everything will be all right. When our thinking is guided in new directions by these spiritual principles, our thinking grows sane.

In recovery, our best intentions can become our goals, and our goals can become our reality. The Second Step helps us give ourselves an attitude adjustment. The hope and faith nurtured when we work and live the Second Step help quiet the noisy static in our heads. The Second Step says our negativity and pessimism are a lie. Not only can we live drug-free. We can experience peace and sanity in every single area of our lives. At last, we are beginning to become the kind of people we always wanted to be. Alone, we cannot. Together with a Higher Power, we can. We work on replacing our negative attitude with gratitude, our fear with faith.

Over and over again, we apply the Second Step in our lives. Yes, we do admit that we are powerless over our disease of addiction and that our lives are unmanageable. But we have come to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity. Not "does restore us to sanity", but "can restore us to sanity."

The Twelve Steps are not designed to tell our Higher Power what to do. We're the ones with the disease. We're the ones who need a program for living. Our job is to come to believe in that Higher Power, to have faith. Working on the Second Step is a way we practice faith. For us, it's like getting a new muscle to develop, because practicing faith expands our faith.

The Twelve Steps show **us** what to do. They are guidelines for the actions we take so that our Higher Power can come into our lives and restore us to sanity, so that we can experience recovery. It is new. It is scary. It is freedom.