

12 STEPS AND 12 TRADITIONS

NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

* REVIEW MATERIAL *

COPY FOR:

North Atlanta Area
Service Committee

STEP ONE--"We admitted we were powerless over our addiction--that our lives had become unmanageable".

It makes little difference how or when we realized that drugs had become a problem for us. What is important is that we felt so miserable we knew we couldn't go any further without help. We needed some relief - now.

Surrender did not come swiftly or easily for most of us. Our pride, ego and dishonesty blocked our efforts to come to terms with our complete failure to control our using. The bottom line is we could not stop using.

Powerlessness indicates an absolute incapacity to control events in our lives, --to prevent or predict their outcome. Learning that help was available and that we could once again live with some semblance of sanity was great news to us. We were tired of using drugs and of the pain they brought us. Drugs had stopped working the way we wanted them to. It was easier to quit than to run out of drugs!

We were forced to clean up at different times by lack of money, fear and jails. But some of us saw temporary periods of abstinence as evidence of our ability to control drugs. We told ourselves that we could stop if we wanted to; yet we denied the times we wanted to stop and couldn't. Powerlessness means using against our will.

The admission of powerlessness is central to recovery. Our addiction had been pointed out to us numerous times by others, but we denied that drugs were the problem. Clearly, we were unwilling to change old habits. It was much easier to justify and rationalize how life had dealt us a bad hand.

Often, we felt others caused us to experience hurt and upset.

We chose to blame them rather than look within ourselves. We realize today, that we alone are responsible for our misery. Sometimes we have the idea that we might as well have just one more drug to see if we can handle it. We need to remember we never could handle drugs. Must we hit rock bottom to change our lives for the better?

We can only stop the progression of our addiction by not using drugs. We stay clean by going to meetings and developing an attitude of willingness to try the 12 Steps of Narcotics Anonymous. Unless we are truly tired of living the way we were, there is little chance of recovery. We must believe above all else that there is hope if we stay clean and sober.

Respectfully submitted by the participants of the Northern California
Regional Literature Conference, April 22, 1983
San Francisco, CA.

Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves
could restore us to sanity

Some of us upon joining this fellowship had little difficulty with the first step. Although not comprehending it fully, we knew we were addicts and out of control. But the second step seemed insurmountable. Some of us had turned our backs to our higher power while others of us thought our higher power had turned its back to us. Others of us vigorously denied that a power greater than ourselves ever existed. In coming to grips with this step, we found we would have to change some of our deepest and strongest beliefs. This at first seemed an impossible task. Going back to the first step and comprehending our powerlessness over our addiction seemed to help. This allowed us to let down our defenses a little and take a look at what this step is about.

Many of us have been acquainted at some time in our lives with a Higher Power or Creator. But because of feelings of guilt or fear associated with our actions, chose to ignore or forget entirely any belief in this Power. Only when our actions and feelings in recovery began to cause us more pain than we could cope with on our own, were we willing to recognize and ask for assistance from that part of our lives we left behind.

Still others came to N.A. with a preconcieved idea of a punishing or revengeful God that controlled our lives through reward and punishment. One of the most difficult tasks was to change that conception to one of Power which was loving and forgiving, one which only wanted the best life for us. This became easier as we talked with others who had

experienced the many benefits from successful acceptance of the Second Step and who had achieved a conscious contact with a Higher Power with daily use.

We can't tell you in simple words how we came to believe. For each of us it's been different. For some it was a magic moment of realization, profound and even mystical. Most of us built a foundation of belief in a higher power a little bit at a time.

For many of us this belief was long in coming because of our lost ability to have faith in anyone or anything other than ourselves. Only through perseverance and hard work and continued involvement with other clean addicts did we achieve the willingness to believe in a Power greater than ourselves.

Being as honest, openminded, and willing as we can be with ourselves is indispensable in working this or any of the 12 steps. It takes honesty to admit that we are not the greatest power there is and to admit that we need to be restored to sanity. It takes openmindedness to consider what powers are greater than ourselves which we can trust and have faith in. It takes willingness to try to work this step. A willingness to believe that there is some power than can restore us to sanity is all that is asked of us by this step.

