

A Spiritual Principle a Day

Approval Draft

*The Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, Twelve Concepts, and
A Vision for NA Service will be included in the published book.*

for Decision @ *Interim Virtual* WSC 2022

January 2022

A Spiritual Principle a Day

Approval Draft

*The Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, Twelve Concepts, and
A Vision for NA Service will be included in the published book.*

for Decision @ Interim WSC 2022

“A Spiritual Principle a Day” Approval Draft
Copyright © 2021 by
Narcotics Anonymous World Services, Inc.
All rights reserved

World Service Office
PO Box 9999
Van Nuys, CA 91409
T 1/818.773.9999
F 1/818.700.0700
www.na.org

ISBN 978-1-63380-370-1 11/21
WSO Catalog Item No. 9146

Preface

Each day we wake up clean affords us the opportunity to seek a life of connection—to ourselves, to our fellow NA members and other loved ones, to service, and to a power greater than ourselves. Captured within the 366 entries of this new work, *A Spiritual Principle a Day*, are expressions of these connections we seek. At Narcotics Anonymous meetings, at conventions, in service activities, and in our day-to-day conversations with each other, we talk a lot about living by spiritual principles, sharing our experience—both directly and indirectly—of what that means and how we do it. Our overarching goal for this project is to create a book that will inspire NA members all over the world and evoke thoughts about the connection between spiritual principles and recovery from addiction. *A Spiritual Principle a Day* is intended to provide us with practical applications regarding how we strive to live spiritually in recovery, facing life on its own terms, and how we support each other in doing so. The structure of each daily meditation—a quotation from NA literature, a brief reading, and something to contemplate for the day—offers us as individuals, meetings, groups, and sponsorship networks a starting point for reflection, discussion, sharing, or however else we choose to proceed.

How *A Spiritual Principle a Day* Was Developed

The idea for *A Spiritual Principle a Day* came from *us*, the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. The 2018 World Service Conference (WSC) approved a project plan for a new book to explore a spiritual principle on each day of the year. This move was based on information garnered from a 2017 survey completed by NA members from 37 countries across six continents. Our responses overwhelmingly indicated a desire to hear the voices of fellow members, to learn how others apply spiritual principles in their daily lives, and to read about how living by spiritual principles shapes our experience.

Once the mission to create this book was established by the Fellowship at the WSC, we were left to figure out how to accomplish the task before us. Specifically: How do we develop a piece of literature that speaks to the range of spiritual principles that NA members practice—and to the range of *how* those spiritual principles are practiced in our daily lives?

Like all NA literature, this book was developed by NA members for NA members. In order to reflect the experiences of our ever-evolving, worldwide Fellowship, the development process included as many NA members as possible—as many and as diversely representative of our Fellowship as have elected to participate. Participants in the process were geographically, linguistically, and culturally diverse, as well as varied in terms of cleantime and spiritual practices.

The entries in this volume are derived from thousands of pieces of material submitted by individual NA members, meetings, and groups, and from *A Spiritual Principle a Day* workshops and activities all over the world. A workgroup composed of a diverse group of NA members was

convened to deliver on the specifics of the Fellowship's requests for the new book, to select quotations from NA literature related to each spiritual principle, to read all of the submissions from members, and to identify the elements that would be woven together to create the fabric of this book. Writers, who are also NA members, were engaged to develop and creatively refine the entries, based on workgroup, World Board, and Fellowship review and input. Drafts of all entries, plus the preliminary list of the principles to be addressed, were posted online so that individual members and groups could provide feedback on the direction of the work in progress. The entire process, from conception to production, took more than four years.

These pages contain the results of this process. This is NA unity in action. The entries exemplify what spiritual principles mean to NA, giving practical, relatable reflections on how to apply them in our daily lives, both in and out of the rooms. Our Fellowship envisioned a well-rounded and broadly appealing book in which individual entries serve different functions—inspirational, educational, heartwarming, humorous, and *real*. This eclectic approach means that not all entries will resonate with everyone, but it ensures that all of us will see ourselves somewhere in this book. These are our stories, our experiences, our voices.

Applying *A Spiritual Principle a Day* in Our Recovery

Based on the Fellowship's recommendations, we structured *A Spiritual Principle a Day* as a daily meditation book, similar to *Just for Today (JFT)*. Each page highlights a spiritual principle with a quotation from our body of NA literature. The excerpt is followed by a meditation on the principle and a reflection for the day.

What we do with these words on the page is entirely up to us. The choices are varied, perhaps as varied as we are. Sure, using the written intention at the end of each page to inspire our personal meditation practice is an option, but it's one of many.

A Spiritual Principle a Day is a labor of love intended to meet each of us exactly where we are in the moment when we pick up the book. We can start *A Spiritual Principle a Day* meeting, just like we've done for *Living Clean*, *JFT*, or *Guiding Principles*. We can use it to start or end our day with meditation practice or writing or prayer. We can use it to connect to our Higher Power in some way. We can share about it with sponsees to help broaden their (and our) understanding of how a particular spiritual principle is affecting our lives at any given moment. Want to focus on one spiritual principle for an entire week? Find it in the list at the back of the book, and get started!

Some of us may find this list too long, while others will surely identify principles that should have been included. Our connection to our principles will vary, just as each day's reading will strike us differently. Our hope is that each of us will find something in these pages that we identify with, empathize with, strive toward, and aspire to. As we continue in our growth, individually and as a Fellowship, we can all expect to learn a lot from each other as we find creative approaches to engage with *A Spiritual Principle a Day*.

JANUARY

Recapturing a Sense of Wonder

The sense of wonder we experience in our own lives—as if we were seeing them for the first time—brings an array of feelings.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Living Our Principles”

Active addiction is a grind, leaving most of us jaded by the time we get to NA. We stay coolly distant from other humans and much of life, hoping to avoid those pesky feelings. We think or say “Who cares?” a little too often, even for our own taste. Cynicism and apathy had worn away any optimism we once had. But then we get clean, and what we learn in recovery challenges this entire mindset.

Experiencing the world with a sense of wonder is one of the fringe benefits of working an NA program. Some of us stumble on a new positivity when we start stringing together days clean. Others warm up to a new way of responding to the world over time or encounter wonder in sporadic bursts. But, regardless of the timeline or intensity, we recognize that feeling of awed respect and the newfound appreciation it brings.

When we find ourselves thinking or saying “Wow!” it’s a good indication that we’re experiencing a sense of wonder. “Wow!” is a prayer unto itself in the minds of some NA members. It captures what it means to embrace wonder as a spiritual principle, complete with awe, connection, impact, and reverence in the space of three letters.

Nature is kind of a show-off when it comes to inspiring wonder. Of course, we don’t have to travel far to be wowed by a sunrise or sunset. But beyond nature—and perhaps more importantly for us in recovery—we find a sense of wonder in everyday life if we’re open to it and paying attention. Moments of clarity—the clean kind—allow us to see our lives anew. Each time we take a moment to appreciate our growth, admire what’s right with us and the world, delight in new insights, or feel all our feelings is an invitation to practice wonder.

I will challenge myself to look at life and recovery with curiosity and enjoy a sense of wonder wherever I may find it.

Unity Keeps Us Coming Back

When we walk into our first meeting and see addicts coming together in unity, the spirit touches us even before the words get through.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, “Spiritual Principles”

That first meeting. Some of us arrive beaten down, asking for help. Others of us show up because we need that paper signed. Still others come to prove a point to someone else or to ourselves—like maybe we don’t need a program, and showing up at a meeting will somehow prove that point. We enter not knowing what to expect, and try to stay on the sidelines, unnoticed. People are chatting, putting out literature, setting up the room, being together. Someone gives us a hug—to be welcoming, not for any other reason. *Culture shock!*

Our First Tradition tells us that “personal recovery depends on NA unity.” We may not fully grasp this concept at first, but even so, unity takes hold of us. Somehow, we sense that we just might belong here. We take up the suggestion we hear at every meeting: We keep coming back. Some of us return to hear more of what members shared or read. For others, the togetherness we witness gets us to that next meeting. We watch as members embrace and let go enough to accept the hugs we’re offered. We sense that we are part of something greater than ourselves and our addiction. We let go just a little. Despite our initial skepticism and discomfort, the spirit of unity encourages us to stay.

Later, we attend our first NA convention, where we experience this spirit on a much larger scale. We come together to celebrate recovery, and unity springs from our shared commitment to living clean. Truly, we have found a new way to live. In unity, we reach out to newcomers and show them how we recover together.

Today I will celebrate the spirit of unity that keeps me coming back by offering my support to a newer member.

Coming to Accept Ourselves

Our sponsor's acceptance and our Higher Power's unconditional love made it possible for us to judge ourselves less harshly.

—It Works, Step Twelve

No one comes to NA on a winning streak. Denial had helped us ignore the wreckage, but those days are long gone. Our minds no longer reassure us: *You're living the dream, especially considering the lousy hand you've been dealt!*

In early recovery we may experience rare glimpses of self-acceptance, but the mental beatings we give ourselves keep that optimism in check. We are undoubtedly our harshest critics. That's especially true when we make mistakes: not showing up for a friend in need, unintentionally making another member uncomfortable, blowing off a commitment, using again. Even for members in long-term recovery, our disease continues to urge us to judge ourselves. Not being real about our mistakes and overindulging in self-pity or self-destructiveness runs counter to accepting ourselves as works in progress.

One member recalled, "Through his steady encouragement in the face of my self-made disasters, my sponsor showed me unconditional love and helped me be open to how a Higher Power was expressing it in my life. As my recovery continued, the chaos lessened but the temptation to beat myself up remained. Sharing the exact nature of my wrongs in Step Five—and still being accepted unconditionally—helped me unclench my fists a little quicker."

Sponsors tell us the truth about ourselves. Inevitably, that truth is more loving, forgiving, and accepting than our version of things. Working the Steps with our sponsor teaches us to find that truth for ourselves. Through the practice of prayer and meditation, we can check in with a Higher Power to guide us toward what is real—about ourselves, our decisions, our mistakes—rather than relying on what our minds tell us.

I'll resist the urge to beat myself up today. Instead, I'll pick up the phone and call my sponsor. I'll take a moment with my Higher Power and get real.

The Gift of Attention

Hearing addicts share their experience, seeing recovery in action, feeling the love in the room—all this is as much a part of the process as the work we do on the Steps.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Eleven, Opening Essay

The “attraction, rather than promotion” that’s evident in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous is often what keeps us coming back in early recovery. If we smelled promotion, it would be a major turnoff. Many of us may start out skeptical, but desperation forces us to pay close attention. At first, the Steps, as read in “How It Works” at many meetings, may not resonate—they’re not what we had in mind as our solution. But the stories we hear, the warmth we experience, takes hold.

Witnessing recovering addicts being their full selves is remarkable and absorbing, and it keeps us coming back. Someone identifies themselves as brand-new—“This is my first meeting ever”—and receives a genuine, hospitable welcome. A member celebrates two years clean, made so precious by the fact that it took way longer than that for them to reach this milestone. Another shares their story of losing connection to NA due to family responsibilities and then rekindling their bond to the Fellowship, thanks to members staying in touch. Others speak about their addictive relationship with food, sex, or money, and about illness, loss, or lapses in judgment that have ugly consequences. And many others talk honestly about their struggles with stuff we can’t control: a psycho first date, a mean boss, traffic, and the weather.

We are paying attention to all these stories, their unique threads and common messages—and their shared solutions often found in the Twelve Steps. When we work the Steps to the best of our ability, they help us undergo the profound change that allows us to stay clean and more free from the self-centered fear that can bog us down. But that’s never to discount the importance of all the hard-won experience and wisdom we pick up from other members. Recovery isn’t just what happens on our own with our stepwork. It’s what we hear, see, and feel from each other. It’s all of the elements of the program in concert.

Yes, I am committed to the solutions contained in the Steps. I’m also here to pay attention to my fellow addicts and enrich my recovery.

Seeking Connection Instead of Distraction

We try to minimize distractions so that we can concentrate on knowledge arising from our own spiritual connection.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step Eleven, “Prayer and Meditation”

Distractions are tricky: The more we try to get rid of them, the more power they seem to gain. As an example, if we spend the entire meeting thinking about *not* taking our phone out, we probably hear just as little of what is shared as if we’d had the phone out the whole time. Worse yet, if we put all of our energy into thinking about *other* people on their phones, how well are we really listening? As with our connection to the meetings we attend, we improve conscious contact with a Higher Power when we focus on the contact, rather than the distractions.

We all have plenty of distraction techniques that give us ways to avoid being present in the current moment. Maybe we stare at a screen for long stretches to distract us from being sad or angry or bored. Maybe we get pulled out of our meditation by hearing the neighbor’s dog bark its head off or the trash truck thundering down the street or . . . air moving. No matter what the source of distraction, internal or external, real or imagined, distractions interfere with our conscious contact—with ourselves, each other, and our Higher Power.

How do we focus on maintaining our connection? In a meeting, it’s as simple as listening closely to what is being shared. If our mind drifts to the phone in our pocket (or the one in someone else’s hand), we simply bring our attention back to the person who is sharing. In meditation, we simply listen for “whatever’s there.” If we catch our mind drifting, we simply bring our attention back to the present moment. By focusing on where we are in the moment, we can resume our connection with our Higher Power. We listen, we share, and we often find that we already have exactly what we need.

Listening and sharing well in meetings can help me better listen and share with my Higher Power. If my mind drifts away from conscious contact, I won’t dwell on the distraction—I will simply shift my attention back to the moment I am sharing with my Higher Power.

Vigilance and the Second Tradition

We need to keep an eye on our passion, lest it become self-righteousness; and we keep an eye on our disagreements, lest we begin to harbor ill will toward our fellows. Vigilance is an inside job.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Two, “In Service”

The practice of vigilance can be like holding vigil: keeping space and silence to honor something of value, such as the spiritual principles that bring us freedom and peace of mind. In our personal recovery, vigilance often means paying close attention to our feelings, thoughts, and actions so we can catch ourselves before slipping into old behaviors or patterns. Our Basic Text reminds us that “we are each other’s eyes and ears.” Our sponsor and other NA members can hold vigil with us by reflecting our values to us when we forget them or pointing out our bone-headed actions when we fail to see them. We need one another’s vigilance.

Our vigilance has a place in NA service, too. We strive always to adhere to the guidance of our Traditions, working to maintain unity, anonymity, focus on our primary purpose, and so forth. Many of us have gone through a phase—or phases—in our service to NA when we felt as though the Traditions needed enforcers, and we were just the right candidates. One member shared, “I had been calling the local helpline and pretending to be a using addict to see if I could catch the volunteers making a mistake. Then my sponsor asked me which list of spiritual principles I found ‘deception’ in. I felt pretty embarrassed.”

Our Traditions guide us to do our best for NA, and we each have a responsibility to remain vigilant and speak our conscience. Sometimes, those who disagree may treat us like vigilantes—people who take matters into their own hands. Other times, we might feel like vigilantes—like NA won’t survive if we don’t save it. Tradition Two reminds us to trust the expression of a Higher Power in our group conscience. NA is a *we* thing, not a *me* thing—rather than enforcing our Traditions or trying to catch our fellow members slipping, we speak our conscience clearly and directly and leave the results up to a power greater than ourselves.

I can be vigilant without becoming a vigilante; my perspectives and interpretations are one of many. I will give my fellow members something we all deserve: room to make mistakes—and room to learn from them and grow.

Faith in the Program and Each Other

Faith is what keeps us doing the footwork even when we can't see the reason.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Growing Pains”

Many of us were fine with living a philosophy of “act now, ask questions later” in our addiction. We did what we had to do—the footwork of using, perhaps—and had a certain degree of faith within the chaos of that lifestyle. But we don’t necessarily bring those bold tactics into early recovery. Why then is it so difficult for many of us to have faith and get on board with NA from day one? Maybe it’s that we didn’t know what we wanted. We thought we’d found what we wanted in drugs, but total abstinence seemed unlikely and long-term recovery unfathomable. Yes, we want a better life, but who doesn’t?

It’s suggested we go to meetings. Help set up the room. Read the book. Call a member when we’re feeling squirrely. Ask someone to be our sponsor so they can take us through those unfathomable Twelve Steps. We also think, *This works for you, but what if it doesn’t for me? And why do you seem so sure it will?*

A lot of us would say the reasons are evident. Here are a bunch of addicts who didn’t use today, who set up and ran a meeting that started and ended on time. They shared their experience, strength, and hope. They griped about their day but stayed clean anyway. They were joyful with each other, celebrating recovery milestones with gratitude. When speaking, most expressed their faith in the program and in each other.

At some point, we made a decision to do the footwork without a clear picture of our destination. Why? Some of us are so desperate we’ll do anything to stop the pain. For others, it’s a lightning-bolt spiritual awakening, a moment of clarity. Some of us take tiny steps or have many moments of clarity. Others find a single person to trust, and that drives our decision. Still others cling to our rebelliousness and then find ourselves celebrating a year clean, then five years, then a quarter-century. No matter what kicks it off, this decision is, for many of us, our first experience of faith. We hear that more will be revealed, and more is.

I see abundant evidence around me that NA works. I just need a bit of faith every day to keep me willing to follow my path of recovery.

Facing Our Responsibilities

We can no longer blame people, places, and things for our addiction. We must face our problems and our feelings.

—Basic Text, Chapter 3: Why Are We Here?

When we were using, denial shielded us from recognizing the part we played in our own destruction. We blamed our circumstances or the people around us for our drug use. Every once in a while, some light would shine through the cracks in our denial. A quiet voice within us said, “If you keep doing what you’re doing, you’re going to keep getting what you’re getting.” By the time we stumbled into the rooms of NA, self-deception was often second nature. We may have been so used to blaming others that it took work for us to spot this mindset and still more work for us to fully appreciate its implications.

Personal inventories help us understand our distorted sense of reality. We decipher “our part”—no more, no less—and take responsibility for it. Yes, we may have been intentionally hurtful at times. Just as often, though, our intentions were good, or at least very human. We attempted to wrestle some sense of security and significance from an uncertain world, we put ourselves in a position to be hurt, or we clung to others in hopes that they might save us from ourselves. Understanding the patterns in our thinking and behavior helps us recognize them when they crop up again, as they often do.

Some of us are survivors of unspeakable trauma. We have real emotional wounds caused by wartime combat, physical or sexual assault, natural disasters, or extreme poverty. We are not at fault for these horrific experiences. We find ways to reckon with our trauma in our own time and often with help from resources outside NA. Our responsibility begins when the Steps uncover a need for more work. Real healing takes courage and persistence.

Recovery gives us the opportunity to know ourselves, to answer to our own conscience, and to own *our part* instead of blaming forces outside ourselves. We take responsibility and reap the rewards that come from being accountable for our actions: We’re capable of feeling the whole range of human emotions and ready to face life on life’s terms.

I will not hide behind the disease of addiction today, nor will I cast blame on others in my orbit. I will practice responsibility by accepting my part in the problem and my role in the solution.

Participation, Service, and the Seventh Tradition

As a member of an NA group, we take part in developing a conscience about how the group will meet its responsibilities and participate in the life of the larger Fellowship.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Seven, “For Members”

Who among us hasn’t felt like a victim of our circumstances at some point? In active addiction, we may have made an art form of blaming outside forces for our problems. It’s true that some situations beyond our control cause undue hardships or difficulties, but we have choices available to us now. Recovery teaches us to actively participate in a solution, beginning with taking personal responsibility for our actions and participating in the program of NA.

We also take responsibility for the Fellowship by participating in the discussions and decisions affecting our groups and service bodies. Each of us has to determine for ourselves—in consultation with our Higher Power and our sponsor—what level of participation feels right for us. “I noticed that when I participate less and have less information,” a member recalled, “the more I think in terms of ‘us’ versus ‘them.’ When I step up my participation, I feel like it’s all ‘us.’” There’s a reason we often talk about service as part of Tradition Seven, not just the money we give. When we give our time through active participation, we are practicing a form of self-support. According to one addict, “Recovery is not a spectator sport. We get out of it what we put into it.”

The practice of participation we learn in NA tends to show up in other areas, too. In our families, in our work—the more we participate, the more we feel that we are part of, our voices matter, and our needs are considered. We are not just victims of circumstance anymore; we actively participate in solutions.

When I passively observe life, service, and recovery, I’m short-changing myself. Today I will show up and participate.

10 JANUARY

Waking Up to Service

Being of loving service is living spiritually. First we take, then we give, then we share.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Creative Action of the Spirit”

In Narcotics Anonymous, we arrive to find ourselves the most important person in the room. For a lot of us, that notion is terrifying, but some of us enjoy the rock-star treatment.

We grab a white keytag and do a victory lap for thirty days in a row—including weekends. We share in every meeting until the timer goes off (every time), wondering aloud what the hell we are doing here with “all you people . . . no offense.” We dazzle our fellows with our theory of the difference between humility and humiliation. They must like what we have to say, ’cause they tell us, “Keep coming back.” We find a sponsor and bend his ear with a detailed account. “Sponse” picks us up at the recovery house and buys us a meal after the meeting. He doesn’t say much, but he’s definitely listening!

As our status as the most important person melts away and our keytag color changes to orange, Sponse suggests we listen more instead of talking so much, take meeting commitments that don’t court attention, and reach out to newcomers. We get a blue six months clean, and we ask our sponsor about doing H&I. “Good idea” is his response. We think he’s pleased about our initiative, even though he says nothing about it. Our bravado shifts. We get some high-fives and tighter hugs from members who acknowledge how well we’re doing. That feels undeniably good, but showing up for other addicts feels even better.

Our story continues. We glow in the dark at one year and are black-and-gold at two. Our commitment to service deepens. We are invited to participate in our recovery, to share our experience, strength, and hope. We start to have this strange new feeling that we can’t quite put our finger on. Over dinner—on us this time—we try to articulate the feeling to our sponsor: “It’s something about being of value, maybe a little gratitude thrown in . . . ?” We struggle to find the words.

“Hmm,” says our sponsor. “Sounds like you might be waking up.”

Today I will ask, “How can I be of loving service?” I will listen to the answer and take action because this is how I want to live.

Striking an Emotional Balance

We need to strike a balance between being in denial of our feelings and letting them overwhelm us; we don't want to go to either extreme.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step Ten, “Feeling versus Doing”

“Feelings aren’t facts, but it is a fact that we feel,” a member shared, as many have. “And in recovery, our actions matter more than our feelings.”

We hear some version of these bumper stickers in meetings pretty often. Doing the “right” thing, even when that action contradicts how we’re feeling, is certainly a shared value among many members. But should we just leave feelings unexpressed—especially those that come with a lot of baggage, such as anger, fear, and shame? Nope. Consciously or not, we’ll eventually let those feelings seep out, weaponizing them against ourselves or others.

Striking a balance between suppressing our feelings and being emotionally overwhelmed doesn’t look the same on all recovering addicts. Many of us are emotional projectiles; anything will set us off, and anyone in our path will also feel the burn. For others, avoidance is our strategy—we’d rather deny, deny, deny.

And while it’s true that we should take caution when letting our emotions drive our actions, we should not deny that *feelings are real*. They are also temporary, which is why other members may suggest we take a pause, breathe, scream into a pillow, and/or talk about how we’re feeling with another addict.

Seeking emotional balance is a practice, not a state of being we arrive and stay at. As with all aspects of recovery, there’s no perfect way to negotiate and monitor our practice of emotional balance. We aren’t self-programming robots that can curate a perfectly authentic set of emotions that don’t swing too far in any unreasonable direction. Lucky for us and those around us, we are clean, and we can lean on the tools of NA to help keep us from imploding or exploding.

I will make a practice of expressing my very real feelings in a productive way and not letting them force my actions.

Forgiveness and the Amends Process

We forgive ourselves, we forgive others, and we find peace—regardless of what others may think or feel or tell us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Amends and Reconciliation”

Many of us want to skip ahead to Step Nine and apologize to those we’ve hurt in hopes of receiving their forgiveness. We desperately want to shed some of our guilt and shame. We may be convinced that getting others to forgive us would provide a shortcut to feeling better about ourselves. We’re reminded that the Steps are in order for a reason and that making amends has more to do with changing our behavior than offering apologies. Despite the urge to find a shortcut and get an early payoff, we surrender to the wisdom of experience. We work our way through the first eight Steps before attempting to right the wrongs of our past.

The gift of time prepares us for the amends process. “I’d be lying if I told you that I wasn’t hoping to be forgiven,” a member recalled. Despite this longing, we focus on clearing out our wreckage and amending our behavior. Some people may never forgive us, but we can forgive ourselves nevertheless. The road to self-forgiveness starts with our commitment to working the Twelve Steps. In doing so, we establish a new way to live. We focus on the things we can change, namely ourselves.

Over time, new, healthy behavior brings a sense of peace to our spirit. Forgiveness is not a finite process—the more we give, the more we seem to get. “As I forgive, I grow in love and compassion and I move forward on my spiritual journey,” one member shared. Our actions solidify our commitment to Narcotics Anonymous and to ourselves. We become less concerned about who acknowledges our growth or how our amends are received. We revel in the peace we’ve found within and offer up a little more forgiveness to ourselves and the world.

Today I will allow the Steps to shape my choices and behavior. I will enjoy the peace I find in this new way of life and reach for more as I practice forgiveness with myself and others.

Inclusiveness and Our Sense of Belonging

Our diversity strengthens and affirms the reality of our simple message.

Across all of our differences, the same simple program works.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Five, “Word by Word”

NA’s simple message is that any addict can stop using, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live. *Any addict.* We’ve witnessed the proof that our program works, for ourselves and addicts from all walks of life, those with obvious similarities and those who are different from us. Tradition Five states that a group’s primary purpose is to carry NA’s message to the still-suffering addict who, on any given day, could be a newcomer or a more experienced member.

While most of us will acknowledge the above as true, it’s not a given. Inclusiveness, like all the spiritual principles, requires work. It takes practice and a degree of self-awareness. “Our diversity is our strength” is just a slogan unless we take steps to actively include each other, welcome and remember each other, share and listen to each other. Nearly all of us walk into NA feeling different and separate, not a part of. Our job as members is to try to bridge that gap.

While it’s true that we all have the same disease, we aren’t the same people. When we look—and feel—different from everyone else in the room, that can challenge us. One longtime member described his experience like this: “I walked into a meeting and nobody looked like me. I asked, ‘Where are my people?’ and a member responded, ‘Oh, they’re on the way. You have to stay, so you’ll be here when they come.’ That made me feel included and that I had a purpose.”

It will do us well to remember that we are used to many factors defining us and our worth. Frankly, some of us have privileges and resources that others don’t. While we like to say, “That stuff doesn’t matter here,” we need to keep actively demonstrating that to newcomers. We’re all accountable to the Fifth Tradition. We must never take it for granted. One member wrote, “The disease wants us to focus on our differences. Recovery helps us appreciate our diversity, see beyond our differences, and know that we belong together.”

How am I putting “our diversity is our strength” into action? Today I’ll look for an opportunity to show another member that they belong.

Discerning When to Act

We learn where we can use our energy to make a difference and where we need to let go.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Awakening to Our Spirituality”

Life in active addiction for many of us seemed like a battle: picking sides, winners and losers, retreating in fear from all conflict, or bullying to get what we wanted. We tend to bring this mind-set with us in recovery. Some of us confront and challenge more than we engage and listen. One member shared, “I brought a sledgehammer to all my relationships. I felt it was my duty to pound my perspective into every discussion. Choosing my battles was a cop-out.”

As we mature in our recovery, examining our behavior through stepwork, most of us will figure out that “we” in NA doesn’t really mean “me, plus all who agree with me.” When we say the “we” version of the Serenity Prayer in our service bodies and in business meetings, we’re inviting discernment into the proceedings. We ask for courage, acceptance, and wisdom to guide us. Instead of approaching service meetings like gladiator games, we concentrate on cultivating enough humility to appreciate and learn from each other. We gain trust in others and become less invested in getting our way. We apply this newer mind-set in all relationships.

We can also tie the Serenity Prayer to discernment in terms of prioritizing our time and energy. We can discern where our efforts would be best focused to change the things we can, accept what we can’t, and let go when others want to make a different change than we do. We can ask ourselves whether we’re getting too caught up in minor details rather than paying attention to the big picture and where we can make a positive impact.

“Sometimes the most discerning choice is to say nothing, step away, and let others step up,” the member went on. “At other times, honest self-assessment will lead me to choose a particular ‘battle.’ But now I try to approach a conflict in my life with spiritual principles in my arsenal and forego the sledgehammer.” This strategy can apply to so many realms within our lives: sponsoring, parenting, romantic relationships, in our jobs, while driving, and, of course, in NA service.

Not everything is battle-worthy. Where can I apply my energy today so that I am contributing to the well-being of others? What situation can I pull back from that isn’t benefiting me or anyone else?

15 JANUARY

Practicing Equality

It doesn't matter who is doing the giving or the taking. We are all equally entitled to ask and to provide, and wherever we are in the exchange, we benefit.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, "Being of Service"

"When you call, I am probably getting more out of it than you are," said many a sponsor. This type of statement is right in line with paradoxes mentioned in our literature, such as keeping what we have by giving it away or loving ourselves more by thinking of ourselves less. Some members have even expressed discomfort with the implied hierarchy of the terms *sponsor* and *sponsee*. "I am not above my sponsees or ahead of them," one sponsor shared. "I walk this path beside them, benefiting from them as they do from me."

The principle of equality is a high ideal and not one that comes automatically to most of us. "It's beautiful and aspirational to say that we excluded no one," a member reflected. "Our lofty goals require practical strategies so that when people do feel excluded or unequal, we have actionable steps to take." In our groups, coming up with practical strategies can mean thinking of specific actions to help all addicts feel welcome and included. Creating a greeter position or asking whether there are any out-of-town visitors are a couple of simple examples of how some groups try to include everyone.

As individuals, practicing equality can be a little trickier. With more time clean and more Steps worked, our self-centeredness can try to use those as excuses to deny our equality with other members. One member wrote, "I started using service as an ego booster, patting myself on the back for helping those poor addicts. My experience with recovery may be valuable, but it doesn't mean I am more valuable than other addicts. If I'm not still learning, I've got problems."

The member with 40 years or 40 hours clean might share, one after another, and we never know which one will say the thing we need to hear. I will practice equality in how I share and listen today.

Finding Our Passion and Purpose

Something different happens as we move into recovery motivated by passion, hope, and excitement. We are released into our own lives.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Why We Stay”

Some of us spend our early days of recovery in NA more focused on what we were trapped in and what we are escaping—compulsion, isolation, alienation, desperation—than aware of what we want in our lives. We see right away that people in NA have gained some freedom from the consequences of addiction, and hope keeps us coming back. It didn’t take long to realize that many recovering addicts get much more than freedom from the cage of addiction—they gain freedom to explore the world outside that cage.

“When I was using, every other interest took a backseat to my disease,” one member wrote. “In one of my earliest meetings, I heard an addict share about going into the wilderness to get back into rock climbing after 15 years away from it. I had no interest in climbing rocks, but the idea of being released into the wild was so exciting to me. I decided to find a passion of my own.”

That’s how it goes in recovery: We regain the ability to pursue our interests. Rock climbing, songwriting, restoring old cars—our lives become our own to live. For many of us, the drive and excitement to follow our own interests grows out of our passion for recovery and carrying the message. Another member wrote, “I was so stoked about life without drugs in early recovery. As soon as I had enough cleantime, people invited me to share on H&I panels left and right, and I felt like I had a purpose. After years of thinking the world was full of threats, I started seeing opportunities everywhere.”

Where addiction limits us and makes our world smaller, recovery opens us up to the world. What opportunities are on my horizon today?

17 JANUARY

Striving for Integrity, Always

Integrity is the consistent application of spiritual principles, no matter what the circumstances.

—*It Works*, Tradition Two, “Applying Spiritual Principles”

We recognize the ultimate authority in NA groups to be a loving Higher Power that’s expressed in our group conscience, according to Tradition Two. For better or worse, however, we entrust mere mortals—and addicts, no less—to carry out our decisions. To do right by this Tradition, it’s important to choose trusted servants who demonstrate “the full range of personal characteristics associated with a spiritual awakening,” according to the Fourth Concept essay. We select such leaders and we evolve into those kinds of people as we live clean and work the Steps.

As trusted servants, we do our best to practice integrity as we fulfill our commitments. Yes, that’s a big order, but the Steps prepare us well. Some might even say integrity is the proof in the pudding, the evidence of how working the Twelve Steps transforms us. “By the time Step Twelve told me to ‘practice these principles in all my affairs,’” one member said with pride, “I was ready to do just that. I’ve come a long way, baby!” We become people with character and backbone, the kinds of people who do the right thing even when no one’s watching.

Of course, the real effort of character building starts long before we get through all Twelve Steps. It’s perhaps most apparent when we’re in the thick of Steps Six and Seven, which give us a close look at some of our deeply ingrained bad habits. The price we’ve paid for living this way was starkly detailed in our inventory. We know what we don’t want. Now, we take the opportunity to identify and practice healthier, more spiritual ways to deal with situations as they arise in all our affairs.

And practice we do. Like so much in recovery, thinking and character follow the course set by our actions. We might think of right actions as the seed, which—in time—produces the fruit of good character. We do good works, practice virtuous behavior, and become people with integrity.

Regardless of the circumstances, who’s looking, or what’s convenient, I will adhere to my new code of conduct today.

Surrendering to Change

Surrender means having the open-mindedness to see things in a new way, as well as the willingness to live differently.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Awakening to Our Spirituality”

Change has a terrible reputation. It’s scary and might make our lives less predictable. Many of us arrive in NA knowing for sure that we want to change the outside aspects of ourselves: improve our health and our finances, further our education, get a career. Common wisdom has it that “Change is an inside job,” and that makes sense to us, too. We want to change our state of mind and stop bouncing between disturbing thoughts and complete numbness. We’d love to turn the volume way down on the negative chatter in our heads.

Then we learn the inside job is more than mental: *NA is a spiritual program*. For many of us addicts, that realization makes us feel like we’ve finally come home. For some of us, that’s the moment many of us want to bolt out the door and never come back.

But we stay. We are told that living by spiritual principles means, at its core, being honest, open-minded, and willing. Even though we haven’t been living that way, we see the value of those principles, and most of us *want* to be like that. When working a program, we ultimately default to telling the truth, rather than being avoidant or keeping secrets. We become open-minded to others’ perspectives rather than relying on the outlook and behaviors that got us here. Being willing to get a sponsor, attend meetings, write some stepwork, and take a commitment *is* surrendering to the program’s spiritual aspects. Gradually, we gain some freedom.

For those of us with more cleantime, it’s no different. Being open-minded and surrendering to change continues to be a necessity if we want any level of serenity. We can become rigid or completely lax in our program. Staying connected to NA reminds us to apply what we’ve learned and to remain open to learning more.

Change is inevitable. I can choose to resist it or surrender to it. Surrender has a good reputation around here. I think I’ll give it a try.

19 JANUARY

Contributing Our Creativity

Some of us discover that we have talents for contributing to the world in other ways, whether through our creativity, our empathy, or our addict ability to focus on one thing and do it 'til it's done.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “A Vision of Hope”

In NA, we often recall how drugs ruined our lives and how our innate talents were ultimately no match for our disease. When we were using, however, many of us believed that the drugs we used were fundamentally responsible for the positive contributions we made to our lives. Drugs allowed us to be confident about expressing ourselves socially, artistically, and sexually. They helped us fall asleep at night and wake up in the morning so that we could be there for our kids after work and before school. Using gave us laser-sharp focus and heightened our productivity at work, which pleased our employers and soothed our insecurities. Still, we eventually came crashing down. As one member put it, “I thought I was high functioning, but it turns out I was just high.”

When we first get clean, we are terrified that our performance will suffer and we'll disappoint others. With no drugs, we believe we are no longer creative beings or we're talentless hacks who never were. We doubt we'll be able to function, let alone complete projects on a deadline. Will our families still love us, because, surely, we'll be less easygoing and fun? And what about sex?

As we heal, we begin to understand that the deep well of our creativity, our empathy, and our focus comes from developing a more honest relationship with ourselves and a connection to a Higher Power. We learn to acknowledge and release—even a tiny bit—our need for perfection and validation. Our expectations of ourselves become more realistic, and that gives us more integrity in how we contribute to our lives. We refocus the wasted energy we spent comparing ourselves to others toward being of service to fellow addicts and to our loved ones. And we may even discover new talents and abilities we never knew we had.

I know I have something to offer the world. If I don't know what it is, I'm willing to ask for help to find out. If I already know, let me seek guidance on how to deliver it with humility and generosity.

20 JANUARY

The Simple, Priceless Gift We Share

The simple, priceless gift we give each other is the recognition of our humanity.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Eight, Opening Essay

When we're new in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, it seems that everyone is speaking a language we don't quite understand. All seem to know the order of things, the readings, the prayer at the end. Newly clean (or trying to be), we're already immensely uncomfortable when we're encouraged by someone to talk about what's going on with us—to a roomful of strangers? We don't know what to say, but we try anyway. People in the room vigorously nod at us, like they understand us. "Thanks for what you said," someone tells us during the break. "You really helped me today. So glad you're here." *This is different.*

"I don't even know what the hell I just said!" we reply. "I have no idea what I'm doing." More vigorous nodding. *What is wrong with these people?*

NA's practice of remaining "forever nonprofessional," as per our Eighth Tradition, suggests we are perfectly capable of delivering a message of recovery—even before we're aware that's what we're doing. We don't need professional training or coaching to share in a meeting. We don't have to know all the NA jargon or have memorized passages in our literature. We begin greeting newcomers when we're still newcomers ourselves. Depending on where we live, we may be called to sponsor before we're done with our first full round of Steps. As addicts in recovery, we are already experts—all of us—from the oldest oldtimer to the newest newcomer.

There is beauty and simplicity in the therapeutic value of one addict helping another. A desire to stop using gets us in the door, and our humanity gives us the capacity to listen and empathize, to share what's in our hearts and on our minds, to be generous, and, crucially, to accept the generosity of others. Each of us finds our expertise as recovering addicts when we accept our condition as addicts and start to tap into our assets.

This principle of simplicity is aligned with NA's commitment to anonymity: No matter who we are, we are deserving of each other's recognition that we are human and worthy of love and acknowledgment. As NA members, we give each other the simple gift of being a part of something greater than each of us. Priceless. Simple. Free.

Today I'm going to do my best to acknowledge my fellow members' humanity and share my own. That's all I have to know how to do.

21 JANUARY

Exercising Goodwill

When we practice living in harmony with our world, we become wiser about choosing our battles. We learn where we can use our energy to make a difference and where we need to let go.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Awakening to Our Spirituality”

Let’s start with an uncomfortable truth: We are judgmental because we are human. Human beings assess one another; we compare ourselves. We can be territorial and take sides. We come by this honestly; our survival once depended on it! Add the self-centered nature of addiction to our humanness, and then throw in something we care passionately about (such as the Fellowship of NA)—and our judgment can become a weapon to control outcomes about NA-related issues that other members also care about.

We can, however, turn down the volume on our judgments. With the volume adjusted, we learn that we can approach people and situations without engaging our fight-or-flight instincts. Our first thoughts may still be judgmental, but recovery gives us options about our behavior. It’s our actions that matter most.

When we have some cleantime and service experience, it’s tempting to tell members, groups, and service committees what’s what. But having knowledge and wisdom doesn’t give us authority. Group conscience is always more powerful than individual conscience. Sometimes—to our great surprise—newer members don’t defer to those of us who have been around for a while, offering insights or suggestions the group had been missing before.

Practicing the principle of goodwill with members doesn’t mean we stay silent. Our opinions matter. Exercising goodwill assures those opinions don’t matter more or less than anyone else’s. We listen to others, don’t force the outcome to meet our desires, allow others to make mistakes (yes, even the ones we have already made), and acknowledge that our fellow members want the same things as we do: to stay clean and to carry the message in the most effective way possible.

Goodwill invokes our primary purpose. It serves the greater good of NA, not our egos.

I’ll take a stance of goodwill toward others by sharing my experience, not dictating outcomes—and by demonstrating openness to the suggestions of others.

22 JANUARY

Serenity Brings Clarity

Serenity doesn't mean that we don't experience dramatic events. It gives us the clarity of mind to go through them.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, "Living Our Principles"

"Ahhhhh, serenity. A permanent state of peacefulness, contentment, and awe. Those of us with time clean float around on a spiritual plane that newcomers can aspire to and will achieve through doing exactly what's suggested," shared no member ever.

Unfortunately—and not surprisingly—life in recovery doesn't work like that because life will keep showing up. We experience some thrilling moments, as well as those that are terrifying, joyful, and sorrowful. And plenty of unexciting times in between when things are just fine, yet the drama in our head continues. But there is good news on the horizon: We can deal with life because no matter what arises, we have learned, collectively, that we can get through anything, and practicing serenity can help.

Practicing serenity is acting with intention to get to a place of equanimity where we can contain ourselves enough to keep perspective, show our gratitude, and act with care and thoughtfulness. Sometimes it's about standing still when our mind is running; other times it's about keeping our mind still when everything around us is spinning. It can be as simple as breathing. Serenity gives us time and space through extreme highs and lows. It can be the calm in the eye of the addict-brain hurricane. But it's not always about peacefulness; sometimes it's about authenticity, about feeling how we feel and being okay with that.

Serenity is a tool for clarity. When faced with a difficult decision—which for many of us can be every single decision—we can pray for serenity. Sometimes the right path is revealed; other times we can adjust unrealistic expectations and realize we have enough information to move forward. We can jump into the unknown because today we have tools to deal with that.

Where can I stop, breathe, and look for clarity during my day? Where can I take a moment to feel what I'm feeling and know I'm okay?

23 JANUARY

Being Authentic

More and more, we are comfortable just being ourselves. We appear in the world exactly as we are.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to Ourselves”

Some members describe authenticity as “being our real selves in the real world.”

Addiction makes our worlds smaller. Our self-centeredness was so powerful that we found it harder and harder to show concern for what was happening around us. The Basic Text says, “We suffer from a disease that expresses itself in ways that are anti-social,” and many of us eventually found ourselves living lives that involved minimal interaction with others—especially anyone who wasn’t using.

In recovery, our connection to the world around us grows. No longer trapped by our obsession and compulsion to use drugs and free from the fear of being exposed as addicts, most of us are able to pursue our genuine interests in ways we couldn’t before getting clean. We become involved in our own lives, in our families, and in our communities.

Whether we are exploring a new hobby, seeking further education, or serving those around us through volunteer efforts, addicts in recovery find that we can follow our passions and curiosities wherever they might lead us. As people who had been held hostage by the disease of addiction for so long, the newfound freedom to discover who we are and what we care about can lead us on unexpected journeys.

*Being authentic is not just good for me—it’s good for the world around me.
To connect with the world, I will begin by connecting with my own interests
and passions.*

We Need Willingness Every Day

Through some combination of desperation, courage, anguish, and hope, we find willingness.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Three, Opening Essay

Our willingness to admit to being addicts who are powerless over our addiction in Step One is linked to our willingness to be members of NA in Tradition Three. They are complementary parts of the same surrender. Resistance, doubt, and fear may forestall our initial surrender to seek help by months or years, even decades. But they ultimately are no match for the array of emotions and experiences that drive our decision to let go and allow ourselves to be welcomed into the Fellowship of NA.

All of us have been newcomers to NA; perhaps we're new right now. Regardless of the amount of cleantime we have today, as we read this passage, we have a shared experience of active addiction that compelled us to try something different. We've all had a moment of desperation—or thousands—that brought us to this moment. No doubt we've experienced pain and anguish from using. We've had the courage to walk into an NA meeting for the first time. And whether or not we are feeling it today, we've felt at least a flicker of hope for the future. All of this collective experience gives us the willingness to get through the day clean and to safeguard our NA membership.

It's not uncommon for us to rethink our membership in NA at some point. We may be hurt by or experience abuse from another member. There may be a conflict in our home group or in our region that disheartens us. Our participation in the Fellowship may fade because we're busy with our work, school, and family. Many of us have relapsed, and the reality is that many still will. But we can surrender again—and again and again—and recommit to NA, if we're willing and if we make it back.

To stay clean, experience the fullness of our lives in and out of NA, and keep what we have so we can give it away, we need at least some willingness every day—no matter what emotions are driving it.

Meeting the only requirement for membership is the easy part. I will summon the willingness to surrender once more and show up for my recovery today.

25 JANUARY

Acceptance and Perspective

When we practice acceptance, we distance ourselves from our reactions and reflexes.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to the World Around Us”

For many of us, everything is a trigger when we’re newly clean. We are 100 percent impulse. Reactive. Protective. Feral. Territorial. The person next to us is sitting too close, even though there’s an empty chair between us. The lights are too bright . . . in a candlelight meeting. Someone hugged us, and now we smell like his cologne! We complain about these things to anyone who will listen. Or we never go back to that meeting.

As difficult as it is to accept, the world doesn’t revolve around us. Often our need to fix, manage, and control knows no bounds. Fortunately, recovery teaches us this: While we are powerless over our addiction, other people, and our feelings, we aren’t powerless over our actions. We have a choice. More often than we would like, people don’t behave as we’d wished, situations don’t work out the way we imagined, and life . . . well, life can get in the way of our plans. A car accident, a case of crabs, a breakup, bad cologne.

Even with time in recovery, our first instinct may be to react negatively and impulsively. Our sponsor may be giving us the most insightful and loving feedback ever offered to an addict since the dawn of time, and before he’s even finished, we’re snapping, “I know, I know, I know!” Or, a sponsee tells us she’s dating a woman with 72 days clean, and we flip out on her, pointing out 17 of her character defects without a second’s delay.

Over time, we learn to pause. We put distance between our impulses and inappropriate reactions. We do, say, transmit nothing until we’ve vented to a trusted friend. We breathe, in and out, with our feet on the ground. We pray for guidance. Some of us even practice a radical acceptance: Everything is as it’s supposed to be.

As I strive to acknowledge the role acceptance plays in my healing and serenity, I will take a deep breath before deciding what to do, say, or send.

Hope Comes with a Catch

For many of us, early recovery was difficult. Facing the prospect of life without drugs can be very frightening.

—IP #23, Staying Clean on the Outside

We usually think of hope as a good thing, but it comes with a catch: Realizing our hopes involves going through change. Some things seem better when we're wishing for them than when we get them. No matter how green the grass looks on the other side, change always seems to stir up a lot of fear and anxiety.

One member shared that he struggled when he first came to NA because he had a hard time with the idea of living the rest of his life without drugs. "I heard addicts share that they could manage a day without using, and I realized that all I had to try was not using just for today. They gave me hope." Our Basic Text mentions this same principle: "Most of us can do for eight or twelve hours what seems impossible for a longer period of time. If the obsession or compulsion becomes too great, put yourself on a five minute basis of not using. Minutes will grow to hours, and hours to days . . ."

Many of us had wishes about getting clean before we came to NA, but we didn't see how a life without drugs could possibly become a reality for us until we heard addicts just like us share how they had done it. Hope begins when we shift our vision from the seemingly endless journey ahead to the few steps in front of us. Life without drugs seems impossible, but five minutes without drugs is doable.

The same is true for any change we wish for in our lives: getting out of treatment or jail, changing jobs or moving, switching sponsors, or becoming more open and vulnerable with our partner. Imagining the new life that awaits us on the other side of any big change can be intimidating, but we don't have to live that new life all at once. We talk to members who have made similar changes, and they share their experience with us. We find hope by listening to other addicts. We begin to see how we can get through the next five minutes, the next few hours, the rest of the day. As it turns out, the grass is greener where we water it.

The difference between wishing and hoping is that hope lets me see a way forward. I will share a wish with my sponsor and ask for help in transforming it into hope.

27 JANUARY

Finding Equal Worth in Anonymity

In NA, in recovery, we are all equal. . . . A college degree, a trust fund, illiteracy, poverty—these circumstances that so powerfully affect so many other areas of our lives will neither help nor hinder our chances at recovery.

—It Works, Tradition Twelve

There's only so much we can say about the principle of anonymity leveling the playing field of addiction and recovery. Addicts are addicts are addicts.

Those of us with money may have gotten ourselves access to posh rehabs or lawyered our way out of jail, but that wasn't enough to keep us clean. We can't buy our way out of our disease. Similarly, for those of us who think we are ever-so-clever, we can't study or think our way out of it. For many of us, poverty or limited education may have limited our opportunities—and that may have made us more at risk for negative consequences due to our addiction. But no matter where we come from or where we end up, on day one of being clean we all have the same opportunity to take advantage of the NA program.

Yes, if addiction is one great equalizer that brought us down, recovery is another that can build us back up! Recovering addicts are recovering addicts are recovering addicts. And the program is the program—for every addict with a desire to stay clean today.

Once we're clean for a while, our life might look different from the outside, but it also might not. Careers, degrees, marriages, families, homes—or lack thereof—don't necessarily reflect emotional healing and spiritual growth. How we treat one another does. We're not just equal in theory; we treat each other that way. How honest and open-minded we are is a good indicator of our progress. So is willingness to look at our part in conflicts, past and present, to apologize, to forgive, and to do better. Our readiness to accept responsibility, to help others, to grow through our hardships, to be grateful, to stop and breathe before we self-destruct or cause someone else unnecessary pain—these are the actions that will save our lives because we are all equally worthy of living.

External factors—past or present—can't keep me clean or make me use again. I'll nurture my recovery internally by practicing anonymity outwardly, treating all recovering addicts as equals.

Practicing Fidelity

As we practice honesty, integrity, and fidelity, we no longer have to keep track of our stories or cover our tracks.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “A Spiritual Journey”

While addiction puts a serious strain on our ability to maintain fidelity to the people who matter to us, recovery allows us to show up for our loved ones in ways we may never have thought possible. Freedom from active addiction takes away one incredibly large barrier to our fidelity—the use of drugs. Once the drugs are out of the way, it is common in early recovery to wonder why our family and friends may hesitate to trust us completely. As we stay clean longer and gain greater relief from self-centeredness, we begin to see that the drugs weren’t the only barrier to our fidelity, and we need more than simple abstinence to be able to truly be present for the people in our lives.

If we focus more on what we’re not doing—using drugs, cheating, stealing, telling blatant lies—it might be easy to think we are being more faithful and loyal in our relationships than we actually are. Our character defects, even when they aren’t glaring, can still get in the way of our ability to truly connect to the people in our lives.

“Step Six was eye-opening for me,” a member wrote. “I had a lousy track record with relationships, and I kept thinking I was just meeting all the wrong people. My sponsor helped me identify some character defects, and I realized it wasn’t them—it was me! Thank goodness for stepwork.”

Putting our behavior under the Step Six microscope can be a bit nauseating at times. Especially when we’ve been oblivious to a particular defect, it is disturbing to see it as a pattern and notice it in action again and again, as often happens when working Step Six. The path to fidelity—to being who we want and need to be in our relationships—is in becoming entirely ready to let go of patterns that stand in the way and humbly asking for help in doing so.

Practicing fidelity allows me to be the truest version of myself for those I love. With the help of my sponsor, I will work to bring the best of myself into my relationships today.

29 JANUARY

Encouraging Growth

We are inspired by one another's journeys. Being present to one another's growth gives us the tools and inspiration to move forward ourselves.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, "Connection to Others"

Starting from our first day clean, one of the most amazing gifts we find in NA is people who truly believe in us. Some of us are hesitant to believe in their belief, especially after disappointing so many people for so long. Still, there's something so genuine in the way members tell us, "You never have to use again, even if you want to," and that encouragement can be all that it takes to get us to our next meeting clean.

We change a lot in our first weeks, months, and years of recovery. "I laugh about it now, but they told me when I got clean not to make any major life changes during my first year," one addict shared from the podium. "My entire life was turned around and flipped inside out—what could be more major than that?!" As time goes by, many of us settle into a more stable version of ourselves. A member with decades clean shared, "It's a reservation in my Second Step if I believe I can't still change just because I've been clean so long. If a newcomer can stop using drugs, I sure as hell can get help with a character defect."

Even though our early recovery often sees the most dramatic change in our lives, there is always room for improvement. "It is the most amazing gift to witness people in my recovery network grow," one member wrote. "No matter how long I'm clean, seeing others change reminds me that I can, too." Being present to others' growth means being present physically, showing up regularly. It also means truly listening to where our fellow members are at—mentally, emotionally, spiritually—and sharing honestly with them. The vulnerability, intimacy, and presence we practice in NA inspires growth in us all.

No change is too small or too big for my recovery. I will be present to the process and accept encouragement from other addicts.

30 JANUARY

No Regrets for Being Kind

We approach people with love and kindness, carrying within ourselves a deep and abiding respect for the feelings of others.

—*It Works*, Step Nine

“I’ve never regretted being kind,” the speaker stated. The rest of us in the meeting thought about those words for two seconds and nodded in agreement. It’s hard to argue with that.

Probably for nearly all of us, treating others with kindness, love, and respect was more difficult in active addiction than it is now that we are clean and striving to be better people. Maybe we were burned by others who treated us kindly but wanted something in return. Very likely we had the same manipulative tendency. Playing either role in this dynamic only reinforced our mistrust of others. If we were up to no good, then so was everyone else.

Working Steps Four through Nine is a reality check on our past behavior. By the time we get to the amends process, we’re prepared to face the hurt we’ve caused other people mostly through our selfishness and carelessness. We witness the results of our manipulation, our disregard for the feelings of our loved ones, and the damaging ways we treated ourselves.

The speaker went on: “Treating others with kindness is like an ‘ounce of prevention’ for our chronic condition of addiction. It lowers our risk of doing or saying something we’ll regret. And it has the added benefit that we won’t have to make as many amends.”

While we certainly don’t have to wait for any Step before we show and receive kindness, our relationship to this spiritual principle will deepen as we work on ourselves. We learn to be more thoughtful about the words we use. We no longer use people to get what we want. Although we cannot completely prevent hurting or disappointing other people or stop them from being angry with us, we don’t want to make the same mistakes.

Through our commitment to recovery, we develop a genuine respect for others and maybe a little belief in humankind as a whole. No regrets there either.

I have many choices today. One of them is to be kind. I’ll opt for that.

Having Empathy for Each Other

As I sit here in my cell, I know there are people out there following in my footsteps, and it brings tears to my eyes, because I know the pain they are feeling.

—*Behind the Walls*, “Is Narcotics Anonymous for you?”

Before we find NA and a path toward empathy and healing, a lot of us find jails first. Some of us follow predecessors into a life we see no way out of. Others of us just see opportunities to take advantage, to make money, and to get *one more* that leads us down a similar path—and we take them because we’re addicts. We push away those who care about us. We end up desperately trying to gain control because we have completely lost it. We live in constant fear and shame and do whatever we can to suppress those feelings. We refuse help. We end up locked up. For many of us, this cycle repeats, over and over.

