

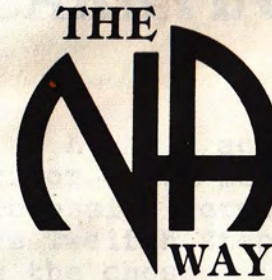
My Gratitude Speaks
When I Care
And When I Share
With Others . . .
The N.A. Way.

THE
NA
WAY

OCTOBER 1983

N.A.

N.A. is a non-profit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem. We are recovered addicts who meet regularly to help each other to stay clean. This is a program of complete abstinence from all drugs. There is only "One" requirement for membership, the honest desire to stop using. There are no musts in N.A., but we suggest that you keep an open mind and give yourself a break. Our program is a set of principles, written so simply, that we can follow them in our daily lives. The most important thing about them is that "They Work".



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CARRYING THE MESSAGE

A while ago I was fortunate to attend an out of town meeting. The meeting was a topic discussion format, and the topic chosen was the Twelfth Step. I was somewhat disappointed in the chosen topic. I get so tired of talking about my involvement in service and trying to hold myself back from conning and guilt tripping others into sharing my attitudes and commitment to "carrying the message". A big part of my thoughts on this topic deals with service. Accepting responsibilities in the group, emptying ashtrays, serving on committees and in general, doing whatever needs to be done... hotline calls, personal twelve step calls, and the like. This evening however, I was privileged to hear someone comment on this step who gave me a new perspective of the Twelfth Step.

I always felt that the last part of the Twelfth Step was the most important part of the Step "... Practice these principles in all our affairs", but I had never made the connection of that to carrying the message to other addicts. This night I heard it when this comment was made: "I'm not sure exactly where this fits in my life and my recovery yet, but I feel there is a distinct difference between carrying the message and delivering the message." A light went on in my head, and it all became so much clearer.

I have heard many a recovering addict deliver the message of recovery from the disease of addiction. Many share their ideas on addiction, what it is and what it is not. We have done so from the podium, in discussion meetings, and in writing. We tell others what addiction is, and we tell them how to recover.

Very few of us carry the message of recovery, and I have noticed that those who do it most effectively are the ones who don't deliver in meetings, but who share. They share their life, the circumstances of their life, and what they do about it. Many addicts have a hard time with this. I know that often, my comments are geared to who I think needs to hear what I speak of the First Step if I hear someone I judge as having incomplete surrender. I speak of commitment to N.A. if I hear someone caught up in confusion. The thing that attracts me the most about a speaker is sharing honestly their feelings and the realities of their life, not the ones that preach to me in the terms my elders often quoted..."do as I say, not as I do".

My prayers have lately centered in helping me to carry, or in other words, to live the message of recovery. To care and to share with others is one of the most important messages of recovery I have to carry today. It in itself helps me to remember that I am not self-sufficient. I need my Higher Power working in my life through the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. Carrying the message has a much fuller meaning to me today. I am grateful for that out of town meeting, and that my recovery allows me to attend things that in the past I would have run from.



MY NEED FOR A GROUP

Group effort is not for service work alone. Having access to a group of people who know me, love me where I'm at and are willing to share, helps me to live my recovery. My N.A. group gives me something I need to have today; people to share my life with.

Just before coming to N.A. all the people I knew were dying, dead, or "gone straight". The laughter in my life was gone. My idea that using drugs was "cool" was gone. Dead and dying friends made me aware of what was in store for me. People who didn't use drugs couldn't seem to stand my company long.

Now I'm an N.A. member who gets a genuine good feeling out of serving N.A. Using the term "group conscience" so much in relation to service work has distracted me from the MAIN VALUE my group has to my recovery. I had no-one to turn to for help before N.A. much less a group of people who understood me. I didn't understand my own pain. I could only accept it and try to have a good time which became harder and harder to do. I had a specific need for people in my life that wasn't filled until I found clean addicts in N.A.

I soon learned that I could stay clean and that a mysterious thing happened when I brought a problem to an N.A. meeting. Either I get a direct answer during the course of the meeting or the problem just ceases to be a problem. Members sharing their experience working the steps makes it possible for me to see a solution that I couldn't see before. When I hold back and don't share my problems I don't get my answers; I can't see a solution and the problem gets worse.

There is a special Spirit in the meetings of Narcotics Anonymous. In N.A. I seek relief from the disease of addiction. I want to be clean, free and useful to others. Recovery makes it possible to be happy and go beyond just being clean and existing. Members meeting together to share common problems and common goals send out a radiance I've found nowhere else. Group sharing is just as important to my recovery as Group Conscience is to our Fellowship's decision making process. I cannot afford to isolate myself and my problems, thereby denying myself the conscience of the Group. Today I seek the full benefits of the Program and the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.