Coming to believe does not necessarily mean our intention in coming here was to develop or enrich our sense of belief in anything. Most of us being extremely self-willed had no problem arguing that what we knew to be true was exactly as it was. For those of us who experienced our own power as ultimate in determining our direction in life, the acceptance of a power greater than ourselves became more of a challenge. For us, "acting as if" and accepting that others had the right to believe as they did somehow worked to create enough space for each of us individually

to gain the willingness and humility to accept it. Eventually all of us realized, usually at the cost of bitter pain, the need to move from our position at the center of the universe and into a sense of joining with others in the fellowship.

The Power can be the group itself or it can follow a religious tradition. The only thing we want to emphasize is that you should feel comfortable with your Higher Power and be able to make the statement that your Higher Power cares about you. If you can accept the fact that a large number of addicts like yourself have found a way, in the program of Narcotics Anonymous, to live clean, then you only have to believe what you see in order to experience Step 2.

N.A. has many members. This collective Spiritual Power is certainly greater than that of any individual member. What is impossible for one alone is often light work for the many, because the many are a greater idea of a power greater than yourself. Just look around with an open mind and you will see a positive power all around N.A. You can call it love, or harmony or peace, or cleanness or good, or you can call it God. It doesn't matter and by looking and listening as openly as you can, you find that N.A. has the power to help addicts.

Pick a power, any power. We suggest one that's loving, forgiving and supportive. Many of us started by using the group at each meeting of the fellowship.

Agnostics, atheists, believers, and the devoutly religious are all subject to the illness of addiction. We all could see ourselves somewhere within this range when we first get to N.A., and our membership still includes persons who fall within all of these categories. Narcotics Anonymous does not demand any specific belief or faith from any of its members and neither does this step. It is a suggestion. It is a principle that has made our recovery possible. If an individual has a desire to

stop using, then we suggest these steps as a way to recover that has proved it has worked in our own experience and lives. Narcotics Anonymous is not a religious program, nowhere does it say that we must believe in God or in any particular philosophy or dogma.

Faith is one of those things that offer us freedom. It gives us the courage to take chances and live a life that has new meaning and opportunities. Fear is the lack of faith. A belief in a Higher Power gives us the strength and courage to approach the unknowns confronting us.

Faith is not an easy word to define, but we know from our experience that those of us who have it seem to function better than we could while using drugs, or just existing without them. The step says we came to believe, not that we have to believe, and that's where our freedom began.

We gradually begin to find some order in the universe and accept that "some power" was supplying us with a conscience we had never listened to before. We came to meetings and saw that we were staying clean. We were receiving the power to overcome the compulsion to use. It certainly wasn't coming from us, individually. Many of us have come to believe that the forces of life know what our real needs are and will take care of us when undisturbed by self will. We have begun more and more to see how much a Higher Power really has to offer. Clean living is only the beginning of a new life. Life without fear is a gift we receive for the price of acceptance.

Many of us arrived here with a sense of being extremely beaten by the life we had been living. We were hopeless and in despair until we could see that many of our attitudes and old ways of thinking had been the source of our unhappiness. We had subscribed for so long to the lies and deceptions necessary to keep from getting busted that few of us knew the meaning of truth or sanity, and some of us still aren't sure. Our warped sense of responsibility to a hierarchy of

thieves and cut throat deals left us knowing that the only way to win was at the expense of another. We felt it necessary to beat one another or anyone out of whatever we could in order to survive. In a real way our insanity became our reason for survival.

For many of us, this insanity of isolation occurred well before we ever took our first fix, pill, drink or joint. We always felt cut off and isolated. We saw ourselves as different from others. Other people called us weird or crazy. When we started using, we seemed to have some relief from the pain we felt in our loneliness. But as our disease progresses, our isolation simply got worse and getting loaded no longer stopped the pain. Seeing our disease in these terms gives the opportunity to consider "restoration to sanity" as the experience of coming home. We rejoin our fellows through the fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. We find the willingness to give up our cherished and painful isolation. We allow ourselves to be a "part of" rather than "apart from".

Still others of us have seen our insanity in terms of denial. We don't know of any addicts who have come to Narcotics Anonymous with the belief that a power greater than themselves could restore them to sanity. Denial is one of the most outstanding symptoms of our disease. Most of us come to this fellowship denying that we have had a problem with drugs,