Along the way, we get exposed to NA and life behind bars gives us time to consider our choices: We can continue down the path of self-destruction and harming others or we can follow one toward healing that is available to any addict through the Twelve Steps. We opt for the latter and begin to follow different predecessors. We are shown empathy by our fellow recovering addicts—through H&I, at NA meetings run by other inmates, or when just a couple of us get together and make a meeting. We work a program in whatever way we can. Our hearts open, particularly to those we’re locked up with who we see struggling with their disease. We think of those from our past who are still running. We pray they find the hope and freedom that we’ve found.

Word travels fast inside, so it’s no secret that we’re in recovery and available to help. We do our best to draw people to us, instead of pushing them away. We try to be a good role model, and when the opportunity strikes, we reach out to the still-suffering addict. We seek healthy companionship and solidarity with one another. We empathize with the pain of each other’s pasts and with the struggles recovery entails.

I will take whatever actions I can to help others find and stay on the path that I have found. Two addicts make a meeting, and I will be one of them. I will let another addict know, “You never have to use again.”

FEBRUARY

Listening Leads to Acceptance

Listening to other addicts share without judging them is the beginning of listening to our own heart without judgment or punishment.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Growing Pains”

We do our best to silence our inner critics as we listen to other members share in meetings. We focus on their words and the feelings behind them. We practice acceptance by listening with care and attention. We set aside our own ideas about their lives and their recovery, even if it’s just for the moment.

One member shared, “I can connect to anyone’s story as long as I filter it through the message.” When we listen for the message, it helps us relate on an emotional level. We can recall our attempts to stop using and the process of losing the desire to use. We find it easier to stop judging and start accepting our fellow members when we recognize all of our struggles as part of finding a new way to live.

We realize that being judgmental sours our ability to empathize, even when we don’t give voice to such thoughts. After recognizing the obstacle this creates in our own recovery, we stop silently condemning other people’s behavior. When we listen without judgment, we get a glimpse of freedom from the punishing thoughts we’ve lived with for so long. One of the gifts of NA recovery is that we learn to quiet our minds so we can listen with our hearts.

Today, thanks to NA, I will quiet my inner monologue and practice applying the principle of acceptance to myself and others.

Pushing through with Perseverance

As new things are revealed, we feel renewed. We need to stay open-minded and willing to do that one extra thing . . .

—Basic Text, Chapter 10: More Will Be Revealed

Though not all of us arrive in NA with tons of willingness and enthusiasm to change everything about our lives, we tend to be open enough to try something different. We're here, aren't we? So we might as well take that "90 meetings in 90 days" suggestion. We get a home group and take on a commitment. We greet newcomers. With some effort and perseverance, we begin to work a program and to feel better, even renewed.

In time, many of us get to a point where those feelings of renewal get old. The well dries up. We aren't having daily epiphanies of self-realization. Our life is more stable, sure, but is it still getting better? Do we have to keep doing the NA "same old, same old": hearing the same shares, reading the same literature, drinking the same weak tea or bitter coffee?

"Don't leave before the miracle," we've heard our fellow members say time and again. While many of us don't believe in miracles, per se, our experience has shown us that if we stay—stay in the room, stay open-minded, stay available to another addict, stay clean—our lives will continue to improve. And we will be better prepared for those times when life's unpredictability presents us with challenges.

We never know where we're going to hear just what we need to help us through our next phase of recovery. It's often in the meeting we really don't want to go to, the speaker we've heard a thousand times, or the phone call we begrudgingly answer. We may not have even noticed that we were stuck until a message moves us into action. When we can push through our resistance, especially when it comes to helping others, we reap enormous benefits for our spiritual growth. The miracle of this program is continually revealed to us through our perseverance.

Today I'm going to find that one extra thing to do and have faith that I'll be reenergized in my recovery. Whether or not I feel that rush of renewal, I'll do it again tomorrow. And the day after that.

Accepting Our Imperfect Selves

Accepting that we make mistakes and that they are not the end of the world or the end of a relationship is part of coming to terms with our own humanity.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Friendship”

Self-destruct mode is a common default setting for many addicts. When we screw up, we think, *Maybe it’s just better if I don’t talk to them ever again*. This self-defeating mindset would have us avoid uncomfortable conversations at all costs. We come to learn that these awkward moments are rich opportunities for growth.

Step Ten gets us in the habit of examining our part in every situation. We see our liabilities but no longer believe we are the sum total of our mistakes. We learn to sustain relationships instead of blowing them up and walking away. We make amends when it’s warranted. We learn how to communicate directly, to know our limits, to listen, and to apologize.

We learn to be as forgiving with ourselves as we are with others. When we accept the humanity of those around us, by extension, we can grasp our own humanity. We start to treat ourselves with more compassion and embrace our imperfection. We find, as one member put it, that we are “broken in all the right places.” Being real and flawed and vulnerable and self-aware is attractive. We connect with others when we allow ourselves to be fully human.

I am learning to treat myself as a friend, instead of as a liability. I will strive to set my “broken” pieces within their proper context and wholly embrace the mosaic that I am.

Courage in the Face of Self-Doubt

There are times when we must find the courage to be the lone voice on an issue or stand up for principle against a strong majority.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Two, Opening Essay

Tradition Two reassures us that, as individual members, we don't need to have all the answers. But sometimes we do have an answer to an issue that comes up in our group, and we're sure it's the right one. It's well thought-out. It's aligned with our Traditions. Its airtight adherence to our primary purpose of carrying the message is sharp as an axe blade. It's undeniably the right answer—except no one else seems to view the issue the way we do. The group's conscience seems to be veering away from logic, principles, and the spirit of NA. So, do we go with the flow or make waves?

When we were using, many of us lived by the old standby “go along to get along.” Even though we may not have agreed with what was being said or done by those around us, we lacked the courage to stand up for ourselves, our beliefs, or other people. Working a program helps to reveal what our convictions are and how they're aligned with NA's. In a group situation where going with the flow might be the easier choice, we, first of all, check our motives honestly to make sure we're driven by our common welfare and not our ego. We ask our Higher Power to help us find our voice, shaky as it might be in the face of a strong majority. Courage is the strength to stand up for what we believe in.

Courage helps us beat back self-doubt and fears of disappointing or angering others. It keeps us engaged, even open-minded, when our “right” answer is, in the end, sidelined by the majority. Humility can steady us, no matter which way it goes. And, once we find the courage, we can continue to be emboldened to keep using our voice and standing up for principles, while inviting in a Higher Power to influence our group decisions and staying out of the result.

I ask for the strength to practice courage to change the things I can. I know what I believe in and will have the courage to stand up for it—and the willingness and humility to accept the outcome.

Harmony and Our Common Good

We can come to these relationships in a spirit of harmony and love, or from a place of suspicion and fear.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Twelve, “In Service”

In any society, including Narcotics Anonymous, there’s a natural tension between addressing the common good and getting our individual needs met. That tension may be more pronounced in a society made up of addicts who are trying to stay clean. We each live at the center of our own world, each with our own intricate history and collection of uniquely expressed defects of character—and assets too, lest we forget. The delivery of our NA message of hope depends in part upon the relationships that we create, nurture, and sustain among us. This is an extraordinary and sublimely beautiful challenge.

Unity takes up this challenge for the common good of NA. This means we prioritize carrying the NA message over our individual desires and our personal opinions of other members. We commit to the conscious action of coming together for a common cause. We serve with members we dislike or have valid cause to distrust, as well as those we find appealing and trustworthy.

Harmony is the recognition and appreciation that there’s reverence and beauty in facing the challenges to unity. It’s what we mean when we say, “I *get* to practice unity, instead of I *have* to.” Or we don’t practice it, and we run the risk of alienating our fellows. Harmony emerges when we practice unity despite our differences, and we try to do this with a sense of serenity and peacefulness. It’s the essence of “we don’t have to like each other to work together, but we have to love each other.”

In service, conflicts sometimes arise. Aggression and retreat are absolutely natural reactions in the face of conflict, but they don’t solve it. It takes *effort* to practice the principles of love, compassion, and understanding in harmony with unity, responsibility, and interdependence.

I will look for opportunities—especially in service work—where I can bring a spirit of harmony to my relationships. I get to do this. I get to.

Unconditional Love and Step Five

. . . many of us have looked up and seen unconditional love in the eyes of the person hearing our Fifth Step.

—It Works, Step Five

From addict to addict, sponsor to sponsor, sponsee to sponsee, there's nothing in NA that all of us experience the same way. There's the popularized, or even idealized, notion of how things should go, and there's how they actually happen. Many of us resist Step Four because of Step Five. The thought of being that vulnerable with someone is scary. And when we hear those wonderful stories of members reading their inventories to their sponsors and immediately feeling relief and acceptance, we may feel more intimidated than reassured. Many of us do have a sponsor whose eyes reflect unconditional love and who says all the right things. But what about tomorrow?

Like all other spiritual principles, unconditional love takes work. It's not a snap-your-fingers moment, a switch we turn for the perfect moment that stays bright without fail. NA provides a place for all of us, a place where any addict can find hope. We deserve the love of the Fellowship, yet that requires the individual effort of members. Unconditional love is more than merely loving someone for who they are regardless of . . .

In the sponsor-sponsee relationship, loving is more than just accepting. A sponsor shared, "Unconditional love says that I will invest in your growth, no matter what. I intentionally decide to invest in someone regardless of who you are or what you've done. We all deserve that. I also have to be working on myself to loosen and remove the conditions on love that my life experiences have placed there." We don't do it perfectly, and how we express unconditional love isn't uniform from addict to addict or from day to day.

Accepting the unconditional love that's offered also takes work. For many of us, the Fifth Step is an opportunity to do just that. Perhaps even more so, it's the day after, when we call our sponsor and they're there for us, just like yesterday.

Love is a decision that needs to be made over and over again. I'm willing to take action about that decision today regarding a fellow member and unconditionally express love as best I can.

Recovery Makes Us More Resilient

As we progress, we learn that we can always begin a new journey in recovery, and we can start over whenever we need to. We don't need to blow up our lives to get a fresh start.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, "Spirituality in Action"

Life on life's terms comes with some inevitable setbacks. Recovery gives us choices about how we deal with those occasional stumbling blocks or misfortunes. Do we summon our inner drama queen, back ourselves into a corner, and turn a minor setback into a full-blown catastrophe? Sometimes, yes. And, sadly, relapse can be part of that story.

Fortunately for us, recovery makes us more resilient. We learn we can reset our attitude instead of resetting our cleantime. We're reminded that change is the only constant. Life's challenges don't end when we get clean. Rather, we learn to respond to change and challenges in a different way, summarized by one member: "Get knocked down three times? Get up four."

Early on, it may have taken a toxic relationship or some regrettable financial mismanagement for us to reach for the reset button. Our tolerance for emotional pain or spiritual disconnection lessens over time, however. Our setbacks are less dramatic because we're quicker to get into the solution. We accept new realities more readily. Instead of resisting the storms of life, we learn to bend with the wind.

The Twelve Steps offer us a spiritual path through life. It crosses the same rough terrain, but we become more sure-footed. We navigate the obstacles and have the courage to explore uncharted territory. With the support of our fellow members and our Higher Power, we may stumble, but it gets easier to get back up. With the hope that our best days are ahead and the courage to make that so, we dust ourselves off and continue on our journey.

I will recognize the sources of my resilience today and be grateful for all that contributes to my ability to put one foot in front of the other.

Willing to Walk in Faith

When we show up for life with willingness and an open mind, the next right thing tends to present itself.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Spirituality Is Practical”

“I have a full, rich life in recovery,” a member shared to knowing nods. “But I’m facing some decisions about what comes next for me. I’m willing to do the next right thing if only I knew what that is. The options are all good, so how do I figure out what God’s will is for me?” After the meeting, some more experienced NA members offered their insights on Steps Three and Eleven.

“I would freak out trying to know, *really know*, if my choices aligned with my Higher Power’s will,” one member shared. “I was told: ‘If you’re looking for a burning bush, you’re going to be disappointed.’” When we’re dealing with clear-cut questions of right and wrong—*Should I steal this candy or pay for it?*—the next right thing is obvious. But looking for one correct response to life’s multifaceted dilemmas can be paralyzing. The member continued, “I came to understand that Step Three is all about my decision. My willingness to work the rest of the Steps is that decision in action. My job is to show up, be willing, and do the work in front of me. So long as I’m plugged into the Steps, I can trust my intuition.”

“I used to pray to know God’s will for *me*, too,” another member confessed. “My sponsor pointed out that self-centeredness had distorted my hearing: Step Eleven isn’t about *me*. It’s about *us*.” She went on to explain how a focus on *us* broadened her perspective. “It changed my outlook and influenced how I pray and meditate. That made it easier to live by principles and to listen to my heart, trusting that my choices would enrich my ability to serve.” Viewing life through a wide-angle lens puts our decisions within a larger context filled with love, support, and service. When we practice willingness and awareness, even our missteps expand our usefulness to others.

When we’re spiritually fit, doing the next right thing doesn’t have to be complicated. We find the willingness to walk in faith, knowing that we’ll be alright. People like saying, “When one door closes, another opens.” As NA members, we become better equipped to navigate hallways with multiple doors, some leading nowhere, others to new worlds, and all of them preparing us to serve.

I am willing to be guided by my Higher Power today. I will make principled decisions and take positive action, secure in the knowledge that my service will be enhanced.

Purpose and Responsibility

Groups have come together to form service bodies that help them achieve their primary purpose. Service bodies have formed workgroups, boards, and committees to accomplish the tasks that support the groups.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Nine, Opening Essay

In our service bodies, we embrace Tradition Nine when we regularly consider our responsibilities to those we serve. By maintaining H&I panels, hosting recovery events, and furthering NA's reach in other ways through public relations efforts, we make it possible for groups to focus on providing an atmosphere of recovery for members. The purpose of our service bodies is an extension of our groups' primary purpose.

In our personal recovery, considering the relationship between purpose and responsibility can be helpful, too. When we are in a meeting, for example, we might have several reasons for attending. We show up for our own recovery, to carry a message, for coffee or tea, or to see whether that cute person who was there last time came back. Whatever our reasons, thinking about purpose can help us practice responsibility. The meeting exists to create an atmosphere of recovery, so our responsibility in that space is to contribute to that atmosphere. Even if the cute person does show up!

The same is true for other areas of our lives. Family, work, school—each has a purpose that may or may not align completely with our own. However, there is usually a fair amount of overlap, so we can practice responsibility by attending to that portion of our purpose that aligns with where we are at. We practice responsibility by looking for the overlap in purpose and focus our energy there. The more we practice, the better we get.

Fulfilling my purpose involves being responsible. I will consider my responsibilities in each area of my life and try to act accordingly.

10 FEBRUARY

Loving Ourselves

My sponsor was one of the people in NA who loved me until I could love myself.

—*Sponsorship*, Chapter 1, “A cornerstone of the Narcotics Anonymous program”

Many of us came to the rooms of NA battered and broken apart, full of secrets we planned to take to the grave. We couldn’t keep a job. Our health was terrible. We couldn’t bear to see that look in our parents’ eyes one more time. But, hey, we’re clean now. Yes! We are done with using and more than happy to move on.

But what’s this “secrets keep you sick” thing we keep hearing? We just want to put the past behind us, and instead, we’re encouraged to tell some sponsor about it? We can share some of it, but not *that*. *Oh, hell, no! No one can ever know that.* And “loving ourselves”? *Does that mean I have to look in the mirror and say nice things? Is this a requirement?*

For many of us, our sponsor is the first—and perhaps only—person who hears about our darkest actions toward others, our insane thoughts and behaviors, and our deep pit of self-destructiveness. The shame and self-hatred we feel are met with empathy and patience. Our sponsor’s loving response and commitment to loving us helps us to understand, a bit at a time, that we are deserving of love. We start to organize the mess we made of our lives as we work the Steps. We know we can tell our sponsor anything, and we know we have to in order to stay clean.

Gazing at ourselves in the mirror and blowing loving kisses at our reflection is not a requirement of NA membership. But, after sustained exposure to the love and acceptance freely given to us by our sponsor, the thought of doing so might make us far less uncomfortable than it would have on day one.

I will thank my sponsor for loving me unconditionally. Today I truly can say that I am on the road to loving the person I’ve become in NA.

Strategies for Optimism

Being spiritually awake, we can see the miracles that surround us, even when life is difficult.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Awakenings”

Optimism is one of those spiritual principles that, perhaps too simplistically, gets merged with a personality trait. It’s true that some of us easily see the positive side of things because that’s who we are. But more of us are wired differently. For those of us who aren’t born optimists, we can use optimism as a strategy to shift our perspective. It takes effort—sometimes enormous effort—to open our eyes to see life’s bounty and beauty during dark times.

“To me,” a member wrote, “optimism means that even if I don’t see a light at the end of the tunnel, I can keep checking to see if one appears. And the ‘miracle’ is that it eventually does, even if it’s tiny.” Because we risk rejection and disappointment by doing so, it takes courage to keep peering into that darkness.

Optimism can sometimes be found when we take a moment to look outside our own woes. “When I can’t discern the good in my own life,” wrote another, “I look at someone else’s. I see the road they’ve traveled and their transformation against all odds. Sometimes it takes one breath to shift my perspective, other times I need a crowbar.” When we look only at ourselves, we’re self-obsessed—obsessed with what was taken away from us or what we never had.

Some of us find our optimism strategy in the simple benefit of the gratitude list. Or it’s allowing others to care for us in our time of need, rather than driving them away with our indulgence in “I got this” or “poor, poor me.” Or it’s prayer, an expression of trust in our Higher Power. Optimism alone can’t save us from utter despair or self-destruction. We need perseverance, hope, and lots of gratitude. One addict put it like this: “The only way to have what I want is to want what I have.”

I’m relieved I don’t have to be an optimist to practice this principle. I will make every effort to see the miracles around me, or at least I can commit to finding strategies that help me to keep looking.

Surrender and Tradition One

Surrender to the First Tradition brings us to understand that we are part of something much greater than ourselves.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, “Spiritual Principles”

When we heard the Twelve Traditions read aloud the first several times—maybe even the first 1,000 times—the First Tradition sounded like some sort of recovery jargon to our newcomer ears. *Am I supposed to put NA’s common welfare ahead of my own? Really?* To many of us, “common welfare” was a new concept. Because we’d consistently been self-obsessed in our disease, we hadn’t thought of ourselves as part of any whole, and that was fine with us.

During our first days clean, the NA Fellowship’s collective whole wasn’t something we imagined being a part of or even caring about. In time, we began to surrender to the truth that we need each other to stay clean. We got a glimpse of the reciprocal relationship between personal recovery and NA unity. We realized that we’re part of a worldwide Fellowship, made up of tens of thousands of groups, with literature available in scores of languages. *Wow, all I wanted to do was quit using drugs!*

“I can’t, but we can” underpins the First Tradition. As our recovery deepens, our capacity to surrender to the principle of unity evolves and becomes more fluid. Surrendering to the needs of the group takes precedence over our desire to get our way at whatever cost. Many of us who struggle with the idea of a “god” working in our lives can surrender to the idea that the power of the group supports us. We begin to understand how our investment in something greater than ourselves through service improves our own lives and increases our feelings of self-worth. And something as basic as seeing a keytag with its “clean and serene” message etched in an unfamiliar language becomes awe-inspiring to us.

As I continue to surrender in my recovery, I will take a moment to embrace the uncomplicated idea that I am a part of NA, just as NA is a part of me. I’ll say a prayer for an addict who lives thousands of miles from me as a way to honor and practice Tradition One.

Opening Up to Understanding

As with so much else that happens in NA, the free exchange of experience and ideas in an atmosphere of support and mutual respect leads to growth and understanding.

—*Guiding Principles*, Introduction, “Group Inventory and Service Workshops”

“It’s like I had blinders on, dark sunglasses, and earplugs, too—oh, and tape over my mouth!” a member shared. “My view of life was so cloudy, dark, and narrow. And secretive. No information got in, and none came out.”

“Same with me,” another member responded, “except for the tape. I had no qualms about opening my mouth and telling you whose fault everything was—and what your problems were, too!”

Before getting clean, we believed that no one else could understand our unique struggles and situations. Our poor coping and communication skills often secured our role as being woefully misunderstood members of our community. We judged others—sometimes internally, sometimes verbally, but always harshly—and we perceived that we too were harshly judged.

Opening up our hearts to other members’ struggles—and being vulnerable about our own—helps us heal the wounds we carried with us into the rooms of NA. When we become willing to have an honest dialogue about our ideas and hear other perspectives, we expand our self-awareness and can benefit more from the wisdom and experience of others. Allowing ourselves to be present creates an environment of mutual understanding and respect.

“Situations that once meant nothing to me now have deeper meaning,” the first member said. “My understanding of something greater than myself continues to evolve. My outlook on life is way more expansive.”

“Yeah, NA has opened my mind in ways I never could have imagined,” said the other. “And sometimes I even keep my mouth shut.”

Feeling loved—and understood—changes us.

Today I will shed the blinders, dark glasses, and earplugs. I’ll be open. I’ll listen. As for the mouth tape, I’ll evaluate each individual situation as to whether or not I need to leave it right where it is.

Selflessness Brings Relief

Practicing selflessness gives us relief from self-obsession.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Fellowship”

Our Basic Text states, “Self-obsession is the core of our disease.” When we look for evidence of this in our lives, most of us find plenty to go around. We see ample proof of self-centeredness and self-obsession in many of the thoughts, feelings, and actions that led us to the door of our first meeting. Coming to terms with the way our disease manifested itself in active addiction is a crucial component of the recovery process. We see much more as we stay clean and work a program—like how self-centered fear spirals into self-obsession and continues to manifest in recovery. And, thankfully, how selflessness can offer us some relief.

“Once I was able to stop using,” one member wrote, “the greatest freedom I’ve received in NA has been freedom from intoxication with my own thoughts and way of thinking, freedom from the self-centered me. I’ve been freed to care about others.” Simple abstinence does not eliminate self-obsession; we get a better perspective on our lives when we get out of ourselves. One member was known to tell newcomers: “If you feel lousy today, call another addict and ask how they’re doing.”

When we focus all our attention on ourselves, we end up feeling bad. By shifting our focus to others, we usually feel much better about everything. Especially when we are helping a newcomer, we find plenty of reasons to be grateful for what we have. Instead of worrying (or obsessing) about our own desires, we try to practice care and concern for those around us. Selflessness doesn’t even have to mean we disappear from the picture altogether—we simply turn our thoughts to others for a bit, and we experience some relief from self-obsession.

When self-obsession strikes, I will help another addict. It’s that simple.

15 FEBRUARY

Compassion Rather than Judgment

When we see someone acting out on a defect that we have acted on ourselves, we feel compassionate rather than judgmental, for we know just exactly how much pain such behavior causes.

—It Works, Step Six

We rarely forget the pain of using drugs and the havoc it caused. However, our memories can be a lot shorter about the pain and havoc we've caused ourselves and others by acting out in other ways. Being overly controlling in meetings and overly sensitive at work. Perfectionism. Keeping secrets. Getting in fights. That trifecta of lying-cheating-stealing. Defensiveness! Witnessing such conduct in our fellow recovering addicts—and the pain it causes—often makes us bonkers, but who are we really judging?

"You spot it, you got it," a fellow wryly points out. Oh, right. It's *us*.

Remembering this simple statement about how judging another is frequently rooted in discomfort with *our own* behavior hopefully will curb our negativity and instead awaken our compassion. Being able to find compassion for others who are acting out on their defects, especially when we have those same flaws, demonstrates considerable growth. This is the intersection between humility and compassion. We know firsthand that such behavior is the result of pain, not just the cause of it. As we develop spiritually, we begin with forgiveness—for ourselves as well as for others—which gives way to empathy. We can then be more loving and accepting. We can be helpful. Whether it's observing an addict on the street doing what addicts do to get another, a member relapsing over and over, or an experienced member stomping out of a business meeting, we can draw on our own experience and find compassion.

Our journey of self-discovery deepens when we realize the reciprocity between having compassion for ourselves and receiving the compassion of others and then giving it away.

Next time I'm disturbed by another member's actions, I'll look inward. I will choose to show compassion for the still-suffering addict because I was there once too—and will be again.

Service and Carrying NA's Message

Everything that occurs in the course of NA service must be motivated by the desire to more successfully carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers.

—Basic Text, Introduction

Of all the spiritual principles in this book, service may be the most directly related to action. Sure, service has a place in our hearts, minds, and souls, but we aren't practicing this principle unless we are doing something.

Our primary purpose in Narcotics Anonymous is service. Essentially, that means carrying the message of recovery to the still-suffering addict who can be any of us at any moment. Participating in service to other addicts, both on an individual level and within the Fellowship, helps us to keep each other and NA alive and thriving.

We often say there are no “musts” in NA, but the Basic Text says otherwise in one of its earliest passages. Depending on who we are, where we are in our recovery, or even what we ate for breakfast that morning, we may find this direction—that *all* of NA service *must* be motivated by our primary purpose—either inspirational or distressing. Some of us may be more driven than ever to carry the message. Others may start to second-guess our motivations for service. We may get defensive at the absoluteness of the statement that “everything” we’re doing “must” be motivated by the purest, most fundamental “desire” to help another. Really? All the time?

Truthfully, the framework of NA—the Steps, Traditions, Concepts, and principles—are indeed oriented toward our singular purpose. Because of the simplicity of service as a principle and its reliance on action to practice it, showing up is all we have to do, really: go to a meeting and share what's going on, answer the phone when our sponsee calls, pitch in for the Seventh Tradition, fill the teakettle. We come early and stay late.

Our purely motivated desire to carry the message won't always be there, but we take the action anyway. That's service in a nutshell.

Simply, I will carry the message to the still-suffering addict today with intention. I'll contemplate my level of desire—and practice willingness along with service.

Open-Mindedness Keeps Us Teachable

The principle of open-mindedness helps us to remain teachable, and to look for teachers all around us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Being a Parent”

When we read “Just for Today”—as we do at many meetings—we’re reminded to cultivate a better perspective on life. Open-mindedness is one of the keys to attaining this improved outlook. Without an open mind, we limit ourselves to what we already know. As one member pointed out, “If I knew how to fix myself, why would I come to NA?” Knowing we don’t have all the answers can be a real asset. Such humility helps us to stay teachable.

In addition to looking within, we can find lessons and teachers in our experience and all around. Desperation, no matter the degree, can be a teacher. It has a way of opening our minds to the possibilities recovery has in store. When we’re open to finding teachers, we’re quicker to detect life’s guardrails and correct course to avoid some of the harshest lessons. When things don’t go our way, open-mindedness helps us find opportunities to stretch ourselves. New ideas seem less like a personal attack and more like a chance to increase our understanding. Instead of avoiding criticism, we seek to learn from it without getting defensive.

Once we stop using and lose the desire to use, the job of finding a new way to live is a lifelong project we chip away at each day. It takes on new meaning as we mature in recovery. “The new way to live I found when I was 20 and new to NA would kill me today,” one member shared with a wink. “I need to be in bed by ten!” Regardless of our preferred bedtime, it helps to remain open and teachable if we want to continue to learn and grow. Life never stops offering new lessons. Instead of resenting life’s twists and turns, we try to focus on what we can discover about ourselves as we navigate them.

I will stretch myself to consider perspectives that may be different from my own today. I will look at my challenges as opportunities for growth.

Making Room for Humility

Understanding that we are not unique is a good indication of humility.

—*It Works*, Step Seven

The disease of addiction turns us into masters of self-deception. A distorted view of the world might convince us that we're smarter than the average addict. When we're new to Narcotics Anonymous, this outlook can keep us separate from everyone in the room and lead us right back out the door.

The pain of stubbornly holding on to our perceived uniqueness can keep us stuck in isolation. As one member found, "Eventually the pain was great enough, and it didn't matter how different I thought I was from everyone else. I was an addict, and if I didn't want to die, I had to start doing some work."

Step Seven shows us that in surrendering the defect of denial, we can let go of arrogance and pride, creating room for humility and identification within the Fellowship. We can see our humility grow when we can sit in a meeting and *naturally* hear the similarities rather than our differences.

When we trust a loving Higher Power to remove our shortcomings, we begin to make space for our true selves and develop a sense of our place within an NA community. Regardless of how long we have been clean, how old we were when we got here, or our career status—we remain teachable. The gift of humility allows us to learn how to ask for help and take suggestions.

Sometimes, even with years clean, we can convince ourselves that "our case is different" or "we are the exception." Calling our sponsors, regularly attending meetings, and continuing to practice spiritual principles remind us that we share the bond of addiction, as well as a common solution in NA. Whether we think we are "nowhere near that bad" or "the most flawed person in the room," we eventually find a place where we can be right-sized by continuing to work the Steps.

*Today I will be grateful for freedom from the sharp edges of my uniqueness
and find opportunities to identify with my fellow addicts.*

Being Flexible through Life's Challenges

Just when we think we know all that recovery has to offer, more is revealed—if we are willing to accept the gift.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Awakenings”

Recovery allows us to take life by the reins. With a clear head and a clean conscience, we're able to deal with situations that would have mystified us in our previous lives. With time and effort spent on our recovery, we find the balance—often repeatedly—between confidence and humility, patience and action, faith and persistence. Flexibility sits at the intersection of all of these principles, allowing us to adapt and be resilient as recovery reveals its gifts.

When life takes an unexpected turn, sometimes there's magic in what we discover—other times, disappointment. In either case, practicing flexibility helps us to go with the flow. We keep breathing, regardless of the circumstances. A difficult living situation, an unhappy marriage, or a dead-end job may call on us to make decisions and take action. Our problems don't solve themselves just because we're clean. The work we put into our recovery helps us to understand our part in every situation. With that, we figure out what we can accept, what we should change, and when it's time to walk away. We take the reins of our lives, but we leave enough slack for the right pace and direction to reveal itself.

With faith and flexibility as our guideposts, new challenges seem more like serendipity and less like a curse. “I grew up hearing ‘We plan, God laughs,’” one member shared. “When something gets in the way of my plans, I take it as divine intervention prompting me to explore other options.” We often emerge from our most painful times with gifts we could not have imagined. Recovery helps us let go of some of our fixed ideas and look for the horse when all we see is manure.

I can learn new things and discover unique gifts at any phase of life in recovery. I will loosen the reins today and be flexible enough to accept the grace that comes my way.

In with Generosity, Out with Fear

Generosity is an antidote to fear, and when we give freely, our hearts are filled.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Seven, Closing Reflection

Addiction is a greedy disease. Even without drugs, it leaves us looking outside ourselves for fulfillment. We buy too much (or steal!), overindulge, siphon off, and manipulate our way into *more*. More ego, more material possessions, more people, and, ultimately, more debt and more unhappiness. The fear that we won't get what we want plagues us. We hunger, we consume, yet we aren't filled. If *more* won't fulfill us, what will?

We hear a lot in meetings about gratitude being a spiritual antidote to fear, but have we thought about generosity as another? If gratitude is expressing our thankfulness, then generosity is a demonstration of that gratitude. In times of pain, difficulty, or even complacency, one ideal default strategy is generosity. When in doubt or in self-centered fear or self-obsession, we tell each other, "Reach outside yourself and *give*. Be of service. Call another addict. Get a commitment. Up the dough we throw in the Seventh Tradition kitty. Contribute."

Practicing generosity by contributing to NA does more than fill our hearts. It gives us perspective, too, and reminds us to be humble. We ask ourselves: *How can I be useful?* Instead of armoring up with fear or indifference, we connect to others through our actions. Generosity isn't dependent on our fearlessness. It's being willing to give of ourselves even if we don't know how to perform the commitment perfectly, say the perfect thing, or put in the perfect amount of time or money.

"I think about generosity in terms of freedom. It's a physical as well as an emotional shift," an addict shared, demonstrating with their body. "Fear is closed off and protective, grasping and hoarding. When we're generous, we're open. The channels of mutual giving are unblocked, we're exposed to each other, and we're freer and more fulfilled because of it."

I'm willing to focus on giving as the way out of my fear and self-centeredness today. I'll let the spirit of generosity fill my heart and share love and gratitude with another addict.

21 FEBRUARY

Faith Provides Shelter from the Storm

I know that faith in my Higher Power will not calm the storms of life, but it will calm my heart. I will let my faith shelter me in times of trouble.

—Just for Today, “Faith,” January 11

Most of us have heard it said that “none of us gets here by accident.” It wasn’t exceptional skills for handling life on life’s terms that got us here—it was unmanageability. Working Step One helps us to see how addiction creates chaos in our lives and shows us how we can begin to gain some freedom.

Some of us, while floating on that early-recovery pink cloud of hope, might prematurely celebrate the end of all the drama in our lives. We might rush off and make amends to our families—or our exes or virtual strangers—eager to let them know that our problems are all in the past now.

Then, life gets tough and reality sets in again. We are let down by people and institutions we think we should be able to respect. Rent is too high. We get sacked from our job for no reason. A public health crisis occurs. On top of that, our favorite television series is canceled. The injustice of it all! And our stepwork doesn’t stop any of it from happening.

Our disease creates unmanageability in our lives, sure—and arresting the disease by working Steps can help us put an end to our needless, self-inflicted suffering. However, not all of the messes in our life are self-created. No amount of stepwork or meditation will prevent us from ever experiencing loss, sadness, rage, frustration, and other unpleasant feelings; no amount of prayer will guarantee freedom from unpleasant encounters with coworkers, family members, or random people in traffic.

We may not know how to react to every new type of weather pattern that comes our way. Still, the freedom from our self-made storms that we gained by working Steps is a source of faith: We can endure all sorts of chaos and nonsense by getting right with ourselves and our Higher Power. Things might not go our way, but we can still go with the flow.

The current crisis—whatever it is—will pass. If the problem is one of my own making, the Steps will help me get through it. If the problem is not one of my own making, the Steps will help me get through it.

Building Trust through Intimacy

Having honest, open dialogue with our sponsor brings us to a new level of trust. As we experience intimacy in that relationship, our ability to be intimate with our partners and with others increases as well.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Sex”

It’s impossible to paint all recovering addicts with the same brush when it comes to our experiences with relationships. To state that we are all permanently damaged and have never had a healthy relationship or experienced intimacy is an overstatement. What we can say is that most of us are shut down when we get to NA. We bear scars from unhealthy relationships. Many of us are certain that sustaining a romantic partnership or being the parent our kids deserve (and vice versa) are impossibilities, considering the injury and chaos we’ve caused. We don’t want to get too close to anyone for fear of rejection. Trusting people? Being honest about our feelings? *No way.*

If intimacy is a spiritual principle we value and a quality we want to bring to our relationships, then we need to practice it. We must surrender to learning new skills and refining existing ones: being honest, sharing feelings, owning our part, listening to and integrating feedback into our behavior, and accepting where our partner is in *their* growth. Ideally, the relationships we forge in NA allow us to explore intimacy in a safer environment than what we’re used to—with other recovering addicts who are striving to do the same.

For many of us, it’s the relationship with a sponsor guiding us through the Steps that inspires us to know ourselves more intimately and to experience intimacy with others in new ways. However, this role isn’t limited to our sponsor. As we start to open up, we may find multiple members we can learn to trust.

We addicts may bear the scars from previous attempts at trusting others, but not all scars are permanent.

I will make today a day of healing from my past relationships. I will do this by being willing to share intimately with someone I can trust.

23 FEBRUARY

A Crash Course in Hope

While abstinence is the beginning, our only hope for recovery is a profound emotional and spiritual change.

—It Works, Step One

Being new in NA is a crash course in hope. At first, our hope only needs to last as long as the distance to our phone. When that obsession to use clouds our commitment to staying clean today, will we call a new friend in NA or our dealer? We hope for the former, but most of us, in early days, have reservations. Do we even want to stop using? *Can* we? In a meeting, someone shares, “HOPE is an acronym for *Hold On, Pain Ends*.” Yikes, more like *Hell On Planet Earth!*

Others of us are sure that we’re done, done, done with using forever and ever and ever. But then we’re told by someone to slow our roll, as it’s “just for today” around here. If that’s the case, do we even dare to hope for a better life beyond the one we can see for tomorrow?

Soon we hear, and eventually absorb, the idea that abstinence does not equal recovery. “Our disease doesn’t just manifest physically in our reliance on drugs and messed-up behaviors,” an NA member clarifies. “It’s mental, emotional, and spiritual, too. So, we need solutions that touch all of it. When we stop using, it’s merely the start of our recovery.”

Our HOPE evolves to a deeper version: *Hearing Other People’s Experience*. We transition from merely wanting some short-term relief from our obsessions and destructive behaviors to desiring significant change in other areas of our lives that we believe might be possible, based on observations of other members’ long-term experiences. *They did the work. So can I.*

We don’t passively hope for a meaningful recovery beyond abstinence. We treat our addiction with the program and principles of NA. We learn to let go of our self-obsession and embrace humility through working Steps. Application of the Traditions in our lives leads us to contribute to the greater good of NA and our communities. HOPE becomes *Helping Other People Everyday*.

Hope helps me to be abstinent today. As I continue to treat my whole disease with vigilance and perseverance, I will keep hope alive, deepening and sustaining my recovery.

Learning to Trust

We do not have to understand this program for it to work. All we have to do is to follow direction.

—Basic Text, Chapter 8: We Do Recover

“Oh, that’s ‘*ALL we have to do*,’ is it?!” we mutter to ourselves. “I’m supposed to trust these folks and do something I don’t understand? Yeah, right.” We learn to recognize this voice of our internal cynic. Sometimes we hear from an entire committee of smartasses living between our ears! Call it what you will—the disease, the committee, or an inner demon—it tries to sabotage our recovery from the start. We learn to talk back to that voice, thank it for sharing, and then seek better counsel from other members.

The members we consult may tell us: “If you want what we have, do what we do.” When we balk at the idea of relying on others, as many of us do, we’re reminded that it wasn’t so long ago that we’d hand our money to a stranger, trusting they’d return with drugs. Despite our resistance, we find ourselves desperate enough to follow the lead of those who came before us. Some of us start by nibbling at the edges of their advice; others swallow it whole. Either way, we can see the value of taking action. We learn to act *as if* we trust the process, relying on blind faith instead of trying to grasp *why* and *how*. “Understanding is overrated,” a wise new friend suggests. “‘Figure it out’ is not an NA slogan.”

It takes a measure of trust for us to come back for a second meeting, and then a third—whether we were inspired by seeing stone-cold addicts who’d turned their lives around or we’d simply run out of options. It takes courage to take direction. We put one foot in front of the other, taking suggestions from a growing circle of support, and trusting that we’re moving in the right direction.

I will take a leap of faith today, trusting that fate or instinct or an addict in recovery or some other power greater than me will steer me in the direction of my hopes.

Gratitude as a Practice

One of the ways we express our gratitude for the gifts of recovery is to help others find what we've found.

—Just for Today, “Giving it away,” January 30

During our first days of being clean, who of us is contemplating the intangible gifts of recovery? Nobody, that's who. We are thinking about making it through the day without using. We're focused on ourselves and how we are going to get through the pain, uncertainty, and shame.

As the weeks and months pass, the physical, emotional, and spiritual gifts of recovery become more evident, and we find ourselves feeling grateful for the journey we have begun and for the people who have helped us. Some say that a grateful addict will not use. So far, that's turning out to be true, though we know it's not a guarantee.

We also hear that gratitude is an action. A member put it like this: “Gratitude isn't just a feeling we bask in or a state of being we pay lip service to. Walking around feeling grateful we're clean and for the gifts of recovery is fantastic, but gratitude is less meaningful without evidence of its expression.” It's an action, as well as an awareness and an attitude, which means that it's something we do—and practice.

There is perhaps no truer or more practical expression of gratitude in NA than helping another addict find or rediscover their path in recovery. If one of the most common manifestations of the disease of addiction is self-centeredness, naturally one of the ways we counteract that is by being there for new members or any member in need. There is a symbiotic relationship between gratitude and service, between expressing our gratitude through supporting others and staying clean ourselves. As we say in NA, “We can only keep what we have by giving it away.” And on a day when we're feeling ungrateful, which happens to all of us, we can do something about it. We can remove our attention from ourselves and focus it on someone else.

Expressing our gratitude is a skill, too. We develop it over time and rely on it to keep our disease in check. Truly, this is one of the greatest gifts of recovery.

Today I will express my gratitude in the most fundamental NA way: I will seek opportunities to help another member. I want to keep what I have, so I can continue to give it away.

The Practicality of Step Three

Many of us believe that every day we abstain from using, or take suggestions from our sponsor, we are taking practical action on our decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of our Higher Power.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step Three, “Turning It Over”

Sometimes we get anxious about how we’re faring in recovery. Are we doing enough to stay clean? Is our concept of a Higher Power crystal clear? Have we struck the right balance of NA versus life responsibilities? When was the last time we reached out to a newcomer—like *really* made an effort? “Stop trying to do it perfectly,” a member suggests. “Just stop and turn it over.”

Just turn it over. Just?!

The concept of “turning it over” to our Higher Power can be a tough one for many of us. We can be confused about what the “it” is that we’re turning over, who/what we’re turning it over to, and what “turning it over” is in the first place. Luckily, we have plenty of opportunities to explore this concept in recovery—we can answer all the questions in our *Step Working Guides*, we can discuss it with our sponsor, we can ask other members we trust about their experience, we can devour every passage on the Third Step to be found in NA literature.

But let’s all just take a moment and consider this: Since we are reading these words right now, we are clearly taking a practical action of turning our will over. Whether alone or with a group, we are in our Higher Power’s will at this very second as we take in this moment. This is all-inclusive, whether we have tons of time clean or are wrestling with our recent relapse. Right now, as we are reading these words or hearing them read aloud by another member, we are having a spiritual experience. We don’t have to force it or define it or wonder about it or control it. We can just reflect on it.

So simple. So practical.

Right here, right now, in this moment, I’m applying the spiritual principle of practicality. I don’t have to do anything else except acknowledge it.

Powerlessness Opens the Door

When we admit our powerlessness and our inability to manage our own lives, we open the door to recovery.

—Basic Text, Chapter 4, “Step One”

Practicing powerlessness as a spiritual principle may seem far-fetched to many of us. Admitting defeat is a concept we’re very uncomfortable with. But what’s ironic is that we’re already practicing powerlessness to some extent by attending our first NA meeting. And, even before that, very likely we’ve had our moments of crying out to *something* to stop this madness, this pain, begging to get well, pleading to finally get to sleep, fearing the sun coming up or going down again, promising and bargaining another time, the *last* time, we swear it!

The surrender of Step One is often terrifying for us because it’s a threshold we can’t easily back away from once we make ourselves truly vulnerable to it. Try as some of us might, we can’t put the toothpaste back in the tube: We can’t return to using and just forget that people like us are staying clean in NA. We admit that we’re addicts, that we’re powerless over our addiction, and that we cannot manage our own lives. We need power to survive, and we gain it with the help of other recovering addicts, a program, and a Higher Power.

Practicing powerlessness is not a one-time occurrence; we are faced with embracing it over and over again. “No, we *get* to do it over and over,” a member reminds us from the podium. “I used to feel so defeated by my powerlessness. But now that I have experienced some relief from active addiction and the benefits of getting this honest about my life, I see it as a source of strength and possibility: the possibility of recovery and a better life.”

Yes, we open the door to recovery. On some days, that door is flung wide open because we are wide open. On other days we can only muster a crack to let a bit of willingness flow out and our Higher Power flow in.

It’s a relief to admit I’m powerless over my addiction—in whatever form it takes. I’ll ask for help because my real power comes when I surrender.

Reliability Matters

We keep our commitments, and that matters to the people around us.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, “For Groups”

For some of us, being a member of an NA group gives us our first taste of what it feels like to be reliable. When we are new, members urge us to come to the next meeting and come back clean. Group members remember us, seem happy to see us, ask us to share or take a commitment. We keep coming back—and whether we like it or not, people begin to rely on us. “I was excited to be trusted by group members to carry on the work,” a member shared. “My end of the bargain was to do the work and serve the entire term.”

Even when we don’t complete our service as reliably as we would expect of ourselves, serving in NA helps us get better, especially because we start to see the value of our contributions. “Our group created some service positions for newer members to get them involved,” a group wrote. “When people miss the meeting, it’s not a big deal. All the tasks get done. But the meeting feels so much more complete when everyone is there, doing their part. It’s like music . . . you might not notice one or two voices missing from a choir, but when they’re all there, it just sounds so much better.”

Our families and friends might feel a little skeptical or surprised about our developing reliability. It’s discouraging when people don’t believe in us the way our fellow members do, but it’s our actions that matter. One member wrote, “I heard someone say that 90 percent of recovery is showing up—bring the body and the mind will follow. That helped me show up for my commitment, and I used it to help me be there for my family and my job, too. People started to count on me. I began to feel like I mattered.” Keeping our commitments changes the way people see us, but more importantly, it changes the way we see ourselves.

Reliability begins with showing up. I will show up for my life today, secure in the knowledge that I matter to others and to myself.

Moving through Recovery with Grace

When dancers move through space with intention and beauty, we say they are graceful. In the same way, when we move through our lives with intention and gratitude, we demonstrate grace; when we crash from one self-willed experience to another, creating damage and confusion, we are disgraceful.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Awakenings”

“Disgraceful?” That’s a bit harsh! But if we’re using dance as a metaphor for how we move about our lives, then all that crashing and thrashing will certainly result in injuries and, very likely, several of the other dancers in the company (family, NA members, coworkers) will get hurt as well.

If we extend the metaphor further, the NA program is our choreography—Steps, how perfect! We dance all twelve seriously and in order, with intention and purpose. We attend meetings and do service (more choreography). We listen to and are moved by the music (our literature, the shares in meetings). We attend to rhythm, pace, and breath (spiritual principles) to stay on track. We are the artists, so each of us develops our own unique interpretation of the dance. We recovering addicts are always honing our craft, interpreting, trying to serve the higher purpose of staying clean, practicing principles, and guiding newer dancers through the Steps. Grace(fulness) works when we work it.

But who is the choreographer in this metaphor? Is it our Higher Power, our sponsor, our predecessors? Perhaps a combination of all three, depending on the particular dance. It doesn’t matter who—as long as it isn’t our egos. When that takes over, and we worry about what the audience thinks of us, rather than focusing on the art of living clean, that’s when we stumble or miss our Steps—and, yeah, then we get kind of disgraceful. That’s what got us in this dance company in the first place, isn’t it?

I may not always strike the right rhythm in recovery, but when my focus is more on serving a greater purpose than having things my own way, I still might fall—but will ultimately land on my feet, like a cat. But that’s a metaphor for another day.

MARCH

Self-Acceptance and Our Sense of Belonging

We learn to accept and love who we are whether or not we feel like we “match” the people around us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to Others”

For so long, we wanted to be anyone else because we were uncomfortable in our own skin. Many of us felt like we didn’t fit in anywhere. And it’s no different when we first get to NA. We compared our insides to the outward appearances of others and drew the usual conclusions. All we could see were the differences—and no one looked like we felt. Not that we had a firm grip on who we were or even how we felt.

As we observe in *Living Clean*, “. . . our identity was built on fantasy: who we could be, would be, should be, or even who we used to be.” With precious little self-knowledge, it was difficult to build the bonds of human connections. Our ability to share with or relate to others was limited at best. We justified keeping other members at arm’s length with assumptions based on old thinking and outward appearances. The outsides were what seemed to matter most. One member shared, “I shielded the scared little girl inside with spikes and leather. I looked for others with similar armor, thinking maybe we could be alone together.”

In recovery, we learn to act our way into better thinking. We begin by emulating people we admire and picking up new behaviors that seem to fit. We do the next right thing, knowing that we don’t have to feel okay to be okay. We learn to practice love as a spiritual principle by simply listening to our fellow members.

Sometimes, we learn to love and accept others as they confront their greatest challenges—the new member, the recent widow, the cancer survivor, the parents fighting for custody of their children. We relate to their insides: their grief, their struggle, their vulnerability as they share their pain. Moments like these bring us back to humanity. The conditions of our own brokenness may have been vastly different, but we connect based on feelings.

We let go of our old ideas about fitting in or “matching” those around us. The basis for our connections shifts to higher ground. Who needs to *fit in* when we *belong*? We learn to practice love and acceptance of ourselves and others a little more fully in this safe harbor of belonging.

*I will examine my ideas about fitting in and discard some old thinking. Today
I will practice the principle of love by looking for opportunities to connect
with other members.*

2 MARCH

Vigilance in Balance

We hang on fiercely, mistaking the attempt to control all the variables in our lives for vigilance in our recovery.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Growing Pains”

As with character assets or defects, many spiritual principles have a flip side. Too much of a good thing can take us down an unintended path. Ideally, practicing vigilance is being reflective and real about our progress, monitoring our program’s balance with outside responsibilities, and keeping an eye out for possible danger zones. But if we turn the vigilance coin over, we may find ourselves being fearful of change once again or desperately trying to puzzle out all possible scenarios of a situation before it even happens. “I look at vigilance like a fence to protect myself from danger,” a member quipped. “I know I’m getting out of hand, hypervigilant even, when I’m constantly repainting the fence, fortifying it with more and more materials so that I can’t see out and no one can see in, and then patrolling the perimeter 24/7. All I need, really, is the fence.”

Vigilance does not equal control. It’s an awareness we can practice daily, reminding us of the severity of this disease and of the horrors of our last days of using. And, of course, this awareness extends beyond the past to our present: No matter how much time we have clean, we best serve our recovery and our well-being if we remain open and flexible. We keep members close who will help keep us accountable by alerting us if our fence has come down too low or is built too high to let anyone in.

Even though we’re clean today, we’re still powerless over many things. We don’t do ourselves any favors by having unrealistic expectations or being overly watchful of how others are working their program. We’re not failing if we stray from practicing principles perfectly. We can’t build an impenetrable fortress against danger, challenges, or change. Our goal is to stay clean today, take action on what’s in front of us, and stay out of the result.

I will make sure to temper my vigilance with surrender, willingness, and open-mindedness. I’ll take care of my “fence”—but I won’t obsess about it. Not today, anyway.

Interdependence and Our Primary Purpose

The group depends on its members, and members depend on the group being true to its purpose.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Five, “Spiritual Principles”

Our interdependence and its significance become clear when we reflect on our group-level service. We come to see how our primary purpose feeds our mutual needs. “I need the group and the group needs me,” as one member put it. Taken together, our individual contributions create a fertile atmosphere in which recovery blossoms. And we bloom, too, as our support for the necessary tasks of maintaining a group elevates our personal recovery.

Our own gut instinct may inspire some of us to get involved in service. For others, being cornered by a seasoned home-group member who doesn’t let us run away after the “We’re having a business meeting today!” announcement provides the inspiration. No matter what gets us to our first group business meeting—or any other service meeting—NA service can teach us a great deal about interdependence. As a group, we can’t function without members performing necessary tasks. As individuals, contributing to those tasks improves our own functioning and emboldens us to recruit others to help carry the message. Offering our time, effort, attention, perspectives—and cornering other members—keeps us alive and focused on our primary purpose.

“I had less than two months clean when I went to my first group business meeting,” an addict shared. “The group was voting on motions for the World Service Conference, and they asked my opinion, saying the newcomer perspective was important. It occurred to me that there were home groups like this all around the world, talking about the same issues and sharing their perspectives—I felt connected to NA in a big way.”

Whether discussing global issues in the Fellowship or local ones, our voices as members and as groups are important. Each segment of our Fellowship does its part so that we, as members, have a place to share in carrying the message of hope and recovery. Our common welfare benefits from every contribution we make and every commitment we undertake. Embracing interdependence energizes unity and vitalizes our own well-being.

At any given moment, a newcomer or seasoned member somewhere is experiencing the same message that saved my life. In NA service, I am a part of that.

Connecting with Our Creativity and Higher Power

Living fully is a creative expression of love for our Higher Power. To be fully alive, awake, and honest about who we are is a gift to us and from us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Creative Action of the Spirit”

The longer we stay clean, the richer our lives become. We pursue our passions and take them where they lead us. For some of us, that means we go to school, launch careers, and start families. Others fall in love, serve our communities, and finally have time to plant a garden or take a road trip. The journey to unearth these passions—whatever they may be—is like an archeological dig. We excavate our personal creativity, an attribute long lost and forgotten, buried in the wreckage of our active addiction.

Our relationship with a Higher Power gives us the courage to discover and embrace our true selves and give voice to our dreams. The journey through the Steps shapes our understanding of our Higher Power and ourselves. We learn who we are and who we’re not and how to put one foot in front of the other to become who we want to be. We let go of old identities that no longer suit us. Our survival no longer depends on pushing people away. We’re free to be our authentic selves and ready to explore all of the quirky weirdness that entails. We often find kindred spirits in the rooms, other members who are just as excited as we are about classic cars, comic books, yarn crafts, independent films, obscure festivals, or any other interest we can imagine.

We are no longer merely surviving our circumstances. In fact, we are full of life and wide awake to experience all that the world has to offer. One of the greatest gifts in recovery is the ability to embrace ourselves for who we are and open our hearts to those around us.

I will explore opportunities to share myself in my NA community in creative ways and strengthen my relationship with my Higher Power in the process.

5 MARCH

Free to Simply Be

Letting go of the idea that we have to understand why things happen or how it all works frees us to have a spiritual experience without wondering if we're doing it right.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to a Higher Power”

Addicts are perceptive people, or so we like to think. When we were using, we could go somewhere we'd never been and easily find either a way to get drugs or someone to use with. Our intuitions and insights often serve us well in recovery, especially as the Steps help us to improve our ability to discern between the voice of self-will and that of conscience. Learning the difference can be a challenge since the disease talks to us in our own voice. Freedom from our disease depends on it. With practice and the help of other recovering addicts, we improve our connection to our intuition and our conscience. We gain the freedom to make better choices, and our lives improve.

Trusting in the process—and in our conscience—can be scary. How can putting down the drugs make the obsession go away? How can we be sure our sponsor won't share our inventory with everyone? What happens if we let go of that defect that has been protecting us? We just don't like not knowing.

Step Two in our Basic Text tells us, “We can use this Power long before we understand it.” One member shared, “I've been staying clean on a Higher Power that I don't understand for over 25 years, and I'm starting to get okay with never knowing. It still works!”

No matter how perceptive we are, our perception is limited. There are wavelengths of light not visible to the human eye, pitches of sound not perceptible to the human ear. We cannot know the totality of things. When we get okay with not knowing, we can shift our focus to what we do feel, sense, and perceive in the present. We are free to be right here, right now.

It's okay if I don't know. I will enjoy the freedom to just be.

6 MARCH

Honesty and Reality

Honesty is a commitment to reality.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, “In Service”

If honesty really is a commitment to reality, then we addicts definitely need help in this arena. Many of us gamed reality for as long as we can remember. A member shared, “We tend to not see things as they are. We see them as *we* are.” Often our version of the past isn’t necessarily reliable. Today we can be confused about how much to say that’s on our minds and who to say it to—and then end up oversharing or being needlessly brutal in our truth-telling.