THE BUS OF RECOVERY

One important tool for me in staying clean is to get off the BUS to using.

BUS = Building Up Sequence.

Getting off the BUS or Building Up Sequence to using is as simple as going to NA meetings and applying the Twelve Steps to our lives.

Here are some of the many ways we may find to get off the BUS:

- . Calling our sponsor or a clean NA member instead of calling the old connection.
- . Picking up a pen and paper and doing an inventory instead of picking up drugs.
- . Turning our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God instead of doing our automatic habits of self will.
- . Running to the program instead of running away from our problems.
- . Concerning ourselves with how to apply the Twelve steps to our living situations instead of worrying about our problems.
- . Using the energy we've locked up in desperation to get us into the habit of going to NA meetings instead of a party.
- . Going to one or more NA meetings instead of out to get drugs.

Whatever phase of the recovery process we're going through in getting off the BUS to using:

- . We don't stop one NA meeting short of the miracle happening in this phase of our recovery.

CLEAN NOT STRAIGHT

I have had to deal with many parts of my identity as an addict seeking recovery, one of which is homosexuality. In our present society homosexuality is frowned upon and, for the most part, considered sick and immoral. Even in NA my search for unconditional love and acceptance has been met with opposition from a few closed-minded people.

Our literature states "...the sooner we face our problems within our society, in everyday living, just that much faster do we become responsible, productive members of that society." In dealing with this aspect of my identity I need to share experience, strength and hope with other recovering members like me. Although one addict can best understand and help another addict, had it not been for the other NA members who were homosexual, I may not have felt like I could honestly open up to others when I came to NA seeking help with my drug problem.

The love, care and concern of all recovering addicts can promote understanding special needs of each recovering addict. Personal differences present each of us with opportunities to practice the Spiritual Principles of unconditional love, open-mindedness, and acceptance.

Please help me and others feel accepted. Think about using the word clean rather than the word straight, it better promotes our Third Tradition, and helps newcomers of all sexual persuasions feel more accepted through a better understanding.

THE GIFT OF RECOVERY

The gifts I've been given through recovery are precious to me; people caring enough for me to commit themselves to help me stay clean and find some recovery. I feel good about my self and am starting to learn about these Spiritual Principles I've heard so much about.

At first N.A. members were strangers who lived in a totally alien way, yet I felt that they had something I wanted. They talked me through my discomfort and called me friend, I felt like I belonged and finally began to hear what they were sharing with me. They talked about a "disease" - "addiction", "powerlessness", "sharing", "surrender", "meetings", and "sponsors". They seemed to need each other. They laughed and cried together. I wanted everything they had, I wanted to be a "part of" whatever this "Recovery" was.

I stayed clean and got a sponsor. I reached out to the things I saw and felt in people. N.A. members accepted me. I went to 90 N.A. meetings in 90 days and more. It felt good, so I kept at it. I got involved in the Fellowship. I've been involved in some sort of service to N.A. since my first week; from picking up ashtrays to being involved in committees, from helping to set up a meeting to being a GSR. Service kept me busy enough that I kept coming back; for that I'm very grateful.

My God gave me the chance to be involved in what I've always wanted; a group of people that I can love and care about who love and care about me. I'm happy. Recovery has given me plenty more than I ever expected. In my wildest dreams I never imagined my life so

full of the very things I care most about. I've grown so much that it's hard to imagine being any other way.

I've had the chance to share a part of myself lately with a new someone who has become very special to me. We can identify so well with each other and it's such a gift to be able to share what was given so freely to me. That's how I remember where I came from, by sharing with new people. Seeing someone begin to understand what it means to be truly powerless over addiction makes the pain of my active addiction worthwhile.



REMEMBERING

The meeting tonight brought back memories of how I used to feel. The best way I can describe it is; I felt dark, ugly, and evil inside and shut off from the light. The only relief from the constant feeling of doom I felt came from chemical use. I tried wearing new clothes, different companions, new facial appearances, even driving to different places, but that feeling followed me whatever I did and wherever I went.

I felt beaten down to nothing when I got to N.A. I was an empty shell, backed against a wall with no other choice but to give this program a try. I feared living without using drugs. It seemed I had to suffer that much in order to surrender. I can thank my Higher Power for that suffering today - for in thirteen months I've been on this program I've experienced feelings and changes I never thought possible.