By working the Twelve Steps, we address our past and present commitment to reality. Through that process, one truth becomes apparent: No matter how hard we try, we can’t make something true that isn’t. Denial can be fierce and keep us running for years, but ultimately, it’s not more powerful than reality. The member quipped, “Reality will always catch up with you. Hopefully it’s just your spouse, a government agency, or a pair of handcuffs, not the morgue.”

We carry our commitment to reality with us as home-group members and in service. Tradition One tells us to consider NA’s common welfare, not just our own. Our commitment to reality can be complicated by having to consider the realities of our fellow group members. Does this mean then that we’ll all have the same perspective on how to put our common welfare first? In a word, no. But what we *can* do is stay committed to spiritual principles in our group work.

There will be communication problems and differences of opinion. We can start by being real about that and accepting our responsibility as committed NA members to face these challenges. As individuals, we can commit to admitting when we’re wrong or when we don’t know something. We can be candid about caring deeply about the outcome of a particular decision. We can be real about the fact that we don’t remember every single detail about the past and we can’t predict the future.

When we can make an honest self-assessment and realize that our self-centeredness is working against our desire to serve, then we have taken a great step toward shedding our denial and embracing reality.

*Today I acknowledge my commitment to seeking and expressing the truth,
respecting others’ perspectives, and staying real.*

7 MARCH

Maturity in Recovery

As we learn to show up without anger, resentment, or fear, we develop an emotional maturity that we might not have expected.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Family”

There’s a saying about addicts that makes sense to many of us: “Our emotional maturity was halted at the age we were when we began using.” Although this idea is by no means provable, it may be useful in examining our behavior. Most of us can identify some pretty immature responses to life in our using days and early recovery—lashing out, taking everything personally, and worrying about what others think of us. Even for those of us with time in recovery, our prehistoric brain still has its moments of *eat or be eaten*. We can react to situations, especially in family relationships, rather childishly at times, no matter how much cleantime we have.

Science has volumes to say about how our brains and, thus, our behaviors have been affected by family relationships, abandonment and neglect, traumatic experiences, and drug use. Though Narcotics Anonymous doesn’t weigh in on scientific findings, many members seek help from practitioners who do. Do some of us find outside help beneficial? Absolutely. Is it sufficient for our recovery from addiction? Not in our experience. Although we have no opinion on other paths to wellness, we subscribe to the spiritual solution that NA offers us: working the Twelve Steps.

Through stepwork, we identify our role in past conflicts in relationships and gain a better understanding of our tendencies toward self-centeredness. We examine what still provokes us today, causing us to act out in our current relationships with other recovering addicts, family members, and people outside of NA. No doubt, we have ample opportunities to amend our behavior. Perhaps most consequentially, we learn to focus on being of service to others as a strategy to stop our adolescent self-obsession in its tracks.

No matter what age we were when we first picked up, we’re all works in progress. If we stay, we can grow. If we stay, we can *grow up*.

I am by no means a finished product, but today I will try to counteract my reactivity in relationships by coming from a place of openness, acceptance, and courage.

Responsibility, No Matter Our Cleantime

We sometimes belittle the struggles we face as “gold-plated problems,” but if we ignore them we may get a “gold-plated” relapse.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Finding Our Place in the World”

In Narcotics Anonymous, our primary purpose is to carry the message to the still-suffering addict. Cleantime doesn't make us immune to pain or problems, so any of us is eligible to be that addict on any given day.

But what if the message seems to apply less to us than it used to? We get some time under our belts and our lives are progressing well. We acquire some of the trappings we associate with being a productive member of society. When our outsides look great and our cleantime anniversaries stack up, are our problems really that bad when we compare them to when we were using? *Nah, we're fine.*

Quality problems. Luxury problems. Cadillac problems. Gold-plated problems. We've heard them all. But what we've also heard time and again is what happens when we don't deal with our problems. While our struggles today may look different from the ones we had while using or in early recovery, our disease remains the same. Left unchecked, it may lead us to relapse or to the all-too-familiar abstinent but miserable. Having time clean doesn't give us an excuse to avoid our problems, deny they exist, or be too ashamed to do anything about them. Yes, the newcomer is the most important person in the meeting, and there are others seemingly in worse shape than us who need our help. But belittling our own struggles helps no one in the end. Pain is pain, no matter who we are or where we are in our recovery. Just like at the beginning of our journey, we're likely to avoid our pain and our problems because we want to avoid taking responsibility. Change is hard.

Luckily for us, the solution is still the same NA solution. Ultimately, we have to apply what we've learned in the past: We are addicts trying to stay clean a day at a time and worthy of compassion and support from our fellow NA members. Like always, it is our own responsibility to own up to our struggles, to ask for and accept help, to reengage with recovery, and to take action. Those solutions aren't gold-plated; they're solid gold.

Today I won't minimize my problems to avoid coming up with a solution. I won't put myself in a different category from other members. We are all the same, and we all need help sometimes. The solution is the same no matter how long I've been around here.

9 MARCH

One Addict Helping Another in Unity

Groups flourish with the loving support of addicts helping addicts. We strengthen our unity by participating in each other's recovery.

—It Works, Tradition One

After living in turmoil and fear for so long, the warm and welcoming atmosphere we found in NA meetings may have been puzzling at first. Some of us wondered if we were in the wrong place. We watched as members jumped in to help set up chairs and greeted each other with hugs. This behavior was unfamiliar and yet strangely compelling. Despite our suspicions, we wanted to find out more.

Some of us looked for excuses to leave or for reasons that we didn't belong but found ourselves relating nevertheless. One member recalled, "I heard the speaker share about the despair that brought her to rock bottom. She gave voice to my own fears and regrets. It was a moment of clarity for me: I was not alone in my struggles."

It dawns on us that NA members understand the desperation and isolation of active addiction because they've lived it. They found a way out and a new way to live. We begin to hope that the solution they found would work for us too.

Over time, we come to appreciate what once confused us. We grow to value what we see and hear in meetings. We follow the lead of more experienced home-group members and participate in some of our meetings' unity-building practices: We welcome new members, empathize with each other's struggles, and celebrate the milestones of recovery. We notice what unity does for individual members as well as for the group—the way we treat each other contributes to a vibrant atmosphere of recovery in which members and groups thrive.

Group unity starts with one addict helping another. I will be a part of group unity by offering loving support to a fellow member today.

10 MARCH

Finding Accountability in Others' Insights

We choose [our] mirrors carefully, seeking those we can trust to be honest, helpful, and kind.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Anonymity”

There are loads of reasons to keep coming back to NA. The fact that we can't do this alone tops the list for many of us. We need each other. As our Basic Text puts it, “We are each other's eyes and ears.” When we share with others in NA, we get to learn from their valuable experience and get their perspective on ours. Their take helps us better understand the past and gives us a new vantage point on what we're doing now. Objectivity is an acquired skill. When we share honestly with our fellow recovering addicts, we can see our behavior more clearly in their reflections. We begin to gain some accountability.

Asking for such insights can make us feel quite vulnerable. One member wrote, “My outsides were suiting up and showing up while my insides remained aloof. ‘Undercover isolation’ became a way of life. I couldn't find my way out on my own.” We find people we can trust and choose to confide in them, returning again and again to those who offer the insights we're seeking. It's what we mean when we tell newcomers to “stick with the winners!” Beyond simple abstinence, we need people who are real with us—and help us get real, too.

When we surround ourselves with people who are living the program, our lives improve. One member shared, “I developed a support system, and that system of support developed me!” We need people to tell us the truth when we can't see it ourselves. Sometimes the clarity starts the minute we begin to open our mouths. “It sounded good in my head,” one addict shared, “but before I could even say it out loud to my sponsor, I realized it was total BS!”

To stay clean, I need a clear reflection. Who are my most trustworthy mirrors today?

Forgiving Our Imperfections

Recognizing our own humanness gives us the capacity to forgive others and not be as judgmental as we have been in the past.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step Nine, “Spiritual Principles”

By working Steps Four through Eight, we confront the person who’s kept our lives in turmoil: “Oh no, it’s *me!*” In this rigorous process, we face our disease and our humanity. We unpack and pick apart lifelong grudges and current resentments against people who hurt, judged, and rejected us. Often, we’re shocked to learn we had a significant part to play. Engaging fully in the recovery process gives us a more realistic awareness of our flaws and limitations. We see a connection between our acting out and our very human need for safety, love, and acceptance. We learn that a lack of empathy for our own missteps has driven our judgments of others. Our capacity to forgive is inseparable from our capacity for empathy.

In the Ninth Step, we strive to make peace with our own humanness. We expose our imperfections to those we’ve hurt. In an attempt to right our past wrongs, we humbly apologize. We change our behavior so we won’t repeat past errors. We’re often—but certainly not always—forgiven for the harm we’ve caused. This process offers us a striking lesson in empathy.

Acknowledging and accepting our own imperfections is key to accepting imperfections in others. We forgive ourselves for the times we let self-centered fear guide our actions. Instead of judging others for similar impulses, we can choose to forgive them, actively seeking to accept them as they are.

Experiencing others’ judgment and rejection—both in everyday life and when our attempt at making amends is rebuffed—increases our capacity to feel empathy and to forgive others. Our own pain becomes a source of strength, and we can draw from the well of self-acceptance we’ve created through our experience with the Steps.

Today I will take a “balcony view” of my judgments of others. Instead of cataloging their flaws, I will acknowledge their humanness because I’m also human and worthy of empathy.

Humility and Sticking to the Basics

A hard lesson in humility reminds us that we never graduate. When we stop practicing the basics, we are in trouble.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Getting Out of Our Own Way”

In active addiction, we were convinced that we had all the answers. This arrogance kept us in the dark and might have killed us if we hadn’t found NA. As newcomers, desperation forces us to unlock the door to humility. At that threshold, we learn to ask for help and take suggestions.

The basics—meetings, sponsor, Steps, service, NA literature, Higher Power, not picking up no matter what—are the same for all of us. Our literature offers abundant and simple advice for what we must do to get humble and stay clean. In meetings, we frequently hear members recount their version of “I relapsed because I stopped doing the basics.” Our fellows continually tell us there’s no finish line in NA, no graduation. We believe all this. The stories we hear in the rooms are the evidence. So, we soldier on with the basics.

Until life gets in the way. The good stuff: We’re housed, out of prison, making money, parenting again, in love. We graduate (from school!). Staying connected to NA becomes harder. Those basics are time-consuming, and time is scarce these days. The arrogance we banished creeps back in. *We got this! We did the work! Having just one can’t hurt, right?* We are in trouble.

How much trouble we get in depends on how willing we are to get back to the basics. We don’t have to destroy our lives and lose everything. We can become teachable again and rediscover our spiritual center. We can call a fellow addict, show up at our home group, say “What’s up?” to our Higher Power.

We’ve heard, “If I never leave the basics, I never have to get back to them.” It means more now.

Which of “the basics” are lacking in my program? What am I willing to do today to change that?

13 MARCH

Securing the Bond of Solidarity

An NA group reinforces the solidarity of its members and the foundation of their continued recovery by declining outside contributions.

—*It Works*, Tradition Seven

One way to define *solidarity* is standing together with others. The Seventh Tradition explains that one of the ways we do this is by taking care of NA together, in our own way. Declining outside contributions is bold—it means we rely on each other to step up and take responsibility for NA. The vitality of our groups and service bodies fully depends on the resources we contribute.

The bonds we share with other recovering addicts are unique; we have addiction and recovery in common, and yet sometimes we have very little else that connects us. Still, we are joined together in solidarity through the NA program. We don't recover alone, and every one of us received the message of recovery as a result of what other addicts gave to NA before we showed up. Practicing solidarity in NA is not just a feeling of commitment to our own group or local services. We stand in solidarity with those who aren't here yet—we stand for still-suffering addicts everywhere—when we take action to make sure they have a chance to experience our message in their own language and culture, just as we have.

In our groups, that means doing what we can to ensure the meetings remain open to anyone with a desire to stop using. Solidarity with our local service bodies means we support the efforts to ensure that local addicts can find NA. We practice solidarity with NA beyond our community by paying attention to the services that make our message more widely available and by contributing what we can to help fulfill the needs of all our services.

NA is here to ensure the message is available to anyone seeking recovery, around the corner or around the world. I will practice solidarity with still-suffering addicts by sharing what I can.

Commitment to Our Spiritual Well-Being

Continuing to take a personal inventory means that we form a habit of looking at ourselves, our actions, attitudes and relationships on a regular basis.

—Basic Text, Chapter 4, “Step Ten”

“I’m in big trouble when I start to think that I’ve arrived,” the speaker shared. “Lucky for all of us, I’m committed to the daily maintenance of my spiritual condition. I continue to take personal inventory, and that gives me regular reminders that I’m a work in progress.”

The Steps lower our tolerance for living an unexamined life. Once we’ve seen the benefits of regular introspection, we can’t un-know what we’ve learned about ourselves or forget the fulfillment we find in this NA way of improvement. To turn our backs on this path creates discomfort, and our patience for that sort of spiritual pain is not what it used to be—and that’s a good thing! We commit to taking stock of our part in every situation and recommit as often as necessary when we let the pace of modern life squeeze out time for contemplation.

Some would say this commitment is the practical exam for our recovery. We need introspection to grow the way that seeds need soil, sun, and water. Understanding the strengths of our character as well as our vulnerabilities, being aware of our motives, striving to do the right thing, and being willing to make amends when we do harm—all of this is fodder for our personal inventories. As one member noted, “My five favorite character defects may never disappear entirely, but regular inventories help me to see them coming.” With that, we can humbly ask for their removal—yes, again—and in that moment, avoid acting out, harming our relationships, and feeling ashamed. Self-reflection pays off. This makes us willing to commit.

How am I still tending to my spiritual well-being? Am I still finding my part in situations that trouble me? Do I need to recommit?

15 MARCH

Goodwill and a Sense of Purpose

It's not selfish to know that having a purpose makes us feel better. If we are acting in goodwill—doing the right thing for the right reasons—we are sure to benefit.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Principles, Practice, and Perspective”

Before we started using, many of us dreamt of what we might become when we grew up and what direction life might take us in. Active addiction dampened any vision we may have had for ourselves in the future. We spent all of our time pursuing selfish desires to escape reality. The world became very small with each day planned around how and when we would get high.

In recovery, we begin to see the big picture outside of ourselves. After clearing the wreckage of our addiction, most of us begin to feed our spirits in ways that help us connect to the world around us: acts of generosity, creativity, and community building. Searching for meaning and purpose in our lives becomes a part of our spiritual journey.

Discovering a sense of purpose can be pivotal in our recovery. We begin to find meaning in helping others. We offer kindness and compassion to others, and, in return, we experience an unparalleled sense of joy and happiness. This reciprocal relationship is the essence of goodwill, feeding our spirit and the spirits of those we serve.

Being of service in Narcotics Anonymous and showing up with integrity can pave the road out of self-obsession and into a more optimistic sense of self. As we start to show up for ourselves and others, we begin to feel better and enjoy a newfound sense of purpose. When we take a moment to look at how our efforts help others, we begin to discover who we were meant to be all along.

To connect with myself, I will look for ways to connect with others. I will develop my character by pursuing my purpose, keeping integrity and goodwill at the forefront of my actions.

16 MARCH

Accepting That I'm Not Always Right

If we notice that we are the lone voice on every issue, we may want to consider the utility of acceptance and surrender as spiritual principles.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Two, Opening Essay

It's hard being right all the time. What makes it more difficult is that people don't seem to notice how right I am!

Before recovery, we were completely resistant to others' perspectives, especially about what we were doing with our lives: *my life, my choices*. Sometimes we'd pretend to hear someone out. *Yes, great idea. I will apply for that job tomorrow*. But we'd hit up the dealer instead.

Then we get clean, and there's an expectation that we take suggestions from more experienced members. *Yes, great idea. I will get a commitment tomorrow*. And we actually do! We even join a home group and are excited to participate in the monthly business meetings. We have some great ideas that will improve this group! First off, the IPs should be racked in numerical order. Secondly, the refreshments cost too much; we know where we can get cheaper stuff. And about that meeting format: Our area has too many literature studies!

There are exactly zero supporters of our proposed overhaul. Actually, there are other proposals on the table the group favors. *Those won't work, we think*. The group feels differently and votes accordingly. The meeting continues to thrive. *What do I do now?* We consult with a member we kind of trust. "Accept it and move on," they respond.

The concept of a group conscience is foreign to many of us, especially one expressed through a loving Higher Power. As NA members, we all get to have our perspectives heard. With practice, we even start to see the wisdom in others' ideas. For some of us, our acceptance only goes as far as this: *Their ideas are almost as good as mine!*

Today I can let go of some of my attachment to being right and accept the group's conscience. I will say, "Yes, great idea" to someone else and do my best to mean it.

17 MARCH

Service Is Spirituality in Action

When we engage in selfless service, we find that all of the principles we have come to love and learn are called upon. It isn't easy to get out of our own way, but that is precisely what frees us from our self-made prisons.

—Living Clean, Chapter 3, "Spirituality in Action"

We hear a lot about the interpersonal difficulties that arose in that infamous NA business meeting. Perhaps too much is made of those times when there was too much talking (or shouting) and not enough listening, when fists flew or chairs were flung. *Well, someone around here sure needs to practice some principles!* we think. But sometimes the most pronounced ego in the room isn't an overtly sensitive newcomer's or that revered oldtimer's—some tender soul who surely needs to practice unity, patience, and understanding. Sometimes the ego that's a ticking time bomb is ours. We are the ones other members put on their resentment lists and whose sponsors advise, "Pray for them."

And being a sponsor will undoubtedly require practicing willingness, empathy, and acceptance. We worry that if we say, "Yes, I'll sponsor you," we'll mess them up worse. We're afraid of being too judgmental or not attentive enough. What if they lie to us? What if they won't do what we suggest? What if they think we suck as a sponsor and break up with us? We want to deflect the request but do it in an enlightened manner: "You'll be better off with a sponsor who can get out of their own way." Instead, we agree because that's how we were taught and that's how we want to live now.

Frankly, no one among us is able to practice principles in all of our affairs every minute of every day, from now until we are buried with the infinity medallion. But giving of ourselves—our time, energy, passion, and skills—opens us up to endless opportunities to get out of our own way. Our character defect of selfishness takes a back seat to the spiritual principle of compassion for others. We practice courage and vulnerability by committing to something we've never done before. We practice surrender when we take someone through the Twelve Steps. Humility comes up, too—and forgiveness—when someone we trust tells us the truth about how we behaved inappropriately in a business meeting.

Today I will take stock of the spiritual principles I'm practicing in my service commitments. If service is not currently part of my program, I'll practice accountability, participation, and discipline, and get on it!

18 MARCH

Thoughtful Awareness, Thoughtful Action

We become increasingly aware of our choices, our motives, and our behavior. . . . we recognize the difference between thinking through to a decision and reacting or acting on impulse.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Conscious Contact”

Pre-NA, many of us flew by the seat of our pants when it came to making choices. Being self-aware and thoughtful of others was as low on the priority list as our impulses would allow. Now we have a chance to be more aware and thoughtful about our decision making and its effect on relationships.

To act thoughtfully, it’s a good idea to assess where our thoughts are coming from. And in recovery, we have many assessment tools at our disposal: Are we impulsively heeding our first thought, or a more measured second (or third or fourth) thought that has been supported by taking a moment to breathe? Are we listening to our conscience or our disease? Are we acting out of love or out of fear, for the benefit of our ego or for the benefit of others? For many of us, the metaphorical cliché of “hitting the pause button” works wonders—and can certainly reduce the chances of pressing the other button: the one that blows things up.

Thoughtfulness goes beyond simple awareness. We consider the reality of a situation and who it’s affecting besides ourselves, and then we act on the awareness we’ve gained—especially when we’re feeling intolerant or indifferent. Luckily, we also have our sponsor, other NA members, and our Higher Power to consult so that we can determine our motives and discern between rational and irrational actions. We can help each other widen our perspectives and keep us more on a path of kindness, compassion, and goodwill. The more deliberate we can be in the moment, the more thoughtful our actions can be. We can’t premeditate outcomes, nor can we completely avoid others being angered or disappointed by us. But at least we can live better with the decisions we make because we know we did our best to be thoughtful.

*I will use all tools at my disposal to try to behave in a thoughtful manner.
When that seems impossible, I can resist the urge to act and wait until the
emotional storm passes.*

19 MARCH

Feeling Connected, Finding Community

We feel a real connection with others, knowing that we're all subject to the same insecurities and failings and that we all have dreams for the future.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step Seven, “Preparing to Work Step Seven”

When we attend loads of meetings and work the NA program, the bonds of kinship and connection are part of the package deal. These are some of the perks of membership.

Meeting attendance teaches us to show up, to listen, and to be helpful. It turns out that these same activities nurture our connections and give us opportunities to relate to each other. Meetings have a way of counteracting the obstacles to connection. That sense of isolation and loneliness—a constant companion when we were using—can't withstand the antidote we hear repeated in meetings: *You're not alone. We're glad you're here. Welcome home. We love you.*

We show up for meetings, for life, for each other. We learn to be present and to listen, really listen. We focus on each speaker as best we can, even sitting up front to help limit distractions when suggested by a knowing sponsor. Paying full and careful attention to each member's share is a gift we give ourselves and to others. As we empathize with our shared struggles, we find connection. And as we celebrate each other's victories as if they are our own, we find community.

By being ourselves, we seed the ground for connecting with others. When fresh forms of unmanageability or familiar defects crop up, we share about them and find empathy. When fear suggests we stifle our ambitions, we talk it out and find encouragement. Stepwork clears out some of the static of addiction that can interfere with connectedness and helps us see that we're enough.

I will keep my mind and heart open to all of the ways my NA community draws me in today. I will appreciate our connectedness and encourage others to join in.

20 MARCH

Self-Support Beyond the Basket

When we see that we can meet our own needs, we start to feel like we have a future.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Seven, Opening Reflection

Active addiction was a dead-end circuit of dependence: our reliance on dope, on the lifestyle, on that person to front us some cash one last time so we could get on our feet. We took without giving. We talked without listening. We made a lot of promises but came through on very few, if any, of them. We couldn't see a way out or a future for ourselves—until we got clean and began our journey toward self-support in recovery.

When we consider self-support as a spiritual principle of Tradition Seven, we think mostly of giving money—or contributing our time—to make sure a group can survive. But an NA group exists because it's made up of members who are practicing self-support in their own lives. In recovery, we learn to invest in ourselves and take care of our own needs. Instead of utter dependence on others, we look inside to find a well of strength and resources.

We also take personal responsibility in situations where before it seemed that we were incapable of doing so. In fact, making our contributions to NA demonstrates our capacity and willingness to engage in self-support. We are investing in ourselves through our recovery community, participating in keeping the doors open for those who come after. This support of others keeps us aloft, keeps us going.

Self-support isn't something we practice alone. When we talk about taking care of our own needs, it doesn't mean we're self-sufficient. It means we're engaging the support we need. We can turn to our friends, a sponsor, our Higher Power—all of which are elements of self-support. We are an integral part of that system, too. Because we're meeting our own needs, others can finally rely on us.

I will practice self-support today by giving and receiving. If I stay on this path, I'll sustain the hope for a future I thought I'd never have

21 MARCH

Surrendering Our Reservations

In ridding ourselves of all reservations, we surrender. Then, and only then, can we be helped to recover from the disease of addiction.

—Basic Text, Chapter 4, “Step One”

We reserve a place for relapse when we keep a mental list of reasons that might justify using. We can tell they’re a problem because we defend and protect them. Our reservations reveal our doubts. Can we stay clean through the death of someone close, a breakup, a job loss, or any major life change?

As we watch other members walk through significant hardships and stay clean, we think maybe we could do the same. Seeing others choose to use when faced with unfortunate circumstances makes us wonder if they had held onto their reservations. We want to continue to recover, so we do our best to root out and surrender our reservations.

As we stay clean, we may find some reservations still lingering. The truth is that we can’t predict what challenges will arise. We never know what’s going to happen or how we’ll feel about it. This is a program for living, and challenges are bound to arise.

Surrender is just as crucial with some cleantime as when we were new. Eventually, we understand the value of surrendering our reservations to the best of our ability, and then surrendering some more when new issues come to the surface. Ongoing surrender gives us the best shot at recovering from this disease. We come to a place where we understand that no matter what experiences life may bring, none of them would improve if we were to use again.

I will keep surrendering reservations as they crop up and use the tools of recovery to stay clean despite life’s challenges.

Embracing Our Independence

We find that we can be happy in our own skin if we are willing to let go—not in the old sense of neglecting ourselves, but allowing ourselves to experience our freedom.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Letting Ourselves Go”

Independence comes in many forms in NA. The most obvious comes in the form of freedom from active addiction. Waiting to feel like we can truly make choices for ourselves, independent of our disease, can be like watching a pot before it boils. We get a little freedom when we stop using drugs, but we gain a greater sense of independence by actively participating in our new way of life. We go to meetings, share with other addicts, and read NA literature. Many of us have shared that we don’t even recall losing the desire to use. “I kept coming back, and I followed suggestions,” one member wrote. “At some point, I realized it had been weeks since the last time I felt like getting high.”

Independence in other areas often comes about in a similar way. Many of us had become dependent on so much more than just the substances we used. We relied on defense mechanisms, escapist behaviors, antisocial tendencies, and much more. We may have relied on others to steer our life choices, even in recovery. Steps Six and Seven help us break our dependence by showing us what keeps us from making our own choices. An addict shared about gaining independence by asking, “What would my life look like if I weren’t afraid?”

Practicing independence allows us to be creative. “In early recovery, freedom sometimes felt like a punishment or a chore because I didn’t know what to do with myself,” one member wrote. “Deciding to get serious about recovery was one of my first truly independent choices. I got the courage to take responsibility for my life, gain stability, become a part of society. I used to depend on others for everything. Now, people in my life can depend on me!”

Practicing independence helps us embrace our freedom. Rather than letting the open horizon scare me, I will take the wheel—and trust my Higher Power to navigate.

Gratitude for Our Common Solution

Gratitude and a sense of wonder change our perception.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, “For Members”

“You’re still alive!” she said, sounding, well, surprised. It can be a bit shocking to find one of our old running mates in the rooms of NA. “I mean, I’ve seen this thing work for lots of addicts, but *you*—you were hardcore.” We puff up as our selective memory kicks into gear. “I mean—*bloody hell*—you were a mess, love. But look at you now! Your mum must be so happy to have you back.” We feel another surge of pride, this time for our recovery.

The jolt of seeing someone who “knew us when” reminds us that we’ve come a long way. It’s also a good reminder of just how incredible this program is and how it really can work for *any* addict. No matter what drugs we took or where using them took us, there’s help available in NA.

Embracing this perspective makes it easier to set aside our differences and consider our common welfare first. Humility helps us see ourselves simply as members in a community of equals. Our gratitude speaks when we welcome the new member who made it to the rooms by way of a different route than the one we took. Regardless of how obvious or how well hidden our active addiction had been, we’ve found the same solution in Narcotics Anonymous.

“If NA can work for me, it can work for anybody,” our hardcore addict responds. “I didn’t want it to, but I’m so grateful that I proved myself wrong.” As we listen to each other’s stories, we’re reminded that NA is for any addict. When we tell our own, we remember where we came from and get glimpses of where we were headed. Letting go of our reservations about membership—our own and others’—makes it easier to surrender to the unity called for in our First Tradition.

With gratitude for the solution that can work for any addict who has the desire to stop using, we put unity first. We focus on what matters: this simple program that changes lives. Our gratitude for what the program has done for us as individuals is amplified when we think of NA’s transformative power in the lives of recovering addicts around the world.

I will reflect on my journey with gratitude today and take time to revel in the awe-inspiring diversity and expanding reach of this Fellowship.

Discernment Takes Practice

We learn to tell the difference between a principle we need to stand for and an opinion that we just won't let go of.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Awakening to Our Spirituality”

A lot of us have spent plenty of energy denying reality. We disconnected from our true feelings, avoided making decisions, and took actions that served our egos more than the truth. Many of us overvalued our own opinions—accepted them as irrefutable facts—and devalued others’ perspectives that didn’t match ours. Or the opposite was true: Opinions? Principles? We had none. Yours were fine.

We have our work cut out for us in recovery. We practice discernment as we make decisions and discern the motives behind our choices. Are we trying to stand up for principles, do what’s easy, or defend the way we’ve always done it? The context might make any or all of these the right choice. The quotation above begins with “we learn,” a reflection of our growth through practicing discernment. The learning comes from lived experience, meaning that we’ve caused or undergone pain, examined our mistakes, and figured something out—usually after many times through this cycle.

Sometimes we’re led by a gut feeling. We talk it over with our sponsor or others. We pray, meditate, and write about it. We read sections of NA literature seeking guidance. We do our best to evaluate how well a decision will positively affect our lives and those we love. Sometimes we just know what we know, without a doubt, because of a similar past experience. But all that searching and discerning is not a guarantee. We can do everything possible to make sure that we are standing on principles instead of opinions or ceremony—and still screw it up.

Discernment is exercising good judgment based on past experience and on guidance from each other—but we mostly find out how we did when looking back. All we can do is take action with good intention and let the cards fall where they may. The result isn’t ours to determine. Some stuff we just have to leave to our Higher Power.

With practice, I'll get better at discernment. I will do my best to make the most principled decision and later, with humility, find the lesson in however it turns out.

25 MARCH

Willingness Propels Us Forward

When we first begin to think about recovery, many of us either don't really believe it's possible for us or just don't understand how it will work, but we go ahead with the First Step anyway—and that's our first experience with willingness.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step One, “Spiritual Principles”

Early in our exposure to Narcotics Anonymous, many of us believe that mere abstinence will be enough. We tell a member who asks us if we've started working with a sponsor yet, “Oh, I'm fine as long as I'm not using. I don't want to do the Steps and have a sponsor and all that.”

The member asks, “Well, weren't you willing to do things you didn't really want to do to feed your addiction? So why not apply that logic to staying clean and read about the First Step?” Reason tells us that these are not parallel issues; we understand what we got out of getting high but are uncertain about what Step One would do for us. We don't say this, however, because we are sure this member will have an answer to that too.

“Okay, then,” the member says, wheels turning. “How about this: Are you willing to become willing?” As it turns out, we are—because we keep coming back.

Most of us do find that willingness to begin the next phase of our journey. For some, we quickly saw the evidence of recovery working in other members' lives. We actively wanted to move forward and were willing to do whatever it took. For others, willingness came when our discomfort outpaced our resistance. For still others, we found it only after going back out and using more.

Working on Step One and staring straight into the mirror of our unmanageability can elicit intense emotions: shame, regret, remorse, anger, fear, and doubt. In response, a member said, “The stuff of our past can either be weight or be fuel.” We don't want to be weighed down anymore, so we become willing to explore our burdens. We learn how to convert the pain of our past into fuel, and we use that fuel to propel ourselves further down the road toward freedom.

I don't want only to be abstinent. I want to recover. I'm willing to start or come back to Step One as often as is necessary to fuel my recovery.

Creating Safety for All Members

We do our best to safeguard those who are vulnerable without making others feel unwelcome.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Three, “For Groups”

Many NA members have a complicated relationship with the concept of safety. It can conjure up the idea of “playing it safe,” of being uncool. More profoundly, some of us come to NA never having known a real feeling of safety or having known it only to have it torn away. During our using days, we were rarely safe—even when alone in a room with ourselves. Sometimes we witnessed or experienced terrible things, and that suffering left its mark. So, how do we practice safety as a principle in NA? And how do we strive to create a safe atmosphere of recovery while standing firm on the Tradition Three proposal that all are welcome?

One member shared, “Safety to me means feeling truly at home in the world. I never felt that until I sat in an NA meeting.” That sense of belonging, of having found our people, is precious. Anonymity means we are all equal in NA, and we respect each other’s privacy, integrity, and choices. We protect our equality by doing our best to provide every desperate and vulnerable member a safe place to recover. Without some sense of safety, it’s hard to listen, even harder to participate, and our effectiveness in carrying our message of hope is diminished. A focus on safety enhances our groups’ stability by creating healthy places that neither tolerate predatory behavior nor drive out offending members. *Everyone* deserves a chance to recover.

At its best, NA provides an environment where we can *be* safe and eventually *feel* safe, too. This may be aspirational at times; creating a safe and welcoming atmosphere in our meetings often takes careful consideration and thoughtful action. When bullying, unwelcome sexual advances, or other disruptive behaviors threaten to undermine our safety, we invite a loving Higher Power to direct our group conscience. Together, we find the courage to safeguard against harmful behavior, extending the promise of recovery to both the vulnerable and those of us who are still learning a new way to move through the world. We trust the process and do the next right thing.

How am I participating in creating and maintaining a safe and welcoming environment for every addict seeking recovery?

Autonomy and Our Choices

We define ourselves by our choices.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to Others”

None of us chose to have the disease of addiction. We also didn’t choose our upbringing or the demographic groups we belong to, our identity or culture, or to have our particular set of character defects (and assets). These aspects of ourselves don’t tell our whole story, not nearly. This truth also doesn’t negate responsibility for our personal autonomy, our free will to make decisions that may in many ways be informed by these characteristics. Personal autonomy is having the capacity and willingness to act on our own behalf. As recovering addicts, our goal for personal autonomy is to have the capacity and willingness to do so while living by spiritual principles—as opposed to the self-centeredness that drove a lot of our decision making in active addiction.

Through the Twelve Steps of NA, we investigate the hand we were dealt and what we did with those cards. This work opens many doors for us to make self-aware choices that align with our true values and a higher purpose. “In Step Four, I had an epiphany many of us have, realizing that holding on to my resentments was a *choice* that was holding me back,” a member wrote. “And my experience with Step Seven shows me that when I’m about to act out on a shortcoming, I have a choice. For me, autonomy is that moment of grace where I pray, ‘Help me choose differently because I want to live differently.’”

We are as we do, not as we feel or think we are. We aren’t all our outsides or insides. We can be kind without feeling kind. We can feel kind and not act on it. Our choices reflect our priorities—how we treat the people in our lives (from our sponsor, to someone we want to date, to a server in a café), how we spend our time and money, how we act when no one’s looking. We’re no longer living by default or vicariously through others; we’ve carved out who we authentically are and can make choices that reflect that version of us. We are autonomous, responsible for our own feelings, words, and actions. And just as no one can “make” us do anything, we can’t make choices for others either.

My autonomy, my willingness. My choice. Now, what do I prioritize today that reflects how I want to live?

28 MARCH

Trust in Our Message and Our Bond

Over and over, we see members from rival nations or neighborhoods, from different faiths or families, come to love and trust each other in the rooms of NA.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Ten, Closing Reflection

Our Traditions enable NA to bring addicts from all walks of life together in a single Fellowship. We often remark how addiction does not discriminate, so neither should we. Tradition Three ensures an open policy of membership, and Tradition Ten helps us learn to leave our outside baggage at the door when we join together in recovery. Unity, anonymity, common welfare—our Traditions are rich with principles guiding us to better embrace one another “regardless of.”

It all sounds great in theory, but it’s the practice that really matters. As in NA, many other organizations value principles like unity and acceptance; they appear in their mission statements and may inspire principled actions to varying degrees. That, of course, is none of our business. We keep our focus where it should be: on what happens in NA. In our groups and service bodies, and as individuals, are we embodying the principles we hold dear? As we stay clean and carry the message, the connections between our experience as recovering addicts, our primary purpose, and NA unity become much clearer.

An H&I trusted servant wrote, “I served on a jail panel with a couple of other members, and we joked that we were like characters in a bad TV show—a former gang member, a retired cop, and me, a defense attorney. We shared together twice a month for a few years, and now we are bonded for life.”

No matter what our differences are, carrying the message joins us together in a special way. We addicts are uniquely qualified to help other addicts. We have been there! This helps newcomers trust our message—and grow to trust us, too—in spite of our surface-level differences. Sharing and serving together with other members helps us deepen that trust. Our message is truly a tie binding us together that is stronger than anything that might tear us apart.

*Carrying the message is a bond of sharing, serving, and recovering together.
I will trust in that bond with my fellow addicts today.*

29 MARCH

Hope Combats Our Fears

When we choose not to look through the lens of resentment and entitlement, we can see the world as it is and find beauty in it even when it's challenging. Each day is filled with opportunities either to escape reality or to show up and live.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Living Our Principles”

An old saying has it that “fear makes the wolf bigger than it is.” The howls of that big, bad, metaphorical wolf—symbolizing all of life’s challenges—threaten from a distance, even in recovery, making us susceptible to resentment. Our improved emotional health may even increase our awareness of the howling. Life can indeed be scary, but today we have tools and choices. We no longer have to live in terror. Recovery allows us to make peace with rational fears, to free ourselves from resentment, and to face life on its own terms.

As we work the Steps, we begin to recognize how fear shaped our responses to life, past and present. We see how we papered over our fear with resentment, fantasy, despair, anger, or a sense of entitlement. We learn how our shortcomings correlate with our fears, provoking us to push people away or hold them too close. We manipulated, bullied, or retreated from reality only to find ourselves increasingly isolated and our lives more and more unmanageable.

Although we’re clean today, fear still crops up. We hear that wolf howling: *Why me? Am I up to this task? Am I worthy of love?* Instead of shutting down or pushing back in the face of existential questions, recovery opens us up to a different approach. Our insecurities no longer have to dominate our outlook, direct our thinking, or dictate our behavior. We can be present in the struggle and find meaning and beauty as we meet life’s challenges with clarity and purpose.

Both hope and fear ask us to believe in something that hasn’t happened. Either can influence how we perceive our conditions and our future. To the best of our abilities, we choose hope. If fear makes the wolf seem bigger, then maybe we can say that hope tames the wolf. Life’s challenges are a little less intimidating when we allow hope to shape our view of the world and inform our responses.

I will face one of the metaphorical wolves in my life and let hope inspire courage and positive action.

Putting *We* Before *Me* with Anonymity

In keeping with Tradition Twelve, the “I” becomes “we.” The spiritual foundation becomes more important than any one group or individual.

—Basic Text, Chapter 6, “Tradition Twelve”

Thanks to the Twelve Traditions, everything that happens in NA is done by us and for us. A member who was a newcomer when the Basic Text was being written shared that this was one of the qualities of NA that made her stay: “At six months clean, I was in a group business meeting. We were discussing changes to the Basic Text, and the secretary made a point of asking me what I thought. I knew right away that NA was unique.”

Anonymity calls on us to try to remain anonymous in our service to NA, but it can sometimes be more difficult than it sounds. Members who have started a new meeting may end up hearing others call it “so-and-so’s meeting.” It can take a while to shake loose a label like that for the meeting, no matter how many times so-and-so says, “It’s the Just for Today meeting, not *my* meeting!”

Other times, we may feel less inclined to practice anonymity in our service. It’s easy to become very attached to a particular service position or role we have filled, and some of us become reluctant to allow others to step up and serve. “I had an H&I panel for almost a decade, and a member with five years clean showed up at a subcommittee meeting offering to take on a panel. The subcommittee chairperson looked right at me and asked if I was ready to practice the spirit of rotation. Although part of me resisted, I knew it was time.”

Groups and service bodies need anonymity, too. A member who served at the area level shared, “Our area nearly left our region over a resentment. The area spent hours debating a regional motion and sent in a strenuous ‘no’ vote. Then the region passed it anyway! We were mad, but our area discussed it again and decided that we needed our region more than we needed to be ‘right.’”

Anonymity sometimes just means being willing to let things go. We can be conscientious and take pride in contributing our best, but then we let go. We do our part, and then we let a power greater than ourselves manage the results.

My contributions to NA are important because they touch addicts’ lives. I can serve without insisting on getting my way, and I can step out of the way to give others a chance to serve, too.

Striking a Spiritual Balance

We remember to put our program first, and to respect our own limits. We strive every day to keep ourselves spiritually balanced.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Conscious Contact”

Addicts, in and out of recovery, are subject to thinking and acting in extremes. Many of us discover a need for personal limits by overdoing things. Even in recovery, sometimes too much of a good thing is just *too much*. One member shared, “I spent twelve hours volunteering in our convention’s merchandise room. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but it was every bit as stressful as my most hectic work days. Looking back, I realized that I had misunderstood what it meant to put my program first.”

The common advice to put our program first isn’t meant to shame us into giving and giving and giving some more. Maybe we take one shift in the merchandise room, perhaps even two, but we certainly do not need to take on six shifts at the expense of our sanity. While service is a key component of our recovery, balance requires us to pay attention to so much more. Spiritual maintenance takes time and commitment.

Many of us develop routines that help keep us spiritually centered. They become the heart of our personal recovery and the wellspring for our spiritual balance. We commune with a Higher Power in whatever ways work for us. We “listen” by quieting our mind in meditation, by taking a motorcycle out on a winding road, or by listening to newcomers at a chai shop before the meeting. We share our hopes and our pain with other members, in a journal, or with the universe.

When we keep a balanced program at the center of our lives, we’re better equipped to navigate life on life’s terms. Practicing balance doesn’t mean we’re spiritually attuned at all times; rather, it means we notice when we’re out of tune, and we take action to correct our course.

I will listen to my body, mind, and spirit to establish my own limits and explore how I tune in to spiritual balance in my recovery.

APRIL

That Energy of Empathy

That wordless language of recognition, belief and faith, which we call empathy, created the atmosphere in which we could feel time, touch reality and recognize spiritual values long lost to many of us.

—Basic Text, Chapter 8: We Do Recover

For some of us, our first perceptible encounter with a power greater than ourselves comes in the form of other recovering addicts. We find it in that vibe we feel in the rooms of NA. Many of us pick up on it even before we've taken that leap and given abstinence a try. We sense this energy unlike anything we've experienced elsewhere. One addict described it this way: "I felt oddly connected to these complete strangers and they seemed to know me, to understand, and to genuinely want to help."

Putting this intriguing something into words is difficult at best and runs the risk of becoming quickly outdated since the words to describe it change with the times. To our ear, our predecessors' attempts to explain it may sound pretty trippy today. It's hard to capture the essence of this almost indescribable thing in words. Had our French-speaking members written "We Do Recover," they may have used the phrase "je ne sais quoi," which translates literally to "I don't know what" but signifies something more in its naming of the unnamable. As the Basic Text notes, "The problem with literature is language."

To be sure, the atmosphere of recovery we find in NA is intangible. Maybe it's too cosmic or mystical to pin down in a description that will stand the test of time and translations. Even so, groups and service bodies sometimes find it useful to talk about how we support or create an atmosphere of recovery. Most will identify empathy as a key ingredient.

Perhaps empathy stands out as central to our atmosphere because it's a quality that's been missing in our lives when we get to the rooms. Nevertheless, we recognize and respond to the empathy like it's a long-lost friend. The world has little empathy for using addicts; they haven't been where we've been. NA is different, and thank goodness it is.

I will listen with my heart today and empathize with the struggles and victories of fellow members.

An Open Mind Is a Life Saver

Open-mindedness gives us the ability to see more and more clearly within ourselves as we go through the never-ending process of surrendering, taking inventory, and inviting change.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, Opening Essay

“A closed mind is a killer!” A member riffed on the idea that a parachute, like a mind, can’t function well, if closed: “When we dive into recovery, we tug at that ripcord in an impulse to surrender, with some measure of courage and faith.”

Being closed-minded makes us jaded, sealing off our secrets and locking in bad habits. It excludes others—their perspectives, their insights, and their compassion. When we resist being open-minded, the light can’t get in, so our humanity is stunted. We can’t see ourselves honestly. New ideas cannot penetrate our fortress of anger or avoidance, and we end up stuck in isolation.

Getting and staying clean in NA dares us to open up the parts of ourselves we would rather keep hidden. As we prepare to engage each of the Twelve Steps, we have to keep our closed-mindedness in check. Through this process of self-examination that is afforded to all of us, we pry open our minds to a new way of life. We inventory our pasts, so we can stop running from them and let go. We assess our shortcomings and assets to see ourselves clearly and to seek balance. We make amends to help us avoid the same mistakes in relationships. In addition to our minds, we open our eyes, our hearts, and our arms, helping others to seek change as we have.

This process, however, does not end—unless we stop attending to it. We don’t arrive at openness and wellness and just stay there. To keep evolving, we keep relying on open-mindedness. The member continued, “Our feet may touch the ground for a moment, but life will have us back up in that plane soon enough. We’ll have to jump and pull that cord again if we want to continue to grow.” Maintaining open-mindedness, even with years clean, prevents us from becoming too rigid, from building walls that we can’t see over, helping us to navigate new areas of conflict that arise.

Where in my recovery can I be more open-minded? Who or what am I resisting today? What part does this spiritual principle play in the Step I’m working on? If I’ve halted actively working on myself, what needs to happen so I can pull that cord and expand?

Losing and Finding Ourselves in Service

We learn who we are precisely when we forget ourselves in service to others.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to a Higher Power”

Before we got to NA, we were all about “the getting and using and finding ways and means to get more.” On the rare occasion when a feeling surfaced, we’d snuff it out with more drugs. This habit of reaching outside ourselves to fix what’s inside follows us into recovery. Our inventories reveal how fear-based defects come into play as we’ve tried to protect ourselves or avoid discomfort. Instead of trying to wrestle happiness from life, we learn to be patient and strong, to give time some time, and even to live with uncertainty. Although we’re sometimes tempted to control and manipulate or to tune out with any number of distractions, service provides a healthier alternative.

Service allows us to get out of our heads and into action. Whether it’s setting up chairs or speaking with a newcomer, being of service puts us in the moment. “It’s such a relief to be right here, right now,” as one member put it. Even when we’re going through our own storms, serving others keeps us in today.

Service can bring out the best in us. It helps us figure out who we are or who we want to be. We show up for each other and our commitments regardless of what’s going on in our lives. We notice that we’ve become reliable and trustworthy. We practice compassion and become more compassionate. We listen without judgment and become less judgmental. One member recalled, “I took this newcomer under my wing, hell-bent on saving her life. My own life blossomed as the best version of myself came out while I was being there for her.”

It happens all the time around here. We set aside our worries to serve others and we’re reminded of our strengths. Asking, “How can I help?” plops us into a petri dish for growing good character. We find confidence, fulfillment, and the best aspects of our identity as we serve.

*I will allow acts of service to guide me away from self-centered thinking,
revealing my best qualities. I will set aside my own selfish interests and build
some muscle memory around practicing spiritual principles.*

The Harmony between Step Eleven and Tradition Two

*Together we seek our Higher Power's will and the power to carry that out.
We know what it feels like to be in harmony with that conscience.*

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Two, “For Members”

There is a link between the improved conscious contact we seek as individuals in Step Eleven and the collective conscience that may express itself in the decision-making processes of our groups, according to Tradition Two. When we're spiritually fit, it's easier to tune in to group conscience. It turns out that seeking our Higher Power's will for ourselves positions us to tap into the same for our NA groups.

We recover over time, not overnight. Likewise, our spiritual awakenings take time to unfold. In Step Two, we come to believe that a Higher Power could restore us to sanity. We make a decision in Step Three, a decision we recommit to by surrendering daily and working the rest of the Steps.

By the time we get to the Eleventh Step, most of us are ready to enhance our sense of spirituality. We explore different ways to pray and meditate. We get in the groove of a daily routine that strengthens our conscious contact with a Higher Power. We notice the payoff: less noise between our ears, more harmony in our dealings with others.

As with so many aspects of our personal and spiritual growth, improving our conscious contact improves our ability to serve. Our egos become “right-sized.” It becomes less important that we are heard as individuals and more important that our voices reflect our Higher Power's will and harmonize with those of our fellow members, our coworkers, even our families. We make an effort to sing from the same songbook, even when we're not singing the same notes. In fact, singing in harmony means just that: We hit different notes, but they complement each other as the group's voice emerges.

My participation in life and in service improves when I'm spiritually in tune. I will inventory my Eleventh Step practice and make any needed adjustments.

Inclusiveness, Service, and Belonging

When we value one another's experience and work to make service fun, interesting, and inclusive, we find that there really is a place at the table for all of us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, "Principles, Practice, and Perspective"

A lot of us come into the rooms lacking social skills and are too intimidated to join in a group activity. Commitments are filled, so we don't see a role for us. Or many are open and still we don't fit, or so we think. A member we don't know at all is sure we can handle the job of greeting people when they arrive at the meeting and helping to find seats for latecomers. But why would we want to get involved? Then people might expect us to show up and stay. *Oh, that's how it works. That's how they get you.*

And it does work. When many of us start on a path of service in NA, we're recruited by a member who's skilled at practicing inclusiveness. Maybe we're attracted by their enthusiasm for service, even a little intrigued by what makes NA tick outside the meeting. Some of the members doing service seem to be really enjoying themselves. Maybe it's not as tedious or serious as it sounds. They ask us to help with a particular task, note our skill in this arena, and suggest we join a committee. In that committee, they're inclusive, asking us, for instance, if we think conducting business this way or that will help to carry the message well. We participate as best we can, and soon the service "they" becomes "we." A place at the table has been set, and we're sitting at it.

We need each other's experience with the Steps to recover, and we need each other's diversity of ideas, perspectives, skills, and knowledge for our groups and activities to function and function well. When we have greater representation of voices, we learn more. We find value in enhancing our understanding and empathy for people new to our group or service body. We end up doing things we've never done before. In service, we join forces to create something for others, sharing our journey, sharing space, and sharing tasks.

Including others helps us to belong even more.

How am I being inclusive of others' perspectives in my service work? What can I do today to set a place at the table for another member?

Spirituality in Simplicity

When we allow spirituality to be simple, we allow it to be universal.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Spirituality Is Practical”

Addicts have a knack for complicating things. Finding a spirituality that works for us is no exception. Spirituality is central to Narcotics Anonymous, and what that looks like is up to each of us. We engage in a personal journey of discovery. The Steps help us define and develop spiritual connections, and we free ourselves to live according to our convictions.

Many of us were relieved that “figuring out the whole Higher Power thing could be a lifelong project,” as one addict put it. “I was able to hear the message and receive the gift of recovery without subscribing to any specific set of beliefs. What a relief!”

Some of us have to try out many belief systems, conventional and otherwise. We may find a good fit, or maybe we eliminate a few potential paths. A buffet approach—a little of this and a little of that—suits many of us.

“I realized that my effort to define my spirituality was boxing me in, limiting how my Higher Power operated,” one member shared. “When I stopped imposing limitations, I started to see my HP everywhere. It is everyone and everything—it just is.”

The bond we share with other recovering addicts is both simple and sacred. The Steps help us understand ourselves, and that makes it easier to connect with others. “Caring about my fellow members helps me,” one member shared. “I notice when the light comes back into a newcomer’s eyes, and it is one of the most beautiful gifts of recovery for me.” Many of us approach spirituality as a practical matter. We know that when we show up at a meeting, we feel less alone. When we are of service, we think less of ourselves. When we share a hug with another member, we feel loved. These simple, spiritual actions are at the heart of our program of recovery.

I will connect with other members today and appreciate the simple spirituality in those connections.

7 APRIL

Vulnerability Teaches Us to Trust

Each time we make ourselves vulnerable and find someone there for us, we come to a new level of safety and trust.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Fellowship”

Working Step Five with a sponsor can feel like baring our underbellies. We summon up enough honesty, humility, and courage to admit the exact nature of our wrongs. Despite our conviction that we’re doing the right thing, sharing our inventories can make us feel exposed. Being vulnerable can be an unnatural state for addicts; it tears down our hardened defenses. Sharing our inventory is an act of trust. For many of us, this may be the first time we reveal ourselves completely to another human being.

Whether we have years clean or days, we find value in sharing our struggles and our victories with fellow members. Being real and sometimes raw creates opportunities for others to connect with us. Sharing from the heart simply resonates. We’re often humbled by the kindness of our fellow members who support us when we are most vulnerable.

Each time we take a risk, open up, and are met with loving support from other members, we understand the strength in vulnerability on a deeper level. “I look at this kind of vulnerability as the emotional equivalent of a trust fall,” one member shared. Each act of vulnerability enhances our feelings of safety in our relationships.

The more we practice connecting with other members, the more at home we feel in NA.

I will challenge my old beliefs about trust. I will push myself out of my comfort zone to practice being vulnerable and allow other members the opportunity to be there for me.

Listening with All We've Got

Active listening is a form of meditation. Some of the most important messages are delivered through some unlikely people.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Conscious Contact”

In the simplest terms, we can think of prayer as talking to our Higher Power and meditation as listening. No matter the method, the goal is the same: We are developing a conscious contact. This wording is significant. Contact refers to the connection we foster through prayer and meditation. Consciousness implies that we are intentional in our efforts—awake and aware, purposeful and deliberate. In one member’s experience, “Meditation sharpens my focus and calms my mind. I can let go of what I think I know. With that, I’m more open to stumbling on what I need, often from unexpected sources. I practice this mindset as I go about my day and my connections—with others and my Higher Power—benefit.”

It’s often easier to stay open to the message when we set aside our ideas about the person doing the talking. “If I listen with my heart, it keeps my thoughts from interrupting,” a member shared. “My recovery has been improved by people who couldn’t seem to take their own advice, bless their hearts. I never know who’s going to save my life.” Empathy and attentiveness help us listen with an open mind, consider different points of view, and be receptive to the message no matter the source.

Others remind us to listen with more than our ears. It’s an old trope in the deaf community that hearing people are emotionally inhibited because they hide behind words. “We communicate with our whole being,” a member explained. “Signing taught me to be present, receptive, and open—mentally, physically, spiritually—to that exchange of energy.” We might all aspire to communicate in such a connected, visceral way: doing our best to listen for resonance and not letting words tell the whole story. When we’re consciously listening for it, we can let a message nudge us in a direction, shape a decision, or make the next right action clear.

I will consciously listen with all I've got—mind, body, heart, and spirit—and be open to messages from unlikely messengers.

Surrendering to Tradition Three

Finding the patience and tolerance to accept those members we can't seem to stop judging is an exercise in surrender, acceptance, and humility.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Three, “For Members”

Addicts tend to feel judged. Likely that's because we can be pretty harsh in our opinions of others. While gossiping and talking down to others may have been currency in our old lives, these defects can reemerge for us in recovery if we're not vigilant. They can poison our outlook on life, spoil relationships, and drive members from the rooms. Tradition Three clarifies the one and only requirement for membership: a *desire* to stop using.

When it comes to the brand-spanking-new member, we seem to get that. Empathy for the newcomer often comes easy, since we've all been in that position. For many of us, it gets harder to set aside judgments of the so-called “chronic relapser.” Then, we remember that guy. He'd been in and out repeatedly over the years when suddenly something clicked. He stopped using and stayed stopped. Or we recall that other longtime member whose cleantime never amounted to much. When her mom spoke at her memorial service, she thanked NA for giving her daughter the best days of her life. We may wish that everyone would stick and stay, but that's not a requirement for membership.

Judgments and expectations of people with significant cleantime can leave them feeling isolated, too. NA is a program for living. We all need a place where we can share our lives' struggles, losses, and failings to survive them clean. Thankfully, we become less concerned about what others think of us with time. “Other members put me on a pedestal, but it's my responsibility to get the heck down,” one oldtimer shared.

When we are truly walking in surrender, we will muster a bit more patience for and tolerance of our fellow members, no matter their cleantime. We surrender to Tradition Three and let go of any additional requirements for membership our disease may have invented.

I will suspend judgment and surrender to the Third Tradition by welcoming anyone who's new—for the first or hundredth time—and by thanking an oldtimer for continuing to show up and be real.

10 APRIL

Seeing Grace in Our Reflection

The people in our lives are the means by which we experience grace. We see the miracle of change in others, and they reflect our own changes back to us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, Opening Essay

The company we kept in active addiction was often based on convenience or ulterior motives. We barely trusted anyone and relied on manipulation to get what we needed. It's no wonder that many of our friendships were short-lived. Denial protected us from seeing the destruction we brought to our relationships.

When we concede that we are powerless over our addiction in Step One, we begin to see the benefits of being honest with ourselves. Emboldened, we begin practicing honesty in our new friendships in recovery.

In forming real friendships, we open the gateway to grace. Grace allows us to view our lives from multiple angles. We can mute the inner critic and appreciate that we possess some of the same qualities we admire in others. As one member noted, "You are or you want to be the people you surround yourself with." Like the other members of our support circle, we strive to get a better perspective on life. Their reflection offers us a picture of who we are now and who we are becoming. Today, we are not alone.

As we continue to recover, we cultivate trusting relationships, strengthening our network of support. Key people in our lives can provide us with an honest reflection of our character. They allow us to experience grace by seeing ourselves through their eyes. Our ability to acknowledge our own progress and spiritual growth is evidence that we see the world and ourselves more clearly. It can be a daily struggle to see ourselves as our peers see us, no more and no less—but we are up for that challenge.

I will make an effort to see myself more clearly today. I will surround myself with people I love and respect and look to them for an honest reflection of my progress.

11 APRIL

The Power of Kindness

The lessons we learn in NA about sharing and caring, asking for help, and offering what we have to give are powerful tools we can use outside the fellowship as well.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Disability”

Before coming to NA, many of us were clueless about our own needs, much less the needs of others. We may have rejected the whole idea of needing help, needing other people, or having needy people in our lives. Identifying our needs—beyond the next fix—would require introspection. Looking within sounded frightening. *There be dragons*, as the ancients labeled unmapped territory. Others of us sensed a void inside, a deep well of vague longing. We clung to the few people left in our lives, hoping for love but settling for sex.

Recovery invites us to rejoin the human race. We learn to articulate what we think, how we feel, and what we need. Being part of an NA community that looks out for one another is a real asset to our lives. The give-and-take of kindness knits together our social networks, in and out of the rooms. We benefit from others’ kindness and revel in the good feelings we get from giving back. It reinforces our humanity and our humility as we recognize that we’re no better and no worse than our fellows. “Just another addict doing my best to stay clean and do better,” as one member put it.

A focus on practicing kindness contributes to the “better perspective on life” we strive for, just for today. Opportunities to help come into view more readily when we’re endeavoring to be kind. As one member wrote, “Giving up my seat to an elderly bus rider freed me, momentarily, from my prison of self-concern. When I want to feel good, kindness ain’t a bad hustle.” We become the good neighbor who shovels more than their fair share of snow, the parent who bakes enough cupcakes for the whole class, the houseguest who insists on washing dishes, or the coworker who restocks the community candy bowl.

If we can shake some old ideas about independence and self-reliance, we can practice kindness even as we ask for help. We know the good feeling of helping others; to need help and not ask for it seems almost selfish. We humble ourselves, ask for what we need, and open the door to letting others be kind.

I will contribute some kindness to my community as I share a smile, give a sincere compliment, or ask for assistance today.

Practicality and the “God Thing”

Sometimes it’s enough just to know that other NA members believe and that their belief helps keep them clean.

—*Just for Today*, “A God of our own understanding,” April 23

We approach the “God Thing”—as some refer to spirituality in recovery—from different places. It can be a major obstacle, a great relief, or something we consistently grapple with. Many of us struggle to identify a set of beliefs—or any belief—that sits right with us, while others find the exploration itself to be profound and rewarding. Some of us have always considered ourselves to be people of faith and find that recovery helps us walk our talk.

Some of us have no spiritual belief or practice to speak of when we begin our recovery journey. But we adapt easily to the idea of a power greater than ourselves. We’re told that it can be anything as long as it’s loving. The group? Nature? An aspirational “higher self”? No problem! Praying to one or more of these powers makes practical sense for many members. Others of us share about our experience staying clean without getting hung up on defining a Higher Power. “When a longtime member spoke of their failed attempt to create a best friend with super powers, it dawned on me that belief in a deity or supreme being wasn’t required,” one member shared. “What a relief! Atheists stay clean in NA, too.”

Then there are those of us who struggle with it all. We don’t believe, but we don’t *not* believe. Infinite choices confound and frustrate us. We bristle at “loving,” obsess about contradictions in NA literature, or feel pressure to invent something innovative. We’re challenged by one member’s belief that we are relapse-bound without capital-G God and another member’s flippant attitude about needing one at all. We feel we *have* to believe. What if we never get there?

“You’re actually doing better than you’re feeling,” a member whose recovery we respect offers. “There may not be a place to ‘get to.’ Why not do the next right thing and stay in the struggle?” In practical terms, that means taking actions that align with our values or beliefs—even when we’re still figuring those out.

“In a pinch, you can borrow my Higher Power,” another member offers. “Maybe it’s enough that *I* believe in something that helps me stay clean.” Why not? We’ll try it—because we have choices in NA. Plus, we need a break from the struggle.

My belief, whatever it is, is practical for me today—so I’ll practice it. If I’m struggling, I’ll embrace that. No pressure. Recovery is a process, and it’s working.

Finding the Hope We Need to Heal

We don't have to deny reality to have hope or gratitude. We feel what we feel, and we do the footwork anyway.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Living Our Principles”

A lot of us have had a hopeless moment when we are going through something difficult, and a fellow recovering addict shares their opinion that “feelings aren’t facts”—and we want to chop their head off. Perhaps more helpful—and hopeful—is this fact: Feelings are real and one thing we learn in NA is that we can feel them *and* survive them. We do so not merely by grasping onto hope that they’ll change soon, but by taking actions in spite of them. As one addict rhymed, we “feel, deal, and heal.”

We deal by engaging the familiar NA footwork: going to meetings, sharing the feelings, and listening for solutions; doing stepwork around an issue, such as our resistance to change; praying and meditating; and focusing on others, not just our own strife. And of course, there’s the footwork that’s specific to our particular situation. Loss of employment, for instance, requires footwork to replace it. A mental health issue might warrant an appointment with a professional. We retake a course we failed or initiate lifestyle changes to improve our health. We end a marriage. We certainly aren’t guaranteed a pain-free life in recovery, and sometimes the footwork is painful, too. Hope is a bridge to relief.

A fresh perspective, especially when infused with gratitude and hope, helps us heal. When we lose that job, many of us will go down the road of fear and self-pity. Taking a moment to shift our perspective to one of gratitude (*I have come so far*) and hope (*There are other opportunities out there for me*)—and faith, too (*I’ll be okay no matter what*)—won’t deny us our very real feelings. Instead, perspective keeps reasonable feelings of sadness and fear from morphing into abject despair or outsized anxiety. We don’t wait until the fear has gone, or the stress or anger or sorrow, before we get back on the path. The feelings might still linger, but we’re moving, letting change happen, even taking risks. We’re healing.

I may not like where I am right now, but I can still be grateful. I can deal with my feelings by working a program and striving to change my perspective. Through NA, and in my relationships with fellow addicts, I find the hope I need to heal.

Unity, Not Uniformity

And just as all of us have our own individual personalities, so will your group develop its own identity, its own way of doing things, and its own special knack for carrying the NA message. . . . In NA we encourage unity, not uniformity.

—*The Group Booklet, “Introduction”*

Our worlds get bigger as we recover. When the fear and isolation of active addiction lifts, we can enjoy the company of fellow members. We may be inspired to visit other NA groups across town or in another part of the world, and we notice the different choices that contribute to a meeting’s culture.

Members gather for meetings in bomb shelters, in church basements, and next to hiking trails. Some groups join in with the readers, saying certain sentences aloud in unison. Other meetings save the chanting for the end of the meeting when they shout: “Go help someone!” or “Keep coming back—it works!” We have different ways of welcoming newcomers; we offer meeting lists, phone numbers, hugs, and sometimes even invitations to the meeting after the meeting.

When we attend a meeting that’s run differently than at home, we might be annoyed by the format or the behavior. *They’re doing it wrong*, we think. But then we realize that it’s still Narcotics Anonymous. We hear those familiar readings, recognizable even in another language. The atmosphere is one of love and acceptance—and that’s what really counts.

Each group makes many choices about how to nurture an atmosphere of recovery. What that looks like varies from place to place, even within the same city. Tradition Four talks about group autonomy; now we see how that idea makes room for our creativity and diversity, helping us embrace our differences and remain united.

Today I will delight in the variety of NA group identities and the unity that allows our diversity to flourish in a single, worldwide Fellowship.

Honesty Becomes Second Nature

... in the beginning, we may have to consciously practice being honest. As we continue this practice, we find dishonesty progressively more uncomfortable, perhaps even agonizing; and gradually we notice that honesty has become more normal for us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Keys to Freedom”

In active addiction, dishonesty was organic to how most of us functioned in the world. We did what we had to do to stay high; stealing and being manipulative and deceitful were among our strategies to meet that goal. We were chameleons more adept at figuring out who others wanted us to be than being ourselves. Our skewed perception was that the risk of being real outweighed its benefits.

Lifelong habits die hard. In early recovery, we often find ourselves embellishing our using careers or whitewashing our wrongdoings. We are quick to justify our behavior, blame others, and minimize our feelings. Some of us continue to steal, cheat to get ahead, or promote a clean date that isn’t quite . . . accurate. But every time we come to a meeting, we hear that honesty is essential to recovery. We know that we’re setting ourselves up for relapse if we don’t start telling the truth and acting with integrity. We hear that lesson in others’ stories.

So, we practice being honest in all of our affairs. We identify with other members—and vice versa—which encourages us to be more open. Our sponsor helps us to see that being honest is actually the solution to our problems. We adjust our stories to match the truth. Gradually, as our behavior shifts, so does our comfort level with the truth. The perceived danger we felt at being truly ourselves is replaced by the gift of participating in reality and receiving support from our fellow members.

Like any defect, the impulse to lie comes back. Though it’s not as habitual, dishonesty may be that rusty old tool we reach for in a jam. Nowadays, when we pop off a lie, it’s painful. Our denial and justification wound us. Knowing ourselves and our defects well allows us to put some time between impulse and action. We are able to investigate the urge, forgive ourselves, and humbly ask for help to avoid acting on it.

When I feel that now-familiar discomfort in the pit of my stomach from being dishonest, I will reflect on it. I’ll change direction and take action because I know reality and the truth pose no real risk to me today.

The Practice of Discipline

Discipline is commitment in action, a demonstration of our willingness.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Commitment”

Because of its past association with punishment, rigidity, or plain old drudgery, discipline is one of those recovery principles we have to reimagine when we get clean. And when we realign discipline with our newfound values of commitment and willingness—and begin to practice our program of recovery—we experience positive results. Our lives change.

Discipline’s relationship with the principle of commitment definitely merits discussion. Our commitment to NA and spiritual growth is crucial to the life we want, but discipline is more internal. It’s in our hearts. We can *be* committed or *hold* a commitment, but are we disciplined about that commitment? As one member observed, “We say, ‘It works when you work it.’ Not ‘It works when you think, believe, or feel it.’”

Discipline gives us the willingness to transform our commitment into action. Sometimes the commitment we’re acting on is more on the surface, say, following sponsor direction without knowing why. Other times, it’s deeper, more heartfelt. In either case, our commitment is measured by our willingness to act. When we’re active in our commitment to the Fellowship—when we are disciplined—our disease of addiction is rendered powerless.

Though we may strive to view discipline in a positive light, it’s not always easy. It takes practice. It *is* practice. Discipline is the drive to move forward regardless of our mood. We say yes to sponsorship. We attend our home group and fulfill our commitments because we said we would. Discipline leads us back to our message again and again.

I’m willing to transform my commitment to action. Discipline takes practice, and practice starts now.

Goodwill for the Common Good

By practicing open-mindedness, we nurture an attitude of goodwill toward others and become willing to serve with our common good in mind.

—*It Works*, Tradition Two, “Applying Spiritual Principles”

Before we found recovery, we served our own selfish desires almost exclusively. We used kindness and generosity as tools to manipulate, nothing more. The idea of serving others didn’t even enter our thoughts when we were out there hustling. After we’re clean for a bit, we learn to take actions that open us up to the concept of giving our time and serving the common good.

We start by acting our way into a different way of thinking. That means showing up for commitments despite the self-sabotage that happens between our ears. Regardless of how long or challenging our days may be, we get to our home group to make coffee if that’s our commitment. We show up because it is the right thing to do, in spite of any momentary lack of willingness. In reflection, we practiced goodwill and served the common good of the meeting by following through.

As we continue taking action—often opposite our thoughts—we become a little gentler with ourselves and more accepting of our own humanity. We come to understand that our first impulse might lead us astray. We learn to take a breath and call on a Higher Power to support our practice of goodwill.

Open-mindedness helps us access this spirit of generosity and selflessness. We may not talk about goodwill a lot, but you can see it in our actions and those of our fellows. Others depend on us, so we respond by being dependable. The “we” of NA becomes more important than the “me” in our old way of thinking and behaving.

Today I will clear away judgment of myself and others. I will strive to serve the common good.

Searching for Our Purpose

As we seek our Higher Power's will for us, we come to an understanding of our purpose. Spiritual awakening is a process. Maybe it is what the whole process is about.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Creative Action of the Spirit”

Life before recovery was in steadfast pursuit of our addiction. We had purpose, that's for sure! Now that we're clean, we are still searching, still striving, but what we're looking for and how we are pursuing it are quite different.

It may be worthwhile to ask ourselves right now, “What is my purpose in life?” and take a moment to listen for a response. Maybe we'll write about it, share about it in our group, meditate on it, or ask our Higher Power directly. For some of us, the answer may come easily, as it's something we've thought much about. We may have a specific practice of seeking the will of a power greater than us, or maybe we're comfortable improvising in the moment. Many others will struggle with the question and with hearing, understanding, and articulating the answer. Still others of us may be seriously pondering this question for the first time clean.

Because we're NA members, we may be of the mind that our purpose is already established: carrying the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers—and anything else is extraneous navel-gazing. Many of us believe NA's primary purpose aligns with ours but that seeking a life of fulfillment and living by spiritual principles extends further—but to what exactly?

In NA, we talk (and read) a lot about “spiritual awakenings”—whether we call them that or not. Most of us would agree that living spiritually is both about *what* we do and *how* we do it. Perhaps the “how” is even more consequential because our lives look different over time, across cultures, and around the world. Striving for integrity springs to mind here: being true to ourselves while acting by spiritual principles. Maybe we don't have a specific answer, and maybe it will change and change again. Maybe the question is enough, and we'll keep asking it.

I'm open to pursuing something different today. I want to be more awake and help others to wake up, too. Beyond that, who knows?

19 APRIL

Finding Self-Acceptance with the Serenity Prayer

We learn to live with our frailties and imperfections.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “A Vision of Hope”

Many of us have ideas in our heads of what we think we should be. These ideas may come from our families, friends, society, our religious backgrounds, and countless other influences. It’s a little uncomfortable when our images of who we think we are and who we think we should be don’t match. Getting to a place of self-acceptance when these pictures don’t align can be challenging.

The Serenity Prayer is a big help here. There are some things about ourselves we may never be able to change. If we’re a lot shorter or taller than most of the people we know, wishing or praying to be an average height isn’t likely to do much. By talking through our discomfort with our sponsor or others we trust, we can begin to make peace with our height.

Then, of course, there are the qualities we are okay with, but others around us aren’t! “I had a sense of humor that usually involved making someone the butt of the joke,” one member wrote. “I kept hurting people, but I thought that if they would just get thicker skin, things would be fine. My sponsor suggested that I find ways to joke without hurting people. I was mad at first, but I worked on my sense of humor, and people don’t look at me like I’m such an ass all the time now.”

Part of accepting our frailties and imperfections comes in finding the wisdom to know the difference between what we must accept and what we can change. “That’s just who I am” is an excuse we no longer need for harmful behavior. Talking with other addicts and connecting with our Higher Power can help us continue to grow into the people we want to be.

Some parts of who I am are here to stay, while other aspects may need a little work. I will use the Serenity Prayer to aid in my self-acceptance.

20 APRIL

The Journey toward Unconditional Love

We greet each other with the recognition reserved for survivors of the same nearly fatal catastrophe. This shared experience, more than anything else, contributes to the atmosphere of unconditional love in our meetings.

—It Works, Step Twelve

Most of us were pretty far from unconditional with our efforts to love when we first got here. One member shared, “When I first started using, drugs helped me connect with people. I would get high with anyone! I started cutting out people who got in the way of my disease, and soon I was all alone.”

The members who welcome us to NA know the look of loss and alienation on our faces; they endured the same feelings we did. We empathize. For many of us, that’s our first practice of unconditional love: We know each other’s pain, so we offer relief no matter what differences we might have, real or perceived. Different political stance? Different football team? Different definitions of “football”? We look past these differences to see the addict, and we do our best to offer hope. The hope we offer is a form of love. In Narcotics Anonymous, we offer this love unconditionally to addicts seeking recovery.

As Step Twelve in the Basic Text mentions, “Many of us believe that a spiritual awakening is meaningless unless accompanied by an increase in peace of mind and a concern for others.” The empathy we feel for other addicts is the first taste of “a concern for others” many of us get. Working Steps expands the reach of our compassion, continually allowing us to clear out the conditions we put on our willingness to love as we’re ready to do so. We aspire to love unconditionally and, even when we fall short, the practice does us good.

Though the journey toward unconditional love is never-ending, compassion helps pave the way. I will embrace the journey enthusiastically today.

Communicating Respect

When we regard one another with respect, we open the door to a different kind of communication.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Principles, Practice, and Perspective”

Outside NA, in our specific cultures or neighborhoods, respect was often something we demanded of others or felt we were entitled to based on our status in the community or our egos. Our communication around respect had one purpose: getting our own way. What mattered was how superbly articulate we were about our beliefs, our willingness to go to battle for every one of our opinions, and the sheer loudness of our voice. And if we weren’t among those with status or volume, we usually gave in to their demands.

Inside NA, practicing respect as a spiritual principle has nothing to do with getting our own way or handing over our power to those who command it. Regarding others with respect includes paying attention to how we are communicating—with our voice, facial expressions, body language, or our silence—and then honestly examining how people hear and respond to us. “If I approach another member with my claws out,” one member shared, “I shouldn’t be surprised if they react by slashing back.”

Ideally, practicing respect results in more inclusivity of opinions and more equality in participation. Communicating our respect prioritizes listening over speaking, our common welfare over selfishness. We try to make space for others rather than cutting them out. In NA, respect breeds trust, safety, and well-being—not fear, fragility, and oversized egos.

This perspective takes plenty of work—and plenty of unlearning. For one thing, we must work against our own feelings of superiority, inferiority, or indifference. A member who’s been around for a while described their experience: “Working the NA Steps has made my own beliefs less fragile. I don’t have to defend them as fiercely as I did before. And I don’t have to express my opinion about everything.” Just because someone else’s or the group’s opinion is different from ours doesn’t mean they’re wrong. And if they are wrong, is this a battle that must be fought, or can we make peace and be part of a solution?

How am I communicating respect to my fellow NA members today? How am I being respectful to the meeting, to the group’s conscience, to the Traditions, to NA as a whole?

The Creative Action of Sharing Ourselves

Sharing with others keeps us from feeling isolated and alone. This process is a creative action of the spirit.

—Basic Text, Chapter 7: Recovery and Relapse

Many of us, even with time clean, find ourselves with a problem or a situation we have no idea how to deal with. For example, grateful as we are that we've been released from prison, we are petrified by the prospect of rebuilding our lives outside of the structure we'd become used to. Or, having fallen out of love with our spouse—who shares the same home group, no less—we want to move on. But how? Or, our supervisor at work is in active addiction. We pick up her slack because we don't want her to get fired. But the stress is killing us.

Shame, indecision, and fear prevent us from talking about our problem with anyone. Or our ego takes over: *I can figure this out on my own*. We've been down this road before and know where it leads: denial, dishonesty, resentments, isolation. But we can make a different choice now, just as we did about our addiction.

If we share what we're going through—with a trusted NA member, with our sponsor, or on a group level—we are acting differently, even creatively. We can rely on someone else's creativity to take us down a road we had never considered. We just have to open our minds to their experience and perspective.

Other times it's the act of sharing that's the solution. Creative action of the spirit requires us to have the courage to open our hearts to share what has seemed impossible for us to talk about. In these cases, we depend on another's empathy to get us through a situation that has no resolution but to accept it.

Today I'll ask myself: "What am I keeping to myself?" and "Who can I ask to share their creative problem-solving skills with me?" Then, I'll seek that person out and be open to what gets revealed in the process.

The Value of Our Individuality

We are mindful of our behavior and our surroundings without giving up our individuality.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Moving Beyond ‘Social Acceptability’”

Rock bottom means different things to different addicts. We come to NA in various states of unwellness, some more visible than others. No matter what kind of shape we appear to be in when we get here, we each find ourselves at the edge of our own learning curve. Although our minds may try to get ahead of us with all kinds of knotty questions, our journeys almost always start with going to meetings and staying clean between them.

It may occur to us that we wouldn’t have used with a lot of these people—unless it was their stuff, of course; no need to be rude. We can’t imagine them using with each other either, but there they go again, hanging out together in the parking lot for an hour after the meeting. We find this mildly troubling. As using addicts, we thought we could suss out any situation and be who we needed to be. Here . . . what? *Am I supposed to be myself? That seems to be the idea. Yikes!*

In fact, that’s part of our charge: to figure out who we are and be that on purpose. In *It Works: How and Why*, we read about the value of our diversity and the “rough-and-tumble liveliness” found in NA. This rings true. We’re told there’s no one right way to be an addict in recovery. This seems reassuring or disconcerting, depending on our mood. We aspire to be as comfortable in our uniqueness as some of those eccentric oldtimers. Like them, we grow secure in our own individuality and learn to express it in context-appropriate ways.

Accepting that our value lies in being ourselves frees up all that energy we used to spend shape-shifting. We no longer feel a need to blend in with the wallpaper or shine like the brightest star. We get to be ourselves, each of us uniquely contributing to the lively whole. We don’t need to fit in—because we belong.

Knowing that my individuality contributes to the liveliness of the NA Fellowship encourages me to be wholly myself, which I’ll do to the best of my ability.

Faith and Step Three

In the Third Step, faith gives us the capacity to actually make a decision and carry that decision into action.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step Three, “Spiritual Principles”

When we look back at early recovery—regardless of how recent or distant that may be—we can see how faith inspired some of our decisions and helped us to act on them. Many of us credit some sort of blind faith for getting us through the doors of our first meeting. We decided to get some help and found our way to Narcotics Anonymous.

As our heads cleared, we saw that our every effort to clean up on our own had failed. Consciously or not, we surrendered and made that crucial admission in Step One. We took another leap of faith by entertaining the possibility that we could stay clean and be restored to sanity. Faith that the recovery that we’d seen work for others could also work for us brought us to Step Three.

Deciding to turn our will and life over to the care of the God of our understanding was huge. It might have seemed too big, really. Other members reassured us, “You’re just making a decision. You’ll have a lifetime to figure out what that looks like, plenty of time to practice.” So, okay, we decide . . . now what?

Some of us get stuck here or find ourselves cycling through the first three Steps, sure that we’ve dropped a stitch. We get lucky—as we do so often in NA—when we’re sitting in a meeting, only half listening, and we hear just what we need to propel us into action: “The footwork of Step Three is Step Four.” And so on.

The faith we practice as NA members gives us the courage to make other momentous decisions: to change careers, to exercise more, to marry, to end a marriage. When we’re secure in our recovery, faith enables us to ask ourselves some really tough questions, like “What do I want?” and “What’s holding me back?” Faith steadies us as we make decisions, supports us as we clear the way forward, and keeps us humble as we find out what we’re capable of.

Faith will show in my actions today, as I make the time to do the things I ought to do and say the things I need to say.

25 APRIL

Compassion Toward All

I have a deep compassion for the still-suffering addict, be it the addict who is sitting in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, the addict who has yet to find the rooms, or especially the addict who left and has yet to find the way back again.

—Basic Text, Coming Home, “Second Chance”

One of the most painful lessons we learn in recovery is that we are each on our own path. No matter how much we want to help, close friends or partners sometimes relapse. Sponsees or other members we’ve tried to help may choose to get loaded. The same goes for members with significant cleantime whom we admire, and sometimes our sponsor (who’s just another addict like we are) will be suffering in the rooms and keeping it to themselves—and will end up using again. The pain we feel in these situations takes many forms: grief, anger, betrayal, confusion, fear for our own recovery.

But we also feel deep compassion for another addict’s pain. We try to let that compassion, rather than our pain, drive our actions.

NA members have different ideas about what compassion looks like. Some of us believe that if an addict is using and not coming to meetings, no contact should be made. Tough love. Others reach out to still-using addicts believing it’s absolutely necessary to maintain that connection.

In some meetings, an empty chair is set out to represent the still-suffering addict, and—as a sort of collective compassion—we pray that seat gets filled. The most important thing we can do is to stay clean ourselves so that when the time comes, we will be there for any addict who is seeking help. The power of living by example should never be underestimated. Whatever our judgments, we can all agree that addicts should always be welcomed to meetings regardless of how many times they’ve relapsed, what they look or smell like, or what our history with them has been. As a Fellowship, our job is to practice compassion no matter what.

During the moment of silence at my next meeting, I’ll pray for a specific addict who’s suffering: I am here for you. I’m saving a chair for you.

Caring for Ourselves, Caring for Others

We need to develop empathy and concern for others, and to let go of self-obsession without losing sight of ourselves.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Friendship”

Negotiating a balance between caring for ourselves and for others takes much self-awareness. It requires ongoing focus, discernment, and thoughtful action. Finding that combination of loving generosity in helping others while maintaining appropriate boundaries—the healthy interplay between independence and interdependence—is a lifelong pursuit for a recovering addict.

Through the work we do on ourselves, our bent toward self-obsessiveness lessens as our empathy for others tends to deepen. What used to be a single-minded concern for “this addict” often becomes tempered with a genuine concern for other NA members. Many of us roll up our sleeves and get to work helping new members because we want them to experience the same relief and connection that we did. We have found a new way of life and want to share with them how we did it. Fair enough. But we may end up feeling like we need to save them and that we are the only ones who can do it. We take it personally when our suggestions are rebuffed. We mistakenly blame ourselves if they don’t stay clean.

This perspective is detrimental to our own recovery, reflecting a bit of that self-obsession we thought we had exchanged for kindness. We must show ourselves some care—and demonstrate some humility, even self-respect, often by taking a step back while still making ourselves available to help when asked. Knowing where support ends and enabling begins can be a baffling process that we revisit again and again throughout our recovery. Some of us develop excellent instincts in this regard and can support other addicts through the process of discovery for themselves.

I can care about others while still caring for myself. I can help others find what I’m finding in NA while maintaining my self-respect and being pragmatic about my powerlessness over other people.

27 APRIL

Pursuing Equanimity

When we feel dignity, we are not turned by a passing breeze, and we no longer need to defend ourselves from every shadow.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition One, Opening Reflection

When we were using, we adapted to the dangerous and hostile environments around us by developing survival skills. Even once we leave that life, we take these defenses with us. Early in our recovery, everything can seem like a threat to our well-being. Our responses are often knee-jerk, reactive, and based on a life we are no longer living, not our present-tense recovery journey.

Over time, we find our emotional and spiritual footing. Equanimity is the art of maintaining this steadiness. We are not so easily thrown off balance by whatever waves may come our way. We find ourselves less drawn to drama, and we don't view challenges as crises so often. The tide comes in and goes out, and we acquire, through our own and others' experiences, a deep-seated belief that we can get through this—that we will be okay no matter what.

The emotional wobbliness we have when we first come to NA subsides as we gain perspective. How we see the world changes and how we respond to what we see changes. Real-life difficulties may emerge, but we can respond differently. When we are rigid, we are apt to get knocked down every time there is a storm at sea. In recovery, we learn to adjust our sails as we acquire “the wisdom to know the difference.”

We get more comfortable being who we are without justifying or explaining our feelings, thoughts, and actions. We relax into a new relationship with life and no longer need to be on guard, defensive, or reactive. Through the Eleventh Step, we learn to pause before reacting. In service, instead of acting impulsively, we can make choices that benefit NA's common welfare. Meditation teaches us to slow down and listen. We don't have to fix everything. We're more open to the world as it is and to solutions that we may not have anticipated. We learn to be fully present and less guarded. We can stand in the middle of what is.

*Being part of something bigger than myself can serve as a life preserver.
When I am tired of swimming, I can lean back and float. I can't always see
what's under the water but can trust my buoyancy.*

28 APRIL

Inspired to Understand

We begin to understand that other people have real feelings and that we are capable of hurting them if we are careless.

—It Works, Step Nine

Active addiction causes us shame, and shame feels lousy. We learned to shut down our feelings, to turn our backs to our emotional well-being. Before drugs were a problem, they were our solution. Our preferred state—a drug-induced haze—made it easier to shut down those pesky feelings.

When we get to NA, we start to feel better; we start to feel *everything* better. Early recovery can seem like a feelings roller coaster that takes us from uncomfortable to exhilarated with every turn. Since numbing our feelings isn't a viable option, we take a stab at understanding ourselves and the effects of the disease. Step One helps us to see how powerlessness and unmanageability shaped our every attempt to control our drug use. We begin to identify our feelings and verbalize our thoughts and emotions. When members nod and laugh in recognition as we share, we experience how good it feels to be understood.

We are inspired to be more understanding and empathetic. We practice being thoughtful and kind, and others reciprocate. We gain an awareness of how our behavior affects others. We learn to practice discretion and keep our unsolicited opinions to ourselves at times. This is new! Where once we were careless, practicing understanding calls on us to be considerate of others.

We gain valuable insight as we inventory our behavior. Most of us find that we've been on both sides of hurt feelings. This brings our understanding of ourselves and others to a whole new level.

We gain additional clarity in the amends process. We rally the courage and willingness to meet with the people we have harmed, to own our mistakes, and to change our behavior. We apply the principle of understanding by moving through our lives with more care and concern. Because we're human, there will be missteps, but as members of NA we have a process for staying clear and current.

I have a choice about my behavior today. I choose to be considerate of other people's feelings and my own emotional well-being. I will allow understanding to influence my actions.

Our Willingness Makes a Difference

When we show up with an open mind and a willingness to be of service, the rewards can be far greater than our efforts.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Family”

A nudge from a sponsor, a longing to be a part of NA, a hunger for validation—any of these might be our initial inspiration to serve. Regardless of what motivates us, the rewards of service quickly become apparent. It feels good to be part of the beehive of activity that goes into keeping the doors open and meetings running smoothly. We feel a sense of belonging as home-group members greet us by name and invite us to check out other meetings. We welcome new members and introduce them to others who have their best interest at heart. Realizing that we fit that description, too, we offer our phone number and some advice: “If you don’t pick up, you can’t get high. Call one of us if the disease starts talking to you.” We’re humbled to think that our willingness to be of service might make a difference for a potential new member. Viewed with an open mind, we realize that it’s already made a difference for us.

While groups remain the most powerful vehicle for carrying the message, the NA service infrastructure exists to amplify our ability to fulfill this primary purpose. Members contribute to the good and necessary work organized by service bodies large and small. All of these efforts are geared to helping more addicts find their way to the rooms. We offer our time and effort and find ourselves becoming more invested, more connected, and more alive. Our willingness to show up and pitch in means that our groups have current meeting directories, that cops and doctors send addicts our way, that websites provide the latest information, and that incarcerated members get sponsors and NA literature.

Our primary purpose inspires all of these service efforts and more. We show up with the still-suffering addict in mind and find that our burdens are lessened by our generosity. Our service to NA affects who we are and how we interact with the world. Within NA and beyond, we do loving things for our families and communities and experience love in return. Our insights compel us to keep showing up and giving back and enjoying the rewards.

I am willing to show up and give of myself today. It will keep me clean and remind me of the abundance I enjoy as a result of the life I found in Narcotics Anonymous.

The Value of Consistency

When we attend meetings regularly, people get to know us and see us over time.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to Others”

The principle of consistency offers great benefits at any phase in our recovery, even though how it might look in practice evolves over time. Early on, consistency tends to mean a meeting a day for the first 90 days, as our Basic Text suggests. A likely outcome of completing a “90-in-90” challenge is knowing and being known by quite a few other NA members. Making ourselves visible in this way exposes our disease to people who see it for what it is. The compassion, concern, and care we receive from other members is a vital part of knowing we are not alone, especially in early recovery. Consistency allows people to know and care for us, and it can save our lives.

The value of practicing consistency changes the longer we’re around. Our lives improve, and we are able to practice consistency in other areas: NA service, family relationships, friendships, and any other place we go. Those of us who were able to show up physically for our family and friends find, over time, that we are able to be more fully present in the spaces we inhabit. “I used to just send someone who looked like me,” one speaker recalled. “My family got a person with my face, my eyes, my smile. But behind all that was empty. Showing up for real in NA taught me how to bring the real me to other places I go. I’m not sending the imposter anymore.”

The magic of consistency in NA goes beyond just showing up. Simply dragging our body to meetings on a regular basis, whether that’s daily or slightly less often, wouldn’t be enough on its own. Something special happens in our meetings, though—we see and recognize each other beyond the surface level. We hear others share and we relate; we share with others and tell on our disease. Consistency helps keep us from going back into hiding, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Our recovery depends on it.

Simply having my butt in a seat at a meeting won’t keep me clean or magically make me recover. But it’s a damn good place to start!

MAY

Service as an Expression of Love and Gratitude

Service changes our relationship to our own lives. We learn to put love and gratitude into action, and when we mobilize our good feelings they have a way of spreading through all our affairs.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Being of Service”

The Basic Text tells us that “we can only keep what we have by giving it away.” That’s as true for us as individuals as it is for NA as a whole. When we share our experience with new members, we’re reminded where we came from and exactly how far we’ve come. We don’t need loads of cleantime to start reaping the benefits of service. One member recalled, “My sponsor taught me to carry a pen to every meeting so that I could give my phone number to newcomers. I asked, ‘But aren’t I still a newcomer?’ and was reminded that I had 30 more days than the person that just walked in the door.” Reflecting on service in early recovery, another member shared, “I was making more than just coffee, I was making friends and beginning to feel a part of my home group.” We gain a sense of belonging as we give of ourselves. It feels good, and we want more. We put love and gratitude into action as we serve.

We focus on carrying the message and let the other details—in life, in meetings, in our heads—sort themselves out in their own time. A shared commitment to service helps us to hear each other and to choose to believe that we’re all doing our best. We love and, therefore, serve NA even when we disagree about the best way to go about it. We contribute to the lively and loving atmosphere of recovery in our meetings and participate in the countless incognito efforts that make this thing work. We arrive at meetings early to welcome each new face or stay late to clean up and put away chairs. Each of these actions expresses our gratitude.

We bring this mindset with us into the world outside NA. We recognize our capacity to help others and know that it feels good to do good. We get some freedom from self-obsession and the opportunity to practice loving kindness in our affairs. We gain a sense of fulfillment as we engage in acts of service inside and outside Narcotics Anonymous.

I will express love and gratitude by serving the greater good.

Empathy in Hard Times

We find people who have been through what we're going through, and got through it clean. We need other people to walk us through hard times, and we need to reach out and help others as we heal.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Growing Pains”

For many of us, when we were new to NA, getting clean—and staying clean—was the hardest thing we'd ever been through. Our life seemed impossibly dark, and it took every bit of effort not to go back to our old lives. But we didn't pick up, no matter what. We survived that time, in large part, because of our connection to other recovering addicts. A member shared: “In my first meeting someone told me, ‘I understand you, and you don't have to go through this alone.’ For years, people had said so many things to me, trying to help, but until NA, no one said they'd had the same experience—and that they'd survived it.”

However, staying clean doesn't mean the difficult times are over. Inevitably, “no matter what” situations await all of us. Sometimes these challenges can add to our lives in significant ways: We get off the street and live on our own for the first time or we buy property or start a family or a business. For many of us, we experience catastrophic events that easily eclipse the suffering of early recovery. We have to care for an aging parent or we lose a child to the disease of addiction. There's economic hardship, divorce or widowhood, infertility, cancer or chronic pain; the list is endless.

And so is the depth of the empathy and experience of our NA Fellowship. None of us has to go through any hardship alone. We get through these times clean, just as we did when we were new—with willingness to accept help from those who understand us and who have endured similar situations.

The member continued: “Without each other, we are stumbling around in the dark. I let people in, not only because I needed help, but because allowing others who love us to support us in our time of need also shows compassion and generosity.” Speaking about the loss of his spouse to suicide, he added, “Ultimately, my own struggle became more bearable because I helped someone going through the same thing. That mutual aid is empathy in action.”

*I am committed to being there for others who have been down similar roads.
We can walk together and welcome others along the way.*

The Attraction of Goodwill

Like so many things in recovery, how we do the work is as important as the work we do.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Eleven, Opening Essay

Many of us have had the experience of encountering a newcomer at a meeting or working with a sponsee who just can't seem to get this recovery thing. We have wished that we could just pour experience, strength, and hope into their minds and hearts, but we know it simply doesn't work that way.

By participating in the hospitals and institutions and public relations service committees, many of us get a front-row seat to newcomers' awakening when we take H&I meetings to inmates or present PR panels to local schools. Initially, some students might attend to get out of class and prisoners to get out of their cells. Regardless of the motivation, many can't help but identify. We see the looks on their faces change from indifference and apathy to relief and understanding. The NA message has a way of penetrating through that tough exterior and getting right to the heart of the still-suffering addict. Sharing openly and honestly, from the heart, is the most attractive thing we have to offer.

If we were to run around like fanatics, proclaiming the spoils of recovery based on our specific gains and achievements, this would be a misrepresentation of the truth. The practice of goodwill in Tradition Eleven comes when we exercise discretion and deliver a simple message: Narcotics Anonymous can work for anyone with a desire to stop using. When the message is clear, recovery can take root.

Today I will be mindful of how I represent myself inside and outside of the rooms, knowing that my story is not the Narcotics Anonymous program and that I might be the only Basic Text some people ever see.

Willingness Gets Us into Action

Willingness without action is fantasy.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Commitment”

Those of us who weren’t stoned out of our minds for middle school science may recall the law of inertia: “An object at rest stays at rest and an object in motion stays in motion with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted upon by an external force.” In other words, things tend to keep doing what they’re doing unless something intervenes. The same might be said for people.

When humans experience inertia, it can signal our resistance to change. Addicts sometimes take this to extremes—imagine that! When we get stuck in place or in constant motion, a powerful force may be needed to provoke change. That’s why getting through the doors of our first meeting is so extraordinary. This first, often tentative action demonstrates a sublime willingness. Looking back on this first hint of surrender, many of us might sense the presence of an external force that propelled us into action. Individually and collectively, you might say that the force is strong with us.

Then and now, meetings can provide a potent antidote to inertia. They offer inspiration and help us imagine a future without drugs. Beyond fantasizing, we learn from each other’s experience and try out practical new tools. We give ourselves a break and learn to let momentary or even obsessive thoughts of using come and go. By attending meetings regularly, we get frequent reminders about the kinds of actions we can take to sustain our cleantime or delve more intensely into recovery.

The NA program holds the potential to change the direction or speed of the addict who still suffers, but it takes some cooperation and effort on our part. As one member pointed out, “We say, ‘It works if you work it,’ *not* ‘It works if you fantasize about it.’” We’re not strangers to wishing things were different. In NA, we still hope and pray, but then we roll up our sleeves and get to work. As the age-old saying goes, “If nothing changes, nothing changes.”

Whether I’ve let complacency grind my forward momentum to a halt or let constant motion block my awareness, I invite a loving force greater than myself to nudge me out of inertia.

Gratitude for All of Life's Challenges

When we feel the deepest gratitude, we can look back and see that our path to that moment was neither short nor straight.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Keys to Freedom”

“I’m so grateful for the life I have, thanks to NA.” The speaker was then quiet for a moment, wiping away tears, before continuing: “Grateful for my sponsor and the Steps . . . and even for the bad stuff that’s happened along the way.”

For someone who’s new, witnessing gratitude from a member for “bad stuff” can sound illogical, overly virtuous, impossible, even undesirable. Why on earth should we be grateful for our addiction, our mistakes, and our poor decision making? Do we really have to feel grateful for pain and loss to recover in NA?

Reframing our past hardships or current challenges with a deep awareness of gratitude is not an easy path, nor is it a quick one. For one thing, we rarely, if ever, start our journey in recovery with a clear and broad perspective on our lives. This doesn’t happen just from being abstinent and going to a few meetings—and talking about being grateful. It requires effort, a lot of it. We do our stepwork thoroughly. We develop and learn to rely on a power greater than ourselves. We try to apply spiritual principles in all our relationships. We work on forgiving others and ourselves. We make amends for our mistakes and find compassion for ourselves when we mess up again. We consistently surrender in the face of new adversity and strive to find the lesson in it.

“My flaws and mistakes are part of what makes me who I am today,” the speaker continued. “They are what inspire me to work to be a better person. My ability to get through some of the worst times in my life—bruised and battered but still clean—is a huge gift. I am grateful for this life.”

Gratitude is not a destination. It’s an awareness and a process. Though we recovering addicts don’t feel grateful all the time, there are times when we do feel it deeply. When we’re feeling ungrateful, we’ve learned what to do: help another person on their journey in recovery.

Today I will do some work to learn from my mistakes and from hardships. I will strive for gratitude for the “bad stuff” as well as the good.

The Discernment Dimmer Switch

Discernment comes from hard experience: trusting people we shouldn't, being hurt, and coming back anyway.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Friendship”

Addicts seem especially prone to being all-or-nothing people. We either know or have been the kind of people who flip between manipulation and brutal honesty, who exercise eight days a week or not at all, or who have love/hate relationships with everything and everybody. One member described their approach to relationships this way: “Either I’m all in or you’re dead to me.” Suspicion, cynicism, and self-reliance were survival skills.

It doesn’t take much cleantime for us to realize this dark and fearful view of the world won’t serve our recovery well. Hope for a better life creeps up on us, crowding out our previously dark outlook. Some of us even adopt an uncharacteristically sunny disposition as the renowned “pink cloud” colors our entire approach to life for a time. Not to knock this glorious phase of early recovery or those lucky enough to experience it, but blind optimism carries its own risks. We can trust NA with saving our lives without entrusting every member with all of our secrets. It’s important to modulate our openness, discerning the difference between sharing at group level, confiding in a friend, and baring our soul in a Fifth Step. Of course, some of our best lessons come from our mistakes.

This is where discernment comes in. Discernment introduces us to the brake pedal so that we don’t have to lurch between extremes. Tapping the brakes on our thinking and behavior allows us to practice good judgment instead of impulsiveness. Discernment turns a toggle switch into a dial. Instead of binary choices like trust or don’t trust, we discern the useful territory between poles. We discern not just right from wrong, but also right from almost right.

Discernment helps us make better choices and learn from experience. We’ll still get things wrong, but we take the time to discern a better approach and try again.

Do I have toggle switches for some of my emotions or behaviors that should be converted to dials? How can a discernment dimmer switch tone down some of my excesses?

Powerlessness and the Second Step

By admitting our own powerlessness, we open our minds to an entirely new idea: the possibility that something greater than ourselves might be powerful enough to relieve our obsession to use drugs.

—It Works, Step Two

Our literature describes how the Second Step helps us to fill the gap created when we admit our powerlessness in Step One. If we are powerless over our disease, what can we do about it? For many of us, simply seeing there are other addicts like us who have lost the desire to use is enough to open our minds to the possibility that *something* might be able to help us, too—even if we don't know what that something might be.

The catch to accepting help from a power greater than ourselves is that we have to stop exerting our own power first. Practicing powerlessness over our disease means that we stop trying to manage and control it. So many of us have shared about trying to limit our using, hiding our stash from ourselves, using only certain substances or on certain days of the week, and many other ways of trying to be clever or tricky enough to outsmart our addiction. If anyone had success with those types of tricks, they're probably not NA members. (Yet?)

That's the way it is with addiction. If we try to overpower or outmaneuver our disease, we're bound to fail. It might not even happen right away, but eventually we find ourselves surrounded by unmanageability, wondering what happened to our well-laid plans. Rather than exerting great control over ourselves to behave in a highly predictable and consistent manner, we let go of the illusion of control and open ourselves to a power from elsewhere. Unlimited examples of experience, strength, and hope are available to us when we share with other addicts in recovery.

Rather than trying to go it alone, I will rely on a power greater than myself.

Tolerance and Toxic Relationships

Another member found that amends meant not tolerating abuse anymore, and felt she finally had permission to step away from a destructive household.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter Five, “Family”

Preparing to make meaningful amends includes plenty of heavy lifting in Steps One through Eight. These Steps give us a new perspective on our place in the world, a better understanding of ourselves, and a conscious contact with a Higher Power. We gain courage and self-respect along the way; these will be vital assets for us as we make our amends. A sponsor’s guidance and the experience of other members shape our approach. With their input, we decide what our direct amends will look like in each situation and how we can avoid “injuring them or others”—including ourselves. The same network of friends and mentors reminds us to put our name on that list.

Family dynamics and a lifetime of baggage can complicate some of our amends. Our support group reminds us that holding ourselves to account does not mean tolerating mistreatment. In some cases, we can protect ourselves from harm by setting limits; healthy boundaries make for healthy—or at least healthier—relationships. In other relationships, the toxicity continues to be intolerable, and the amends process often reveals a need for greater distance. We can stop giving headspace to those who disregard our needs and forgive ourselves for tolerating what was never okay. As part of our amends to ourselves, many of us reevaluate how we use our time and energy.

Making our way through a list of amends brings clarity. Protecting ourselves by setting limits of what we will and won’t tolerate is often part of the amends we make to ourselves. We take responsibility for our own beliefs, feelings, and actions. Not every relationship can or should be rebuilt, but the one with ourselves is definitely worth the effort.

I can forgive myself for tolerating mistreatment in the past and make amends to myself by rethinking my approach to one of my most challenging relationships. What limits might I need to introduce or reinforce?

Love and Step Twelve

When we are practicing Step Twelve to the best of our ability, love becomes central to all that we do—there is no more powerful antidote to the despair and self-destruction of addiction.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Love”

Love in Narcotics Anonymous is the Twelfth Step in action. We felt the power of love when we entered our first meeting and were welcomed, no matter what we looked like, where we came from, how we smelled, or who we came with. We found open arms and true acceptance—perhaps for the first time in our lives. The hugs, genuine care and concern, and offers of support extended to us provide a powerful model of love in action.

In the beginning, allowing ourselves to receive this love takes some effort. Eventually, we get to give it away. That sounds simple, but it’s not always easy. Through service, we learn to love even those members we don’t really like. Sometimes we’re surprised by what can happen when we focus on the primary purpose and choose principled actions.

One H&I subcommittee member recalled serving on a panel with his least-favorite person in the rooms. “We set our differences aside and focused on our primary purpose,” the member shared. “We’re never going to be best friends, but I could see his heart was in the right place. We both loved NA and wanted to help the addict who still suffers.”

As NA members, we understand that sharing the message is an act of love. We share and we care to sustain our own recovery and to help the sick and suffering addict. It’s what saves us all from the desperate and self-destructive lives we’ve known. After being in NA for some time, we also appreciate the love extended to those who’ve been here for a while, who need love just as surely as they did on their first day clean. While love alone may not help us overcome all our problems, it sure does provide a great springboard toward the solution.

I will put love into action by carrying the NA message today.

Perseverance Helps Us Stay

We may tire mentally in repeating our new ideas and tire physically in our new activities, yet we know that if we fail to repeat them we will surely take up our old practices.

—Basic Text, Chapter 7: Recovery and Relapse

Many of us can say: “Relapse is a part of my story.”

From our own experience and from listening to each other share, we know the possibility that we might not stay clean is very real. What causes an addict in recovery to choose to get high again? It can be anything, really, but an unaware “I got this” can be especially dangerous. We tire of hearing the message, sharing the message, and, frankly, each other. The sun goes down and comes back up on what seems like the same day. We become increasingly cranky and unfulfilled. Having become disillusioned with life clean but without recovery, maybe we even quit going to meetings. Eventually, we reach outside of ourselves to fix our insides and use again. When we come back to the rooms, we tell our story of complacency and sitting on that stepwork.

While there are endless versions of the relapse story, we all have heard the ones that don’t have happy Narcotics Anonymous endings. Not everybody makes it back to NA and has the opportunity for another go at recovery. Knowing we could die out there—or not die but bring ruin to our livelihood and relationships—doesn’t keep us clean. So . . . what does?

We know the answer to the question. It’s pushing through with the basics of Steps, service, sponsor, and Higher Power. It’s breathing life into our recovery in whatever ways we can. Start a new meeting? Take on another sponsee? Read the daily “SPAD” entry? It’s doing what we all have done in the past, again, just for today. It’s carrying the message to a newcomer to remind ourselves of where we came from and what was so freely given to us. It’s not picking up, even when we want to. It’s staying, even when we don’t want to. Perseverance can be an antidote to complacency. We want to live, so we have to keep on living.

We don’t need a new relapse story, or one at all. It’s preventable, not inevitable.

Today I will honor the rewards of recovery that I’ve worked hard for by persevering in what I know works: the program of NA. I want to stay—and keep what I have so I can give it to others.

Honest Self-Appraisal in the Steps

The steps help us to increase our ability to be honest with ourselves and others.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Growing Pains”

To say that honesty wasn’t a top priority when we were using may be an understatement. We gain a new awareness of honesty’s value once we clean up. With a clear head and a restored conscience, we find that dishonesty comes at a price. Regret is no joke, so we try to avoid it. Practicing honesty with ourselves can be a little more complicated. Self-deception creates some major blind spots that have a nasty habit of reemerging. Fortunately, our ability to be honest with ourselves deepens as we work the Twelve Steps.

We admit our powerlessness and begin to reckon with our unmanageability. We come to recognize that we’re, frankly, screwed on our own and decide to accept some help. Taking action that’s aligned with that decision begins with an honest evaluation of how we’ve lived our lives so far. Sometimes we get as many insights in sharing our inventories as we do in writing them. We go on to dig a bit deeper, examining how aspects of our character had become disproportionate to their intended purpose. We turn this bag of dirty tricks over to a Higher Power—and over and over and over again as we strive to be better people with help from that Power, whatever we conceive that to be. Taking another look at the harm we caused, we make an earnest effort to right our past wrongs.

Continuing on this path takes daily commitment and, honestly, we all slack off from time to time. Our experience with the Steps means we’re quicker to notice when old patterns of thinking and behavior creep back up on us. *Oh, I’m doing that again.* We may find that we’ve shut down emotionally, become disconnected from our spiritual lives, resumed a hurtful interior monologue, or taken up some other outmoded approach to life. We put in the work to restore wholehearted honesty to our lives and in our relationships, including those with ourselves and with a Higher Power. We tune in to reality, to the truth, to our higher selves. And we help others to do the same—to live and to thrive through the daily application of spiritual principles.

I will engage in some honest self-assessment today. I will shore up my foundation and restore my zest for learning how to live.

Surrender to What?

Surrender . . . is what happens after we've accepted the First Step as something that is true for us and have accepted that recovery is the solution.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step One, "Surrender"

Our first introduction to the Steps often stirs up a powerful rebelliousness. "All my life I've felt disempowered. Now you're telling me that I'm powerless and that I have to surrender? Every day?" many of us ask.

While NA is truly a program of action, we also strive to understand the ideas, concepts, and spiritual principles that underpin this new way of life. Before we got clean, surrender to most of us meant the inconceivable: showing weakness. In many of the neighborhoods we came up in, surrendering would threaten our very survival. For others, the thought of losing or being wrong—and, worst of all, admitting it!—defied the very core of our being. We'd rather go down fighting than accept defeat, especially if others would know about it.

Once we better understand the First Step and the concept of surrender, we realize that we've already admitted defeat when we come through the door of an NA meeting. "No one gets here by accident," our sponsor says.

Okay, we now understand that we've surrendered our grip on denial. We get that our addiction has worn us down, and we are powerless over it. No matter how we fought, we couldn't make using work. And, yes, we've even surrendered to the idea that surrender is a "process" that we must sustain by working Steps, going to meetings, service, all that.

"But what am I surrendering to?" we ask, thinking we are pretty smart.

"You're already doing it," our sponsor says. "You're surrendering to recovery as the solution. If you wanna fight for something, fight for that."

Point, sponsor.

I'm going to take a moment to find where in my life I am still resisting recovery as the solution to my problems. I'm still a fighter, but today my fight is for recovery.

Flexibility and Relationships

The flexibility that relationships require comes more easily to us when we are practicing principles in our lives.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Romantic Relationships,” ‘The Courage to Trust’

Most of us are not wired for flexibility. Letting go of control just isn’t in our nature. We struggle with rigid expectations of how people should behave, so we fight or flee when things don’t go our way. Others of us live with minimal boundaries; we put up with anything to avoid conflict, pain, and rejection.

Thankfully, we have a program based on spiritual principles and relationships with NA members to help teach us how to live by them. By being real with each other in NA, we support each other in becoming less rigid. We learn to handle the truth. Working with a sponsor helps us to trust and to ask for what we need. Serving in a home group and beyond provides us with opportunities to compromise, speak up for ourselves, and respect boundaries. We become more flexible as we apply other principles, too. Our emotional muscles get more limber with open-mindedness, willingness, honesty, empathy—sometimes tolerance if that’s all we’ve got.

Working the Steps and practicing principles helps us to let go of the illusion of control. Our lives improve as we figure out who we are and who we’re not. We come to understand the disease and trust our Higher Power. We allow people to be who they are because we’re learning to be okay with ourselves. Getting to know someone on a deeper level is easier when we know ourselves. As we let go of self-centered patterns of gratification, being cooperative and accommodating allows us to be equal partners in our relationships. Many of us once lived by a policy of “my way or the highway.” By practicing the principles in our program, we gain the flexibility to be able to say, “Your way? Sure. Let’s try it out.”

Relating well with others involves some give-and-take. I will draw on my NA experience to practice flexibility in all of my relationships.