My life is a rainbow today...Love, Faith and Gratitude overwhelm me. The more effort and willingness I put into living this Program the more rewards my H.P. gives me. I'm free to be me today, good and bad. I'm free to accept myself and others. I'm free to live without the burdens of addiction, knowing my God will take care of me.

I'm in touch with my feelings and know most of the things I can and cannot do, because today I'm willing to be responsible for my actions and my recovery.

Freedom is changing me for the better a day at a time. Developing a conscious contact with my God helps make my decisions right for me. When I make a mistake I try to learn from it. Freedom is waking up in the morning and being glad to be alive, being excited about the new day my God has given me. This Program can take me anywhere I want to go if I will let it. I'm so grateful to be recovering...Just remember it takes rain and sunshine to make a rainbow!

I AM AN ADDICT & N.A. IS THE ANSWER

When I came to N.A., it seemed the only place I hadn't been. This Fellowship was new and different enough that I stuck around. I fell in love with N.A. and eventually became involved in every aspect of the Fellowship. I served on the group level, area, region and eventually in World Service. Along the line my life had the glamour of success. Financially, I still spent three times what I made, and was well on my way, but where? I was into accomplishment, success in N.A. service, in my career, a wonderful marriage, the American Dream.

Then "IT" happened; FEAR crept in. I took a "safer" job, one not so challenging. My self-esteem suffered so, that I threw myself into service activities in an effort to prove to myself that I was okay. I got "burned out", lost my job, my marriage failed, and eventually I realized that I wasn't praying or working the Steps anymore. Very secure in my ability to dance in bars and associate with users after meetings, I felt quite proud to be handling it all on my own. Then I got high, my relapse was complete. It just happened and I was stunned. This couldn't have happened to me. The guilt was overwhelming. I cried, I hurt, and I wanted to run. Instead I went back to meetings and shared my feelings. I blamed others for the course of events. I was again afraid, alone and helpless. Suicide was a constant thought. It didn't last long, but long enough. It was enough to show me the lack of humility in my

life. Finally my God helped me to forgive myself. He put people in my path, prayer in my heart, and brought me "back" again.

It's good to be home, a survivor of the one thing I was sure could never happen to me. I relapsed. Today I pray to be God-reliant rather than self-reliant. Thank you God for N.A...., and thank you N.A. for a God of MY understanding. I came to believe.



RESERVATIONS, NO MATTER WHAT THEY ARE

Over a year ago I met a man in prison, he was a lot like me: using drugs, hurting, hating, covering his feelings, and isolating himself. We wrote to each other and had visits in the prison visiting room. I gave him money sometimes when I had it, and took him clothes. I even let him call collect.

One day after I'd known him a while he told me that his soul was in the hands of the devil, and he couldn't be freed from that power. I walked out on him because even though I used, I believed in God I couldn't accept his ideas. I cut off all contact with him, I didn't write or accept calls.

My life was going to hell all around me. I was losing my job, my apartment, and my own self-respect, finally the respect of my family and friends. I used heavier and heavier trying to escape from my own reality.

After I lost my job, I started looking for another one; anything to keep my habit supplied. I answered an ad for a babysitter job. I had an interview with my potential employer. She asked me, "Do you use drugs?" I gave her the most honest sounding answer I could, "No, I don't do that!" Just to look at me you wouldn't know that I used. She "bought it" and I got the job watching her kids. I eventually found out where she went at night. "Meetings". I thought she was an ex-drunk" or something. One thing was for sure - there was something very different about her that I just couldn't figure out.

I had to move back home to my parents house because I couldn't pay my bills. That was just fine, one less thing for me to worry about. Good old mom and dad would lend me

money to do what I "needed" to do. Things had changed around home though, and I wasn't very comfortable there at all. They were much less tolerant of my using. They didn't hesitate to jump on me about it and made sure I knew all the things I wasn't doing around their house for them. I thought they owed me a place to live; they were my parents. I shouldn't have to hassel with them.

I kept babysitting, things still weren't making much sense to me about what was really going on with this woman. She always got lots of phone calls, and she said things that I really wondered about, but didn't understand.

One night this girl from across the street called, she needed to talk to 'someone', so I told her to come on over. She did. I did most of the talking though. I told her that I "just smoked pot and drank", "I used to do hard drugs, but I didn't do them anymore." I lied, and said "it's no problem - too bad you can't handle it!". She told me she had a choice, and that she didn't have to use, and that Narcotics Anonymous was really helping her. For some reason I kept remembering her words for the next couple weeks. I was hurting.