Autonomy and the Ties That Bind

Autonomy offers us the freedom to try new things, and we demonstrate courage when we make new efforts to better carry our message.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Four, “For Groups”

When Tradition Four says that “each group should be autonomous,” it opens the gate for creative expressions of our primary purpose. What comes next—“except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole”—defines the path beyond that gate. The other eleven Traditions and our spiritual principles guide us along that path. They offer direction to ensure the best possible conditions for our journey and mark potential trouble to keep us from wandering off a cliff.

“We don’t just do as we please. We do what’s right,” as one member put it. “At our business meetings, my home group considers two questions: ‘How do our actions carry the message?’ and ‘What else can we do to improve the atmosphere of recovery?’” Keeping our primary purpose foremost in mind has a clarifying effect. It ensures that each innovation is motivated by our desire to carry the message more effectively.

Changes in society, in the neighborhood, or in the law can impact our meetings and often call us to innovate. We do our best to let go of that “this is the way we’ve always done it” mindset, which can undermine the courage we need to exercise group autonomy. It may be helpful to distinguish between the capital “T” Traditions that guide all our efforts in NA and the small “t” traditions—local customs or norms—that sometimes feel as important. Longtime members assure us that we won’t break this thing by thinking a bit outside the box. We’re reminded to strive for unity, not uniformity, and to evaluate proposed changes with our hearts open and the guidance of all Twelve Traditions in mind. We can practice our autonomy *and* pay attention to the ties that bind. When we do, we find that—as promised—all will be well.

I will appreciate both the freedom that group autonomy offers and the continuity that our guiding principles provide.

We Can Rediscover Hope at Any Time

When we see a member experience a real breakthrough with 20, or 30, or more years clean, we can see that, truly, recovery never stops.

—Living Clean, Chapter 7, “Love”

As a twelve-step program, stairs are an easy go-to metaphor we often use to describe the recovery process. We climb up out of the darkness and despair of active addiction into the light of recovery. Some members say that the farther we go up the staircase, the more we have to lose should we go tumbling back down again. *Living Clean* describes recovery like a spiral staircase: “Again and again we come to the same view, only each time we are seeing it from a different perspective.” One member shared with a laugh, “My staircase feels more like one of those trippy optical illusion paintings where the stairs circle back on each other and the laws of physics don’t apply.”

The longer we stay clean, the more life we experience. And when we’re actively working our program, we experience life deeply and continue to encounter more truth about ourselves all the time. Finding a new way to live takes on a different meaning when we stay clean for decades. We discover ourselves, reinvent ourselves, lose ourselves, find ourselves, discover ourselves—again and again and again. The staircase circles back on itself.

When we stay clean through it all and stay active in NA, much of our process is visible to those around us. It can be messy. We may grow in ways that cause us to drift apart from some friends in recovery. We may form new connections with other members we never thought we would get close to. We might have moments where we feel silly or slow for having a realization about ourselves so far down the path, only to have our friends respond, “Oh, yeah—we’ve known that about you for a long time.”

Few of us end up having the lives that we would have expected to have—or even being the people we would have expected to be—when we first got clean. Our fellow members love us through it all. No matter how far along we are, when we share our new discoveries, we share our hope.

My journey may not look like what I expected—or what I think others expected. As my horizons broaden, I will relish each discovery and freely share what I have learned so others can see how my journey continues.

The Freedom to Let Go

We are free to participate, create, care and share, surprise ourselves, take risks, be vulnerable, and stand on our own two feet.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Keys to Freedom”

When we stop using, we eliminate the most obvious symptom of the disease and the source of many of our problems. Abstinence alone, however, is seldom enough to straighten out our thinking. Even after the drugs are gone, our outlook, priorities, and personalities remain distorted. If we want to be free from all aspects of the disease, it will take some work.

“My self-centeredness had me tied up in knots,” one member recalled. “I was angry and judgmental, greedy for attention and material things, dishonest with others and myself. Just not using was just not enough. It took time and change for me to get free from my self-imposed prison.”

We get relief along the way and glimpse what it’s like to be unburdened from self-centered fear. Stepwork loosens the grip that worry and shame once had on us, freeing us to live in today. We find freedom in having friends we can count on and confide in, in belly laughs that aren’t chemically induced, in the depth of our empathy for others’ struggles. We stay aware of our spiritual condition, not settling for freedom’s cheap substitute: irresponsibility. Humility liberates us to be a little more forgiving of others and ourselves, recognizing that we’re all works in progress. We’re grateful for our new capacity to stay in the present and for the respite we get from the disease when we tend to our spiritual wellness. We face life’s many choices knowing that, no matter what, we’ll be okay.

Freedom is a state of mind, not a state of being. The NA program helps us discover and discard limiting beliefs and patterns that keep us stuck, regardless of our living conditions. “Each day offers a fresh start and another opportunity to cast off my mental, emotional, and spiritual shackles,” wrote one member from the confines of a prison. “If I want to fly, I have to let go of the baggage that’s weighing me down.” That’s apt advice for all of us.

I will release something that’s kept me bound. I’ll let go of it daily if that’s what it takes to live free.

17 MAY

Love for Unity's Sake

Unity depends on our willingness to keep coming from love, even when that seems like the hardest thing to do.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Two, “Spiritual Principles”

Why is coming from love so difficult sometimes?

Practicing the principle of unity in all of our affairs—and coming from a place of love while doing it—so often seems to require superhuman powers.

Sometimes coming from love is hard because a friend has truly wronged us or hurt someone else we love. Or maybe it's the member who stole money from the group or the one who gossips constantly. Or a newcomer from a treatment program uses language from another fellowship. Or, at dinner after the meeting, that guy is chewing with his mouth open. Again.

At other times, coming from love is a challenge because we know we are right! Yet our group's conscience runs counter to this indisputable fact. “There's no way in hell that our collective Higher Power is being expressed through that ridiculous decision!” We want to throw a chair across the room or break down in tears of frustration.

Clearly, coming from love may not be our first reaction to most any distraction. The good news is that we're teachable. We can learn to empathize with others, to trust group conscience, and to let go of our desires to control everyone and everything. The more we're able to absorb this lesson and practice unconditional love, the more relief we experience from our anger and self-righteousness.

Tradition Two reminds us that the group's conscience is expressed through a loving Higher Power. To support this idea, we've heard members say, “We are acting out of either love or fear.” Maybe it's not always quite that simple, but as we grow, we come to understand how critical unity is to our own recovery, and we become willing to examine whether a chosen action squares with spiritual principles.

Even at an emotional breaking point, it is possible to ask myself, “Am I coming from a place of love?” Today I will take a moment to breathe before opening my mouth, clicking send, or throwing a chair.

Connecting to Our Conscience

We learn to listen to our conscience—that still, small voice within that tells us if we’re heading in the right direction.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Spirituality Is Practical”

Some of us might argue that the solutions to our problems, the answers to our moment-to-moment decisions and our big life choices, have always been within our reach. We just haven’t been listening to our conscience. We’ve been unable to hear it because of the competing, confusing cacophony of noise in our heads, a squeaky hamster wheel of thoughts that we can’t get off of. Others of us feel as if we never had a conscience and that it’s something we develop only once we become abstinent and start to work a program. We come to the opinion that our disease speaks to us—in our own voice, no less!—and is the sole influence for our bad decision making. Conversely, our conscience, as an expression of our Higher Power, is the source of positive influence.

Whatever our opinions are about the origin story of our conscience, we can probably all agree that we can do a lot to cultivate our sensitivity to the voice of our higher self. We get clean and become humble enough to ask for help. We listen to each other’s experiences of recovery. The work we do on ourselves through the Steps and for others through service awakens us enough to experience our conscience. Many of us would say our conscience has become clearer, more distinct, and more dependable as we’ve grown in recovery. It becomes easier to access because we’re able to turn down the static brought on by its evil twin, our disease. We learn to quiet our minds and, through prayer and meditation, we gain a lot of practice in not just being able to hear it but in listening to what it has to say.

“My conscience is my inner guide,” wrote a member. “It’s a driving force that gives me what I need to make an honest decision. I still can’t control outcomes just because I’m choosing wisely, but I come to my decisions with integrity.”

I will practice staying conscious of my conscience. It’s there for me when I listen, helping me to stay connected to living this new way of life.

Selflessness, Self-Care, and Our Spiritual Condition

The principles we learn in the steps help us let go of our selfishness and lovingly serve the needs of others.

—It Works, Tradition One

In hindsight, many of us find that self-centeredness shaped our thinking and behavior. We realize how much energy we spent protecting our fragile egos, imagining what others thought about us, or carefully curating our image on social media. Privately, we were often negative, selfish, and entitled, as we neglected the work of doing our best with what we had. The Steps have a way of setting us on a more productive course in life. We see who we've been, come to understand who we are, and clear out what interferes with taking a more positive, selfless, and grateful approach to life.

Whether we're new or have been around a while, some of us take up seemingly selfless activities like ducks to water. But, like anything that feels good, we can take selflessness to unhealthy extremes. We do love too much of a good thing, after all, and—bonus!—we can avoid examining ourselves by becoming immersed in helping others. Many of us learn the hard way that unrestrained generosity can harm both the giver and the recipient. As the old saying goes, “You can't draw water from an empty well.” The Steps help us build a more realistic self-concept and a life we don't want to run from.

“To practice selflessness requires that I first have a sense of self,” in the words of one member. “I tell my sponsees, ‘You first, right after me!’” We take responsibility for our own well-being and strive for harmony as we contribute to our common welfare. The principles of the Steps help us establish healthy boundaries and strive for balance. For many of us, the idea of loving and serving others selflessly adds a new dimension to our spiritual self-care routine. We find ways to recharge and gather fresh inspiration so we can selflessly contribute to NA unity.

I will care for my spiritual condition so that I can selflessly love and serve and contribute to NA unity. The Steps are the key to my outlook and well-being, although a bubble bath and some dark chocolate won't hurt either!

20 MAY

The Rewards of Responsibility

We don't always want to work our program, but we know the rewards we get when we take responsibility for our recovery—and the consequences when we do not.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Keys to Freedom”

Early recovery—especially our first go at it—can seem almost magical. For many addicts, things get so much better so quickly when we first find NA. We put some days together clean. We start feeling physically better. It's easier to pay the rent because we don't have a habit, so we gain a little stability. Those NA folks are really encouraging and—*what?*—is that hope I feel?

Soon, the minor miracles of early recovery—like paying bills, eating actual meals, or having regular bowel movements—lose some of their charm. It dawns on us that just not using is not enough. Despite having a cool sponsor and some friends who are clean, NA activities, and a roof over our heads, we still have that gnawing feeling that something is missing.

While surrounding ourselves with good people is important, recovery is not contagious—we won't catch it simply by hanging around. This is an important realization, but it's what we do with it that matters. Ignore it and know that using may start to appeal to us. Get busy and reap more of the rewards of recovery. Sooner or later—and at multiple points in our journey—each of us faces these alternatives: stay clean but remain miserable and set ourselves up for possible relapse *or* take responsibility for our recovery.

And so we engage in what's before us: the work of recovery. It's a twelve-step program; why not work all twelve? The rewards are many, and the most valuable among them intangible. In recovery, we become self-aware and—unlike when we were in the grips of the disease—we have the freedom to choose what to do with what we learn about ourselves. The road to spiritual wealth opens up when we accept responsibility for our recovery and all it entails.

I will check in with my feelings and confide in a friend today. I will apply the spiritual principle of responsibility by identifying what's happening with me and being open to change.

Facing Feelings with Optimism

When we realize we've survived every emotion we ever had, we start to believe that we are going to be alright even when we don't feel alright.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, "Living Our Principles"

Feelings get a bad rap, so it's no wonder many of us tried to avoid them. At best, they seemed complicated and uncomfortable. At worst, they posed a threat to us, since appearing vulnerable might be dangerous. By the time we find recovery, we may be accustomed to being shut down emotionally. Our hardened exteriors were an asset in active addiction, protecting us like armor. But, like so many of those old survival skills, we find being emotionally unavailable hinders our recovery. We need a different approach.

Having little to no experience with emotional well-being, many of us tried to select which feelings we would feel. Unsurprisingly, we welcomed feelings that brought us pleasure: love, connection, joy, satisfaction—bring it on! On the other end of the spectrum, we did our best to stuff or avoid anger, heartache, or dread. Sadly, we recognized that this familiar pattern of seeking pleasure and avoiding reality—retooled without the cushion of drugs—was not an effective path to emotional health.

Try as we might to avoid it, we all face adversity eventually, and the emotions that accompany it flood in. When we first experience despair without drugs, we may feel like we're going to die. "Everything is horrible!!" we tell our sponsor dramatically. Though we'd been fishing for a cosigner, we settled for some empathy. We're offered assurances that our troubles are neither inescapable nor permanent.

"I think of my feelings as works in progress," our sponsor explains. "I won't deny my emotional response these days because I know it's just a first draft, not ready to be framed and hung on a wall. My feelings can evolve with some time and distance, just as I do. The hope I found in NA gave me the courage to test out this theory. My optimism is rooted in experience. I have faith that better times will come."

I will approach my emotional life with optimism today. My feelings—good or bad—are only temporary and subject to revision.

22 MAY

The Generosity in Being Vulnerable

Recovery is a gift, given freely, passed from hand to hand and heart to heart.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Eight, Opening Reflection

While it can be easy to think of our Traditions as nothing more than rules or guidelines to keep us in check, the truth is that they describe the way our Fellowship is able to enjoy tremendous freedom. The NA approach allows us to carry our message in whatever way suits us best; no degrees or specialized training necessary—simply our personal experience shared in our own way. One speaker laughed about our Traditions: “I heard ‘nonprofessional’ and ‘ought never be organized,’ and I knew I was in the right place! Then I had the experience of sharing a total mess, crying and cussing and crazy, and people came up afterward and told me that they got a lot out of what I shared.”

Sharing who we are and where we are—no fronts, no filters—is an act of generosity. Especially for secretive addicts like us, giving other people a chance to glance behind the curtain and see what’s really going on can be a precious gift. We are able to do so much for other addicts when we get honest this way. When we tell on ourselves, we let other members see they’re not alone in what they’re going through. “They told me I can’t save my face and my ass at the same time,” one addict wrote. “I realized later that if I try to save face while I help an addict, I won’t do a very good job doing either.”

We never really know which of our words or actions will break through and reach the addict who is suffering. It could be that one kind gesture, a hug, a particular experience shared, or all of them taken together. NA isn’t treatment or therapy or any other type of place where professionals can offer a diagnosis and plan. Instead, we share freely the way other addicts shared with us, and we connect with others on a heart-to-heart level.

Getting vulnerable when I share opens my heart to other addicts. I will freely give what was given to me: the gift of recovery.

Maturity Helps Us Face Reality

Maturity comes to us when we use spiritual principles rather than defects to deal with reality.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Awakening to Our Spirituality”

It took some pretty twisted survival skills to deny our active addiction. Some of us coped by living a life of make-believe. Such fantasy thinking has a nasty habit of following us into recovery. It reemerges when we’re unwilling to accept circumstances as they are or resist taking personal responsibility for our part of any problem.

When we are clean and awake, resistance to the truth becomes painful. Through the process of working the Steps, we learn how to deal with day-to-day reality in a much less agonizing way. Instead of reaching into that bag of dirty tricks that got us through our using days, we begin to rely on spiritual principles to deal with life.

Growing pains are inevitable when we uncover the contents of that old, decrepit toolkit. Even before we learn to take our own inventory, a sponsor or close friend may plainly point out some of our less desirable behavior patterns in the moment. One member shared, “The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off!” Appreciating the people who hold us accountable is a mark of our emerging emotional maturity. These are the friends who help us grow up in recovery.

We learn what makes us tick and what ticks us off. We come to know what defects call to us under which circumstances, and what spiritual principles we can practice instead. We develop a moral compass as we incorporate spiritual principles into our daily lives. Instead of responding to an upset boss or partner with defensiveness or anger, for example, we take a moment to consider the alternatives. When we respond thoughtfully, inviting spiritual principles—not impulse—to guide our behavior, we begin to feel like we are meeting reality like mature human beings. We are growing up.

Today I will apply the spiritual opposites of my defects, recognizing the benefits that maturity offers.

Intimacy as Conscious Contact and Connection

Intimacy is conscious contact with another human being. We connect. As we get close to others we see the divine in them, and we see it in ourselves as well.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Conscious Contact”

Few of us come to NA with mountains of success practicing intimacy. Often we hear our fellow addicts grumble, “I hate people.” Before getting clean, family life was often dysfunctional, to say the least. The deeper we were in our addiction, the shallower our friendships and romantic relationships became. Our drug use, ego, and denial were a trio of airtight barriers that prevented us from connecting with those closest to us. We lacked trust in others and avoided being vulnerable at all costs. The idea of truly being seen by another person was unbearable, even absurd.

Upon getting clean, we may not initially be conscious of a desire for connection with our fellow addicts. We resist the idea of exposing our true selves, but intimacy isn’t just about sharing the details of our lives. It can be abandoning our old ideas about people and relationships, even letting go of our definition of what’s safe. It can be taking emotional risks when we don’t know the outcome. It can be saying what we want from a relationship—to the other person in it with us. It can be tolerating feedback from our loved ones and growing from it. It can be sitting in meetings with a group of recovering addicts and hearing each other’s gripes, pleas, desires, and strides. It can be witnessing what makes us human and worthy of love and connection, over and over again. Intimacy is the result of all this.

Intimacy is nothing less than letting go of everything that stops us from being ourselves in front of another person. What’s divine in us is what’s genuine.

Today I will consciously seek opportunities where I can get closer to my true self with another human being I trust.

25 MAY

Humility Grounds Us

The practice of humility helps us be honest about our circumstances. We learn to live and give within the limits of our lives.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Seven, “For Members”

In active addiction, we became masters of manipulation. We spun a web of lies so intricate that we began to believe our own nonsense. The admission that we were addicts may have been the first time we had been *truly* honest with ourselves in years. With this honesty comes an opportunity to take a look at our lives and where our active addiction led us.

For many of us, being at our lowest low, having lost everything but our lives, and feeling humiliated by our behavior inspires a modicum of honesty and humility. Others of us identified our spiritual and emotional desperation before we destroyed our relationships or lost our material possessions. In either case, an honest assessment leads us to practice humility as we accept that we’re no better and no worse than anyone else in the room.

As we stay clean, we get to know ourselves better through the process of working the Steps. Becoming familiar with our strengths and weaknesses in the Sixth Step gives us some perspective on what we have to offer the world and the Fellowship. And in Step Seven, we find new freedom in developing a humble and realistic view of ourselves and our resources.

Life has a way of nudging us back to a state of humility as new experiences challenge us over time. We learn to stay clean through life’s losses—divorce, bankruptcy, death. And we learn to stay humble even as we pursue an education, meet success in our careers, or establish healthy romantic relationships. We do our best to stay grounded in our program by remaining humble.

Practicing humility can help us learn how to monitor our emotional well-being and change course before we hit a breaking point. When we lose sight of our humility, we become more vulnerable to overextending ourselves, risking emotional or physical exhaustion. Over time, we learn our limits. Protecting pride and ego takes a backseat to defending healthy boundaries. We begin to learn how to give within our means.

Today I will maintain a realistic perspective on my circumstances and exercise humility and discernment when offering to contribute or serve.

Forgiveness, Acceptance, and Healing

Walking with the knowledge that someone has not forgiven us is hard, but through it we find levels of forgiveness and acceptance that we may not have known were possible.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Amends and Reconciliation”

Over time in NA, we learn that we are worthy of forgiveness. That discovery comes, in part, as a result of making our Step Nine amends. Part of our preparation for this process is to understand why we are doing it. To make meaningful and lasting change in our lives, we must make peace with the consequences of our actions and the harm we’ve caused.

While being forgiven by those we’ve hurt is a blessing, finding self-acceptance cannot be conditional on another’s actions. We must reconcile with *ourselves* to heal from our past. Forgiving ourselves is not contingent on receiving forgiveness from those we’ve harmed.

Reconciliation may not always be possible. Though we may believe we deserve to be heard and forgiven, some will understandably stonewall our efforts. What then? It’s pretty hard to gain the courage to undertake this process—but then we have to be humble enough to accept the reaction, even if it’s a flat-out rejection? That rejection may be excruciating for those of us whose self-esteem hinges entirely on being liked by others. We ask ourselves, “Am I even still worthy of forgiveness? How do I walk through this?”

No one is obligated to forgive us. We are powerless over other people’s willingness or readiness. In a situation like this one, we have one option for healing: move forward. That may take time because rejection is painful. As hard as it is to accept, we have to find a way to live with that pain without inflicting it on others. We must try to forgive ourselves for the consequences of our actions.

Not being forgiven is its own beast—and its own lesson in practicing spiritual principles. This experience might give us pause the next time we want to rebuff someone else’s amends. We may be quicker to forgive because we know what it’s like to experience that wall and how much effort it takes to live with that and let it go.

Today I will strive to accept my past and move on from it, though others may not. All I can do—today and every day—is to do better.

Showing Up with Integrity

Integrity is the state of being fully integrated: Our actions, our thinking, our feelings, our ideals, and our values all match up.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Spirituality Is Practical”

Most of us think of having integrity as being honest and reliable, as keeping our word. While that’s certainly true, integrity has a deeper and more nuanced meaning we don’t always consider: being whole, being wholly ourselves, being our whole selves at any given moment, no matter whose presence we’re in.

As active addicts, we often demonstrated a lack of integrity. We weren’t dependable, trustworthy, or responsible, and we weren’t whole. We omitted parts of the truth and parts of ourselves. “I was like a three-legged table,” a member joked. “Yeah, I could stand, but don’t try leaning on me.”

We compartmentalized our existence: We behaved in certain ways with some but not with others, and we led double—sometimes multiple—lives. These ways of being can follow us into recovery. How we act and appear on the outside doesn’t always match who we really are—or strive to be—on the inside. A member put it like this: “Today, I know I’m out of alignment with my values when my emotions reflect my defects—like fear and judgment—and I act on them. Instead, I try to show up as honestly and entirely ‘me’ as possible. That includes the ‘ideal me’ I want to be in relationships and interactions.”

It’s unlikely our feelings will “match up” with our ideals and values all the time. This friction can be productive; we learn to take actions of love even when we don’t necessarily *feel* the love. For instance, we can treat a member we don’t like with kindness and respect. We can serve right alongside someone even if we sometimes fantasize about pushing them into a swamp full of alligators. Other times, our feelings are less reactive; they match our conscience rather than our defects. In those cases, it may be necessary and right to address someone’s behavior. Integrity guides our decisions and how we express ourselves in those moments. It allows us to risk others’ disappointment and anger. That’s being true to ourselves. That’s honesty and reliability. That’s love.

I’ll practice integrity by reliably being all that I am, ensuring that my actions reflect what’s inside me. I’ll keep on this path of distinguishing my conscience from my reactions—and, of course, I’ll show up when I say I will.

Equality in Anonymity

NA has no classes of membership and no second-class members. The common denominator in NA is the disease of addiction. We are all equally subject to its devastation. We share an equal right to recovery.

—*It Works*, Tradition Three, “Applying Spiritual Principles”

Tradition Three, which insists that there’s only one requirement for NA members, comes easy to some of us. We found recovery in NA, after all, and no one asked us about our qualifications. We may take for granted that everyone else finds it that simple. Maybe we’d lived a fortunate life with a tight circle of friends despite our addiction, so the idea of not belonging had never occurred to us. If we shared a language and culture with others in attendance, fitting in may not have been a challenge for us. Maybe we looked around the room and saw faces that looked like our own. Or maybe our desperation had dulled our cynicism just enough to allow us to receive the warm welcome we found in our first meetings, despite any outward differences. No matter the specifics, many of us unthinkingly assumed that others felt equally welcome. The disease of addiction tries to weaponize our differences to keep us sick.

The fact is that barriers exist for many potential members despite our individual efforts to extend that classic NA welcome. Some of us struggle with accepting hospitality from members who seem different from us in all of the ways that society deems important. “I constantly disqualified myself from NA,” one member wrote. “I got clean young, didn’t use certain drugs, and I am transgender. My disease tells me that I don’t belong, that I somehow deserved to stay separate and alone.” Before we set aside our differences—as practicing anonymity would suggest—it may be helpful to recognize that identification may be a little more difficult to come by if we don’t yet see other members like ourselves in meetings.

Established NA members do well to emphasize our common disease. Regardless of the specifics in our experience, using brought us all to isolation, shame, and degradation. Identifying on an emotional level is often a good place to start. Our common path to a better life is summed up by the NA message: “An addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live.” The disease does not discriminate. NA must not either.

Recovery is precious, so I will strive to make it more accessible by emphasizing our similarities and taking no addict for granted.

29 MAY

Vigilance for the Long Haul

Many of us leave not when things are horrible, but when we have one more spiritual hump to get over. We lose our way right before the miracle—sometimes again and again.

— *Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Growing Pains”

Most of us have heard the saying, “Don’t leave before the miracle happens.” For newcomers, that can mean staying in a meeting even when the urge to leave feels like more than we can handle. After a little time clean, it might mean taking one more phone call from the sponsee who hears nothing we say or choosing not to react when our boss or significant other pushes our last button—again (and again and again).

But how do we get there? How does the newcomer stay in the seat when everything in them screams: *Get up! Get out of here!* How does the sponsor dig deep and offer experience, strength, and hope to the troubled sponsee, instead of just sighing deeply and asking, “Have you prayed about it?” How do we shift our focus from the momentary frustration of an argument to the fulfillment we experience in our relationship or career?

It’s easy to do the right thing when things are going well, when we’re getting what we want or think we deserve. Sometimes, though, the “rewards” might seem minimal or feel like they’re taking forever to arrive.

Some members have described recovery as being “a marathon, not a sprint.” Marathoners call it “hitting the wall”—that point in the race when it feels impossible to keep going, and there’s no end in sight. It happens in recovery, too: We live by these principles for months, years, even decades, but some of our hopes and dreams still seem so out of reach. We can’t even see the finish line yet, and we are TIRED. We have to remember that there is no “finish line” in a just-for-today program. We’re not here for the reward at the end.

We keep the pace. Even if it’s slow and steady, we keep moving forward whether we feel like it or not. We might need to stop at an aid station—for runners, a cup of cold water or sports drink every couple of miles makes it possible to go the distance. In recovery, coffee or tea with another addict can get us over that next spiritual hump—to the miracle on the other side.

When I feel like quitting, I’ll take a moment to remember that recovery is a journey, not a destination. I will be vigilant and keep moving forward.

Accepting Another's Path

I have learned to love and to accept the people I sponsor as the people they are—not little mirror-images of me or any other model of recovery.

—Sponsorship, Chapter 3, “To the Sponsor”

Each of us looks for a sponsor who does the deal: trusts a Higher Power, cleans house, and helps other addicts. We seek out experienced members who have what we want and will accept us without judgment. Most importantly, we look for sponsors who will offer loving guidance through the Twelve Steps of NA.

Such love takes many forms. Some of us rely on our sponsors for an unbiased perspective on our thoughts and behaviors. Others appreciate being offered gentle guidance, tempered with loads of support and empathy. Whether our sponsors apply a firm hand or a soft touch, we learn to confide in them. Their acceptance of us—warts and all—helps us to accept that everything is as it should be.

Working Steps is a process of self-discovery. With a sponsor to hold the flashlight, our hands are free to dig deep. They help us figure out who we are and who we're not. As one member described it, “This process taught me not to fear the truth about myself. It turns out that I'm not as good or as bad as I thought I was.”

We can learn a lot about recovery by talking to more experienced members. To find what's true for ourselves, however, it's helpful to have someone to question our ideas. As one member put it, “Instead of telling me what to do, my sponsor helped me figure out my own answers about who I am.” We may aspire to be like our sponsors at first, but few sponsors are looking to mold a mini-me. Instead, they help us to be ourselves.

My sponsor's love and acceptance helped me discover who I am, who I'm not, and who I want to be. Today I'll try to practice those same principles and help someone else on their recovery journey.

Finding Balance in Our Lives

Each of us seeks our own balance that allows us to participate in the world without sacrificing our recovery or putting ourselves at risk.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Bridging Two Worlds”

Imagine life as a pie chart. The sections of this pie represent the different areas of our lives. We have a portion for Narcotics Anonymous and sections for family, friends, work, our community, our interests, and many other categories we could add to this list. While we often hear that recovery should be our priority, maybe even the biggest segment, there’s no prescribed ideal balance for how much time we dedicate to NA versus the world outside of NA.

While we were using, our addiction took up most of the pie. Everything else was reduced to a sliver. For a lot of us, when we’re new in the program, NA becomes the lion’s share of our pie chart. As newcomers, we tend to stick very close to the Fellowship because it’s suggested by our sponsor and other members—and because NA is where we begin to find comfort and safety in being who we are.

But as we transform in recovery, our lives tend to fill up. Our pie chart diversifies! Even though our aim may be to sustain the same level of participation in meetings and Steps and service, there are only so many hours in a day—and space in our chart. As we seek to maintain balance in our busy lives, we may find ourselves obsessing about one area and neglecting others. No matter what we have going on, we have to remember that our number-one priority must be to stay clean or we risk losing the rest of the pie—along with our cleantime.

We can seek the balance we need without worrying about perfecting it. We can learn how to assess when things are off-kilter and a dose of the NA basics is needed. We can adapt as the demands of our lives keep shifting. We can enjoy a full life without posing unnecessary risks to our recovery.

How’s my pie chart sectioned these days? How am I balancing my NA program with my other responsibilities and pursuits?

JUNE

Consistency and Step Ten

In the Tenth Step, we use all the principles and actions we learned in the previous steps, applying them to our lives on a consistent basis.

—It Works, Step Ten

Left unexamined, anger, fear, shame, and resentment can bring out the worst in us. Character defects we'd once honed into survival skills stand ready to "help." It's no surprise they spring to mind first when we're faced with a challenge. We've relied on manipulation, self-pity, intolerance, dishonesty, perfectionism, arrogance, and the rest of our defects for as long as we can remember. But now that we're in recovery, it seems increasingly clear they're not such a good fit for our new lives.

The lessons of Steps Four through Nine help us see those crusty old tools in a new light. We've become deeply familiar with the damage we caused in the past, have surrendered aspects of our character that shaped hurtful words and actions, and have humbly gone about owning our messes and cleaning them up. Understanding how we've operated in the past sets us up for a better way, but it will take consistent effort for our new ways to become second nature.

Step Ten gets us in the habit of viewing our lives through the lens of the Steps. Consistent practice helps us integrate their principles into our lives. Here's one member's experience with doing just that: "My regular inventories read like letters to my Higher Power. They begin with 'Dear HP'—my reminder that I'm not alone in this process. Then I jot down the fears and resentments that are popping up, the defects that are calling me, and the spiritual principles I need to keep handy instead. I end with 'I am ready for you to remove my shortcomings and clear the way for my loving service.'"

There are many ways to practice Step Ten, of course. How we go about it is far less important than the fact that we do! Reflecting on our progress helps us integrate the principles into our lives and live consistently by our values.

Does my habit of self-reflection encourage consistency between my beliefs and behavior? How can I integrate the Steps and their principles into my practice of Step Ten?

Learning to Love Ourselves

We've begun to see that God's will for us is the ability to live with dignity, to love ourselves and others, to laugh, and to find great joy and beauty in our surroundings.

—It Works, Step Eleven

When we are new in NA, we may hear someone say they will love us until we learn to love ourselves. Despite our self-centeredness, many of us arrive in the program devoid of self-esteem and incapable of loving anyone, perhaps most especially ourselves.

Over time we learn how to value ourselves. Simple acts of self-care at the beginning of each day can be a good place to start. Maybe we make the bed, set an intention for the day, or do a daily reading. In the Basic Text story “Just Say Yes” one member shared, “I discovered that breakfast is a spiritual principle: With honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, and breakfast, we’re well on our way.”

NA is a practical program that we use in every area of our lives. Sometimes this means nurturing our physical selves or contemplating HALTS as suggested in the Basic Text: “Are we too hungry, angry, lonely or tired? Are we taking ourselves too seriously?” It’s easy to forget how the state of our body can deeply affect our sense of well-being.

The contrast between a life in recovery and a life of active addiction is clear. We can find gratitude in the simple benefits of recovery, like food in the cupboard and a safe place to eat it. If we think about the mornings we experienced before we got clean, we might remember feeling sick and desperate or cold and hungry. The NA program gives us a way out of that darkness and into a day full of possibilities.

Through working the Steps, we learn to love ourselves and the world around us. We find ways to take care of ourselves and treat ourselves with kindness. And we share that love with others, perhaps telling a newcomer we will love them until they learn to love themselves.

I will contemplate my physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being and reinvigorate my morning routine. I will take time to consciously reflect on the abundance recovery has brought to my life.

The Simplicity of Tradition Eleven

Our message—that any addict can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live—is all we have to give, and it is sufficient to change the lives of addicts all over the world.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Eleven, Opening Essay

Simplicity is an essential principle of Tradition Eleven and of our entire program. Our approach to public relations is to inform the world about NA and let our simple message of freedom from active addiction lead the way. We trust that to be attractive enough. NA doesn't run special promotions: *Stay clean for one year and all your dreams will come true!* We don't promise financial stability or a happy marriage. Lifelong problem-free serenity is not guaranteed as a result of meeting attendance, stepwork, and service.

Our simple offer of hope and freedom is enough. According to one member: "We don't need a complicated message to attract people. We are complex enough! Our message isn't simple for the sake of simplicity. It simply works." Both NA's message and our primary purpose are identifiable, relatable, and digestible. They're also adaptable, not bound by the specifics of a single language or culture. Since our message is applicable for addicts all over the world, dare we say, it's universal?

The simplicity of Tradition Eleven is a relief for most of us. When we do public relations, we let folks know who we are, what we do, and how we do it. With H&I, sponsorship, or speaking from the podium, we don't have to do more than share what's worked for us. We share the message just as it was shared with us. We lean forward and witness its impact—on our own lives, for those near to us, and those far away.

Our message works. So how will I share it today?

Finding a Life with Purpose

*What a joy it is to be part of something that not only saves people's lives,
but makes them worth living.*

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, "Fellowship"

We're brought together by desperation, so being alive and clean may seem like enough reason to be joyful at first. But wait, there's more! Even in our earliest days clean, we may have some inkling that we are part of something special. We may wonder, *Am I being indoctrinated into a cult?* but with no discernable leader and no dogma to adhere to, we can rule that out. We decide to keep coming back. *I'll just play along as we see what these weirdos are up to.*

So, we're clean! Now what? We come across this passage in the Basic Text: "When the drugs go and the addict works the program, wonderful things happen." *I like the sound of that!* We start to piece together what it means to "work the program" and find some practical advice in "What Can I Do?"—Chapter Five of the addict's owner's manual. We go to lots of meetings without using between them—even on holidays! We get a home group, a sponsor, and a service commitment, and we find ourselves surrounded by people who take great joy in our progress. They want nothing from us, just good things for us. They offer us words of encouragement, lessons from their own lives, and epic tales of shenanigans with other members. They point out our growth and say they're happy, grateful, and even honored to be a part of our miracle. We smile and nod and our eyes start leaking. All we can think is, *This NA thing . . . is a trip.*

Our lives are transformed as we become both the helpers and the helped. Now we're those people with stories and kindness for the newer folks and are moved by being a part of their miracle. Our mentors continue to evolve, too, and they allow us to help them. We've found a purpose and a framework for living. We are free from active addiction, and although that's NA's only promise, that freedom opens up in unimaginably beautiful ways.

I will soak up the vitality around me and be grateful to have found a life with purpose.

Valuing Self-Acceptance over Validation

We no longer have to look for the approval of others because we are satisfied with being ourselves.

—IP #19, *Self-Acceptance*, “The Twelve Steps are the solution”

For many of us, needing others’ approval—or seeking validation—is perched near the top of our character defects list. We have lived in constant fear of making the wrong choices and others knowing our faults, weaknesses, and mistakes. We did everything we could to avoid being judged and actively, sometimes obsessively, sought others to tell us we were worthy, lovable, desirable, or cool. After a lifetime of self-deprecation, self-pity, and self-harm, how do we gain self-acceptance?

Self-awareness is key to self-acceptance. Working our Steps sparks that awareness. By sharing our inventories, assessing our defects, and struggling not to act on them, we gain a new perspective: *We have been our own most vigorous judges and harshest punishers, not others.* We harmed ourselves with the delusion that others’ approval would make us satisfied with being ourselves. The emptiness we feel cannot be filled by validation from others. We have to find it within ourselves.

Understanding what *doesn’t* work is a good place to start. And soon, we see that self-acceptance is an inside job that doesn’t happen with a flip of a switch. We work hard to accept ourselves as we are now, so we can make the changes we want to see. We can lovingly reintegrate parts of ourselves we used to disown because they were of no use to us in active addiction. Recovery helps us revamp mistakes into learning experiences rather than excuses to rag on ourselves and quit trying. As we continue to take personal inventory, we discover how we want to live our lives, who we want to spend them with, and what makes our hearts sing.

Self-acceptance allows us to value someone’s insight without living for their approval or, for that matter, bowing to their condemnation.

I know my strengths and my liabilities today, and I’m working to accept both. Others have a role in my life, but it’s not to determine my worth.

6 JUNE

Service Strengthens Our Foundation

*Service begins when we put ourselves aside and welcome the newcomer.
That simple action might be the most important thing we ever do.*

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Two, “For Groups”

Many of us recall being welcomed by total strangers as we stumbled into our first Narcotics Anonymous meeting. We felt oddly at home in the rooms of recovery, and that fragile sense of belonging made all the difference. Every gesture mattered: a warm smile, a gentle hug, a meeting directory. When members looked in our eyes, asked our name, and treated us like a human being, we were stunned—in a good way.

Welcoming newcomers is one of the most significant things we do in NA. It’s important to be welcomed and it’s important to be welcoming. Those of us who have trouble getting out of our own way can extract a powerful lesson from graciously welcoming new members. We take a break from our busy brains and reinforce our belief in the NA program: “Against all odds, we are clean and it can work for you, too.” It’s a message we all need to hear; it keeps us anchored in Narcotics Anonymous.

When we set aside our thoughts and feelings to welcome the newcomer, we reinforce our stake in our recovery. We defy the self-centered and self-seeking nature of the disease of addiction. We shelve our burdens and answer that call from a newcomer. It offers perspective and reminds us that “we keep what we have by giving it away.” Each act of service strengthens our foundation in recovery and deepens our investment in this new way of life.

*I will extend a warm welcome to a new member and pay attention to how it
benefits us both.*

7 JUNE

Maintaining an Open Mind

New information can be hard for us to accept when it doesn't come to us in the way we think it should.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Keys to Freedom”

Our ideas about the help we need, how it's packaged, and who delivers it can be decidedly unhelpful. Our work in Step Three can provide some useful strategies. We're often advised to “do the footwork and leave the results to your Higher Power,” and to “pay attention to which doors are opening and which remain shut.” When we find ourselves too attached to an outcome or banging our heads against the same locked door, open-mindedness may be in order.

In the classic allegory told in NA meetings over the years, a flood drives a man onto the roof of his home where he prays for help. He refuses to get in the rescue boat or the helicopter that come to his aid, telling them, “My God's got me!” The water continues to rise and the man perishes. In the afterlife, he rails at his maker for allowing him to die, to which his God replies, “I sent a boat and a helicopter!”

There's a reason this story is a classic: It reveals some of the problems with closed-mindedness. One member described their broken process this way: “I put my needs out to the universe and ask for help, then I evaluate, judge, and reject the help that's offered. Turns out I'm often just looking for someone to cosign my BS.” Open-mindedness will come in handy here, too.

Attending out-of-town meetings illustrates the benefit of open-mindedness. “I was just 25 kilometers down the road, but everything I heard seemed so profound,” one addict shared. “I realized that not knowing these members made me a better listener.” Without the mental static about the messenger—their cleantime, reputation, or other baggage—it's easier to hear the message. Listening in the same way takes a little more effort close to home. Applying the principle of anonymity helps us set aside information that interferes with how we hear others. Instead of listening to validate our own perspectives, we can practice humility and open our minds to consider others' experience, strength, and hope.

I will entertain the possibility that I don't always know what's best, making space to consider the ideas of others, no matter whose they are.

Anonymity Connects Us

... addiction makes us one of a kind. Our personal stories may vary in individual pattern but in the end we all have the same thing in common. This common illness or disorder is addiction.

—Basic Text, Chapter 8: We Do Recover

By the time most of us show up at our first few Narcotics Anonymous meetings, we are pros when it comes to the difference game. Within moments of meeting someone new, we can fire off a list of ways that we are both better and worse than they are, ways in which their opinions, concerns, and experiences have no bearing whatsoever on our own lives and problems.

But something strange happens to most of us when we sit through an NA meeting. Whether it happens right away or after months or years, we look around at a room full of people who are nothing like us, and we begin to realize that we are sitting in a room full of people who are exactly like us. We might not even realize it at the time, but anonymity is what flips that switch.

Addiction comes with its own strain of terror and desperation that we recognize when we hear each other share. We suffer the pain of wanting to stop using but not knowing how, of wanting to stop disappointing the people in our lives but seeing no other choice, of wanting to stop waking up disappointed in ourselves—again!—and yet, here we are, sick and tired of being tired and sick. We hear our fellow addicts share these experiences, experiences we know so well, and we know we're in the right place.

For some of us, connecting to NA members on the level of pain and suffering is the first time in a long, long time that we have felt any connection to other people. But it doesn't stop there! First, we have only addiction in common, but when we stay and work the program, we soon have recovery in common, too. When we practice anonymity, we are able to have greater empathy and compassion for those around us. We see our sameness.

Our sense of connection with other NA members keeps growing. We meet members from other areas, cities, and countries—they share differently, but the message is the same. We have never met, but we know each other intimately. Such is the blessing of being an addict in recovery—anonymity connects us all.

Addiction separates me from other people and from myself. To reconnect, I will acknowledge what I have in common with other recovering addicts today and reach out to them.

9 JUNE

Communication Is a Two-Way Street

We learn to listen carefully, and to communicate in a way that we can be heard.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Being a Parent”

Addiction does a number on our ability to communicate. We can get so preoccupied with self-obsession that it’s hard to pay attention to others—unless, of course, there’s something in it for us. For many of us, the ability to hear the message for the first time—to truly experience the hope that our message offers—was a result of desperation. A member wrote, “The people who had what I wanted shared with honesty and vulnerability. They taught me how to save my life.” We needed something different very badly, and the message of hope got through. We were home.

And then comes early recovery. Minds racing. Our bodies difficult to keep still. “When I was new, I couldn’t hear what anyone was saying,” one member wrote. “The noise in my head was just way too loud. I kept coming back, and things started to get through. The slogans began to make sense. The fog in my head cleared away and I shared honestly. Others responded, and I felt connected.”

Clearing out the noise in our heads helps us communicate better in all of our relationships. We learn by attending meetings, by connecting with our sponsor, by helping sponsees, and those lessons in communication improve our ability to communicate in other areas of our lives. Our growth improves our relationships with our partners, our parents, our friends, our children. Sometimes, we simply shut up and listen. One parent in recovery shared, “I couldn’t get my child to listen to me, and my sponsor reminded me it’s a two-way street. I should try listening to my child more.” When we give our attention to others, we understand them better. If words fail us, we speak through our actions.

Recovery thrives on vibrant, two-way communication. I will listen with an open heart and share in that same spirit.

10 JUNE

We Show Respect, Rather Than Seek It

Practicing this principle doesn't necessarily mean that others respect us; it means we offer others the respect we wish for ourselves, and that we respect ourselves enough to walk in dignity and quiet strength.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Eleven, “Spiritual Principles”

Tradition Eleven—which seems to be about public relations but can be applied to other aspects of recovery—reminds us that the message of NA is what's most important, not the messenger. Respect and anonymity are the keys to deciphering the difference between “attraction” and “promotion.” An opportunity to share NA's message of hope outside the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous is a privilege for any member and a responsibility not to be taken lightly. Whether it's a public relations activity like speaking to a group of medical professionals, being part of an H&I panel, or helping to explain NA to the family of a sponsee who's just relapsed, we must avoid our impulse to make the message about *us* instead of NA. Rather than seeking respect for ourselves, we show our respect for the program—and for our listeners—by sharing the NA basics or the impact the program has on our lives, while being real about what NA is and what it's not.

The same can be said for what happens inside the rooms. We keep it real whether we're talking one-on-one with a new member, speaking at a meeting (whether small and intimate, or large and spirited), or representing our region at the World Service Conference. These are moments when our recovery is best served by the clarity of our message and the integrity of our role, not by seeking attention or validation. There's no need to make inflated claims about our lives in recovery. And look, if we're sharing at a huge convention, we will get attention and very likely validation! That's part of the deal. Speaking with genuine humility and gratitude shows respect for NA and preserves our self-respect, too.

Yes, that's the bottom line right there: We show respect, rather than seek it. With that as our goal, we can walk with dignity. Keeping our self-promotion in check and leading with attraction enhances our self-respect.

Whether it's public relations, addict relations, or my relationship with myself, today I will strive to show respect rather than to seek it.

Approaching Life Creatively

When we are engaged in creative action of the spirit, whether in our personal lives or in our service work, we may be surprised by the solutions that present themselves.

—*Guiding Principles*, Introduction, “Guiding Principles”

Living clean and working the Steps gives us loads of practical experience with applying spiritual principles. Open-mindedness unlocks some doors for us in Step Two, and we learn the benefits of being flexible in our thinking. The trust required to turn our will and lives over in Step Three gives us new confidence in the quiet knowing we might call our faith or intuition. With these and other experiences to draw from, it gets easier to align our actions with spiritual principles. With enough practice, spiritual solutions become second nature. We find ourselves more flexible in our thinking and more ready than ever to engage in creative problem solving.

We practice listening to our intuition and learn to sift out impulses that are rooted in the disease. We tune in to what some call our higher selves, the better angels of our nature, or simply good judgment to find inspiration that’s more closely aligned with our spiritual center. One member shared, “With some time clean and some Steps under my belt, I realized that my head wasn’t always trying to kill me.” Sometimes we’re inspired to give up our seat on a crowded bus, to take a panel into a treatment center, or to get back to our education—age be damned!

Creative action of the spirit can lead us in any number of directions. We continue to be amazed by our creative capacity to craft spiritual solutions to the challenge of living life on life’s terms. We stumble upon new career paths, find new ways to serve, and learn new lessons. When we are engaged in living in the world and participating with other humans, our focus shifts from our self-centeredness to a more global perspective. That shift might be just what we need to live in the solution as regular contributors to the greater good.

I will approach life creatively today. I am open to inspiration and the guidance of a loving Higher Power and willing to contribute to our common good.

Kindness Reflected in Our Growth

... we learn that people see goodness in us that perhaps we don't see in ourselves. Our fellows reflect us back to ourselves and show us how we have changed.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, "Connection to Others"

In our first days clean, most of us feel utterly horrible about ourselves. We're sick from withdrawals. We hate everybody whether we know them or not. We're ashamed, mostly because we got caught. We're pissed off at jails, institutions, and, in some cases, not dying. Our outlook on the future is just as dark: We have to go to these stupid meetings for the rest of our lives and we can never use drugs again. And we have to give, give, *give* to the meeting, to each other, to our dad who messed us up in the first place because of his using, to the old lady who lives in the flat downstairs even though *she's* mean to *us*. And we have to be nice all the time and talk about our problems and listen to other people's problems and help other addicts who are more messed up than we are. Being even slightly positive about our future requires an impossible effort.

Eventually, our resistance cracks. We "do the deal"—meetings, sponsor, Steps, service—and we're there for newcomers. We find a Higher Power and start praying and meditating. We forgive Dad and make sure he has all his meds (and we don't take any of them). We gratefully accept our elderly neighbor's terrible holiday fruitcake and pick up her yappy little dog's poo when she doesn't. When she criticizes our new tattoo, we smile instead of plotting her death. Sometimes we do these things begrudgingly, but mostly it's second nature now.

On occasion, people notice. After we share a few IPs with a newcomer, an oldtimer who remembers who we were when we first came in hugs us (longer than usual) and looks deeply into our eyes, tears brimming. "What's up?" we ask. It's awkward.

"You," the member tells us, "are so different. Soooooooo different."

We protest. "Aww, come on!" All we did was give someone an IP! But our resistance to this also cracks. We do the right thing, say "thanks," and hug them back.

I'll aim to be kind and generous today. If someone points it out, I'll say "thanks." I can acknowledge them and acknowledge that I've changed.

Humility Opens Us Up to Support

It's a tremendous struggle for most of us to stop relying on our own thinking and begin to ask for help, but when we do, we have begun to practice the principle of humility found in the Second Step.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step Two, “Spiritual Principles”

Before recovery, pride, ego, and denial were essential to our survival. They allowed us to fake a fierce sense of independence. These powerful defects of character can be real stumbling blocks to our recovery. Left unchecked, they can lead to what some have called “Superhero Syndrome”—the belief that we can and must do everything on our own. This can be a very lonely place, separated from the god of our understanding and other addicts in recovery. It can be so easy for us to encourage our friends and sponsees to reach out to others for help, only to find ourselves stuck in our own self-centered thinking.

In the Second Step, we begin to build a belief system and come to understand that two of us together represent a power greater than any of us on our own. In our active addiction, many of us perceived asking for help as a form of weakness. But we learn to be vulnerable enough to ask for support and find strength in this surrender. For many of us, the sponsorship relationship is where we learn to trust someone and reach out when we are in need.

Something clicks into place when we realize that we are not giving up our independence or problem-solving abilities by simply asking others to be there for us. Whether it is a shoulder to cry on, experience with a commitment, or learning how to do our own laundry—we all need a little help sometimes. One addict shared, “As I practice humility and become open to the support of others, my relationships become increasingly authentic.”

When we can let go of the idea that “our way is the only way,” then we can find some comfort in knowing that we are not alone in this process. People can and will help us; all we have to do is ask.

Even though it can feel like an attempt to climb Mount Everest, I will continue to reach out and let another member help me to consider a perspective besides my own.

14 JUNE

Faith in Spiritual Principles

Many of us use spiritual principles as a power greater than ourselves.

—*It Works*, Step Two

We all have differing experiences with religion and belief when we arrive in NA. Some of us were raised in very religious families, attending mosque, temple, or church regularly, while others grew up in secular homes without much exposure to religion or spiritual matters. One member shared, “My parents were both scientists and atheists. In my family, exploring spirituality made me more of a rebel than using drugs did.” We may show up at our first meeting with an attitude of intolerance toward all things spiritual, thinking that ideas like “faith” are total rubbish. Others of us may have rejected the idea of spiritual principles because we associated them with the religion of our childhoods that failed to protect us from addiction. Or we came to NA with an open mind, eager to try something new—or desperate to find something that would work for us.

Regardless of our past experience with spiritual or religious matters, we all have work to do when we get here. We all need to learn to live in a principled manner. On the surface, it might seem like faith in a Higher Power should come easier to those of us who grew up with strong convictions about what that Higher Power is. In reality, the ability to *act* in faith can have very little to do with our beliefs—secular or religious. Part of acting in faith is giving up the illusion of control. Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, every principle discussed in this meditation book is a force beyond our control. We can allow the power of principled action to guide us, or we can struggle to use our own power to control our lives.

Step Two does not say, “We came to believe *in* a Power greater than ourselves,” it says, “We came to believe *that* a Power greater than ourselves *could* restore us to sanity.” It doesn’t matter much whether we understand how or why; we consistently get better results from principled action than we do from self-will. As we experience the results of living by spiritual principles, we come to believe that sanity—peace of mind and connection to ourselves and others—is possible for us.

There are countless forces in life that I may never fully grasp. I will place my faith in spiritual principles because I know they work, even if I don’t always know how or why.

15 JUNE

Finding and Extending Acceptance

Regardless of who we are, where we've been, or what we've done, we find in Narcotics Anonymous a place of empathy, acceptance, welcome, and belonging.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Two, “Spiritual Principles”

When we get to NA, so many of us are thinking, Oh, man, what happens when they find out I did THAT?

Or maybe it's What if they find out I wasn't THAT bad?

Either way, and everywhere in between, most of us come to Narcotics Anonymous in fear. We are afraid of being judged for who we are and what we've done. We're concerned we'll be asked, “Why are you here?” There would be no point in answering that question since we're already convinced that we'll be misunderstood. We fear that we won't belong in NA, and in many cases, we hope that we don't, so we can carry on using and not have to face our problems.

Instead of being denied entry, we hear that the only requirement for us to belong is a desire to stop using. All the group wants to know is what we want to do about our problem and how they can help. No one asks us for our addiction resume.

If we said that we leave all judgments at the door, we'd be kidding ourselves. We are human beings, after all. Instead, despite our judgments, our differences, and our histories, we are welcomed and accepted. People have compassion for us, and it seems genuine.

Later, we begin to see ourselves in newcomers. We empathize with them and welcome them just as we were welcomed. They are enveloped in the love members show one another as they learn to love and accept themselves.

NA accepted me. Today I will ask myself, “What can I do to be more welcoming to my fellow addict?”

16 JUNE

Enduring Loss, Reclaiming Joy

We come to understand that happiness is an inside job, a spiritual experience that can get stronger with recovery. We find that no matter what happens on the outside, joy can still live within us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Love”

As far as spiritual principles go, joy is uncomplicated. It can be elusive, however. In active addiction, joy was an abstract concept often far removed from our reality. How can we position ourselves to experience it now? One addict wrote, “Recovery from addiction is our path toward joy. I invite it in by removing barriers to that path, like anxiety, fear, and self-obsession.” Another wrote, “Joy is the result of my commitment to gratitude, service, and simplicity. I never thought I could appreciate ordinary things.” A third wrote, “The greatest joy is bittersweet because I have experienced moments of it during my darkest hours. I can’t have joy without hope, and no amount of pain can take it away from me.”

Experiencing pain is part of our human condition, even when we do everything right. We can get clean, own our part in our past mistakes, make amends, learn to live by spiritual principles, be of magnificent service in the rooms, at home, and out in the community—yet pain will visit us again. We’ll lose people and relationships. Material gains come and go. Our health may decline. But can joy be taken from us? Is joy—like pain—an inevitable part of our experience?

Most of us would say that joy, like recovery, is available to us all. Despite our struggles, when we infuse our situation with gratitude, we find hope for our future—and create a place for joy at the table. We can choose to look at our troubles with a sense of humor and maybe even benefit from some laughter through our tears of anger or sorrow. None of this is easy. But through the inside job that is recovery, acceptance of this very moment is within reach. Serenity is possible. We can endure loss and reclaim joy over and over.

Regardless of any current burdens, I will shine the light of gratitude on what’s right in my life today and experience joy. Recovery has taught me that I can embrace multiple experiences at once.

Building Trust and Trustworthiness

Through our developing relationship with our sponsor, we learn about the principle of trust.

—It Works, Step One

More often than not, a last-ditch effort to stay out of jail, keep a job, or hang on to a relationship drives us through the doors of NA. We'd stopped using plenty of times before but staying stopped seemed beyond us. We knew something had to change, and, honestly, we had nothing to lose.

When we looked around at that first meeting, we saw people who understood our plight because they had been there. They'd experienced the high price of low living. The NA program worked for them; maybe it will work for us, too. Desperation may have brought us to NA, but inspiration keeps us coming back.

Trust hadn't been on our radar, but we are somehow willing to accept a few suggestions. Just a few days in, and we're committed to attending a meeting a day for 90 days. We even reach out to other members between meetings. With each passing day, we feel a little better and trust in this NA way a little more. And our actions show it.

We've begun to trust the process, but we'll need a guide—a sponsor—if we want to give this a fair shot. "You don't have to trust everyone," we're told, "but you've got to learn to trust someone." This seems like solid advice. The source, a more experienced member, seems trustworthy. "How about you?" we respond. "Will you sponsor me?"

It takes time for most of us to shed our armor, but sponsors have a way of gaining our trust little by little. "One of us shares some truth about our life and experience, and the other returns the favor," as one member put it. In the process, we develop trust and, eventually, intimacy. It's a pattern of behavior we can replicate in other relationships, as sponsees, sponsors, partners, and friends.

Following my sponsor's example, I will build trust a little at a time. I'll learn to trust and be trustworthy in small moments by being true to my word, supportive of others, and open to intimacy.

18 JUNE

Grace Gets Us through Hard Times

*What we find is not that our Higher Power spares us the hardships of life,
but that we receive the grace to get through them clean.*

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Walking the Walk”

When terrible things happen to us or people we love, especially those we deem to be innocent and undeserving of strife, our first reaction is often to try to make sense of it, to look for someone or something to blame. “How could this happen?” Such incidents—like a terminal diagnosis or losing a child, or less dire ones like getting fired from a job—can shake our faith in our Higher Power or the NA program. We may question, “Why am I bothering to stay clean and trying to live by all these spiritual principles if life is just going to end up causing me so much pain?”

No matter how much integrity we practice and how much love we have in our hearts—or how little—life will continue to show up. Instead of trying to reason our way through pain or out of a mess, we learn to ask our Higher Power, in whatever way makes sense for us, “How am I going to get through this clean?”

If we ask this question in earnest and listen for the answer, we will be able to find grace. Grace is an active force in our lives. It’s the gentle nudge that directs us toward the next right thing and gives us a reprieve from our addict thinking and reasoning. Grace allows us to find blessings in the hardships we endure—or, at the very least, to accept what’s happening to us and seek guidance. We know that others have gone through the same life events that we are experiencing and have stayed clean. That collective wisdom, the deep well of experience and resources available to us through our connection to NA, is grace.

The more we notice and acknowledge the presence of grace, the more grace we’ll experience.

*Even in times of great distress, I will make an effort to be present enough to
recognize and receive grace.*

Communicating Honestly in Service

Open, honest, and straightforward communication nurtures the spirit of service in our fellowship, and poisons the impulse to govern.

—*Twelve Concepts for NA Service*, Twelfth Concept

At its best, our service to NA is selfless—the right thing, done for the right reason. Selflessness may be a stretch for us at times. It requires us to keep our egos in check while communicating with each other honestly, directly, and respectfully. Committed as we may be, we can't do this perfectly, but it's something we aspire to. When we make an honest effort to fulfill our primary purpose—whether one-on-one, through a home group, or in some facet of our service system—we have the opportunity to reinforce the best aspects of ourselves. This is a benefit to us as individuals as well as to our common welfare.

Selfless service calls on us to apply everything we know about spiritual principles. The experience we gained from working the Steps and applying Traditions comes to bear big-time. We learn a lot about open-mindedness when we work Step Two, for example, and then as we serve, open-mindedness finds a new purpose as we exchange ideas in a business meeting. Likewise, the importance of inclusion that we first encountered in Tradition One reinforces our belief in a spirit of rotation, making it a little easier to end a commitment. We practiced honesty and gained clarity as we inventoried our lives, past and present. This practice proves invaluable in service as we strive to foster healthy, honest communication.

When we tend to our spiritual condition, it's easier to come correct to service. We've done the work and can trust ourselves to act appropriately. We're able to set aside the rigidity, ancient resentments, and impulse to control that can interfere with a spirit of service. Fortunately, we're not all sick on the same day, and a spiritually fit majority has a way of keeping our worst impulses in check. At some point or other, we'll probably get our turn to play the role of that difficult member. The good news is that honest communication has a way of neutralizing the countless forms that self-will can take.

I will practice the spiritual principles of honesty and open-mindedness in my service to NA today. I will encourage open communication and unity by acknowledging others' efforts to do the same.

20 JUNE

Willingness to Give It a Go

Great or small, our awakenings show in our willingness to practice the principles and carry the message.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Creative Action of the Spirit”

We may have hoped for easy answers to our drug problem when we attended our first meeting. We’d hoped for a quick fix, some simple formula to provide relief from our troubled existence; with that, we could be on our way. “I was hoping you’d cast a spell on me and then send me off with a reminder to take cold showers and sleep with a chicken bone under my pillow,” one addict joked. To our disappointment, no one promised us instant liberation. Worse, it was clear that working *all* Twelve Steps would take some time.

Although the simple equation we sought proved elusive, we warm up to the idea that recovery is less like math and more like one of Grandma’s unwritten recipes—a little of this, some of that, and so on. Our longing for respite or connection or awakening gets us to meeting after meeting. Without our fully recognizing it, willingness shows us the way.

We hear a member celebrating 30 days clean explain, “I went to meetings every day and didn’t take anything in between.” Duly noted. Could this be the formula we were looking for? It seems almost too simple and also impossible. But maybe it’s a good start—hello, open-mindedness! We’re willing to give it a try.

As our heads start to clear, we awaken to the possibilities of a better life. We gravitate toward another formula that seems doable: “Go to meetings, get a sponsor, read the literature.” Check, check, and check. We willingly take these actions and practice humility by keeping things simple. We’re handed a pink card with the “Just for Today” reading and, as we read it aloud, another light comes on. This seemed like a practical approach and we were willing to try it.

Our experience at 30 days reveals the value of taking action. We made it this far! Holding up our keytag, we share, “I’m celebrating 30 days today because I went to meetings every day and didn’t take anything in between. I picked up the Basic Text and got a sponsor and I’m finding that there *is* life after drugs. As much as I wanted to figure out this recovery thing, I’m learning to just do what you do, and it seems to work.” And just like that, we’re carrying the message and offering hope to every addict in the room.

No matter how many days I have, I recognize the awakening that’s evident in my willingness. I will apply spiritual principles to the work that’s in front of me and allow my example to carry the message.

Sharing Solidarity with Our Fellow Members

There is a special feeling for addicts when they discover that there are other people who share their difficulties, past and present.

—Basic Text, Chapter 5: What Can I Do?

Many of us experienced a sense of solidarity with our druggy buddies early in our using careers. We found camaraderie as we conspired on our next score, caper, or conquest. We entrusted at least some of our secrets with a select few, and they counted on us to hold our mud. There were limits to our loyalty, however. In time, we'd betray them, or they'd betray us.

The romanticized version of our stories often focuses on those magic moments of solidarity with our running partners. If we follow the storyline of these relationships through to their collapse, we might mistakenly conclude that those kinds of bonds are a thing of the past or that we're still incapable of sustaining solidarity and close friendships. This adds to our sense of isolation and alienation, making us vulnerable to unhelpful self-talk that can create a wedge between us and our clean new friends. Once we recognize that recovery changes everything about our capacity for connection, we're able to take a stand against that negative chatter. Our previous sense of solidarity centered around drug use. Now solidarity springs from honest sharing and empathy, and the occasional caper, conquest, or war story.

In one member's experience: "I came in feeling like I didn't belong, that I was so uniquely troubled. Then I heard the stories and realized I'd found my people." Solidarity is the spiritual opposite of isolation and self-centeredness. Although our circumstances, interests, and ambitions vary wildly, we connect emotionally and spiritually and stand by one another. We all have dreams and struggles, experience joy and sorrow, want to be happy and forgiven, to love and be loved. And we don't have to experience any of it alone. Over the years, countless sponsors have offered this assurance: "I can't fix your problems, but you won't have to face them alone." And, really, what more could we ask for?

To build solidarity with my fellow members, I will share my struggles with someone who can help or someone who might need help.

Self-Supporting and Standing Tall

When we are willing to stand for our own dreams and beliefs, we are practicing a deeper kind of self-support.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Finding Our Place in the World”

Addicts are often viewed and portrayed as disaffected loners or rebels without causes. Many of us were (or still are) quite comfortable with that image. Even so, identifying what we believed in or what we wanted out of life escaped most of us before recovery. Breaking out of our rut and genuinely standing for something different from the people in our using lives was rare—and certainly not something we viewed as self-support.

For one addict, approaching and finding self-support came at the end of the road: “My whole family used, and I let that stop me from getting clean more than once,” the member wrote. “I didn’t want them to think I was abandoning them or that I thought I was better than them. But I couldn’t live that way anymore.”

Changing our lives is scary enough already, even without the additional burden of having loved ones who don’t share our interests or goals. Not everyone we used with wants recovery, but many people still respect our needs and boundaries when we get clean. We may grow apart from some people, but those who care about us want us to follow our own path.

We may feel a similar sense of hesitation about pursuing interests in recovery. We don’t want to abandon our friends. “When I had a couple of years clean,” one member shared, “I was the youngest person in my NA crew. I wanted to take college classes, but I thought I’d be ditching my people. My sponsor told me it was okay—he got the prison experience for me, now I could go get the college experience for him.”

We don’t have all of the time, energy, or money to do anything and everything we want. We can’t be in two (or more!) places at once. Practicing self-support means taking responsibility for the choice of how we use our limited resources. Some of us may still rebel, but it’s more likely we now have a cause to support.

People who truly love me want me to follow my dreams. I will honor my loving relationships by choosing to stand tall in my own choices.

Attentiveness to NA's Message

Each of us has something to offer. We don't need specialized training to carry the message; all we need to do is pay attention.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Eight, Opening Reflection

We all have something to give in NA, and we don't need to be professionals to do it. There's no NA University where we take classes like Sharing 101, Advanced Sponsorship, or a graduate-level seminar in Hospitals and Institutions Strategy. We learn as we go. Some of us sponsor others following the way we've been sponsored. Or we improvise. We aren't professional recovering addicts or sponsors or trusted servants. We pay attention to how others do it, and we consult our sponsor and our Higher Power, attentively listening for what rings true for us. It's the therapeutic value of one addict helping another.

Paying attention to our surroundings should come easy for us. In our old lives, situational awareness was necessary for survival. We were always watching our backs, measuring up others, and doing what we had to do to get through every hairy situation we found ourselves in. Those same skills can help us read a room. We can see where our help is needed: Are there people sitting alone before the meeting? Greet them. Does the secretary need help passing out the readings? Done!

Perhaps most importantly, we pay attention to what is happening in real time as we share with other addicts. We truly listen when others share. Rather than guessing what we think someone might need to hear, we simply listen. When we're moved to do so, we share our relevant experience. When we are present and attentive to the process, we realize we don't need to control things. Humility, prudence, and attentiveness—to our own assets and to the needs of those around us—help us make better decisions.

Since there's no such thing as a professional recovering addict, I'll do my best to carry the message the NA way. I'll do so by being attentive to the needs of NA, especially the still-suffering addicts.

24 JUNE

Awareness Through Spiritual Maintenance

Carrying the message brings us awareness of our gifts and limitations, and guides us to change.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1: Living Clean, Opening Essay

The effort we put into our recovery—working Steps, studying Traditions, living by spiritual principles—frees us up to be ourselves. We develop a connection with a Higher Power, come to understand more about what makes us tick, clean up wreckage—past and present, mend old relationships, and build new ones. Each element of this process expands our awareness. The message we carry is enriched by personal experience with the daily application of spiritual principles.

Life can get really good, often better than we'd ever imagined. We're free from active addiction and less consumed by self-centered fear. We might drop habits from our daily routine without paying an immediate price. We stop writing, reflecting, and meditating. We call our sponsor less often. All the external evidence indicates that we're okay. When anxiety bubbles up, we stuff it down with ice cream, hide it beneath new clothes, or flee from it on a fast motorcycle.

Attending meetings regularly—even when we've slacked off on other good habits—gives us the chance to correct course. We may notice our attempts to share feel stiff or detached. There may be some satisfaction in the nostalgia of sharing about our past, but the absence of connection to our current emotional or spiritual life reveals a bit of emptiness. We recognize the dangers of living an unexamined life. We may be in trouble, but seeing it coming is a good start.

With this awareness, we can turn to the practices that feed our recovery. We take responsibility for the brewing storm in our brains or bellies and share our sense of disconnect. By attending meetings, we can take in some gentle cues about what's important. Awareness can bring us back from the edge if we let it.

I will conduct the spiritual maintenance needed to bolster or maintain my recovery, always seeking to continue, improve, and practice with guidance from Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve.

25 JUNE

Building Connections

Through our self-disclosure, we feel connected with humanity, perhaps for the first time in our lives.

—It Works, Step Five

As new members, we come in disjointed, distracted, and disconnected. Our divisions, our better-thans and less-thans, and our walls are firmly in place. Ego and pride, self-loathing and self-pity dictate our interactions. We look outside ourselves to justify why we don't feel connected. But soon we begin to hear and absorb other recovering addicts' stories. We observe a theme that's also reflected in our stepwork: We are getting in our own way of connecting with others.

The process of breaking down walls takes more than a single admission that we need to be more open. Building real and enduring connections with other NA members is more than acknowledging that similarities outweigh differences. It takes time, and it takes effort. As we listen to others self-disclose, our courage grows, and we start to share ourselves. For most of us, our walls weren't as heavy-duty as we thought they were. They don't take as much time to break down—or at least begin to see over—as they did to build.

When we peer over our walls or peek through the cracks, others begin to see us, too. The acceptance, understanding, and, often, identification that happens when we tell the truth about ourselves encourages us to open up more. Parts of our walls may remain standing; some self-protection is only natural. But we build roads now. We find people in the rooms, usually just a few, including our sponsor, whom we allow to see and connect to the entirety of who we are. Self-acceptance and hope travel along those roads.

In NA, our purpose is to extend the connectedness we acquire to new members, who, like us, stumble into NA not yet aware that their walls aren't long for this world. When we share ourselves, the road toward connectedness awaits all of us.

Today I'll try to dismantle my walls and build roads in their place. I'll be unafraid to let another person know me better.

The Therapeutic Value of Practicality

We feel that our approach to the disease of addiction is completely realistic, for the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel.

—Basic Text, Chapter 4: How It Works

By the time we get to Narcotics Anonymous, many of us have a long list of what didn't fix us: family, relationships, doctors, treatment programs, religious institutions. We begged God or Something-Out-There for relief. Because of our involvement in the justice system, some of us have had help imposed on us. All these individuals or entities may indeed have been helpful to our survival, even if only to introduce us to NA. Some may continue supporting us to this day. But we found them to be insufficient to help build the long-lasting changes to our lives that we needed. So what was missing?

One member shared their “aha” moment: “This concept of one addict helping another hit me on the head like a ton of bricks. I thought, *Now I get it!*” These were helpful, practical bricks, of course. Bricks that we can use to build our life back up. Recovering addicts who've survived what we've survived are unquestionably the best source of practical information about recovery. This idea not only makes sense to us, but it also brings us some relief.

In NA, we create an atmosphere of healing for each other—that's what we mean by “therapeutic.” We help each other to heal through empathy and solidarity. The “we” of NA is a powerful and practical resource we use to walk through life's difficulties and hold each other up as we heal. Honest sharing helps identify others who have survived infidelity, infertility, illness, and myriad other hardships. We connect each other with members who've had to navigate similar things and we get to learn from their experience. Our personal tragedies can become a shared source of strength. What could be more practical?

While our disease would have us focus on what makes us different, we know the ties that bind us together are way stronger than those differences. Those ties are strong, real, and practical. They are the bricks that build us up and keep us from falling. NA is a practical program delivered by addicts to other addicts, with other addicts, for other addicts. That's how it works.

How am I creating a healing environment for my fellow addicts? What can I do today that's practical to help another addict?

Cooperating for the Common Good

It's essential in whatever way we give back that we are able to share with others and to cooperate, and these are not skills most of us bring to the rooms with us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Principles, Practice, and Perspective”

Sharing and cooperation are generally taught to us as children as core social values. A lot of us, however, didn't quite absorb the critical lessons of sharing what we have, playing nice with others, and being helpful. Some version of “Together we can”—prioritizing the greater good and the concept of common welfare—is posted on schoolroom walls all over the world, just like the Twelve Traditions are often on display in our meeting rooms.

If we didn't learn the lesson then, we can learn it now—and help other addicts follow suit. The NA Fellowship is built on cooperation, mutual support, and shared leadership. True cooperation requires that we have respect for each individual with an eye toward acting in the group's best interest. What is freely given is freely shared. We share our skills as well as our experience, strength, and hope.

In keeping with Tradition One, we can learn to disagree without being disagreeable. Taking disagreements personally is a threat to practicing cooperation and puts our common welfare at risk. Working the Twelve Steps prepares us for challenges like sharing space, serving, and cooperating with those we don't agree with. We pitch in even when we're not happy with the group's conscience or, at the very least, we don't just quit when things don't go the way we wanted.

Our cooperative participation helps deliver NA's message to the still-suffering addict, and it helps our own recovery. We grow and thrive when we participate. We need each other, and NA needs us, too.

I am committed to overcoming my self-centered tendencies today by cooperating with other addicts to fulfill our purpose of carrying the message of recovery.

28 JUNE

Unconditional Love Brings Healing

Practicing the principle of unconditional love in the Twelfth Step is essential.

Nobody needs love without conditions more than a suffering addict.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step Twelve, “Spiritual Principles”

Judging from our experiences prior to NA, many of us believed that love only came with conditions. That was often true in our families and in our relationships while using. We were loved as long as we got decent grades, were gainfully employed, looked presentable, or could talk our way out of an arrest. We internalized these messages and berated ourselves for not being good enough. We felt ashamed of our very existence. Many of us turned those feelings of guilt and shame outward. We judged others based on how we felt about ourselves.

Thankfully, working a program allows us to examine and discard much of this damaged thinking. Members’ willingness to love and support us without conditions makes that work possible. Their unconditional love helps us to climb out of that pit of despair and self-loathing.

When we begin to work the Twelfth Step, we get to pay that favor forward by giving unconditional love to other suffering addicts. Our self-esteem grows as we do esteemable acts. As one member shared, “After taking a meeting into the local jail every month for a year, I began to believe that maybe I was a good person, worthy of love, too.”

Learning to practice unconditional love is a process. The love of other members sustains us along the way. In one member’s experience: “If I’d had to wait until I loved myself, I might not have made it.” A firm hug outside a meeting, sharing our story at an H&I meeting, giving newcomers rides, even a friendly smile of recognition—we give and receive these acts of love without conditions. And it keeps us coming back.

Today I will give away the unconditional love that was (and is) so freely given to me.

In Harmony with Reality

Sanity is living in harmony with reality.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “A Vision of Hope”

“Get real.”

To addicts—even those of us with time clean—reality can be a dirty word. People telling us that our version of XYZ isn’t real, that we are in denial about XYZ, or, worst of all, that our feelings about XYZ don’t square with reality! They might as well be telling us to go XYZ ourselves!

When we are in active addiction, it is much easier to hold false beliefs about ourselves and the world around us. We don’t want to hear the truth because we fear the truth will hurt us. In a sense, drugs keep us safe from having to deal with reality—until they don’t. When we get clean, that barrier is removed, and the twelve-step process actively challenges us to discover, dismantle, and discard those beliefs that separate us from the truth of a situation and prevent us from being authentic and acting with integrity.

The ongoing struggle is in identifying which of our beliefs are not in harmony with reality. This process starts when we begin to trust that we might not have the most astute judgment about our choices. Our willingness to question the stories we tell ourselves often precedes our ability to see reality. We accept help from other recovering addicts as we navigate through the minefield of our alternate realities.

Our capacity to be in harmony with the world around us improves when our worldview widens and is shaped more by principles than by our disease. Reality becomes less distorted. The Serenity Prayer’s meaning becomes astoundingly clear.

After a period of numbness, reality often stings. But the truth will help us, not harm us.

What is an “XYZ” in my life that currently isn’t in harmony with reality? Can I trust my own perspective about that issue? If I’m not sure, who in my life loves me enough to tell me to “get real”?

Goodwill toward New Members

One of the purest expressions of goodwill in NA is our heartfelt desire for the newcomer to have freedom.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition One, “For Members”

In our first days of being clean (and for many of us a long time after), it’s difficult for us to accept the goodwill of addicts in the Fellowship as *real*. We think, *Why in the hell are all these people so happy to see me, like they know me or something?* Some of us believe these NA people are trying to manipulate us in some way. Otherwise, why would they be so welcoming? We remain on red alert to find a crack in their game, but the goodwill of other humans can be hard to resist, especially when we haven’t been offered it in a while. So, we keep coming back. Our journey toward freedom from active addiction begins.

In NA, we do what others have done to stay clean, so we’re encouraged to welcome those newer than we are. “At first, I found this uncomfortable because I didn’t feel genuine approaching people,” a member shared. “But as I became more aware of the value of what had been so freely given to me, my desire to help new people grew. I sincerely felt hope for them, and I was truly excited to see them when they came back. I didn’t think I was even capable of feeling like that.”

For many of us, that shift is nothing short of a miracle. This newfound, heartfelt commitment to the well-being of other addicts represents freedom from the self-centeredness we’ve been trapped in for so long. We know the program is working when we realize that we have hope for others to succeed.

Whether or not I feel goodwill deep in my heart today, true hope for freedom—for others and myself—is there far more than it ever was before. I can act on that hope today no matter how I feel.

JULY

1 JULY

Love and That NA Hug

We learn that a simple, loving hug can make all the difference in the world when we feel alone.

—Basic Text, Chapter 8: We Do Recover

That awkward moment . . . We shuffle up to the door of our first meeting. Some guy is standing there with a big smile and asks our name. We reach out our hand to shake his, but instead of taking it, he puts his arms around us. “We hug in NA!”

For some of us, that hug is the first show of affection we’ve received in a very long time. That simple, welcoming action can be reassuring (*You’re going to be okay*), affirming (*You are in the right place*), even restorative (*You are loved and accepted*). We hear time and time again, throughout our literature and in meetings, how our self-love tank was on empty when we got to NA. Later, when we inevitably make a mess of things in one way or another, our fellow members tell us with a hug: “You are not alone.” That NA hug is an expression of unconditional support, and it’s a distinctive part of our NA culture. It’s meant to ignite that slow process of building (or rebuilding) our capacity for compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, and love for ourselves.

For many of us, receiving that love from others is a challenge, in the beginning and even with time clean. The idea of being loved by strangers who expect nothing in return can feel unsettling or outright bizarre, despite our loneliness.

And for others, it’s not the love we balk at—it’s the hug. We didn’t grow up that way, in our families or cultures. Or, being touched is not our thing, period, and we have our reasons for it. Let’s be straight-up: Some of us don’t want to be hugged, even by those with the best of intentions. Perhaps the most open-minded, accepting, and compassionate way to show that NA love is to watch for the signals others give and follow their lead. As one member commented, “There’s only one requirement for membership in NA, after all—and engaging in the NA hug ain’t it!” Each of us gets to determine if, when, and how we want to be hugged.

No matter my comfort level with hugging, I value being loved and supported by my fellow NA members. How can I help someone else feel less alone today?

Reliability Transforms Relationships

We grow to be steady, reliable, loving people who can be a force for change in the lives of other addicts and beyond.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5: Relationships

For active addicts, unreliability is a near-universal character defect. When we did manage to be physically present for the family, for work, or for other commitments, we reliably brought chaos. With our lack of follow-through, our dishonesty, our untrustworthiness, and our instability, who really wanted us around when we did show up?

Recovery in NA is a reliability game-changer. We show up to meetings regularly—and participate. We take on service commitments—and fulfill them. We communicate with our sponsor and other addicts—and we pick up the phone or return a message when someone reaches out to us. Through our stepwork, we gain some reliability skills that help us go beyond being consistent and doing our part. Others can depend on us emotionally. We're more reflective and self-aware, apt to practice gratitude, and quicker to forgive. We're more available in terms of time and our spirit, bringing our whole selves to our relationships. We listen. "I have started to feel, even at my age—which is not young!—finally like one of the adults in the room," a member commented. "People rely on me for the first time in my life. Members seek my help, and I'll willingly give it."

Put simply, when reliability shapes our actions, our relationships transform. When we're present and available in our encounters with NA members and others in our lives, people begin to trust us. They take our expressions of love and kindness with more than a grain of salt because we take actions now to back them up. We are works in progress, and we reliably allow others to be, too. Leading a spiritual life has ceased to be a theory we hear about in meetings; it is now becoming our own tangible reality—and we may even inspire others in the process.

Learning to be reliable has helped me become a force for change. I will honor the person I'm becoming by showing up wholly and humbly. I'm here today for others.

Empathy, Connection, and Identification

Empathy is the ability to connect with others at the level of the heart and the spirit.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Friendship”

Many of us have had the experience of hearing someone else tell our story. We love it when we recognize ourselves in the details of how another member went about “getting and using and finding ways and means to get more.” Relating to the specifics is far from typical, however, so how is it that we identify with others’ experience when, really, it’s not our own?

Identification doesn’t require that we come from the same place. After all, hitting “rock bottom” often has little to do with our circumstances. Our willingness to give recovery a try can emerge in wildly different contexts. One member shared, “By outward appearances, I had it all. And yet, I felt isolated and alone, filled with fear, resentment, and regret.” Another recalled, “The source of my desperation wasn’t living on the streets. It came from that hollow ache of hopelessness, shame, and sadness deep inside me.” Many of us will relate to both stories—and so many more—because they express the emotional state that precedes the gift of desperation.

We share a few telling particulars in our stories because it keeps us in touch with where we came from and what awaits us should we return to using. We revisit that desperation and touch base with our First Step. And that’s where we connect, too. Empathy has the power to bind us together regardless of our stories. One member shared, “The disease will tell me ‘you’re not like these people,’ but my spirit can’t help but connect when I focus on the feelings.”

As we stay clean and experience the Twelve Steps, our ability to connect with heart and spirit expands. Beyond the using stories that qualify us as drug addicts, we share a common path, a spiritual program in which we learn to practice living principle-centered lives. Recovery gives us access to the range of emotions we’ll need to respond to life’s ups and downs. When NA groups make it safe for intimate sharing, we can summon the courage to share our feelings—good, bad, and ugly—and make room for empathy to emerge.

*I will listen empathetically, connecting to others with my heart and my spirit.
I will disclose more about my emotional life so that others might connect with me.*

Autonomy Balanced with Responsibility

Autonomy encourages groups to become strong and lively but also reminds them that they are a vital part of a greater whole: the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

—*It Works*, Tradition Four

We addicts can be pretty creative in how we deliver our simple message of recovery. We're free to develop all kinds of meetings that focus on particular areas of recovery or literature, at any time of day. Autonomy gives us leeway to establish a meeting that addresses an unmet local need, has a unique format, or targets a particular group of addicts who may feel safer accessing and delivering our primary purpose together. The possibilities are endless as our Fellowship continues to evolve, strengthen, and reach an even wider geographic scope. How inspiring!

But let's not forget the latter half of Tradition Four: "... except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole." This warns of the pitfalls of using autonomy to divide us. Expressing complaints about important issues, such as finances, area guidelines, and Traditions "violations," and then declining to be part of the solution is unproductive and creates disunity. Autonomy is not a mic drop. Instead, we can choose to examine our urge to raise an issue, asking ourselves if we want a solution or just want to make a statement.

Open-minded communication allows us to make reality-based decisions, unencumbered by personal opinions. Some members think service bodies have undue power over groups, and others may believe that all NA decisions must be made with group buy-in. We hear a lot about what *they* are doing. But *WE* are *they*. With autonomy comes responsibility: as seen on NA buttons and T-shirts, "Be the we!" In reality, we are accountable to each other, to NA as a whole, and to communicating our disagreements, as well as our message, with as much respect as we can muster.

Freedom needs to be balanced with accountability and responsibility. I will respect our interconnectedness and play a role in creating a Fellowship that is united, loving, and diverse.

5 JULY

Seeking Balance

So many things compete for our attention, and as addicts we have a tendency to think in extremes: all or nothing, right or wrong. Finding the balance is an ongoing negotiation.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, Opening Essay

In recovery, when our lives get “bigger,” our already questionable attention span is pulled in many different directions. We have our NA life, and we balance it with work life, school life, home life, family life, sex life, and more. On top of that, we are now able to address the consequences of our using: improving our health, dealing with legal issues, making amends. And many of us are also pursuing other interests and goals that bring us joy. Through using the tools of the NA program, including prayer and meditation, we can maintain a manageable balance of all the above. We’re living by spiritual principles as much as humanly possible. We’re sincerely grateful more often than we aren’t.

What could possibly go wrong?

Sometimes it’s a truly life-altering event that will throw us off balance. Or maybe we make a mistake we can’t run from, or we don’t achieve something we’ve worked hard for and feel we deserve. Other times, if it’s only that we spill a glass of water, we’ll want to smash the glass and drown ourselves in the water.

Seeking balance—both in terms of our inner life and how we spend our time—is an ongoing negotiation. Reacting in extremes to our mistakes or to what we can’t control will wear us out and make us vulnerable to our disease. Just because we’re clean and doing well doesn’t mean that life will consistently get better and better without fail. We can be vigilant, but we can’t prepare for everything. If we have our program as a base and a constant in our lives, we will have spiritual principles, relationships, and a Higher Power to lean on when life inevitably shows up.

Life is unpredictable and can be chaotic. It’s the seeking of balance within the chaos that will help keep us clean and moving forward.

I can commit to pursuing balance among all areas of my life. But it’s just as vital to my recovery that I accept life’s chaos—without adding to it.

Moving Forward with Passion

Passion is a lot like desperation: It is a motivating, energizing force that can propel us forward.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Desperation to Passion”

The gift of desperation doesn’t look the same for all of us. One member quipped, “You can get off at any floor on the way down to hell.” All of us were propelled into NA by despair, pain, and fear. And—over time—we’re able to harness that energy to transform it into enough passion and excitement—even joy—to help us stay clean another day, grow spiritually, and live creatively and with purpose.

Living Clean reminds us: “Making the shift from desperation to passion is a First Step issue.” In desperation, we surrender to being powerless over our addiction, and ultimately surrender to the first steps on our path of a new life and to the purpose of carrying the NA message. The member continued, “After my initial surrender, the changes I saw in myself fueled my passion for recovery! I was energized by the potential of what could come next.” Like that initial surrender, this desperation-to-passion shift isn’t a one-time deal. Despair still happens in recovery. But we can allow it to motivate us, driving us to make needed changes to our program and reigniting our passion to persevere with purpose.

Passion, like desperation, doesn’t manifest in the same ways for all of us. Our personalities absolutely play a part in how our passion is revealed—and our mood also affects how we experience it. What is burning, purposeful, and creative passion on one day—excitement for sponsorship, motivation to serve, strongly held conviction—may look more like quiet fidelity to our program or begrudging perseverance on another. Although the fires may burn differently, they all propel us forward. Our passions don’t always remain fixed, either. We may revisit ones long forgotten and discover new ones. We’re free to passionately pursue the things that bring us joy and nurture our spirits—both in the rooms of NA and out in the world.

Passion isn’t just a feeling. It’s an energy I’ll use today to move forward in my program, in my relationships, in my purpose.

7 JULY

The Practical and Spiritual Application of “We”

In NA, our identification as addicts is what we have in common.

—In Times of Illness, “Mental Health Issues”

What bound our predecessors together in NA’s early days is what connects us today: It’s our identification as addicts through the common lens of the disease of addiction and our desire to get clean. That commonality alone means we belong here and with each other—despite what or how much we used, the specifics of our stories and experiences, and what makes us different as people. One of NA’s gifts, we hear members say over and over again, is having relationships with people whom we very likely would never even have met, let alone connected with, outside the rooms.

NA’s success as a Fellowship since its inception has hinged on this fact: Our best hope for recovery from addiction is banding together to help each other. Our common welfare—the health and well-being of our groups and NA as a whole—underpins our personal recovery. That includes every member of this Fellowship, past and present. Even our future members depend on the “we” of NA. Though we may approach them in a variety of ways, it’s no accident that eleven of the Twelve Steps start with the word “We.”

But “we” isn’t just a concept. Like all principles, its practical application is what makes it spiritual. When we identify, we connect. When we share our true selves, that connection deepens. When we help each other and accept help, we stay connected. Above all, practicing “we” is fulfilling our primary purpose of carrying the message of recovery to the still-suffering addict.

I will be mindful of practicing “we” today by investing in our common welfare: I’ll keep what I have by giving it away to another addict.

We Give What We Can with Gratitude

Every act of service, no matter how small, is a contribution demonstrating our commitment and our gratitude.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Seven, “Word by Word”

The Seventh Tradition is confusing at first to most of us. The basket is passed, and our reaction ranges from surprise (because we thought this was free), to guilt (because we have nothing to put in), to shame (because people see we don’t), to resistance (because do we *have* to?), to indignation (because *hell no*).

In time, we absorb the meaning of Tradition Seven, appreciating the importance of our contributions as a demonstration of our gratitude and our commitment to self-support. We give what we can, when we can, and sometimes more than we thought we ever could or would—not just with our money, but with our skills, our passion, our empathy, and our time. And we also come to understand how contributing to NA demonstrates our commitment to the program and gratitude for its impact on our lives.

Beyond the basket, it’s tempting to assume that service that requires an election, gives us a title, or takes a lot of time has the most meaning. A member aptly shared this: “We are often asked if a glass of water is half-empty or half-full, but I’m not concerned with how much water is in the glass. I just want to know how good the water tastes. The quality of NA work we do is more important than the quantity. Every bit of love and gratitude we contribute has value.”

Sometimes momentary acts of gratitude have lifelong meaning to another addict: remembering a newcomer’s name or saying “welcome home” to a member returning after a relapse.

And then there are those acts of service we use to occupy us so that we can endure the terrible awkwardness we sometimes feel. They can help us stall long enough to get up the guts to ask someone to sponsor us. They keep us busy until we are ready to receive hugs. At times, just having something physical to do before or after the meeting can help us keep it together when our insides feel like they are ready to spill out. These contributions are self-supporting in a different way. We’re grateful that they get us through challenging moments.

What time, talent, or treasure can I contribute to NA today to show my gratitude? What can I do to make an addict feel more at home, even if that addict is me?

9 JULY

Courage to Walk Our Path

It takes courage and humility to open new doors and to close old ones.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Courage”

If we imagine life to be like a hallway full of open doors, each leading down new paths of opportunity, then active addiction basically consists of walking down the hallway, kicking doors closed. Getting clean in NA and working the program allows us to explore new opportunities or revisit old possibilities we had closed off to ourselves in our addiction. Courage and humility make it possible.

The freedom to choose our own path can be scary. After all, if we make a choice for ourselves, we don’t get to blame others if we’re unhappy with the results! Each time we choose a new door to walk through—or a door to close behind us—we build courage to keep doing so. Actively making choices helps us to see that our Higher Power will be present in the process, even when the initial results aren’t what we wanted. Perhaps we walk away from a relationship, home group, or job that we found unfulfilling, and then we find ourselves feeling lonely or lost afterward. We find a new partner, new group, new job—or maybe we go back to what we’d left—and our feelings change again. It’s all temporary, and we always have more chances and choices coming our way.

Some of us change relationships, jobs, and home groups the way others change socks and undies, but if we don’t get comfortable with ourselves, none of these external factors can keep us comfortable for long. Courage helps us walk through doors. Humility will help us embrace—or endure—what we find on the other side. Humility means knowing ourselves, faults and all. To be happy with our choices, we need to be honest with ourselves about who we are and what we need and want. The NA program helps us find the courage to make our own choices and the humility we need to live with the choices we make.

The Steps help me find the courage and humility I need to choose my own path. I will put my freedom to good use by living the Steps.

10 JULY

Striving to Be Humble Servants

Being asked to lead, to serve, to accept responsibility, is a humbling experience for a recovering addict.

—*Twelve Concepts for NA Service*, Fourth Concept

While using, most of us were not asked to lead anything. When we did have such experiences, they were often opportunities for our character defects to feed like vampires on their victims' blood. Our ravenous need for perfection and validation, our self-importance, competitiveness, and attention-seeking branded those situations. Others of us imploded with self-doubt. We couldn't ask for help, didn't feel we had anything to offer, or were too high to show up. Such experiences only made us more isolated and fearful and even less willing to take on responsibilities, if anyone bothered to ask again.

When it comes to service, our one-two punch of low self-esteem and high self-importance follows us into the rooms. If we are asked to take out the rubbish, it requires asking someone, "Where to?" and even that can be hard for us. If we're asked to lead a meeting, we need assurance that we don't have to wow them with war stories—real or imagined—or slay with our comic genius. All we have to do is show up and be honest. When we lack humility, everything is more complicated than it needs to be.

If we are willing, we'll end up in service positions that suit our innate talents—some that we'll grow into with support and others that will expose our defects to the bone. Humility is the vehicle that allows us to accept responsibility without serving our ego. We can do something well without showing off, just as we can do something awkwardly, or even fail at it, with grace.

Next time I'm asked to serve, I'll just do the task as well as possible. That's what really matters.

11 JULY

Compassion for Ourselves

When we have compassion for ourselves, we give ourselves permission to be in the world, and that makes us much more useful to the world.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Growing Pains”

“I am my own worst enemy.”

We’ve heard some version of this sentiment from addicts with four days clean, four years, and four decades. “I’m judge, jury, and executioner for myself” is another version of the same sentiment. We struggle with feelings of worthlessness, self-pity, crippling fear. Our disease tells us that we are “not enough” or even that we’re unlovable. We remind ourselves of our considerable mistakes or obsess about minor ones. When these thoughts are most rampant, we tend to isolate ourselves from the world, protecting others from having to deal with us and protecting ourselves from having to deal with them. But we’ve also heard, “An addict’s mind is a dangerous neighborhood. You shouldn’t wander around it alone.”

Self-compassion is one remedy for self-obsession. What does that look like? It’s giving ourselves some slack. It’s acknowledging, at least for a moment, that we are doing the best we can. It’s channeling some of that kindness we more freely extend to others toward ourselves. As we grow, we learn to redirect ourselves toward compassion when we go through difficult times, don’t meet our own standards, or feel unworthy of love. We can be gentle with ourselves—and get out of our own way.

Compassion allows us to move forward. We see our value more clearly and are able to exit the “bad neighborhood” of our minds more readily. Getting out of our heads gets us out in the world where we are useful to others. In fact, being of service to others is another key remedy to the mess in our minds.

It takes practice to stop berating ourselves for every struggle and misstep. Even with years of recovery, we aren’t always our most trusted ally, but with some compassion, we can switch from the enemy camp.

Today I dare myself to look in the mirror and say: “Hey, you! You’re a good person. You may make mistakes, but you still have a lot to offer. So, crawl out from under your rock—and get out there and rock it!”

12 JULY

Responsibility Versus Control

Finding the line between personal responsibility and willful control is a challenge.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Letting Ourselves Go”

After years of willfully trying to control our lives, our moods, and other people to get what we want, we arrive in the rooms of NA and are told we must surrender every day and turn our will over to a Higher Power. On top of that, an inventory shows us that being controlling is a character defect that has constantly placed our needs at the center of all of our relationships. We thought we needed that control. How else were we going to get things done—the correct way? (Ours.)

“So, what are we supposed to do then?” a newer member demanded to know. “Just casually sit back and not handle things because we can’t control the outcome or other people? I thought I’m supposed to be responsible now.”

There’s a fine line between being responsible and grabbing control. Few situations are black-and-white, all-or-nothing, so discerning the position of that line may be a lifelong endeavor. Few life lessons in recovery are learned in one go, but that doesn’t mean we don’t get better at living them. It takes much effort to gain the wisdom to know the difference between the things we can—and perhaps must—change and the things we must accept.

“So then, how?” the newcomer—and everyone else—wants to know.

The “how” of it is pretty standard NA stuff, isn’t it? We listen to others’ experience and talk about our struggles in this area. We seek suggestions and take them. Through stepwork, we reveal our self-centered tendencies and find strategies to address them. We say “yes” when asked to help, but we don’t sacrifice our needs either. We own up to our mistakes and own our assets, too. Crucially, we start the lifelong process of assessing the difference between those two sparring voices in our heads. One is our disease that will tell us to avoid, deny, or control. And the other, which is connected to our Higher Power, is rooted in our values and our conscience, and, yes, our responsibility to do the right thing and let go of the outcome.

How can I explore this concept of personal responsibility versus willful control? What am I holding on to that I need to let go of, and what is something I’m avoiding that’s my job to get done?

13 JULY

Unity in Loving Care

We contribute to unity in our meetings by exercising loving care in the way we speak and the way we treat one another.

—*It Works*, Tradition One, “Applying Spiritual Principles”

Speaking to and treating other members with love, care, and respect is effortless . . . except when it isn’t. But that’s on us. To practice unity, we learn self-awareness.

It could be fear that we’ll say the wrong thing to the member who is grieving the loss of 20 years of cleantime that makes us look past her. Instead of reassuring her, we say nothing. This action, driven by our discomfort, she assumes is a harsh judgment of her relapse. It could be that serious bout of depression we’re experiencing that causes us to snap at a newer member who set up the chairs incorrectly. And that sponsee brother’s story that he’s shared *three* times already this week! We can’t help but roll our eyes as far as they will go. Maybe we just forgot to eat?

We don’t intend to be hurtful or dismissive. We won’t always know the right thing to say. And we don’t all express—or prefer to receive—love, care, and respect in the same ways. In times of need, one member might approach us with warmth and a nonjudgmental ear. Another might demand, “Take the cotton out of your ears!” in the style of old-school tough love. An action of physical contact—a friendly hand on the shoulder or that big NA hug—most often will be welcomed, but sometimes it will be rebuffed.

Our experience tells us that we must be doing something right because so many addicts come to meetings and stay clean. We may not always exercise “loving care” flawlessly, but we get better at it. We learn to exercise patience and kindness, even as we share opinions and suggestions. We work on breaking through our discomfort and uncertainty because we care about each other—and we want to show it. And we listen to each other’s stories (no matter how many times) and try to be respectful because we value our group, even when a member of it bugs us. As long as we’re trying to be supportive, we are exercising the principle of unity.

To promote unity, I will make an effort to be careful in my words and actions today, keeping in mind “the therapeutic value of one addict helping another.”

Acceptance and Relationships

Recovery is not always a tidy process; we are building intimate relationships with other people and with a power greater than ourselves, and neither of these comes naturally to all of us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, Opening Essay

Before getting clean, a meaningful relationship was one that got us what we wanted. Now, more and more, we find ourselves getting to know and love other people through NA, sometimes members we never would have expected to connect with. We start by being honest and empathetic with the eccentric bunch of clean addicts we find in recovery. Through working the Steps, we also—to our surprise—begin to develop intimacy with a Higher Power.

But we don't always know what to make of these new assets. Our lives are surely better with their addition, so we accept these unforeseen gifts even when it feels awkward. We realize these new relationships can teach us a lot. We make progress, even when it's two steps forward, one step back. Our intentions aren't to cause pain, but sometimes we end up doing just that. We lean on our sponsor for help and learn to apply spiritual principles. We are starting to accept the fact that we need other people.

We also accept our need for restoration to sanity and seek out a power greater than ourselves for help with that. Some of us return to a spiritual practice we grew up with; others discover, define, and create beliefs that work for them. We pray, we listen, and—if our heads are in the right place—sometimes we even get answers. One member said, “Even when I feel disconnected from my Higher Power, I can still believe that you believe.” And some days, that's good enough.

Relationships—with a Higher Power and other people—have rough patches even when we work a program. Our ability to accept ourselves and others helps us learn from challenging relationships instead of running from them. We can stay clean and continue to grow even as our spiritual connections and relationships ebb and flow. When we work the Steps, our relationships get better over time, just like we do.

Even though it's messy at times, I can give myself credit for how far I've come in learning to build relationships with others and with my Higher Power.

15 JULY

Regular Inventory and Meaningful Commitments

If there was anything in our lives that required a regular commitment, chances are that we only followed through if it wasn't too hard, if it didn't get in the way of our self-indulgence, or if we happened to feel like it.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step Ten, “Spiritual Principles”

Being committed is more than just doing something over and over or showing up when and where we said we would. Commitment involves a conscious decision. We consider what we need or want, what we think is right, and what we are willing to devote our resources to. We take the time to think about benefits and drawbacks, time and energy required, other existing obligations, and whether we are willing to be willing when our enthusiasm goes away.

Our past experiences with phrases like “going to any lengths” and “no matter what” were quite different from commitment in a healthy, spiritual practice. Even in recovery, we remain compulsive. As creatures of habit, we may find ourselves repeating behaviors even when we don't want to. This can show up in our commitments. We keep a commitment out of habit or because no one else has stepped up. We commit impulsively and then back out just as impulsively. Or we stick to an unwanted commitment, resenting ourselves and the commitment from start to finish. In time, we learn a healthier approach.

The daily inventory of Step Ten can improve our ability to make and keep commitments. Reflecting on our lives each day teaches us a great deal about ourselves, including the types of commitments to which we are and are not well suited. Regular inventory helps us become more disciplined and self-aware, and we experience further relief from defects and shortcomings. We grow, and our commitments become deeper and more meaningful as a result.

Commitment is more than just showing up. Today I will draw on Step Ten and honor my commitments with mind, heart, and spirit.

Listening for Common Ground

In service, we listen well by listening for common ground rather than for ways to prove that our idea is better.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Four, “In Service”

NA offers plenty of opportunities for us to learn how to do a better job of living in the world. While very few of us show up to NA with the credentials of “great listener,” sitting through recovery meetings can teach us much about making an effort to truly understand what others are saying. The listening skills we hone in recovery meetings are quite useful in NA service, too. Self-centeredness might cause us to put the responsibility for good communication on others: If they would just be clearer, we wouldn’t have to listen so carefully. As we learn in meetings, with our sponsors, calling other addicts—communication is a two-way street, and we’re much better off when we work on our side, rather than insisting on improvements across the way.

“I noticed a fellow trusted servant frequently restating things other members had shared, but in different words,” a member wrote. “I got angry, thinking they wanted credit for everyone else’s ideas. After a while, I realized that they were basically interpreting for themselves as they tried to understand what other people were saying. The service meetings take longer, but I think hearing things in multiple ways actually ends up being helpful.”

There are many ways we can improve our ability to listen in service. For example, not talking while others are talking can be practiced well in most recovery meetings. Other techniques, like asking others to clarify what they’re saying, might be better reserved for service meetings. Sponsorship helps, too, of course. A member wrote, “My sponsor would say, ‘What I hear you saying is...’ I started using that phrase in service, and soon my communication was improving dramatically!”

I typically have more in common with others than I may believe. I will listen for common ground with patience and gratitude.

17 JULY

With Hope Comes Resilience

Our hope is renewed throughout our recovery. Each time something new is revealed to us about our disease, the pain of that realization is accompanied by a surge of hope.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step Two, “Hope”

Hope and resilience so often seem to be interconnected.

In active addiction, our resilience was largely based on our dishonesty. Many of us bounced back from difficulties thanks to our capacity for manipulation, shadiness, and flat-out denial. Hope kept us going, too—even if our only hope was to not get caught. When our kid, a coworker, or current friend-with-benefits confronted us with the truth, trying to make us see how we hurt or disappointed them, we could not and would not deal with that. Same with law enforcement: “I swear, officer, that’s not mine—these aren’t even my pants.” Anything that poked a hole in the story we told ourselves was to be soundly rejected. Or else, it was the beginning of the end—which clearly it was because here we are reading an entry from an NA book of spiritual principles.

Our resilience lands us—and then keeps us—in NA. When our powerlessness and unmanageability are revealed to us in Step One, we stay, despite the desire to escape. Through meetings, our first service commitment, relationships with other recovering addicts, and a Higher Power, we find hope that we can stay clean.

Instead of avoiding the truth, our solution is now to uncover it. The process of working the Twelve Steps thoroughly—whether it’s the very first time we are diving in or the hundredth—involves actively and methodically confronting our disease, our ego, our flaws, our fears, and our mistakes. As a result, we often experience considerable pain, regret, and shame. But hope is here, too, among those revelations—hope for serenity, for courage, and for wisdom. We may not experience a “surge” of hope, as in the quotation above, but a spark will do just fine to keep us bouncing back and moving forward.

When I acknowledge or reveal something about myself that causes me pain, I will make every effort to acknowledge the hope that follows as well. I can get through this. I know I can.

18 JULY

Growth Takes Vulnerability

By asking for help, we can change. Sharing is risky at times, but by becoming vulnerable we are able to grow.

—Basic Text, Chapter 9: Just for Today—Living the Program

As kids, some of us became completely self-reliant out of necessity because the people and institutions meant to care for and help us consistently let us down. That skill got us through our using days—until it didn't. Others of us definitely sought help when we were using, but it wasn't to assist us in our growth. The help we wanted was for feeding our addiction and often put us in risky situations. We were vulnerable but not safe.

The act of coming to NA is an admission that we need help. But are we thinking of our personal and spiritual development as we drag our butts into our first meeting? For most of us, the answer would be a resounding *no!* We just want to stop using. A member shared, "Asking for help was not an option. That meant I was weak, a whiner, a loser. I could be retaliated against, humiliated, rejected, or abandoned, cuz that's what happened when I showed vulnerability out there."

Sharing in recovery does pose some risks. Rejection is possible and real. We expose ourselves to feeling shame and guilt. And who wants to experience any of that? Sometimes the risk is about accountability; like, if we tell someone what we're contemplating or feeling, then we might have to *do* something about it. However, withholding and going it alone make us less safe. We become more fearful, our isolation intensifies, and then acting out can seem like a good idea.

As we grow in recovery, the pain we experience from isolating or acting out eventually outweighs the pain of sharing what's going on with us. Our experience of sharing with other members demonstrates that, overall, we find acceptance, support, and love. We learn that it takes courage to be vulnerable. Our desire to grow as recovering addicts eclipses our fears of feeling exposed.

I will assess what I may be concealing and where I'm afraid of being vulnerable. I may not make the choice to ask for help today—but I know I'm safer if I do.

19 JULY

Tempering Willingness with Humility

Each member finds a level of service that fits comfortably into a balanced program of recovery.

—*It Works*, Tradition One, “Applying spiritual principles”

Each of us contributes to NA in ways that fit our lives and abilities. As homegroup members, we show up early and stay late. As sponsors, we demonstrate love in action. We’re elected to serve in various positions established by groups and service bodies to support our primary purpose. And we bring this spirit of service to our lives outside of NA. Giving back is an expression of our gratitude and a big part of our identity as individuals and as a Fellowship.

Service gives us purpose and helps us find our place in the NA community, but our commitment to helping others can skew our perspective at times. In the service equivalent to having eyes bigger than one’s belly, we can be tempted to pile too many commitments onto our plates. We might find ourselves neglecting our families and stepwork in favor of service to others. Our willingness to serve can outpace its usefulness for many noble reasons and a few lousy ones—like avoidance, hubris, and a desire for control. We learn to be realistic about our limits, allowing humility to temper our willingness. It gets easier to ask for help and to recognize when saying no is the right thing to do.

One addict shared, “When I see someone being a commitment hog, I know their heart is in the right place, but they’re not doing themselves or us any favors by taking on too much. Our challenge is to moderate our willingness with some humility. Too much of this good thing is a bad thing for this addict and for those who have to deal with me.”

To balance our enthusiasm, we also become willing to consider our limits. We face our limitations collectively and as individuals. Time is not infinite. Our skill sets are not comprehensive. Sometimes our needs and passion simply exceed our aptitude and energy. We find ourselves willing but not quite able to meet all the demands or notice the price we’re paying as we try to do too much. Honesty helps us to recognize reality. Humility allows us to ask for and accept help.

I will examine the portions on my service plate and temper my willingness with humility, sharing the blessings of service with others.

20 JULY

Forgiveness Sets Us Free

Forgiving is its own reward. We start to find peace within ourselves. When we are free of guilt, shame, and resentment, our minds can be still.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Love”

Self-righteous indignation used to be its own reward. We were uplifted by our intolerance of other points of view. Mad rage was addictive. No one was going to stop us from reaping its choice benefits: isolating ourselves from others, a free pass to gossip, fortifying our side against the person who wronged us—and, of course, a thousand more reasons to get high. A member shared, “Why would I want to forgive when that adrenaline rush of righteous anger felt so damn good?”

But what do we really gain by being “right”? It’s a distraction from the real problem. All the hard work we put into staying angry at others could be used to improve ourselves. And like drugs, that initial rush of self-righteous indignation wears off—exposing the shame and guilt lurking below the surface. “I needed *more*, just to stay well,” the member continued. “A thousand hits of justified anger just weren’t enough.” We end up alone obsessing about our guilt, shame, and resentments, stoking a fire of fixation no one is tending to but us.

Through the process of recovery, we can let go of reacting to every injustice we experience (or think we do). That’s a bit of relief right there. Beyond that, we seek to forgive and do the work required to let go of resentments. The rewards are far more satisfying and long lasting. We become more content with minding our own business and less inclined to keep tabs on the behavior of others. We actively try to love them instead—or at least try to understand them. And a lot can be said for off-loading the resentments we’ve lugged around forever. There’s so much freedom in that. There’s lightness and even some ease in walking through life.

For many of us, forgiving others does get easier over time, not least because we have experienced its rewards. “I know what it’s like to be imprisoned in a deep, dark hole of anger and self-righteousness,” the member went on. “But freedom ain’t free—and a lot of times the price of freedom is forgiveness.”

Who in my life have I forgiven or at least started to—and what has that been like? How might my life be different if I continue down this path?

21 JULY

Freedom to Heal

Gradually, we come to experience freedom from some of our deepest wounds. As we begin to clear up some of the confusion and contradiction in our lives, we can move forward with less of the baggage we brought in with us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Sex”

Freedom for any recovering addict begins with not using. But as the fog lifts, our emotional turmoil becomes more apparent. To stay clean, we need a different approach to deal with our underlying issues. We understand we can be free from active addiction—but can we be free from our deepest wounds?

We’d love that answer to be a resounding “absolutely!”—and for some, it will be. But for many of us who’ve suffered traumas and abuse, the more realistic answer is: We *can* heal. We can move forward. We can gain more freedom than we have today. Recovery from addiction is a process, and so is letting go of “baggage,” especially the burdens we never asked for and, no doubt, the ones we inflicted on others.