It was around Christmas and there were lots of parties. I went and couldn't seem to get high enough. I couldn't fill myself up enough to be satisfied. Her words kept returning to my thoughts, so I used more in an attempt to forget them. All the time I wondered ... "could those people help me?"

I was supposed to babysit on New Years Eve day, but my employer had caled my mom's house to say she didn't need me that day after all. I never got that message because I never went home. I was too ashamed, I had stolen \$20.00 from my mom and she knew I had done it. Because I hadn't gotten the message, I went to babysit that morning. Another lady was there

and she asked if I wouldn't like to stay and have some coffee since I was there. I stayed, we talked, and after she had shared quite a bit of herself with me, I admitted to her what had been going on in my life and that I was hurting. I remembered what the girl across the street had said to me, and I asked her what it meant. I wondered if I could do what these other people were doing. She shared with me, I could tell she meant what she said, and believed that her new life was right for her. She was happier than she had ever been. She told me I had a choice too, that it was my decision to make. "Was I an addict?" She explained the symptoms of addiction. I couldn't deny any of them, but I was scared and really wanted to run. I had a New Years Eve party to go to. Maybe I'll stop using tomorrow, (I thought).

They were busy doing this and that. I got my stuff together, put on my shoes and coat, and was standing by the front door. I couldn't leave without saying good-bye. I told them I wanted to leave. They knew why. They told me it was up to me and that it was okay to be scared of changing. Would I want to try it for today, not to use? They were having a special meeting at their house that night and that I was welcome to stay all day at their house and check out the meeting that night. I stayed, and I liked it. I felt uncomfortable at first, but I listened and could relate. I heard these people share; and realized whatever it was it really was working for them. I wanted to know more.

The next day, the woman I babysat for, my new friend told me she would be my temporary sponsor if I wanted her to. I did. She made suggestions to me that I followed. She told me I should go to a meeting, call two recovering addicts with substantial clean time, call her, read "Recovery and Relapse"

and another chapter of my choice. She even suggested that I clean my room and make my bed, get cleaned up and dressed every morning. She shared that all of this had helped her to feel better about herself, so I followed her suggestions, I knew I had to start from somewhere. Sometimes I was not willing, but I tried.

Meetings became a part of my life that I could look forward to. I liked them, I felt "wanted" and "a part of" the Fellowship. I got involved with service work right away. I was really busy, and I knew drugs couldn't make me happy. People cared about me and wanted to help me in my recovery. I was feeling happy about me, and the changes that were visible to me.

Later, my "friend" from prison started to write to me again. I wanted to share with him how my life had changed and what was going on in my life now. Deep down, I think I really wanted to "save" him. We started writing, then the calls and visits started again. For a while, that's what my recovery consisted of, approval seeking. He was an escape for me, he altered my mind, moods and thinking.

The guy in prison said he really liked the new part of me I was sharing with him. I was as honest with him as I was capable of, and for some reason expected the same from him. I believed he had the symptoms of the disease of addiction, but I knew he didn't want to believe he had a problem. It was fine for me to live my life in N.A., but he didn't want it for himself. "He could handle his life the way it was." As long as he still got money, letters, visits, calls, and "things", his life was comfortable in his view.

My relationship with him was definitely a reservation in my recovery. I didn't want to look at it for a long time. It really hurt to go to visit and care, then have to leave and

hear those bars slam behind me. Of course I was glad to leave, but it bothered me that someone I felt close to was behind bars instead of with me. I felt it could be me behind those bars; I just didn't get caught.

My discomfort lead me to stop visiting. I also slowed down on writing, and told him the phone calls had to stop. I couldn't afford them, in more ways than one. He resented my involvement with N.A. because I was losing interest in him. My whole life was changing and I didn't need to depend on our sick relationship anymore. It had been so comfortable for a long time. There weren't any real committments, just a dependency that helped us both stay sick.

Our contact became very limited. He finally wrote me a letter. He called me every name in the book. He told me not to bother writing or visiting, that he didn't want it, he had a new girl from his home town. Deep down I was glad; I was off the hook; but my ego was bruised. My feelings were hurt, yet I wanted to deny it. I wanted to feel anger, not hurt. I was hurting though and felt like using, so I told my sponsor the whole story. First, she told me I never had to keep things from her, then she asked what I expected from a using addict. My expectations were way above what the man was capable of. The pain subsided, faster than I expected. It takes time to let go of my pain and feel my own growth, that's why I'm writing this down, because I need to be rid of it, so I can learn from it. Maybe someone else can even learn from my pain.