That process can be fierce, terrifying, sometimes beautiful, often unexpected. We gain freedom from working Steps and sharing about our past with each other. We get relief through meditation and prayer, perhaps through outside help, through the passage of time and patience with ourselves. We try not to avoid or disconnect from painful memories. Instead, we deal with our baggage as best we can and realize that some of what we’ve been carrying isn’t ours. We come to some acceptance and healing, finding forgiveness for ourselves for not letting go. And, equally as important, we help others to do the same.

While some wounds may never fully heal, they don’t overwhelm us today. They don’t run our lives—or our relationships with others, with our bodies, and with the world. We can learn how to relate to others and respond to their needs without sacrificing our own. We can be vulnerable and explore physical and emotional intimacy. We can find freedom, lose it a little, and regain it by digging in again.

My pain doesn’t define me, and I can use it to help someone else heal. I will find both refuge and freedom in the Steps and in my fellow addict.

22 JULY

Extending a Thoughtful Welcome

It may be helpful to remember what made us feel welcome, and what made us feel uneasy or alienated, when we first came to meetings.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, “For Groups”

We often reaffirm that “the newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away.” Reading the words is fairly simple; putting them into action can be a little trickier at times. One member wrote, “My compassion for others, especially newcomers, is a huge indicator of my progress in recovery.” In our groups, that compassion shows in the actions we take to consider the newcomer’s needs. By keeping our focus on the still-suffering addict, we also keep our common welfare first. The questions implied by the quotation above are a great place to start.

When we discuss what it means to feel welcomed, we are often pleasantly reminded that our group is doing many of those things well already. Much of it is hardwired into our NA culture. One member shared memories of being a newcomer: “Before the meeting, I was approached and welcomed by someone, and I was a little skeptical of the warmth. Soon someone else welcomed me, and they did the same with other addicts entering the room. I saw a pattern here of how they embraced people, and I felt like I was in the right place. I didn’t feel like an undesirable, the way I did most of my life.”

Plenty of us feel uneasy or alienated in the beginning. Helping new members resist the impulse to bolt out the door and go pick up takes some thoughtfulness on the part of NA groups and members. Although we can’t eliminate every possible excuse a newcomer might use to leave, we can consider our actions and our groups’ atmosphere of recovery through the newcomer’s eyes. Some thoughtful reflection helps us identify what made us feel welcome and how we might do the same for others.

The simplest gesture can have the most power. I will practice thoughtfulness to make sure the newcomer is always welcomed.

23 JULY

Inspired by Hope

We may not relate exactly to one another's dreams, but we can relate to the hope, energy, and excitement of trying to realize them.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, "Connection to Others"

One of recovery's greatest gifts—and joys—is seeing another NA member's hopes and dreams become realized. We are there when someone in our home group plants a seed of an idea into their own life, where it takes root in the dirt below and sprouts a stem that stretches toward the sun. We witness them take all the necessary steps to bring their goal to fruition, in spite of struggles with self-doubt and some real setbacks. We celebrate each other's successes at graduations and weddings; for births, adoptions, and reunifications; at launchings, openings, and housewarmings; and at the finish line—or just by hearing about them at a meeting.

We are inspired, even if our own seed of an idea is very different or even if we don't yet have a seed of our own. Most of us would agree that the specific details of our stories of active addiction don't have to be the same as another addict's in order for us to empathize, or even identify with them. The same can be said regarding our specific ideas about how we want to enrich our lives. There are as many paths to freedom as there are addicts and just as many paths to joy, success, contentment, and fulfillment.

Seeing others follow their dreams can inspire hope in us to find and follow our own. At different periods of our journey, hope may inspire us in different realms, like employment, family and relationships, using our intellect, our creativity. As one addict quipped, "I used to climb the walls, and now I climb mountains." Bearing witness to each other's journeys is a boon. We can learn from each other's mistakes, without having to make the same ones ourselves. What looks impossible or undesirable to us in early recovery may appeal to us later on—and transform our lives. We get most of our best ideas from each other.

I can find inspiration in my fellow recovering addicts—sometimes despite the details and sometimes because of them. Today I have hope for my own future, and I'm willing to do what I can to inspire others to find the hope they lost or never had.

Goodwill Is the “Right” Reason

Good will is best exemplified in service; proper service is “Doing the right thing for the right reason.”

—Basic Text, Our Symbol

When engaging in service in NA, we can get caught up in our reasons why we choose—or are chosen for—a particular commitment. How “pure” is our motivation? How involved is our ego?

A useful skill we have sometimes leads us to the “right thing.” Some of us are natural leaders or organizers, have a knack for relating to people, or are good with numbers or words. Our reason might be as simple as following the suggestion of our sponsor or another member. Sometimes we’re motivated to join a committee based on who else is involved in it—admiring the chairperson’s recovery or wanting to spend more time with friends or someone we have a crush on.

There are more spiritually oriented motivations, too. Perhaps these are even more “right.” It could be a sincere desire to give back. We’re looking for purpose. We want to demonstrate our love for NA or to broaden our minds and our spirits. Maybe we prayed for guidance and walked through the doors that opened up, finding ourselves with a new service commitment.

Maybe we just want to feel better about ourselves.

We cannot completely avoid ego. Feeling good about ourselves is not improper, nor is desiring *some* validation or approval from others. It’s natural and human to want to be seen positively by our peers, to want others to regain trust in us.

We place our feet as firmly as possible onto the foundation of goodwill and let our primary purpose influence our choices. Striving for an ideal of doing proper service for the right reasons is noble. But we can’t wait until the stars align and the angels sing. Now is the time.

Regardless of anything else that motivates me, I will focus on exercising goodwill as I serve NA.

25 JULY

Practicing Maturity and Grace

Facing uncomfortable situations and taking loving action is a demonstration of maturity and grace.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Principles, Practice, and Perspective”

Some of us took conflict avoidance to a new level. We didn’t just steer clear of confrontations; we adopted a general policy that uncomfortable situations are best avoided. We applied this rule in our personal lives, with our families, at work, and in the Fellowship. Given a chance, we avoided any circumstances that might be awkward. We made excuses and skirted around the very experiences that build bonds among humans. Embarrassed by our own unease, we dodged the friend who needed comforting, declined invitations to weddings, and switched meeting attendance following an embarrassing outburst.

When we resisted showing up for life, our social awkwardness left us feeling incapable of taking the simplest of loving actions. In active addiction, we may have convinced ourselves that we didn’t care—not even a little; our conduct was certainly consistent with that sentiment. Despite our every intention to remain aloof, we find ourselves learning to care as we begin to recover.

A desire to increase our level of engagement with the world may sneak up on us in time, or it might not. Some of us are loners by nature; it’s just how we’re wired. Finding comfort in solitude can be a beautiful thing. Isolation is a different matter. When we need help but refuse to pick up the phone, we might be in trouble. We learn to identify when enjoying our own company gives way to isolation and to take the actions necessary to stay safe and clean.

The Steps help us figure out who we are and who we’re not. Experience is a great teacher, boosting our confidence in simply being ourselves. Instead of avoiding awkward situations, we walk through them. We enjoy the payoff when we get to the other side. When we reflect on our actions, we can see our growth. We let go of our old ways of feigned indifference and find ways to be ourselves in the world. Our willingness to grow and to be ourselves in the world shows that we are evolving into a more mature version of ourselves.

I will reframe my outlook on my own discomfort and take on opportunities to practice maturity and grace.

Open-Mindedness Leads to Understanding

Our fellowship matures and develops as each of us brings our increasing understanding to the table; we grow from one another's experience when we are willing to share and to listen with an open mind.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “A Spiritual, Not Religious Program”

When we come into recovery, some of us dust off a faith tradition that we were raised with. Others develop their own framework for spiritual beliefs. Those of us with an anti-religious bias bristled at seeing “God” sprinkled throughout the Steps—*what have we gotten ourselves into?* We were relieved when we learned that we could pursue any kind of spirituality that suited us.

As we learn about the Traditions, the importance of making room for everyone becomes clear. We do our best to avoid lingo associated with any particular path when we share in meetings. We try to convey our experiences with spiritual growth in language that’s inclusive, understandable, and respectful to those with different beliefs. When we use NA language to express our deepening spirituality, we strengthen the link between our spiritual lives and what we’ve gained from living the Twelve Steps.

Over time, we all make peace with the fact that spirituality is central to the NA program. We each arrive at our own sense of spirituality that works. We listen to addicts share the integral part their spiritual awakenings have played in cementing their foundation of recovery. Our sponsors, friends, and predecessors offer their insights on our spiritual, not religious, program and we gain a deeper understanding of our own beliefs as we work Steps and apply Traditions. Intimate conversations help us articulate what we believe and allow us to see how much our paths converge. NA language helps us rise above the barriers that naming names and rituals might create. One member shared, “Our spiritual growth enables us to listen to others with an open mind. This leads to a greater understanding of ourselves, others, and the world around us.” We keep coming back and we see how this program works in each other’s lives. We have faith, above all, in the process of recovery we’ve found in NA.

I will listen with an open mind and an open heart when other members share their experiences with spirituality, coming from a place of understanding and curiosity.

27 JULY

Our Step-One Surrender

Only in working the First Step do we truly come to realize that we are addicts, that we have hit bottom, and that we must surrender.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step One, Opening Essay

We don't all enter the rooms of NA certain that we are addicts like *those* people. Some of us are dubious. Now that we have a couple of weeks clean, we remember our using days a bit differently: Was it *that* bad? Do we really have a "disease"? Sure, we have a problem with drugs, but it's not like we were ever arrested for it. We have a roof over our head and teeth in our mouth. Never have we exchanged sex for drugs, and all our student loan payments have been on time. Was our bottom so terrible? Was it terrible enough to warrant a daily surrender? An oldtimer offers some unhelpful advice: "Maybe you aren't done yet." That sounds ominous, and we definitely have *some* sort of problem, so . . .

We stay clean and get a sponsor. We pick up the *NA Step Working Guides* and, at our sponsor's direction, begin to answer the questions as honestly and thoroughly as possible. By the time we get to the section on surrender, we've already written about our "disease" at length: our profound dishonesty and denial, our manipulation of the people who loved and trusted us, all the laws we broke (even if we didn't get caught), the powerlessness over our addiction, our obsessiveness, our compulsiveness, our obsessive-compulsiveness, the unmanageability we've created in our lives, and the reservations we may be holding onto.

Seeing it all there on the page, all that proof in black and white—it's undeniable. *I am an addict*. In an ideal world, that's the moment of surrender we never look back from. Sure, that happens for many of us. That's the beginning of our process of surrendering, opening the door to recovery. Others of us end up getting loaded, doing more "research," hitting a lower bottom, and surrendering later. Still others never make it back.

I've already done enough research. What is unmanageable in my life right now? What am I obsessing about? What can I do to surrender today?

28 JULY

Inviting Generosity

When we allow another person to step up and help us, we give them a chance to express their own love and generosity.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Being of Service”

Railroading newcomers into service is an age-old tradition in NA. We do it with love, remembering our own reluctance to volunteer, and with gratitude for what early service opportunities gave us. We complied back then since the people suggesting that we make coffee, set out literature, or greet people at the door were clean, after all. We trusted that they knew a thing or two, so we surrendered to doing as they suggested.

Years later, we’re the ones nominating newcomers for those same lifesaving commitments. By then, we recognize that some of the benefits we derive from service come from practicing love and generosity. Service often gives us our first sustained exposure to the good feelings that come with giving of ourselves. As we support other members, meetings, and service bodies—and rope others into doing the same—our generosity is evident in our contributions.

Longtime members assure us that this is no accident. Generously serving each other and NA develops our capacity; we grow as human beings, and NA grows as a Fellowship. We open doors for others to practice generosity; in turn, they reach out to bring others along. An interlinked series of relationships define the history of almost every NA community.

We are the direct beneficiaries of our predecessors’ vision and generosity. And yet, the names of those still with us might not come to mind when we need to recruit panelists for H&I, hosts for the convention’s hospitality room, or facilitators for the newcomer orientation. We may assume that our most seasoned members are above such tasks or that they’d volunteer if they were interested. One member had this to say: “I’ve grown old in NA—which beats the alternative—but I’m not as plugged into what’s happening in NA beyond my home group and sponsees. My phone doesn’t ring like it used to. But I’ll tell you this: Being asked to help never gets old. I still have more to give.”

I will practice generosity by inviting another member—new, old, or in between—to help me or to serve NA.

29 JULY

Being Prudent with Our Obligations

... we learn to take on obligations thoughtfully to ensure that we can follow through on what we've promised.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Money”

Looking back at our active addiction, most of us can see a clear theme: Moderation was not a strength for us. If something is enjoyable, worthwhile, valuable in any way—why not get as much as we possibly can of that thing? The fact that we never seem to be satisfied was a crippling weakness for most of us. We drew lines in the sand for ourselves over and over, and then we stumbled across them by doing things we said we would never do. In recovery, some of us find our lack of satisfaction can be almost like a hidden superpower: We raise the bar higher and higher for ourselves, leaping over past achievements by doing things we thought we could never do. Being difficult to satisfy can prompt some of us to achieve a lot in recovery.

However, we are still addicts, and we run the risk of spreading ourselves too thin. We may be inclined to think of prudence as being careful with our money, which is a difficult lesson most of us must learn at some point in our recovery. However, prudence can apply to any resource we have, including our time and attention. One member found himself struggling to fulfill his NA commitments because “people told me I could never say ‘no’ to NA requests.” He recalls his sponsor telling him, “If you’re feeling overcommitted, practice prudence by learning to say ‘no’ to NA requests that get in the way of fulfilling other commitments you’ve already made.”

Our disease tells us *if one is good, more is better*. Prudence helps us to say “no” or “not yet” when that positive, fulfilling thing we want to do or be doesn’t fit on our full plate. If we finish what we have, we can go back for seconds!

I cannot be everywhere or do everything. I will practice prudence in my commitments by acknowledging my limitations.

Open Mind, Open Heart, Open Spirit

Open-mindedness leads us to the very insights that have eluded us during our lives.

—Basic Text, Chapter 9: Just for Today—Living the Program

When many of us arrive in NA, we fancy ourselves as reasonably open-minded people. For one thing, many of us tried lots of different drugs! More seriously, we may have an *anything goes* or *live and let live* type of attitude and have been tolerant toward others who aren't like us. But were our minds even a tiny bit open to others' insights and opinions or to feedback about our behavior? Could we even listen? Were we able to admit that we might be wrong or didn't know something? Did we believe that we needed to change—and even if so, did we believe we actually could? Probably not so much.

Our experience tells us that open-mindedness is at the very foundation of change for us. While some NA members may insist that we have to “change everything about ourselves,” practicing open-mindedness does not mean that everything we know—or think we know—is worthless. Instead, we gain some carefully wrought insight into what behaviors and perspectives we want to keep in our lives and what is no longer serving us today—and we learn to share these insights with others. Asking questions, listening to the answers, and then letting those answers resonate helps us to identify our old ideas and patterns, see our behavior more clearly, and act differently when it's called for.

Open-mindedness is also one of the most indispensable tools for carrying the message to other addicts and for having productive discussions regarding NA service. We learn to listen more to our sponsees and service buddies, rather than planning out what we want to say. In the process, hopefully, we grow more comfortable with the concept of *I don't know*. As one member put it, “We're not here to be right, we're here to be better.”

Open-mindedness prevents us from running away from problems, ourselves, and each other. Many of us believe that striving to be open-minded keeps us closer to our Higher Power or to the higher self we want to be.

*I aim to keep my mind and my heart open. I will listen more and speak less.
And I will allow my insights and opinions to evolve as my recovery does.*

31 JULY

Simplicity Is Key!

Clarity and simplicity are keys to our message. . . . Narcotics Anonymous, all by itself, is enough. We promise freedom from active addiction.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Ten, Opening Essay

Tradition Ten is pretty simple: Addicts have opinions, but NA does not. Topics like politics and religion create unnecessary controversy and conflict. While civic involvement and participation in our faith communities may certainly help us as individuals to get and stay clean, NA is mute on these topics. To maintain an atmosphere of recovery for everyone, we do our best to leave potential distractions at the door.

Relatedly, here's a good one that we've heard often: "Narcotics Anonymous is a simple program for complicated people." And then there's this gem: "Opinions are like belly buttons. Everybody's got one—but that doesn't mean they're useful." While that statement may ring true, it's not an NA "opinion," so let's move straightaway to the NA message.

Our NA message is clear and simple. Any of us can stop using and stay stopped. Our obsession to use will dissipate. And we can find a new way to live our lives. Freedom from active addiction is our only promise.

The program of NA has enough to keep us busy—no need to overcomplicate it. We have Steps, Traditions, and Concepts—twelve of each. We have spiritual principles. We have service, literature, and our Higher Power. We have a vision of making NA accessible to addicts around the world. And we have each other. We need each other to stay clean and to find freedom from active addiction and the complicated mess that goes along with it. Keep it simple.

One disease, one program, one promise.

NA is enough to keep me clean and free. I'm grateful for all my human complexities, for the outside support I may have, and for the activities and worlds I engage with. But I need to keep my recovery simple. I can commit to that for my own healing—as well as for everyone else who's seeking freedom in the room with me today.

AUGUST

1 AUGUST

The Power of Creative Action

Creative action keeps us moving forward.

—*Guiding Principles, All Will Be Well*

One way for us to examine the power of creative action is to take a clear look at its spiritual polar opposite: destruction. In our active addiction, instead of building up our lives, we knocked them down. We demolished relationships, careers, and property. We self-destructed, harming our bodies, our minds, and our spirits. In many cases, our destructiveness resulted in losing our freedom.

As melodramatic as it may sound, we can rise from the rubble, fumes, and bloodshed of our self-destruction! We destroyed a lot, but we didn't destroy everything. Because we're alive and we're clean, we have the opportunity to rebuild. Most simply, creative action is everything we do to reconstruct our lives and elevate our communities. It includes all the actions we take to build our self-esteem, strengthen our relationships, and bolster our integrity.

It's important to note that some of us use our creativity to build only our outsides—getting our looks back, doing our time and being released, finishing the degree, or retiring in style—but deny our spiritual needs. That neglect can lead us down a path of destruction. We may not relapse, but we risk destroying some of the good we've built in our time clean. The creative actions we take to stay engaged in our recovery, give of ourselves in service, and nurture a relationship with our Higher Power will sustain our spirits even as we thrive in other ways.

We will make mistakes and may experience massive failures beyond our control. We are bound to take actions that undermine our progress and hurt others. We aren't perfect. But, again, we can rebuild. Our capacity to engage in creative action during times of adversity is key to our progress. Learning how to be grateful for life's hard-hitting lessons is the ultimate protection against our destructiveness.

I'm going to take this moment to examine my destructive tendencies. Today I'll find an opportunity to consciously and creatively prevent them from taking over.

With Independence Comes Responsibility

Learning to make decisions for ourselves also means accepting responsibility for those decisions.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Finding Our Place in the World”

We aren’t alone, and we can’t recover alone. But our commitment to mutual support doesn’t negate our independence or the responsibility that attaining it—and sustaining it—demands. Even with all the apt suggestions we provide each other, our decisions about how we live are our own. And learning to live with those choices is its own beast!

Some members define responsibility as the willingness to accept the consequences of our actions. Even clean, we have to keep learning the lesson that our choices aren’t made in a vacuum. They affect those around us. When we find ourselves thinking once again, *I’m only hurting myself*, it’s time for a closer look. We may want to exercise freedom of choice with more awareness and care.

And other members say, “Careful what you pray for—you just might get it.” Often when we do get what we want, it’s a whole other world of responsibility that is ours to manage. A romantic partnership, getting our kids back, a career, property, a new puppy—all of these are gifts we must care for in order to sustain. “We keep what we have only with vigilance”—and also with commitment, discipline, patience, acceptance, passion, and a lot of love.

Another aspect of taking responsibility for our independence is when, inevitably, we are faced with other people’s opinions about a new direction we choose. At times that “I told you so” reaction we get makes us defensively dig ourselves further into a bad choice—or someone else’s response spurs us to run from a good one. Blaming others gets us nowhere. Practicing independence requires an honest assessment of our choices in the face of others’ reactions. We’ve also heard members say, “The more I make new mistakes rather than repeating old ones, the more I know I’m making headway in my life.”

I’m doing the best I can at living fully and owning my independence. I can live with my choices, and, if not, I can make different ones!

3 AUGUST

Unity in Our Shared Purpose

Our ability to survive as a fellowship and to reach others depends on our unity.

—*It Works*, Tradition One, “Applying Spiritual Principles”

We bring all our old beliefs with us when we come to NA. Being intolerant and even hostile to people from different backgrounds may have been part of our identity when we were using. Some of us held prejudices based on race, ethnicity, or culture. Others held negative views about certain religious or nonreligious beliefs or sexual and gender identities. Our judgments about age, disability, income, and even what neighborhoods people lived in influenced how we felt about them.

It takes time to realize that our old ways of thinking may not serve us in this new life. And it takes even more time to change our thinking and behavior. We often encounter opportunities for growth as we do service in NA. One member shared about bumping heads with a fellow home-group member. “He was so rigid and seemed to be *against* anything I was *for*,” the addict grumbled. Many of us have found ourselves similarly frustrated. Especially in early recovery, it’s almost a reflex to assume that our way is best and they— whoever “they” may be—must be wrong.

Fortunately, our sponsors can talk us down from that tree. They help us see that we’ve taken it for granted that others should think, feel, and communicate as we do. As we get to know people from a variety of backgrounds, we start to see the value of our inclusivity. Life is more interesting when viewed from multiple perspectives. We adopt a mindset of goodwill, and unity shows us how to put *we* before *me* as we focus on our common welfare. United by the ties that bind us together, we let go of our prejudices and embrace diversity as an asset.

I need NA to thrive, so today I will choose to practice the principle of unity by letting go of my old ideas and accepting all my fellow members.

Open-Mindedness and Spirituality

A new idea cannot be grafted onto a closed mind.

—Basic Text, Chapter 9: Just for Today—Living the Program

“Approaching Step Two with an open mind was a real challenge for me,” a member shared. The concept that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity presents a real dilemma for some of us. “Thankfully, a thorough First Step pried my mind open enough to convince me that my way wasn’t working,” the member continued. “That surrender set me up for Step Two, and I came to believe that maybe this NA thing would work for me.”

Each of us grapples with the meaning of “spiritual, not religious” within the context of our own worldview. The Basic Text promises that there aren’t any catches to the proposal that we find a Higher Power of our own understanding, and our experience bears that out. Some of us come with deeply held convictions based in a religious tradition. Others have secular beliefs that we may be equally committed to. No matter what our view or experience is prior to NA, we find that an open mind is an important asset, allowing us to consider ideas that are new to us.

In recovery, we find that being open to spiritual concepts enriches our own beliefs. We’re not being asked to swallow novel ideas whole, as we may have feared, or to replace a current belief system with some prepackaged dogma. Rather, open-mindedness allows us to learn from others’ experiences, taking what feels right for us and leaving the rest. It’s a graft, not a transplant. Instead of closing our minds to new ideas, an open mind frees us to try them out. If the graft takes, it may enhance our previously held beliefs. If not, it might still clarify our own ideas. In either case, growth results from keeping our minds open.

I will remember the benefits of a more flexible and open approach to new ideas, even those about the spiritual aspects of recovery.

Finding Purpose in One Another

Helping others is perhaps the highest aspiration of the human heart and something we have been entrusted with as a result of a Higher Power working in our lives.

—It Works, Step Twelve

Many of us wanted to help others before getting clean, but once we started using, doing so became difficult. One member described it this way: “My heart aspired to help people, but my brain never got the memo!” At some point in early recovery, many of us have the experience of sharing and then seeing another member relate. Maybe they nod in agreement, or they shake their head in shared amusement or disgust at the insidiousness and insanity of our disease. Maybe they vocalize—“That’s right!”—or shed a tear. However they do it, they let us know that *they* know that *we* know—we share in the knowledge of the disease, and we share our experience with recovery, too.

This is how we get clean and stay clean—the therapeutic value of one addict helping another. We share experience, strength, and hope; we share tea and coffee; we share the joy of staying clean and the pain of losing fellow addicts. We do it together. At many points along the way, we are reminded of our purpose for being here and being together. Maybe it’s when a nonmember asks, “Why do you still go to those meetings?” We might even wonder, *Yeah, why do I?* Then we remember—we are uniquely qualified to help other addicts, and helping addicts gives us purpose and keeps us clean.

When we go through something clean—an unintended pregnancy, parents with dementia, falling in or out of love—we are rarely the first ones in the room to do so. We share what we’re going through so others can help us. Then we share what we went through so we can help others. Yes, we’re each other’s eyes and ears; sometimes we are also each other’s trailblazers, coaches, older siblings. We have a reason for being here. And that reason is one another.

A sense of purpose can fill that void I tried to fill with drugs. I will find purpose by sharing with and helping another addict.

6 AUGUST

Spiritual Discipline Builds Good Character

What matters most are the actions we take. Consistent application of the tools of recovery changes us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Awakenings”

“My parents sacrificed to send me away to school when I was a kid. They were at their wits’ end and hoped that this school could drill some discipline into me,” a member shared. “They said it would build character. It toughened me up, all right, and made me even more rebellious. It would be a long time before I’d see discipline and character in a positive light again. But here I am, grateful that my rebelliousness landed me here. NA gave me what my upbringing and education could not. You showed me the value of a different kind of discipline, a spiritual discipline, and through it I’ve become a person of good character. That matters to me today.”

Many of us have negative associations with the word *discipline*. It conjures up memories of the principal’s office or worse. We understand discipline to mean punishment—and it does—but other definitions are better suited to us in recovery.

As a spiritual principle, discipline refers both to the good habits that support our recovery and the composure and serenity resulting from that work. As with athletes and musicians, our performance in real life reflects the effort put into disciplined practice. When we’re disciplined about our spiritual maintenance, we’re less distracted by our impulses, our defects may not call us as often, and we’re more apt to listen to the quiet, steady assurances of our conscience or Higher Power. As we improve our conscious contact, we find it easier to curb our excesses and strengthen our character. As one member wrote, “I have a daily spiritual routine that puts me at ease with my emotions. I can practice restraint when it’s called for because I’m no longer governed by impulse.”

My character is defined by my choices; who I am is what I do. Are my current routines providing adequate spiritual maintenance? How might I strengthen my character by being more disciplined?

7 AUGUST

Unconditional Love for Fellow Addicts

A member shared, “Unconditional love is not the same as unconditional acceptance. I don’t have to like your behavior, but that doesn’t mean we reject each other as human beings.”

—Guiding Principles, Tradition One, “For Groups”

Oh, great. This.

So often we come from families and relationships where love was conditional. If we didn’t act right or when we made mistakes, love was withheld from us. For many addicts, rejection of any sort is unbearable. When an NA member takes issue with something we did or said, we see it as solid evidence that we are worthless. That person is now our mortal enemy, judging us every second. No matter how gently we are pulled aside and pulled up, we won’t be able to feel the love in it—nor will we be able to forget it. Forever and ever, we will remember that oldtimer who took us aside after the meeting and told us, “I love you, but could you please . . .”

That being said, there’s no list of hard-and-fast rules to determine when a member’s behavior in meetings warrants unsolicited feedback. As a recovering addict wrote, “No matter how obnoxious I was, people always gave me a hug and told me to keep coming back.” Ideally, our default is to treat each other with respect and kindness. We put our common welfare first when we address behavior that puts meetings and members at risk. We protect the right of all of us to recover when we communicate to a member that disruptive, predatory, or violent conduct is not acceptable. NA is here for all addicts, and our experience shows that we can support members through just about anything.

Our capacity to love and accept others as they are impacts our personal growth in recovery. When someone drives us mad, “Pray for them,” a trusted oldtimer suggested. “We don’t have to pray they win the lottery. But still pray for them.”

I am reminding myself that we are all addicts trying to get and stay clean, just for today. I don’t have to like everybody, but I’ll try to love them anyway.

8 AUGUST

Accepting Ourselves as Works in Progress

A spiritual understanding of self-acceptance is knowing that it is all right to find ourselves in pain, to have made mistakes, and to know that we are not perfect.

—IP #19, *Self-Acceptance*, “The Twelve Steps are the solution”

“Change is a process, not an event,” NA members often say—because we find it to be true! The same can be said about how we begin to experience self-acceptance in our first days, weeks, or months clean. That intuitive sense that we are, in fact, okay can feel like coming in from the cold. We enjoy a bit of self-acceptance even before we’ve worked all Twelve Steps. As we work the NA program, those feelings deepen, settle, and evolve just as we do.

It’s a mistake to assume self-acceptance awaits us once we change some external conditions. We may hope—without evidence—a new year, a new flame, a new town, or a new diet will bring us contentment. When we reach outside ourselves to fix what’s within, our plan is to emerge as better people, more worthy of acceptance. To our disappointment and pain, we also have found accuracy in this familiar saying: “Wherever you go, there you are.” Sure enough.

NA’s literature, meetings, and online spaces help us find a better perspective on ourselves and our lives. Instead of focusing solely on our admirable qualities, we learn to embrace all facets of ourselves—our assets *and* our liabilities. We take responsibility for our recovery and, in working the Twelve Steps, come to accept the world around and within us. We divulge our secrets and find that we’re not alone. “Even amid my struggles and sometimes bad behavior,” one member wrote, “I’m all right with this perfectly imperfect me. I know my wounds and my weapons. I’m a work in progress, and I am okay.” We embrace our values, our process, and our growth.

I’ll try to accept all of me today. I’m neither my strengths nor my weaknesses—I am both: broken in places but just enough to let the light shine in.

Practicing Tolerance and Self-Acceptance

As we learn to gently accept ourselves, we can start to view others with the same accepting and tolerant heart.

—Just for Today, “Expectations,” July 29

Working an NA program uncovers a considerable need for self-acceptance, and slowly we proceed on that journey. Our work also reveals that the people who get under our skin the most are among our greatest teachers. Just like us, they deserve our acceptance and empathy. There’s a reciprocal relationship between self-acceptance and tolerating others who bug us. We learn this from the harsh truth that we often share some very similar traits with those very same people. As we extend grace and dignity to other flawed people in our lives, we often find it easier to treat our less-than-perfect selves with the same compassion.

But then how is tolerance a spiritual principle? Shouldn’t we just be unconditionally loving and accepting of everyone? “Earlier in my recovery,” a member remarked, “I rejected tolerance as a spiritual principle because when I practiced it toward the person who was driving me nuts, there was nothing spiritual going on in my head. I wanted to go right to acceptance . . . or scratch their eyes out. But now I see it as an act of love.”

“Tolerance, in my mind,” another member responded, “is like a gateway spiritual principle. It’s a layover on a multistop flight on the way to your final destination: acceptance.”

“Or it’s an appetizer principle,” a third member joked. “You have it first, to tide you over before the empathy entrée. And maybe unconditional love is dessert.”

No matter how we slice it, tolerance helps us combat unrealistic expectations we place on others’ behavior and our own spiritual condition. Whether we practice it with an open heart or through gritted teeth, it helps prevent us from acting out in fear or anger or expressing our impatience with others who may not be as far along in their journey as we believe we are.

Today when I practice tolerance, I’ll know that it relates directly to my level of self-acceptance. I’ll try to let people be where they are and focus on what I can change about myself to invite serenity in.

10 AUGUST

To Be Both Willing and Humble

Balancing willingness and humility means that we are able to step up to the work we are able to do, and also admit that sometimes we need help.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Eight, “Spiritual Principles”

Recovery offers us many chances to adopt a realistic view of who we are. Humility deepens when we admit powerlessness in Step One, accept help in Steps Three and Seven, and get clarity about our assets and shortcomings in Steps Four, Six, and Ten. We continually gain experience sorting out what we can and can’t do for ourselves. Sometimes, we embrace our strengths or expand our capabilities. Other times, we accept our limitations.

When deciding what we can realistically accomplish on our own, Tradition Eight reminds us to practice humility and prudence. That’s good advice for groups and service bodies, and it’s equally applicable for our personal lives. We strive to be self-supporting, as Tradition Seven suggests, but that doesn’t mean we’re self-sufficient. In NA and at home, humility helps us discern the difference.

Making the NA message widely available often involves tasks or projects requiring more time or expertise than we have available. We can and do employ special workers for many functions in NA, from printing meeting directories to proofreading to navigating the rules of international trade. When it comes to demonstrating NA’s reliability and expanding access to our lifesaving message, it’s sometimes prudent to hire some help.

Seeing our principles at work in NA service helps many of us learn to apply them in our personal lives. “I wanted to save money on a plumber by fixing a leak myself,” a member recalled. “My partner reminded me that I’d made several valiant attempts at home projects in the past year, and none turned out very well. If I want to become a fix-it person, I can make the time to take a class or get help from a friend. But while the water is leaking, I might just need to call an actual plumber.” That’s practicing willingness, self-support, and humility . . . all while preventing unnecessary catastrophe!

I don’t have to be capable of everything. If my needs or desires outweigh my ability, I will practice humility by asking for help.

11 AUGUST

Harmony in Spite of Conflict

When we practice living in harmony with our world, we become wiser about choosing our battles. We learn where we can use our energy to make a difference and where we need to let go.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Awakening to Our Spirituality”

Freedom of choice is a new concept for most of us in recovery. Recovery allows us to start to make healthy choices for ourselves and to consider the consequences of those choices for everyone involved. We begin to realize that we are not the center of the universe and strive to practice goodwill. Living in harmony with the world comes easily when our interactions with others are guided by mutual respect. We may be unaccustomed to disagreeing without being disagreeable, but we can see the benefits of this approach.

When we’re engaged with life, disagreements and conflicts come with the territory. In recovery, we learn to navigate confrontations differently than we had in the past. None of us gets clean to be a doormat, so we’ve got to learn to defend ourselves and fight for our passions in principled ways.

With practice, we become less impulsive in our actions and take time to decide where we want to spend our energy. One member described how he questions his own thought process: “Am I championing this cause as a matter of principle or pride? Is this my battle, or do I need to let go?” We learn from our mistakes and those of others, and we consider the suggestions made by members of our support group more often. We grow to understand the preciousness of time. With only 24 hours in a day, we choose to find our way through conflict in ways that preserve our dignity and foster harmony.

*I will take a deep breath as I decide how to spend my time and energy.
Today I will choose responses that preserve my dignity and that of those
around me.*

12 AUGUST

Finding Grace in the Process

Spiritual awakening is a process. Maybe it is what the whole process is about. We nurture our awakening spirits and know that we are finally free to live in grace, integrity, and dignity.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Creative Action of Spirit”

When we were using drugs, our spirits slowly eroded as our disease progressed. We compromised our beliefs and screwed over anyone who got in the way of our self-serving plans. The journey from desperation to spiritual awakening is a long and storied path for each of us.

A pink cloud may protect us from the jagged edges of life on life’s terms for a time, but reality sets in sooner or later. Eventually, we will walk through the death of someone close to us or perhaps go through a painful divorce with years clean. We each deal with loss differently. Our initial response may be to avoid our feelings, instead seeking comfort in food or sex or gaming. With time, we learn to rely on a power greater than ourselves and our support group to navigate overwhelming feelings. When we let go and surrender to the process, our spirits are free to awaken.

Grace teaches us to let things unfold naturally and let go of the illusion of control. We’re less invested in outcomes, and we focus instead on aligning our will with the greater good. We open our minds to the possibilities and pay attention to opportunities as well as to closed doors. We live in the moment and enjoy the freedom that comes with grace.

I will let go of my expectations and enjoy the clarity of the moment. I will allow myself to be present for the evolution of my spiritual journey and revel in the grace of living just for today.

13 AUGUST

Anonymity and Individuality

In anonymity, we are free to be ourselves and to carry and receive a message of hope with the addict who suffers, regardless of whenever, wherever, or whoever they might be.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Twelve, Closing Reflection

We live in the world where—consciously and unconsciously—we adjust how we speak and behave at times to fit our circumstances. We avoid certain four-letter words when talking to Granny or the boss, for example. We greet each other in different ways, too. A handshake, a bow, or a fist bump may be called for, depending on the situation, or maybe cheek-to-cheek air kisses—one, two, or three. The point is that people—even nonaddicts—adapt as a sign of respect or solidarity.

But as with so many other characteristics, addicts can take this natural inclination to extremes. In active addiction, we scaled up our capacity to “read” situations and leveraged this skill set to get what we needed. Instead of being flexible to connect with others, we were cunning manipulators trying to get our way.

Recovery helps us return this ability to its proper proportions. Working the Steps helps us figure out who we are and then supports our efforts to be and do our best. What a relief! We can be more secure in our own identities and less like chameleons today. Practicing the spiritual principle of anonymity does not mean losing our individuality. In reality, the very character of Narcotics Anonymous relies, in part, on “the rough-and-tumble liveliness that arises from the diverse personalities of our members,” as stated in *It Works: How and Why*.

In being our weird, wonderful selves, we allow a broader range of addicts to connect with the message and come to believe that NA might work for them, too. Collectively and individually, we are NA’s best asset. In fact, we *are* NA. When we share from the heart, others connect. Being ourselves to the best of our ability makes way for others to do the same. There is a place for all of us in NA. We all fit in when we focus on carrying and receiving our message of hope.

I will share my unvarnished experience today, knowing that sincerity and genuineness are far more important than polish or pretense. NA needs me to be me—no more, no less. Turns out I need that, too.

14 AUGUST

Surrendering Shortcomings

In the Seventh Step, we take our surrender to a deeper level. What began in Step One with an acknowledgment of our addiction now includes an acknowledgment of the shortcomings that go along with our addiction.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step Seven, “Spiritual Principles”

The Steps are in order for a reason; each one prepares us for the next. We acknowledge that our way hasn’t worked when we surrender to Step One. Some members boil it down to a single acknowledgment: *I need something different*. This admission opens the door for us to recognize our need for restoration in Step Two and to make a decision in Step Three. With each of these first three Steps, we surrender a little more. In exchange, we gain hope and enjoy glimpses of freedom.

Surrender takes on new meaning when we get to Steps Six and Seven. Sure, we were sick of some shortcomings, but others were still useful. We were rather fond of one or two that we believed defined us. Still other defects kept us safe; we may even credit some of them with our survival out there. To become entirely ready to release the whole list, we ask ourselves, “Are they still serving us in our new way of life? What would life be like without them?” The answer is always “a little freer.”

With humility, we surrender our shortcomings to a Higher Power and ask for them to be removed. More than one sponsor has pointed out that “the Seventh Step doesn’t go on to say ‘and we lived happily ever after without them,’ does it?” Instead, this Step Seven surrender opens us to guidance and requires us to do some more work. Many of us find that we’re more receptive to the suggestions of our sponsors, trusted friends, and our own insights. When we start to feel ourselves reach for a defective reaction, we make an effort to choose a principled response instead. We surrender, again and again, deepening our commitment to living by spiritual principles and inviting them to counter our worst instincts.

Each time one of my shortcomings seems appealing, that’s when I can practice surrender. The gifts of surrender are available to me each day.

15 AUGUST

Guided by Conscience

*We come to know our intentions. We get better at hearing our own voice,
our own conscience, and listening to our instincts.*

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Conscious Contact”

Even those of us who were raised by wolves were taught the difference between right and wrong. The code of ethics we inherited may have been a bit twisted, but it gave us a point of reference nonetheless. As a result, many of us suffered from a guilty conscience when we screwed up or caused harm early in our using careers. At some point, though, we made a choice—knowingly or not—to behave in ways that were contrary to the values we had internalized. It’s not that we lacked a moral compass; we’d just put it away for a bit. On those occasions when we still felt bad, we turned to denial, defensiveness, and drugs—lots of drugs—to help us stuff the discomfort of a guilty conscience.

Our awareness of that still, quiet voice within starts to return almost as soon as we put down the drugs. Our first reunion with our conscience can feel pretty distressing. Without drugs to mask our feelings, many of us experience an uncut dose of the shame we’d been stuffing for years. We’re relieved to read that “we are not responsible for our disease” in the Basic Text. People who know their way around the Twelve Steps assure us that the second half of that sentence, “we are responsible for our recovery,” will help us make peace with the past and develop our own conscience.

We begin to tune in to what’s right for us and focus on aligning our actions with spiritual principles and our own values. We learn—sometimes through trial and error—to behave in ways we can be proud of. Not wanting to pay a spiritual price, we’re slower to act out on our most basic urges and selfish desires, so we do so less frequently. We can even observe our impulses without acting on them—who knew? With practice, we recalibrate our value system and develop a code of behavior that reflects our intentions.

*I will listen for the reawakened voice of my conscience knowing that it
reflects my beliefs and intentions.*

16 AUGUST

Our Commitment to Encouragement

As a group, it's our job to be tolerant, listen well, hear the message through the mess, and encourage newer members to grow.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Ten, "For Groups"

Practicing encouragement, especially with newer members, is a job not to be taken lightly. Encouragement breeds hope, which leads to a willingness to change, which leads to courageous action, which leads to growth that can be miraculous to witness. When we consider the importance of encouragement, we realize policing the message, or the messenger, is likely not helpful. We all hope to be met with empathy and encouragement, not an explanation about outside issues. We can overlook when a newcomer misspeaks. When we're tempted to correct the way someone shared, maybe we offer a hug instead and our phone number.

The share that hits the marks of solution oriented, message carrying, and utterly authentic—all before the timer goes off—may not happen every day. And is that even our goal? Many of us believe sharing honestly *is* the solution—and actively listening for the message reflects our empathy and encourages others to speak honestly. We can validate each other—and also model how to connect the dots between what's happening in our individual lives and the process of recovery we all share. When we provide each other with support and encouragement, we're more inspired to be part of each other's growth.

Encouragement is living by example, as much as it is the words we utter. Rather than critique a group member's way of handling a problem, we share our experience with a similar situation. Through it all, we witness each other's courage to endure some unimaginable conflict and strife and stay clean through it. "NA members' encouragement has provided the nudge I needed to take one more step forward," a member recounted. "I was told not to quit before the miracle. My suggestion is to not quit during or after either!"

We've all shared a "mess" at some point. Heck, we've all BEEN a mess! But the encouragement I received gave me the courage to learn and grow. I'm committed to doing that for others today.

17 AUGUST

Willingness to Change

When we take the Serenity Prayer seriously and really consider what in our lives we do have the courage to change, we find that our ability to shape our lives is limited more by our willingness than by anything outside ourselves.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Finding Our Place in the World”

We say the Serenity Prayer so often in NA meetings that it’s easy to do it by rote, without intention or commitment. “Sometimes I forget that it’s actually a prayer,” one member reflected. “It was only when it was suggested that I say it outside of meetings as a prayer for willingness that I began to connect to it, to really use it to help me in a moment of strife, confusion, or indecision.”

“It helps me get real,” another member offered. “I need to know what I can change before mustering up the courage to do it. Most of the time it’s me that’s standing in my own way. Not my past. Not my upbringing, or my culture, or institutions, or even other people. Just this addict.”

Change is hard because it’s often painful. Our current level of discomfort is familiar, at least. Trading it in for the unknown seems risky. We fear the pain will be worse on the other side of a decision. Who wants to experience rejection or failure? Or what if we succeed? Then, there may be a slew of new responsibilities to deal with. Will we be able to manage those? In the simplest terms, these are fears that limit our capacity to grow.

Change is even harder when we view the world as hostile to us, when we listen to the voice in our heads telling us “you can’t” or “don’t do it.” Ignoring that voice and practicing willingness to change the things we can—and then taking an action toward that change we want to make—requires a lot. We have to simultaneously accept where we are right now and be willing to take a risk.

There are lessons to be learned, no matter how things turn out. A bonus of NA membership is that we get to report back and share those with each other.

*I’ll carefully consider what I have the power to change in my life right now.
Instead of cursing the dark, I pray for willingness to change the lightbulb.
Sometimes it is that simple.*

18 AUGUST

Perseverance Pays Off

Caring for our spiritual condition is like cleaning the house: If we want the benefit, the work must be ongoing.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “A Vision of Hope”

We experience peace of mind and freedom when we consistently work on our spiritual fitness. We get in a groove of daily inventories, prayer and meditation, and helping other addicts. The results are obvious, and it feels great to be comfortable in our own skin, connected to a Higher Power and to others in recovery. It’s a beautiful thing—until we sabotage it!

Just as it’s easier to keep a home tidy after we’ve done a thorough cleaning, steady work on our recovery yields consistently good results. And yet, it’s so flipping easy to skip our daily inventory and, before we know it, several days or weeks or months have passed. It’s no surprise when we lose perspective and our lives become unmanageable again. We sit down, reluctantly, and recommit to our Tenth Step. A sense of relief returns. Maybe next time, we’ll only wait a few days before we sit down to write. Progress!

We may not be hardwired to persevere, but we get better at it with practice. We can start again at any time. We don’t need to devolve into a state of desperation before we reach for solutions; today, we can be *inspired* to do the work of ongoing recovery. We notice the sense of ease we enjoy when we stay immersed in the process. We put one foot in front of the other and persevere.

Each of us develops a routine that works for us, built from the suggestions shared in the experience of others. “When I see a member struggling, I always tell them that my best days start with a quick prayer before my feet hit the floor,” one member shared. Another shared about their eclectic approach to meditation: “A couple of deep breaths in the shower or a long walk after dinner does it for me.” The trick is sticking with it and, when that fails, getting back to it.

I will evaluate my spiritual condition today. Am I getting the results I want from my current routine, or is it time for a spiritual deep cleaning?

19 AUGUST

Inclusiveness Means Any Addict

All addicted persons are welcome and equal in obtaining the relief that they are seeking from their addiction; every addict can recover in this program on an equal basis.

—Basic Text, Chapter 6, “Tradition Three”

Many of us who have been around NA for a little while have no doubt that the NA program is for any addict. Our literature and our Traditions clearly state that any addict with a desire to stop using should be able to find a place in our Fellowship. Making that ideal into a reality requires more than telling newcomers to “focus on the similarities, rather than the differences”—it requires us to actively make space in our meetings for *any* addict, “regardless of . . .”

“I was the only person who looked like me in the rooms where I got clean,” a member shared. “People told me to focus on the similarities, and all I could think was, *That’s pretty easy for all of you—everyone looks like you!* Then I heard someone say, ‘One day you’ll hear someone who is nothing like you share your story,’ and it clicked. I needed to hear that it’s okay that we’re not all the same—our stories are similar even when we’re not. I don’t have to ignore real parts of who I am to belong here.”

Making space for any addict requires taking an honest look at ourselves and our communities. Society outside of our meetings has all sorts of social strata. Differences in language, ethnicity, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, and financial status can present challenges—and some might prefer it if distinctions like these melted away at the door to our meeting. But they’re often all wrapped up in who we are as people, and our distinctions are assets to NA, not problems to be solved. We can tell newcomers that our differences don’t matter, but if our meetings are largely made up of people from similar backgrounds, it can look like NA is no more inclusive than the rest of society. When we share openly about our differences and encourage others to do so, too, our distinctions enrich the NA Fellowship. Being who we are helps newcomers identify and relate—and stay.

Focusing on the similarities does not mean I need to ignore the differences. I will share honestly about who I am, differences and all—and honor the experiences of addicts who are not like me.

20 AUGUST

Practicing Service in All Our Affairs

Service gives us opportunities to grow in ways that touch all parts of our lives.

—Basic Text, Chapter 9: Just for Today—Living the Program

The Basic Text describes who we used to be in active addiction as “devious, frightened loners.” Many of us come to NA with very limited healthy and productive life experience. We may never have held a legal, on-the-books job and don’t have the skills to get one. Or we may have skills and experience, but our dodgy work history reflects our using more than our employability. Our relationships, if they even still exist, are a mess—with our loved ones, with ourselves, with a Higher Power. Our self-serving behavior and our aversion to being truly vulnerable and intimate with others have kept us isolated. And then there’s the spiritual deadness so many of us arrive with—and either the hardness or the utter fearfulness that comes with it.

In meetings, we hear members share that their lives are “bigger,” “amazing,” and “beyond my wildest dreams.” Initially, we are skeptical at best, especially when they also tell us that it’s not because of material gains but because of what they’ve gained by being of service to Narcotics Anonymous. A member shared, “Through service, my relationship to humanity was restored.” *Seriously? ALL of humanity?*

Most of us get involved in service because we’re told, “That’s how we stay clean.” We don’t fully grasp its holistic benefits until we experience them ourselves. Through our NA commitments, we learn basic accounting, public speaking, and good communication skills. We learn how to listen—in meetings, to a fellow member who needs to vent, to people we don’t even like. We learn how to treat others with respect when we disagree. We learn to show up to do the job no matter what. And more.

These are qualities we take with us wherever we go, in all our affairs. NA doesn’t just help us stay clean; it transforms us into people who can make a positive impact inside and outside of the rooms.

What aspects of my life have been touched by NA service? Through service, what can I do today—at work, at home, or wherever I go—to make a positive impact?

21 AUGUST

Faith to Let Go

We plan for the future just for today and let go of the outcome, even when we really want it.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Why We Stay”

Early in recovery, many of us are told, “Hey, don’t future-trip!” when we express certainty that disaster lies ahead, no matter what we might do to prevent it, including staying clean and working a program. In NA, we frequently and actively encourage each other to be in the present moment, to focus on today and what is directly in front of us, instead of fearing what may come to pass.

But let’s not be confused about what this means. We can and *should* plan for the future. We can allow ourselves to want a better life, full of good stuff—even really, *really* want it. We can’t let fear of the unknown prevent our progress. Enacting the future we desire depends upon our willingness to plot steps in the direction of our vision and our desires . . . and having faith that we are going to be okay, no matter the outcome.

What we need to be cautious about, however, are expectations. Because we’ve let ourselves really want something, dare to hope for it, even (gasp!) fantasize about getting it, a loss can really shake us. But we can’t let disappointment, or feelings of entitlement, rob us of the faith in ourselves that can feel so fragile at such times. We also can’t succumb to the temptation to let a single failure, despite all of our good intentions and hard work, define us and stop us from trying again. One of faith’s toughest and most rewarding lessons is when we do everything in our power to succeed, turn over the rest, lose out, learn from it, and be okay to let it go. That’s a moment of freedom to savor, because it strengthens our faith to try again.

And there may even be times when the outcome we’ve experienced initially as utter failure turns out to be the best possible result that could have happened. Faith, perspective, and time often work together in ways that create insights we could never have imagined.

I won’t let fear and uncertainty stop me from wanting more out of life. Faith will help me get my plan in action, find some acceptance, and help me stay out of—and deal with—the results, whatever they may be.

22 AUGUST

Trust and the Fifth Step

This may be the first time we've ever trusted another person enough to tell her or him about ourselves and allow that person to get to know us.

—It Works, Step Five

We addicts have lots of stories. What some consider to be deep, dark secrets others easily share, sometimes even as badges of honor. Many of us are fine with divulging the goriest details of our using days, the mayhem of our childhoods, and our experiences of victimization. Regarding the Fourth and Fifth Steps, we think, *No problem, I am an open book!* But, as we do the work that is suggested, perhaps using the *Step Working Guides*, there's a depth inherent in those questions that goes way beyond our comfort. Exposing our own part in situations turns out to be messy, agonizing, and illuminating all at once. For many of us, our pettiness, our unforgiving nature or unkind acts, our ego on blast, our shame: These carefully guarded parts of ourselves turn out to be far more significant than the dramatic tales we thought we'd tell.

Thankfully, we've had the benefit and experience of the previous Steps to build trust in the program, each other, a Higher Power, and our sponsor. The Fifth Step is an opportunity for us to open our whole book and have another human being bear witness to the stories about ourselves that are the hardest to tell. As much as we'd been nervous about sharing our inventory with another person, it's the first time we've admitted much of this business to ourselves.

Building a bond of trust takes courage as well as vulnerability. As we exercise that bond, a weight is lifted off our shoulders: We reveal the truth about ourselves and we're not rejected. Many of us don't even realize how distant we've been in our relationships as a result of the secrets we'd guarded. And often being seen as truly ourselves by one person allows us to feel much lighter and more open in other relationships. One bond of trust inspires us to form others.

I'm willing to practice trust by sharing my whole story with another person. I aim to build upon my ability to trust and be trustworthy by applying what I've learned to other relationships.

23 AUGUST

Striving for Emotional Maturity

Emotional maturity is our reward for letting go of anger and resentment.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Principles, Practice, and Perspective”

Perhaps we’ve all encountered circumstances when another member gets on our last nerve. When that happens, sometimes it takes everything in us not to attack them, mock them, shut them down using whatever tactic we can. We may want to bolt from the room because we see how this person—who may or may not have wronged us in some way—enjoys the respect of other members in the group. We want to expose them as a fraud and a hypocrite, but we don’t. We say nothing because we know our personal feelings about another member should play no role in how, for instance, our area contributes to the region’s Fellowship development efforts.

At other business meetings, we’ll have no problem keeping our mouths shut because we’d much rather roll our eyes—and smugly watch the same two members battle it out like they *always* do over the finer points of coordinating an effective public relations campaign. In those situations, we have to stop ourselves from sharing the eye roll with everyone else in the room, revealing our displeasure with the proceedings. We’d love to break our silence by audibly groaning at how much time they are taking up. A member shared, “The second I start thinking about how I’m the only adult in the room, I know I’m not coming from a place of emotional maturity.”

With some practice, we can learn to check ourselves in situations where previously the monster that lives in our head would have burst out in full force in an effort to kill the proceedings. Similarly, we find a way to restrain our inner adolescent, who would snark, scoff, and snipe at members merely for being themselves.

Emotional maturity may not sound like a big enough reward for not acting out on our character defects—but doesn’t it make our lives so much more manageable? And peaceful? And isn’t that a big part of why we came here in the first place?

I will practice reining in my reactivity in situations where my personal feelings about other members serve no relevant purpose. Today emotional maturity is a reasonable reward for those efforts.

24 AUGUST

Finding Healing in Humor

The way we share . . . finding humor in some of the darkest, most frightening things that have happened to us—is not always available outside the rooms.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to the World Around Us”

In NA, we often get to know each other from the inside out. “I knew the biggest hopes and fears of some of the members of my home group before I knew their last names or what kind of jobs they had,” one member shared. We may never know the inner life of nonaddicts the way we know each other in NA—and it’s a big part of why we’re able to laugh with and poke fun at our fellow NA members.

Humor often comes in the form of a surprising or unexpected gap between expectation and reality. In society, there are lots of expectations about how people ought to act around one another—expectations that we addicts disregard completely. The nonaddicts in our lives often do not see what’s so funny. Sometimes that’s the joke: “Normal” people act one way; we addicts act very differently. When we hear members share their bizarre ideas and actions, we relate and are relieved that we’re not alone.

Many of us find a deep well of humor in the way denial framed our experience. Sometimes *that’s* the joke. “I thought my life was like something out of a big-shot gangster film—money and drugs and lots of drama. In reality, it was more like a depressing ad for keeping your kids off drugs.” The stark contrast between reality and the imagined movie version of our stories might seem pathetic or deranged to outsiders, but we lived to tell—and we can knowingly laugh at ourselves today.