My recovery and priorities are in the best order I'm capable of today. I believe what happened to me was my God's will, I am glad to accept it, it feels right. I pray for

the man in prison and all the other suffering addicts. I'm grateful, I at least got to plant a seed. Maybe he'll remember the message I tried to carry, when he "needs" it. A line from our basic text comes into my mind "... there is no way to graft a new idea on a closed mind...". I can only be grateful for what this program has given me, and live it to the best of my ability.

I remember "Today, I have a choice". I feel good about losing one more reservation even though it was painful. "Reservations, No matter what they are, rob us of obtaining all the benefits this program has to offer. "Today, I want all I can get for myself through recovery in Narcotics Anonymous. My H.P. is lookin' out for me, and has a better way than mine.



FIFTY TWO QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STEPS

1. Do you have to work the steps* to stay clean?
2. What step do you have to work before you can begin to work the steps?
3. Do these steps need to be worked "in their entirety and in their continuity?"
4. How are these steps inter-related and how do we know when to move on to the next step?

STEP ONE

1. Define powerlessness.
2. What is addiction?
3. How was my life unmanageable when I was using and how is it unmanageable now?
4. If I can't manage my own life, does that mean I no longer have the right or power of choice about my life?

STEP TWO

1. What does it mean, "Came to believe" and how does it happen?
2. What is sanity?
3. Does our Higher Power restore us to sanity; if so, how long does it take?
4. What is a power greater than ourselves?

STEP THREE

1. What is a decision?
2. What does "our will and our lives" include?
3. How does God take care of our will and our lives?
4. Having worked the Third Step - What is God's responsibility and what's mine?

STEP FOUR

1. What does the word moral mean?
2. Are we capable of doing anything fearlessly?
3. What does the word inventory mean?
4. What is the purpose and result of working a searching and fearless inventory?

STEP FIVE

1. Why do I have to admit to God - he already knows it?
2. Why do we have to admit to another human being and how do we admit to ourselves?
3. What sort of "other human being" should you choose to do this step with?
4. Why aren't assets of character included in this step?

STEP SIX

1. What does it mean "were entirely ready"?
2. What are defects of character and how does God remove them?
3. How do you know when you have worked step six?
4. Why are steps six and seven separate?

STEP SEVEN

1. What is humility and how do you get it?
2. What is a shortcoming?
3. Why do we ask God to remove our shortcomings instead of our defects of character?
4. How does God remove our shortcomings?

STEP EIGHT

1. How do we know who we've harmed?
2. What is willingness?
3. How do we become willing to make amends and do we have to become willing to make amends to everyone we have harmed in order to work the eighth step?
4. Why are the eight and ninth steps separate?

STEP NINE

1. What does it mean to make direct amends?
2. What does "whenever possible" mean?
3. What does injure mean in terms of the ninth step?
4. Does "others" include me? And how does this relate to the Third Step?

STEP TEN

1. What are three ways to take the personal inventory of the tenth step?
2. How did you learn to recognize when you were wrong?
3. What does promptly mean?
4. Who do I have to admit to when I'm wrong?

STEP ELEVEN

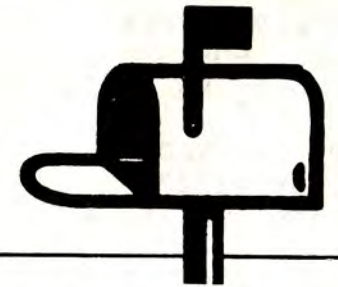
1. What is "conscious contact"?
2. How and when do you get a "conscious contact" with God?
3. Why does this step say "we sought...to improve our conscious contact.." rather than we meditated and prayed...?
4. Why should we call the Eleventh Step the service step instead of the Twelfth?

STEP TWELVE

1. What is a "spiritual awakening" and when do we have one?
2. Why is a spiritual awakening needed before we can successfully carry the message to the addict who still suffers and practice these principles in all our affairs?
3. What are the principals that we try to practice in all our affairs?
4. "I'm working the Twelfth Step, now what?"



Our Readers . . .



We have had many requests for the addresses of the various Fellowship Newsletters as a result of our last issue. They are enclosed below for your convenience. The many excellent stories in the September issue are representative of the excellent work that is published in these Newsletters.

We are sure the Newsletter would welcome your subscription if you wish to write to write to the address shown.

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