Humor helps us heal as we come to terms with the reality of our lives. We see the outrageous gap between our behaviors and what “polite” society expects. (Of course, there are gaps—we’re square pegs in round holes!) Or we notice the laughable distance between our lives and our fantasies. We share our inner selves in a way we can’t anywhere else, often giving our fellow members a good chuckle. We stop taking ourselves so seriously, let our flaws show, and start to grow. It can be very funny, but it’s no joke!

By sharing my insides with other addicts, I can learn to laugh at the insanity of addiction—and let go of it, little by little.

25 AUGUST

A New Meaning for Love

How we go about getting love is where our defects come into play.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step Six, “Our Defects of Character”

Before coming to the Fellowship of NA, we had a distorted sense of both giving and receiving love. Now that we’re clean, we’ve got love all figured out . . . *if only that were true!* It doesn’t matter how much time we have clean (or what type of love we are talking about); love is a serious business that requires vigilance.

Where and how do we addicts go looking for love? When we write our inventories and listen to those of our sponsees, that question is answered in abundance. We hear many stories of unmet expectations, abandonment by parents and partners, abuse, and neglect. Others are about relationships sought, gained, and sustained through manipulation and passive-aggressive behaviors—and sometimes coercive acts. We hear about love being confused with the exchange of sex, money, and, of course, drugs.

We did those things to others, and others did them to us. And many of those behaviors will appear in future inventories because our character defects will rear their ugly heads again. The difference is that in NA we have the opportunity to seek and express love in ways that are manifestations of our assets, rather than our defects.

In NA, we get to experience the unconditional love of the Fellowship. We learn how to love and care for people in the rooms, as we learn how to accept that same love and care from others. Also, we will have abundant opportunities outside the rooms to apply the principles of love. Through working the Steps honestly and thoroughly, we are far less likely to try to manipulate and control others—or let ourselves be manipulated and controlled.

I am learning new ways to give and receive love. I don’t have to act on my defects to experience love anymore. I will try to love those in my life with acceptance instead of expectations today.

26 AUGUST

Choosing Intimacy over Isolation

Caring and sharing the NA way is the ultimate weapon against our alienating, isolating, destructive disease.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, Opening Essay

Experiencing loneliness is an inevitable part of the human condition. For many addicts, this loneliness is amplified by how different we've felt from our peers. We've had trouble fitting in, or we're just plain weird. We needed too much attention and alienated others in our efforts to get it. Or we wanted none of that; instead, we stayed silent and hoped that others wouldn't notice us.

Drugs helped us deal with those feelings and experiences. Initially, using made us feel more "normal," more comfortable in our own skin. It allowed us to be more social and, most importantly, created a buffer to keep us safe from intimacy and vulnerability.

Early in recovery, we learn that our disease is fueled not only by getting loaded, but by keeping us isolated from others and from ourselves. When we first get clean and we don't have drugs as that extra layer of defense, we are *raw*.

Narcotics Anonymous provides us with opportunities to heal that rawness—through intimate relationships with other addicts. Allowing ourselves to share fearlessly with another addict is truly the salve for our isolation. Even with years clean, a voice in our heads will tell us that we are better off dealing with (or not dealing with) our problems alone. However, we know the act of revealing ourselves and being present for others is the most powerful antidote to our very human state of loneliness—and to our default addict state of believing we are just too weird.

Even though sharing may be uncomfortable, I will take a risk and allow myself to be seen by another addict. I will choose connection over isolation.

27 AUGUST

Discernment and Autonomy

As we mature in recovery, we learn to exercise sound judgment in how we make decisions, place our trust, and meet our responsibilities.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Four, Opening Essay

Stepwork, living clean, and the passage of time bring the gift of maturity to NA members. We gather practical experience as we take on various roles in NA—as homegroup members, sponsors, and trusted servants. Each allows us to grapple with the meaning and application of the Traditions in real-life contexts and become more skilled at discernment as we do. We grasp how each Tradition works individually and discern how the tension between them creates balance.

For example, Tradition Four’s assertion that “each group should be autonomous” makes it a favorite, especially when we want to validate any unconventional means of fulfilling our primary purpose. The Tradition doesn’t stop there—unless we’re trying to manipulate—and what follows provides some pretty clear instructions about the limits to autonomy: “except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole.” The other eleven Traditions point to the kinds of things that threaten to do just that. Being mature and responsible members of NA—or at least aspiring to be—we lean into discernment to sort out whether or not expressions of autonomy are in harmony with the principles of the other Traditions.

To make sound decisions, we invite a loving Higher Power to influence our group conscience, as Tradition Two suggests. NA groups and communities arrive at group conscience by different paths, but we share some common markers: We come together in unity, we honor and include multiple perspectives, and we create space for honest and open communication. When we listen for the will of a loving God, we are practicing discernment. It pays off as we find a spiritual way forward, enlist trustworthy members to serve, and meet our responsibilities to provide them with the resources and support they need to carry out the work.

I will review my personal decision-making process and be more discerning about how I contribute to shaping my group’s conscience. Sound judgment—my own and my group’s—is a worthy goal.

28 AUGUST

Treating Ourselves with Respect

We start by not engaging in self-abuse and gradually learn to treat our body, mind, and spirit with honor and respect.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Wellness and Health”

Many of us could accurately describe our active addiction as “suicide on the installment plan.” Thankfully, when we stop using drugs, we eliminate a main catalyst of our self-destructive behavior. Without the compulsion to get high, it’s easier to avoid the degradation and criminality that brought us to new lows again and again.

Abstinence is one clear marker of our restoration to sanity, and it’s certainly a good place to start. Being clean allows us to think more clearly, and that clarity enables us to consider who we’ve been and who we want to be. The Steps offer guidance as we examine our lives, our motivations, and our choices. We learn from the experience of other recovering addicts, and it gives us the courage we need to strip away the guilt, remorse, and shame.

Taking care of our whole selves—body, mind, and spirit—is part of the amends we make to ourselves. Addiction touches all areas of our lives, and so must our recovery. Many of us seek professional help to find specific healing. One addict shared, “My first sponsor explained that doctors, dentists, and therapists can also be powers greater than myself.”

Still, many of us struggle with the urge to undermine our success or to sabotage healthy impulses. Progress is often two steps forward, one step back—but that’s progress, nonetheless. As with using, we become aware of harmful habits before we’re willing or able to make a change for the better. Our tolerance for self-deception lessens as we gain self-respect. With the help of our Higher Power, we’re quicker to learn the lessons, to stop unhealthy habits, or to take up new practices that honor our body, mind, and spirit.

I will honor my recovery process and treat myself with respect today. What can I start or stop doing to better care for myself?

29 AUGUST

Hope in Darkness and in Light

We find [hope] again and again as our journey continues: In the dark moments when we realize we can go on anyway, and in our triumphs—it is possible.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Living Our Principles”

The first bit of hope we experienced in NA came from a place of defeat. Using drugs hadn’t worked for us. Our grand experiment of solving our living problems with mind- and mood-altering substances was a profound failure. In that dark place, though, a ray of light shone through: We could find a way out of addiction and into recovery.

Once we have been clean for a while, many of our hopes come from more positive places. We think about how much more we can accomplish with our career goals, our creative endeavors, our loving relationships. Maybe we want to sponsor more addicts or try out new service positions.

Having hope for the good things that will come our way is great, but we would do well to remember how much more precious hope can be when we have very little of it. We are bound to experience tremendous disappointments when we stay clean for years and decades, some of which rattle us to our very core. We bury parents, children, siblings, or spouses—and lots of fellow addicts. We lose jobs and relationships, we make terrible mistakes, and hurt people we love. Guilt, shame, and loneliness take up so much space in the room that it’s hard to make any space for hope, even when it is what we most desperately need.

Hope is why we must stay in the practice of going to meetings, sharing, calling our sponsor, reading literature, and talking to other addicts when life is going well for us. We get to see clean addicts find their way through incredible difficulties by showing up—no matter how fragile or broken—and putting themselves in the position to receive some hope. When we find ourselves there, fragile or broken, we think of the others we have seen walk through it, and we know it can be done. We must go on—together, we can.

I will pay attention to members going through the unthinkable and do my best to offer them hope. If I am one of those members, I will go where I know I can find hope—to an NA meeting.

The Value of Honest Self-Assessment

Honest self-assessment is one of the keys to our new way of life.

—Basic Text, Chapter 4, “Step Four”

As we begin to work on the Fourth Step for the first time, it’s highly likely we already have an opinion about it. Chances are that it’s not very positive. Most of the words of this Step are daunting in their own right. Searching. Fearless. Moral. Inventory. *Ourselves*. That last one is the core of it. We will be getting to know *ourselves* honestly, something that most of us have had limited experience doing prior to getting clean. Isn’t that who we ran from for so long?

By the time we get to Step Four, we’re already practicing some self-honesty. We’ve admitted that we are powerless over our addiction and that we need help. The next step is to learn what we’re holding on to that is keeping us from progressing in our lives. We identify our resentments toward other people, institutions, and ourselves. We look at our guilt and shame, our fears, our sexual and relationship behaviors, abuses we’ve suffered and wrought upon others, and our secrets.

Working Step Four also provides another, perhaps unexpected, gift—revealing our assets. For many of us, this is the most difficult part. We tend to be far more comfortable obsessing about what’s wrong with us than owning our positive qualities. But our inventory is inclusive of our whole selves. Assessing our assets is absolutely critical to our new way of life. We need to know what we have that we want more of, not just the negative aspects we want to rid ourselves of.

Our honest and courageous self-assessment doesn’t end with Step Four, or with Step Ten that helps us to make this process a consistent practice. Beyond what happened during our using days, we continue to look at the patterns and behaviors that follow us into recovery. We learn to differentiate what’s really true about us now from what our head tells us. Through this work, we develop trust in ourselves and in this new way of life. Our pasts instruct us; they do not define us, and they no longer control us.

No matter where I am in the Steps, I am committed to looking at myself as honestly and completely as possible. I have the fearlessness I need to examine the parts of myself I want to cultivate and those I strive to diminish.

31 AUGUST

Fidelity to the NA Message

Fidelity suggests that we are true and faithful to our message, that it is consistent on all occasions.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Ten, “Spiritual Principles”

As a spiritual principle, fidelity signifies loyalty and commitment. We clarify our shared understanding of the disease of addiction and our common solution when we share the NA message with fidelity. Translators think similarly about fidelity as a concept in their work. In translations—NA or otherwise—fidelity refers to how well a translated document corresponds to the original. Although computers can substitute the words of one language with those of another, the results often make little sense. It takes the human touch and the work of skilled translators to convey the meaning, style, and tone of any piece of writing. They do more than transcribe; they interpret.

In Narcotics Anonymous, local translations committees and their professional partners assure that translated literature is faithful to our message. That’s no easy task. Each new language group has to grapple with words and phrases like *addict*, *clean*, and *the disease of addiction* to figure out how to capture their meaning, essence, and spirit in the target language. NA members serving on local translations committees play an important role in ensuring fidelity. Their experience with the NA program and often impressive language skills help to ensure that translated NA literature precisely reflects the ideas and spirit of the original.

Whether translating literature, speaking at a unity day celebration, or sharing with our home group, we strive to use NA language with the same precision. A clear NA message is about more than avoiding certain words. Clarity comes from living the NA way and addressing the disease of addiction with our program of recovery. When our predecessors wrote, “We admitted we were powerless over our addiction,” they focused Step One on the disease, not the drugs. This stroke of genius makes the First Step relevant to members at any phase of recovery. When we use NA language to convey our experience with fidelity, we contribute to an atmosphere of identification for all to hear. The NA message mirrors our experience. Fidelity to it solidifies our bond with other members and our common solution.

As I share and listen, I will make an effort to faithfully connect the dots between lived experience and the proposition that “an addict, any addict, can stop using drugs, lose the desire to use, and find a new way to live.”

SEPTEMBER

1 SEPTEMBER

Interdependence Knows No Borders

Just as we learned in early recovery that we need each other to stay clean, we come to believe that all of us, every NA meeting and group, are interdependent.

—It Works, Tradition One

Interdependence may not be a word many of us use, but expressions of this principle in Narcotics Anonymous are very familiar. Our program is one of mutual aid, recognizing the therapeutic value of one addict helping another. As per Tradition One, our individual recovery is uplifted, enriched, secured by—and dependent upon—unity in purpose and a simple message of recovery. A worldwide network of meetings, groups, and service bodies are a part of the same whole. We need each other to stay clean and to carry our message using all the strategies we have to do so, such as H&I, helplines, public relations, creation of new literature, translations, and Fellowship development—all over the globe.

Working this spiritual principle is, in large part, coming to the understanding and acknowledging that we are already practicing interdependence—by being a member of NA and participating in our recovery. We recognize that healthy relationships inside and outside NA aren't unidirectional. They're reciprocal, mutually beneficial. One prime example is that sponsors help sponsees, and sponsees help sponsors. The "come to believe" in the quotation above is a result of the broadening of our experience of recovery in NA. We start to better comprehend the role of service and the interconnectedness among our local meetings and beyond—as our group's conscience combines with others through various layers of NA services.

Interdependence knows no borders; it is the tie that binds us. It's the ripple effect that empathy and participation have on our Fellowship. It's the integrity of our movement to help addicts heal from the disease of addiction and to increase our connection to each other, to our surroundings, and to a life worth living.

I need others to practice interdependence, so I'll connect with other addicts today. I'll contribute to the recovery of others and participate in my own, recognizing that they are intricately linked.

Untangling Life's Knots with the Serenity Prayer

The Serenity Prayer is a tool we use again and again in our recovery: Considering what we can change and what we cannot becomes increasingly powerful.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to the World Around Us”

The simple binary offered in the Serenity Prayer—sorting between what we can and cannot change—provided quite a bit of relief to many of us as newcomers, especially when our minds were racing. Having this prayer as a new tool in our belt in early recovery enables many of us to muster a bit of courage to work on ourselves and, perhaps, achieve just enough serenity to tolerate those around us. Over time, we realize there is more depth in the Serenity Prayer than we might see at first glance.

Our wisdom to know the difference grows as we accumulate more experience with trying to change our lives. Inserting “Me!” into the Serenity Prayer—as in “the courage to change the things I can: Me!”—might remind us to stay focused on ourselves, but many of us soon encounter traits that are not so easily changed. “They told me I only have to change one thing—and that’s *everything*,” a member wrote. “I had these visions as a newcomer of changing my diet, getting fit, folding my laundry as soon as it dries, achieving enlightenment, and all that. It didn’t take long before I wasn’t feeling very much serenity at all. I had to adjust my expectations.”

If our lives were all knotted up when we first got here, we aren’t likely to get it all untangled right away. Talking to other addicts helps us better see what knots we can loosen now, and what parts of the thread we’ll need to accept—at least for the moment—while we work on what’s right in front of us. Sometimes a knot gets tighter, which can be a vexing part of the process. As our Basic Text mentions, “We learn that we are growing when we make new mistakes instead of repeating old ones.” As we draw on recovery experience—our own and what others share with us—our wisdom grows. Serenity and courage are likely to follow.

The wisdom to know the difference evolves as I do. When I say the Serenity Prayer, I will try to connect with the principles behind it.

Free to Be Authentically Me

*We can be ourselves in the present moment without fear or apology,
without the need for approval or justification.*

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Awakenings”

As we lived through active addiction, few of us felt free to be fully ourselves. We often needed to pretend to be someone we weren’t to get what we wanted or needed, and it didn’t take long before we were confused about who we really were—if we ever had any idea in the first place. We were so accustomed to wearing masks that we didn’t know what our own faces looked like anymore.

The atmosphere of acceptance and welcome we found in NA was a breath of fresh air for those of us who couldn’t breathe freely for a long, long time. The Basic Text tells us, “The masks have to go,” and we notice that when the metaphorical masks come off, it’s so much easier to breathe. For some of us, NA might be the very first place we have been where we suspected that we might be able to show our true selves to others. We may not feel that way in every meeting or with everyone we know in NA, but little by little, we become much more comfortable showing who we really are.

The freedom to be ourselves flows directly out of the sense of security we develop by being welcomed and accepted in NA. Admitting that we are addicts was the first of many admissions; each time we show a bit more of who we truly are to our fellow members, we increase our sense of security and become free to learn even more about ourselves. We accept who we are and lose the need for approval from others. We no longer feel the need to justify our existence. The insecurity that defined so much of who we were in active addiction fades away, and we become who we were meant to be all along.

*I will take off my mask and breathe more easily, knowing that others in NA
will accept me for who I am.*

Choosing Freedom

We are free to change our minds, to change our perspective, and to change our lives. Freedom means that we are no longer living by default.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Awakening to Our Spirituality”

In active addiction, we lived in a kind of default mode. We neglected responsibilities and disregarded the consequences of our actions or inaction. We were utterly vulnerable to our defects. We self-destructed and harmed others. A member offered this metaphor: “I was on an amusement park ride that started off fun . . . until it made me sick. But by then, I couldn’t get off of it.”

Although living by default made us miserable, even the slightest suggestion that we could change would elicit a defensive “That’s just how I am!” *Trapped* is how we were! Trapped by our resistance to getting off the “ride” we were on. Fearing and avoiding change, still today, we’re sometimes trapped by our willful denial and rigidity.

Outside ourselves, change is inevitable. Recovery helps us deal with this fact. Within ourselves, change is a net positive. It’s a dynamic force exercised through the freedom of choice we now have. “Freedom isn’t just a state of being,” the member continued. “We practice it by choosing to change. We’re no longer trapped on a nauseating ride. We leave the active addiction amusement park behind. Life in recovery is a whole different park!”

As we realize our true selves, we achieve some freedom in NA. Maybe it’s less that we change and more that we become who we truly are. We grow less attached to our story; we can write a new one. We can reexamine aspects of ourselves we never thought to question—our religion, political leanings, musical tastes, even the food we eat. We get to be curious. We’re free to not be so cool.

Being clean allows us to challenge our belief systems and behavior patterns, to be and to feel a little less trapped. We don’t act on impulse as often; a breath provides a moment to respond with love, not fear. At our best, we are flexible, evolving, able to be influenced by others. There’s freedom in open-mindedness. We learn how to say no and to say yes. Though there will be times when we fall back to default mode, we don’t have to linger there. We have a new life to live.

I will live this day consciously and with purpose. In choosing to change, I’m choosing to be myself. I’m choosing freedom.

Cooperation Despite Friction

Time and time again, in crises we have set aside our differences and worked for the common good.

—Basic Text, Chapter 6, “Tradition One”

Cooperation is fundamental to what we do in NA, starting from the moment when the message is first carried to us. “I didn’t get clean because of my own Step One,” an addict shared. “I got clean because of someone else’s Step Twelve.” Whether we first heard the message from one member, a group, or a piece of literature, carrying the message to a using addict requires cooperation. We are clean because other members cooperated with each other—and we cooperated by listening and believing that recovery was possible for us, too.

Our cooperation in NA continues well beyond that first moment of willingness to listen and receive a message of hope. As we stay clean and get to know our fellow members better, we cooperate with each other and keep the doors open for the addicts yet to come. We’re sure to see or experience friction at some point, but addicts in recovery can be surprising in our ability to come together when it really matters.

“I got clean in a small town, and there were only two addicts at my first meeting,” a member wrote. “They carried a message to me that night. I thought they were best friends. Later, I learned that they couldn’t stand each other. I never would have known it from my first night clean.”

Some differences are more extensive than just a personality clash. “Our city was divided along racial/ethnic lines,” a group wrote. “We had two areas with big overlaps, and they didn’t get along. Some members finally had enough and created an annual unity event bringing both areas together. It was sort of controversial at first, but every year it gets bigger and better. Since it started, our areas have started collaborating on H&I and public relations service, too.”

Placing principles before personalities means cooperating whether or not I get along with someone. I will do my best to set aside differences for NA unity.

Anonymity and Selfless Service

The fact that we are anonymous means that the work we do in NA really can be selfless service. We don't want or need credit for helping others; it's what we do to save our own lives.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Anonymity”

The first thought some of us have when given the chance to help someone is *What's in it for me?* We stay clean, work Steps, experience freedom—and still, our diseased thinking whispers that we ought to be rewarded for our selflessness.

“I volunteered in the merchandise room at our convention right after celebrating ten years clean,” a member shared. “I folded T-shirts and unboxed coffee mugs for hours, wondering all along what kind of goodie I’d get for doing my part. A mug? A shirt? At the end of my shift, they said, ‘Thanks for your service!’ and gave me a hug. In a matter of moments, I went from being disappointed in them to being disappointed in myself!”

The good we do for others is not limited to our service in NA. Another member wrote, “My sponsor told me to do something for someone else and keep it a secret. On my way to a meeting, I saw someone asking for change, and I bought them a sandwich. The first thing I did when I shared at the meeting was congratulate myself for being so generous.”

Perfect selflessness may be out of reach, but we can always strive to be less self-centered. We don’t have to disappear completely; we simply step out of the spotlight for a moment. When we feel the impulse to make a moment about ourselves, we learn to say, “Thanks for sharing,” and let the impulse go.

Feeling like we are owed for our service and comparing our generosity to that of those around us are just a couple of the ways addiction seeks to separate us from others. Service and kindness help us reconnect. We keep our focus on those we are helping. We hope that the convention-goers who purchase a mug or a T-shirt look back fondly on their convention experience for years to come. We hope that the hungry person felt some relief for a little while; we hope that if we see them again, they look and feel better. We think of ourselves a bit less, we think of others a bit more, and we begin to feel gratitude.

I may never be perfectly selfless, but I can try to serve as though it's not all about me. I will make my service about others today.

7 SEPTEMBER

Patience and the Process of Healing

Healing takes time, but it does happen. We must be patient with ourselves.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Sex”

Some of us came into NA hoping for a speedy recovery, like the way we’d bounced back after that accident and got over the flu right quick. We wanted to put addiction behind us, and then we could get on with life. A mixture of hope and denial convinced us that detoxing would fix us. Our experience told a different story. We’d been able to stop using on occasion, but we could never seem to stay stopped. At some point, we realized we needed more than a spin-dry, and we rallied the patience to persevere on a just-for-today basis.

We face our lives and ourselves in everyday living, as the Basic Text suggests. We strive for progress while taking care not to expect perfection. Sticking with it calls on us to be patient with the process and ourselves. Recovery is ongoing for folks like us, not something we can look at in the rearview mirror. We consider ourselves recovering, not recovered, addicts.

Practicing patience requires us to be more gentle with ourselves. We attempt to nurture kind and encouraging thoughts, shutting down the harsh self-talk that says, “I should be better than this by now.” When we measure our progress against some unrealistic benchmark, or worse, compare our insides to others’ outsides, it’s no wonder we come up short. We focus on finding satisfaction with the pace of our progress. Patience serves as a bridge to some much-needed hope, faith, and humility as we learn to trust the process.

We’ll need all of these spiritual principles and more as we navigate the minefields of our past with the Twelve Steps and a sponsor’s guidance. Trauma and abuse cast a long shadow on many of our lives; we learn to be patient with ourselves as an expression of love. We come to understand our past without allowing it to define us. All of this takes time—time that’s available to us because we’re learning to practice patience.

I invite patience to help me find satisfaction with my progress and access the resources I need for continued recovery and healing.

Gratitude Transforms Us

Gratitude in action is an engine for change: As we carry the message, our own lives transform.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Five, Opening Reflection

We tell the newcomer, “Welcome home,” as we give them our number, an IP, and a meeting list. “Call me anytime. Hang in there—it gets better.” This simple act of gratitude carries a powerful message, just as Tradition Five and Step Twelve intend. Simple words and actions like these take place in meetings every day. Though our intention may be to help the new or potential member, we end up helping ourselves, too. We’re reminded of where we came from, and our gratitude engine gets tuned up.

In NA, all of our service efforts focus—directly or indirectly—on our primary purpose. Groups are the main vehicle for carrying the message, and it takes trusted servants to make them run smoothly. Likewise, events carry a message and require a lot of work behind the scenes. We serve to ensure that the addict who reaches out for help by phone or online finds the information they need to get to their first meeting. All of this and more happens within a bigger context for NA service that goes largely unnoticed. Our fellow members are hard at work translating literature, telling the world that we’re here to help, and demonstrating that NA is a reliable program of recovery.

We tell the newcomer that change is possible and barely notice how *our lives* transform as we carry that message. It’s a happy by-product, a pleasant surprise, an unintended consequence. Call it what you will, there is no doubt that our lives change, just as we do. Each Step has an impact on who we are and how we see ourselves. We connect with a Higher Power, with ourselves, and with other people.

By the time we get to Step Twelve, we’re not the same people, and all of that change has made us increasingly able to serve. Our newfound approach to life reflects this transformation. We are there for each other in moments of crisis and celebration. It’s who we are and what we do. We take this “How can I help?” mindset into the community, and it changes the way we interact with the world.

I will look for opportunities to give of myself today and take time to appreciate my transformation.

Humility Is Living in Reality

Humility is most easily identified as an acceptance of who we truly are—neither worse nor better than we believed we were when we were using, just human.

—NA Step Working Guides, Step One, “Spiritual Principles”

In early recovery, we often find ourselves going from unrealistic, grandiose self-perception to believing we are the worst person in history. It’s that familiar addict pendulum swing—from one extreme to the other (with an optional sound effect):

I’m a spiritual giant deserving of high praise—*WHOOSH!*—I’m a worthless piece of trash.

I’m the hottest person here—*WHOOSH!*—I’m repulsive and don’t deserve to live.

I’m the only parent who knows what they’re doing—*WHOOSH!*—I’m going to screw up my kid worse than my parents screwed me up.

Torchbearer of overblown self-importance—*WHOOSH!*—barren self-pity farm.

Hero—*WHOOSH!*—zero.

Getting clean and working the Twelve Steps of NA can slow our addict pendulum and greatly narrow the distance of its swing. The humility that ensues from working Steps will help us to find that serene sweet spot somewhere in the middle. This place is where our true selves reside. Here lives reality.

Humility is like kryptonite to our self-indulgence, jealousy, and entitlement. It allows us to accept the beautiful muddle of our humanity, the truth of our perfectly imperfect selves, and our authentic place in the world. We can have reasonable expectations of ourselves and let others be who they are without our interference. We can find humor in our shortcomings and try to do better when criticized, instead of wanting to annihilate ourselves when we make a mistake.

Perhaps most crucially, we don’t boast about our spiritual growth, especially in comparison to other members, nor do we overindulge in denigrating who we “used to be” when we were using. We were human then, and we’re human now.

I will try to be mindful of where my pendulum is swinging today. Though I can accept where I am, I’ll still try to move toward the center because that’s what’s real.

Surrendering to a New Way of Life

Admitting our powerlessness is a surrender, an admission that we don't know the solution to our problems.

—IP #17, *For Those in Treatment*, “Recovery in Narcotics Anonymous”

Admitting powerlessness over our addiction is often the first time we surrender to anything. Never mind the fact that we used to surrender to the drugs every day! Many of us had tried to clean up on our own, without success. We couldn't control our using, so what makes us think we can control our recovery?

We experience one of the greatest paradoxes in NA when we let go of our attempts to control the recovery process and find peace and freedom as a result. One member shared, “Surrender is like learning how to float in water, instead of thrashing about. It's a process of letting go.”

We can surrender quietly to this new way of life and allow the experience of other addicts to guide our next steps. There is a sense of relief that accompanies surrender, a peace in powerlessness. Giving up our illusions of self-control frees us to become better versions of ourselves.

And, in NA, we don't have to walk this journey alone. We ask for help when we need it. Sometimes that's the hardest thing we do, but it gets easier with practice. We learn to surrender our old ideas, listen to suggestions, consult a Higher Power, and make up our minds about what course of action we need to take. We do the footwork, let go of the outcome, and move on—confident that surrender will help us accept whatever unfolds.

I will practice admitting my powerlessness in any situation and free myself to see new solutions. I will surrender the things I can't control.

Self-Support Takes Faith

Belief in self-support is a massive leap of faith. We commit to the idea that we will be enough.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Seven, Opening Reflection

For many of us, a belief in our own inadequacy was a constant undercurrent in our lives before NA. We did our best to keep it hidden by putting on a brave front. Behind our masks, thoughts that we were not enough still plagued us. This idea that we lacked sufficient ability, power, or means follows a lot of us into recovery. Although we'd stopped using, we still felt incapable of dealing with life.

We can start to rebuild our self-image by embracing a practical application of humility; we commit to seeing ourselves as part of humanity, no better or worse than the rest of it. With time and effort put into stepwork, we get a more accurate picture of who we are. We warm up to the idea that we will *have* and will *do* enough, and even that we *are* enough.

When self-support seems like too big of a stretch, we entrust our support system to help us make that leap. We pay attention to the experience of our fellows and emulate their commitment to self-determination. We lean into acceptance and faith as we figure out what the next right thing might look like. Our collective experience tells us that action is the key to moving an idea from our heads to our hearts. So, what actions align with self-support?

When we are present, plugged in, and ready, we can step through doors as they open, find the right words to match the situation, and otherwise take leaps of faith we weren't sure we had in us. One member's experience speaks to such a moment: "My mom was paying my rent for my first year clean, but she would also always come around and tell me I wasn't keeping the place clean enough or that I needed to do something different with my hair. The idea of saying 'no' to her support was scary; the freedom that came with it was a big step toward believing in myself . . . maybe for the first time in my life."

How can I stretch toward self-support today? What conversations might inspire me to take that leap of faith or prepare me for opportunities on my horizon?

Individuality, Openness, and Our Spiritual Lives

Each of us finds our own way to live spiritually, and that allows us freedom to make choices about how we live.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “A Spiritual, Not Religious Program”

Throughout our literature, in meetings, from the podium, over a coffee or tea, during late-night phone calls, alone in quiet meditation or prayer, we’re reminded that NA is a spiritual program. Whatever our individual beliefs or practices or methods or paths are or aren’t—whether they be secular or religious, or do not fit within that binary—we can’t deny that spirituality is central to a life of recovery in NA. Who we are spiritually and how we express that aspect of our individuality is unique to us, though we may use elements from all kinds of traditions, or none at all. Many of us can—and will—easily explain our relationship with our Higher Power. For many others, it’s not intelligible through words. And it’s private, something we’d rather not share about in a specific way.

For NA members, the road to recovery is paved by the same Twelve Steps, yet the journey we choose is varied. Our path to living spiritually is personal, though there’s some commonality and mutual understanding derived from the principles that appear throughout this book. Application of these principles is based on our individual needs and desires. We respond differently to everyday situations; we see through our own lenses and react to events in our own ways. And how we connect to the program—and its principles and spiritual nature—most often doesn’t look the same when we’re new as when we’ve become more comfortable in our own skin, or as we undergo life’s upswings and tragedies. As we continue our recovery journey, we find the Steps prepare each of us to meet our individual circumstances.

Reciprocity is important here, too, as described by a member: “You have your own spiritual expression and your beliefs, and I have mine. That I can be my own person in NA reminds me that as you let me be me, I must let you be you.”

My aim is to be open to the rich mosaic of spiritual expression I find in NA. I’ll explore and nurture my own beliefs as I apply the principles in our Steps.

Sincerity and Keeping It Real

We listen to one another with an open mind and an open heart, and we share our experience with the understanding that it won't necessarily be shared by everyone else.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “A Spiritual Journey”

Among the first things many of us notice about NA is how recovering addicts get very real with each other when sharing in meetings. Sincerity is sometimes mistaken for weakness, especially among using addicts. Showing up to recovery meetings for the first time and seeing people willingly exposing vulnerabilities the way we do can be both shocking and refreshing. We start to listen and to open up.

Being present and showing up wholeheartedly would mean a 180-degree change from our old approach. We were accustomed to wearing masks, deflecting attention, or adapting to whatever was happening around us. Yeah, yeah, yeah, we played along. Not making any waves was key to our survival before we got clean.

Early in recovery, we may find ourselves listening to others and then trying to match how they share. Not wanting to call attention to ourselves, we might string together slogans or pretend to be something we're not. One addict wrote, “I would tailor my shares to try to appeal to the listeners, and the harder I tried to make people relate, the phonier I felt (and sounded). When I just tell my own story my own way, people seem to connect so much more.”

Something within us shifts as we do the work of staying clean. We prioritize honesty and authenticity over ease, empathy over shallow connection, from-the-heart sincerity over fitting in. When we share, we allow ourselves and each other the dignity of our own understanding and experience. We each take on the responsibility of expressing what's going on with us. It's harder to talk the talk when we don't walk the walk. We share what we've found, what we think, and where our uncertainties lie. The truer we are in what we share with others, the better the odds that they will be able to relate.

As a recovering addict, sincerity makes it possible for me to connect with others wholeheartedly. I will keep it real today.

Service, Purpose, and Belonging

Service helps us feel like we belong. We have a place and a purpose. The experience can be humbling. Doing as the group asks, rather than as we choose, is a form of surrender.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, “For Groups”

Feelings of belonging don’t often come easy for us addicts, though some of us faked it well. We were social chameleons who so often felt like imposters, masking insecurity with perfectionism and hiding our control issues behind allegedly high standards and attention to detail. For others of us, that game seemed like way too much work. We were too cool for all that. We prized our loner status. Or maybe we were just too high to care. Whatever our situation was, most of us have been on a difficult path to a sense of community and solidarity.

In meetings, we hear right away that our desire to get clean—no matter how desperately or indifferently we feel it—is our ticket to membership. We are also told—and shown by example—how important service is in solidifying our relationship to the Fellowship and in helping us to stay clean.

“Until I eventually took my sponsor’s direction and took on a service commitment, I never felt like I was really a part of in NA,” one member shared. “I never thought I wanted to be. All of a sudden, I had a voice. I started to use it, and people even listened.”

“I took on five commitments in the first 30 days,” a newer member shared. “I stayed clean, but I made everyone bananas with my brilliant ideas to make everything better. Soon I found out about ‘group conscience’—which wasn’t necessarily the same as *my* conscience. I always wanted to know *why why why*.”

And someone with a lot of time shared, “After 33 years, I still find it hard to ‘let go and let the group.’ . . . I want to explain all the history of how we do things in NA. I may be older, but that doesn’t always make me the wisest. Unfortunately!”

If I’m not an NA service warrior, I’m going to become one (within reason). If I’m a talker in business meetings, I’m going to make an effort to be a listener. If I’m a doer, I’m going to teach someone else how. If I’m a control freak, I’m going to try to “let go, and let the group”—just for today.

Practicing Honor the NA Way

We learn to trust our intuition and honor our feelings.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Conscious Contact”

The concept of honor comes with some baggage. It brings to mind ideas about virtue and morality that resonate with some members but aren’t really our thing within NA. Another form of honor refers to expressions of admiration and respect. That might mean awards and fanfare in some walks of life. But honor doesn’t require big, bold, public recognition; in fact, we find that practicing honor as a spiritual principle is often pretty quiet. Although many of us are no strangers to spectacle, we intuitively know that for honor to serve a spiritual purpose, it might be best to dial down the drama and draw on humility instead.

Thinking about what it means to honor our feelings and experience gives the concept of honor a new purpose and reveals its utility as a spiritual principle. We practice honor in a classic, low-key, NA way when we approach recovery with a healthy degree of respect and humility. In the experience of at least one member, “This is the kind of low-key honor that feeds my soul.” For many of us, that starts with conceding that those who came before us were on to something. When we give the Steps, NA literature, and each other an honest try, it’s a choice to set aside thoughts of going it alone. We honor the process and the path cleared by our predecessors when we read a book or two, consult with our sponsor and friends in recovery, dive in, and find some relief.

The same process that brings relief also allows us to access feelings anew. We may find this uncomfortable, but it’s worth the effort. We honor our feelings by feeling the full range of human emotions. We resist the urge to repress the unpleasant ones or deny ourselves the benefits of sharing our emotional burdens by being “fine” all the time. Because we’ve honored our recovery process, we know ourselves and can truly be ourselves.

I will practice honor the NA way by engaging with the recovery process, connecting with my emotions, and sharing my feelings and experience with someone else.

We Are Responsible for Our Recovery

Although we are not responsible for our disease, we are responsible for our recovery.

—Basic Text, Chapter 3: Why Are We Here?

Responsibility was a dirty word in active addiction. We feared it. We avoided it. The people close to us—and perhaps those in law enforcement and the justice system—told us over and over: “Take some responsibility for your life.” We thought freedom meant freedom from responsibilities, but, ultimately, we found it to be quite the opposite. We were enslaved by our addiction. For many of us, this version of freedom landed us behind bars.

We are not “bad” people because we suffer from the disease of addiction, and we’re not bad people trying to become “good” in NA. But while having the disease isn’t our fault, it’s still important to recognize that many of the consequences we face stem from our own decisions. We made choices. We took action. A member shared, “All my life I saw myself as a victim of my circumstances, and I made blaming others the centerpiece of my victimhood.” Through stepwork, we discover that it’s important to take responsibility for our past, even though we are powerless to change it. To move forward, we cannot cling to guilt over our past actions, nor can we succumb to the shame from the social stigma of being an addict. We can’t let our disease continue to overwhelm and paralyze us. We must act differently.

NA offers us a chance to take responsibility for our present and future lives. We do this slowly at first—perhaps by performing the most basic of life tasks, being of service in meetings, getting a sponsor. We discover that people can influence our recovery, but we have to do the work ourselves if we are to reap its benefits. “No one goes to meetings for me, calls my sponsor, or works Steps for me,” the member continued. “No one else is to blame if I choose to neglect my recovery and am caused pain by my choices—or cause pain to others.”

For many of us, the work we do in NA reveals a new perspective on our disease. Many of us become grateful for our addiction because our journey toward responsibility in recovery has made our lives so beautiful and fulfilling. And so free.

I’m not responsible for the way I’m wired, but I am responsible for my life and my choices. Today I will refrain from blaming others for the consequences of my actions. Today, for me, responsibility equals freedom.

17 SEPTEMBER

Hospitality and the Newcomer

Feeling welcome, and welcoming others to our new way of life, helps us see the world as a less hostile place.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Three, “Spiritual Principles”

“I don’t remember many details about my first NA meetings, but I can tell you this: I left every one of them feeling a little better, a little more hopeful, and a little more convinced that you folks had found a way out, one that could work for me, too,” a member shared. “Meetings still have that effect on me.” And maybe that’s the point of hospitality as a spiritual principle and practice in NA. It’s not the individual things we do or say that are most memorable, it’s all of those things taken together and the way we make each other feel. All of us can contribute to a group’s hospitality, and all of us reap the benefits.

Hospitality gives our various strengths a chance to shine. There are great huggers among us and others who remember the names of new members. Still others offer a sincere welcome to all of us every week, such as “I’m so glad y’all made it another week ’cause I need each and every one of you.” We might notice how the member charged with setting out literature always recruits someone to help them. Could they do this task alone? Sure, but we carry the message by being more inclusive. We help others feel a part of and affirm the same for ourselves. Each time we tell newcomers, “Welcome home,” we’re reminded that we’re home, too.

Hospitality is made up of these words and actions—and so many more. The atmosphere of recovery that emerges is greater than the sum of its parts. We embrace the worth and dignity of each of our fellow addicts and of ourselves. Through our hospitable actions, we contribute to a world in which we are all treated with equality and compassion.

I will contribute to the collective efforts that make up NA hospitality and consider how my words and actions can bring some of the same warmth and camaraderie to my life outside of NA.

18 SEPTEMBER

Living Life in Balance

Sometimes we get confused and think that to live spiritually means that we are happy and get what we want, and that if we're not happy or don't get our way, something is out of balance.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, "Spirituality Is Practical"

For many of us, our lives get so much better so quickly in the early years of recovery that it's only natural to think we've found the key to happiness, unencumbered by life's difficulties. It's nice while it lasts, but ultimately, as one member puts it, "Life is more than killing time between meetings, and I eventually experienced hardships despite working a pretty good program." Life is not always fair—that's a fact. Sometimes we lose loved ones, homes, and relationships even when we're spiritually centered.

The results of day-to-day life are not always what we would have hoped for. Nevertheless, we learn how to walk through situations by living according to spiritual principles. If we don't get the job we wanted or a long-term relationship comes to an end, we hold on and stay clean. Our world may still be thrown out of balance from time to time but, as long as we stay clean, we can survive sadness, disappointment, and uncertainty and return to balance again and again. We experience the full range of human emotions and marvel at the strength of our spiritual foundation.

Life is in session, and we get to choose how we want to participate.

Today I will not equate my program of recovery with the circumstances of life on life's terms. I will show up in my life even when things don't go my way and remind myself how much I have to be grateful for.

19 SEPTEMBER

A Bond of Selflessness

Make us servants of Your will and grant us a bond of selflessness, that this may truly be Your work, not ours—in order that no addict, anywhere, need die from the horrors of addiction.

—Basic Text, Introduction

The service work we do in NA is all about carrying our message of hope to addicts seeking recovery. No matter what our beliefs about a Higher Power are, most of us can agree that anything capable of keeping addicts all over the world clean, just for today, is a power greater than any of us as individuals. “I couldn’t keep myself clean,” one member shared. “So there’s no way I have the power to keep anyone else clean either!”

The same holds true with our service efforts: Our job is not to keep anyone clean or make anyone recover. We carry the message. Our Service Prayer was adapted from the literature prayer in the Basic Text, acknowledging the crucial role selflessness plays in our services. Many of us understand a Higher Power to simply be whatever force keeps us clean, and when we serve selflessly, we can be a part of that force for the addicts who benefit from our work.

Selflessness isn’t always easy. Self-centeredness will try to make our work about us, rather than those we serve. Maybe we think a certain service position will make us popular or powerful. Maybe we think sponsoring a lot of addicts, or the “cool” addicts, will lend us some prestige in our anonymous Fellowship. Maybe we think having the biggest home group or the best conventions means we are recovery rock stars. Some members say that ego can stand for “edging God out,” and there’s some truth in that: When we allow ourselves to move to the center, we have to push something (or someone) else *out* of the center.

The Service Prayer reminds us to keep the needs of the still-suffering addict at the heart of our service efforts. We do our part and then try to stay out of the way. We won’t get it perfect, but practice helps!

I will practice selflessness by striving to keep the message—and a power greater than myself—at the center of my service efforts.

20 SEPTEMBER

Hope Around the World

Narcotics Anonymous offers hope to addicts around the world, regardless of any real or imagined differences that might separate us.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, Opening Essay

“Addiction doesn’t discriminate. Fortunately, hope doesn’t either,” a speaker shared during an international marathon meeting held online. “And neither should we.”

Our hope lives at the intersection of anonymity, unity, acceptance, and inclusiveness. We believe that any addict can get and stay clean in NA, no matter who we are, what we’ve done, where we live, or any aspect of ourselves that, on the surface, would seem to separate us. To help us feel like we belong, we encourage each other to look for the similarities, not the differences; to focus on the message, not the messenger. We strive to bring this openness to visitors to our home group, and to meetings and NA events we’re lucky enough to attend in unfamiliar settings with unfamiliar setups, in other areas, in other countries, in other languages.

The universality of hope in our program and our message doesn’t diminish the fact that there are differences among us, real ones. As important as it is for us to take responsibility to see past our own differences, we have perhaps an even greater responsibility to be inclusive of those who may have experiences or identities that depart from the group’s majority. Actively including others assures a place for each of us and elevates hope for all of us in the rooms.

To give hope to those who feel intimidated or unheard by the majority, some of us find it important to establish meetings that embrace a similarity of experience or identity. There is room for this diversity of hope’s expression within NA; autonomy also ensures that addicts are able to find each other in ways that are welcoming and safe—and acknowledge and honor the similarities inherent within our differences.

NA’s message of hope is heard around the world. I am an integral part of this whole. Today I strive to receive that message from whoever offers it and to take responsibility for carrying it to whoever needs it.

21 SEPTEMBER

Forgiving Others, Forgiving Ourselves

Sometimes the path to forgiving ourselves begins with forgiving another for their lack of forgiveness.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Amends and Reconciliation”

At first glance, this quote may sound like a riddle, but our experience validates its wisdom. Hoping to be forgiven is only human. Despite advice to the contrary, we sometimes harbor expectations about how amends *should* be received. We have ideas about how and when we’ll be forgiven. We anticipate the relief it will bring—only to be disappointed at times.

Given the harm we’ve caused, it’s understandable that some people may not be quick to forgive us. It hurts nonetheless. The conventional wisdom that “expectations are just premature resentments” makes even more sense to us now. Regardless of how our amends were received, we do our best to clean up our side of the street and let go of any ill will.

We take ownership of the damage we’ve caused and earnestly make an effort to compensate for our wrongs and change our behavior. We release those expectations we had about receiving forgiveness, let go of any hard feelings we set ourselves up for, and—with time—find forgiveness for ourselves and those who were unable to forgive us. Letting all of that go frees up a lot of headspace and energy.

We’re not as attached to how our formal amends were or were not received; we’ve done the work to make things right whether or not others recognize it. Our actions lead us to a deeper level of self-acceptance—who we were then and who we are now. We can focus our energy on becoming the best version of ourselves by continuing to work the Twelve Steps.

Today I will empathize with those who have yet to forgive me. I will contemplate forgiveness in my Eleventh Step practice and seek to forgive on a deeper level. I will forgive others for not forgiving me.

The Value of Empathy

Empathy means we get each other; we see the hidden darkness and love and hurt, and we understand.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Fellowship”

As newcomers, we often were suspicious when NA members told us “I get you” after we shared. When someone said, “I’ve been there,” we thought, *No way anyone has been through what I’ve been through*. Even scarier is when someone says, “I see you.” *If someone can see me, then they know how horrible I am*.

A lot of us reject empathy at first because we misinterpret it as sympathy, like someone feeling sorry for us. What we begin to understand, as we keep coming back, is that our fellow NA members are feeling our pain *with* us. We get each other. Our situations and experiences may be different, even unique, but our suffering is not. All of us came to our first NA meeting having fought to keep our addiction going and having lost that fight.

Over time, the value of empathy is revealed. After we surrender to the fact that we belong in NA, it is others’ empathy that makes us feel safe enough to accept help. We learn we don’t have to hide—we can remove the mask we’ve been wearing, whether it’s one projecting intimidation, righteousness, innocence, or invisibility. We can allow ourselves to be seen below the surface and accept that others do understand us. And in turn, we start to identify and empathize with other addicts in the room.

Being understood can be scary in a different way, too, because we witness people who’ve been through situations similar to ours who have taken positive action. They are clean and are taking responsibility for their lives, their relationships, and their choices. Allowing their empathy to affect us helps us to let go of the depth of our hurt and to see a path forward. Eventually, we feel grateful that we get to do that. Accepting others’ empathy brings relief.

Although we get each other’s darkness and hurt, we also feel each other’s love and joy. We certainly do get each other, and it’s based not only on our wreckage but on how we deal with it. Let’s acknowledge that, too.

*I acknowledge that feeling seen and understood has helped me to heal.
That’s why today I’m going to be open to other addicts identifying with me
and relating to them. I know I’m not alone.*

Planning Keeps Us Accountable

Trusting each other doesn't mean that we reject accountability; we put routines in place to protect ourselves, and our trusted servants, from the types of mistakes we, as addicts, are liable to make.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Twelve, “In Service”

“NA service taught me how to be a responsible, productive member of *this* society first,” a member shared. “Doing service gave me skills and knowledge that help me navigate the world outside of NA, too. I think of these as ‘the hidden curriculum’ in NA service.” From that perspective, we might consider accountability to be one of the subjects we study.

Lessons on accountability begin in our first home group’s business meetings and continue as we serve in various roles. One of the first things we learn is that the order of operations is different in NA. We had previous experience with the kind of accountability that comes *after* we screwed up. In NA, we often focus on setting each other up for success. To avoid missteps, we try to define tasks and spell out expectations up front, and then strive for transparency, communication, and support as we follow through. Having safeguards in place, especially when money or ego might be involved, can help protect our trusted servants and NA.

We check our worst impulses in advance and limit openings for errors in judgment. The treasurer who asks another member to confirm the Seventh Tradition count avoids temptation. The subcommittee chair who keeps the service body informed and regularly seeks direction is less likely to go rogue or be micromanaged.

This kind of preemptive accountability has applications in our personal lives, too. Managing medication after surgery involves a relay between multiple members of a support group in many NA communities; transparency about pill counts protects everyone involved. We can even see accountability’s relevance in one member’s strategy for staying out of the sack on a first date: “I meet them for coffee while the sun’s still up and wear my shabbiest pair of underwear.” Little reminders can help us live up to whatever standards we set for ourselves.

I will seek out guideposts—in life and in service—to keep me accountable to myself and others.

Letting Love In

It is a loving act to let others love us.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Death, Dying, and Living with Grief”

NA recovery allows us to accept love even when our lives have been shattered by loss. Emotional pain makes this feel especially risky, but we take a chance, gather our courage, and lean on our fellow members. In times like these, we grow to appreciate all that recovery has to offer.

Too often, pride, low self-esteem, and fear of rejection block us from reaching out or accepting help from others. Not wanting to be a burden or to appear needy, we isolate and tell ourselves that we can handle this alone. We overestimate our nuisance value and deny others the opportunity to love, support, and serve us. We’re embarrassed by our pain. It’s inconvenient and uncomfortable to be so vulnerable. We hide behind a cloak of self-sufficiency and independence.

Of course, there’s no right or wrong way to grieve. It’s not unreasonable to want to spend some time alone with our thoughts and our Higher Power. Intense feelings of loss can make it hard to find a balance between solitude and isolation. We do our best to be honest with ourselves. Letting others love us when we’re grieving helps us avoid the trap of old ideas.

Accepting love, whether gracefully or begrudgingly, is in itself an act of love. And the consequences often prove astounding. “My best friend relapsed and died,” one member shared. “I thought people didn’t want to hear about how I felt, but after I shared, I got so much love and support that it truly renewed my faith in NA. It’s why I’m clean today.”

I will trust the process, feel the pain, and allow others to feel it with me today. I will let others love me, even when I’d rather they didn’t.

Honesty and Self-Awareness

Honesty is the antidote to our diseased thinking.

—Basic Text, Chapter 9: Just for Today—Living the Program

Looking back at our using days, it's easy to see how our outlook on life morphed to accommodate and justify our choices. Self-delusion had become second nature. It takes effort and practice to embrace honesty instead.

Even before we got clean, there were clues that honesty might have helped to counter our distorted thinking. At some point in our using, many of us experienced a “moment of clarity”—although we probably didn't have those words to describe it. Instead of the usual lies we told ourselves, we encountered a sudden wave of understanding in which we realized some essential truths about our lives. The veil of denial lifted, if only for a moment, to give us an undistorted view of ourselves and the mess we'd made. It wasn't pretty. That brief encounter with reality stuck with us and wore us down until we were ready to try something new.

Eventually, we make it to the rooms and identify ourselves as newcomers. We give our real name, take a breath, and add: “I am an addict.” This admission transforms a tired old excuse into an affirmation and positions us for the first of the Twelve Steps. With the Steps as our guide, we honestly confront the wreckage of our past and establish practices that help us maintain our connection to reality.

Recovery is a collective practice, and community is essential to learning about honesty. Real friends support our efforts to be true to ourselves, to choose actions that align with our aspirations, and to help us spot when we're in trouble. “I surround myself with people who aren't satisfied when I tell them I'm fine, when they know better. In public, they let that slide—they give me the side-eye and say ‘really.’ In private, they ask questions that challenge me to get honest, like ‘What are you afraid of?’ and ‘Where would you be without that defect?’” Our delusions crumble under such scrutiny. Resisting well-rehearsed, unhealthy patterns takes this kind of support and a whole lot of courage. Honesty frees us from diseased thinking each time we choose to voice our concerns instead of censoring ourselves, reveal our insecurities instead of acting like a know-it-all, or practice some humility instead of thinking we're too good or not good enough.

I'll take some time to honestly evaluate any feelings and behavior I've avoided looking at. I will get a better perspective by putting pen to paper and talking to another addict in recovery.

Open-Mindedness and the Third Tradition

Tradition Three asks us to practice open-mindedness toward ourselves, toward others, and toward the possibility of change.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Three, “For Members”

Tradition Three, which states that the desire to stop using is the only requirement for Narcotics Anonymous membership, is direct, inclusive, and thorough. We can even say that it’s radical in what it invites us to do: leave our judgments about who qualifies for NA membership at the door. As individual addicts, we decide if we qualify, and we leave that decision to others to make for themselves.

As with all spiritual principles applied to any single Step or Tradition, open-mindedness is not an “I got this” position we take. It’s an ongoing process that demands work. The excerpts from our literature that are read aloud in meetings continually confront our views about who is an addict or what is recovery. We need to keep reading them, hearing them, and acting on them. They support NA’s values of inclusiveness and acceptance of all addicts no matter where we come from or what we look like; what substances, delivery method, or quantities we used; what’s on our resumes (criminal or otherwise); whom we are attracted to; what our spiritual pursuits have been in the past (if any); and so on. We are all welcome here in theory—and, ideally, we’re welcomed by each other in practice.

At the practical core of this Tradition is not only open-mindedness but also compassion for ourselves and for others. We begin to reject our preconceived notions of belonging, relieved that even a slight desire is enough. We become willing to be part of a group that will have us as a member. For many of us, that’s tough going, as in the past we’ve resisted becoming a member of anything. Our dual low self-respect and lack of humility told us that a group that welcomes us and is so open to anybody probably is for losers anyway, so why bother?

We bother because we’re desperate and we want our lives to improve. As we grow, open-mindedness further expands our investment in others’ health and well-being. It’s the gateway to empathy and unconditional love. Our open-mindedness helps keep others in the room who doubt that they qualify as addicts, who fear being part of a group, or who think that they can’t stay clean.

I will put my membership to good use by actively practicing open-mindedness. I’ll do what I can to make space for others to grow.

Vigilance and the Path of Recovery

We can get stuck in patterns so quickly. Vigilance is necessary to keep old patterns from resurfacing.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to Ourselves”

We used to get utterly stuck, didn't we? We were caught up in impulsive patterns that seemed impossible to interrupt for any length of time. Our first real hope of breaking free from the grip of our disease came when we found NA. When we admitted our powerlessness over our addiction, the possibility of new, stable, productive patterns of behavior became a real possibility.

It's a relief to be off the toxic path of our past, but staying on track with our recovery requires vigilance. It takes practice to break out of destructive patterns and develop new, healthier habits. The good news is that we can now see our disease coming and can usually head off old behaviors before we're in deep trouble. Still, times of intense struggle or humdrum complacency bring thoughts of instant relief to mind. Rather than risk going back to our old ways, we sometimes find new distractions disguised as recovery. “I quickly found new bad behaviors to give me that same rush, even ones that seemed helpful on the surface. One minute I'm taking on a service commitment, or maybe two, and the next I'm completely obsessed, ignoring my family and other responsibilities.” The member continued, “Practicing vigilance is serious business. It reminds me that there's danger out there and in my head.”

How do we stay vigilant? Sharing what's going on with us is crucial. We learn to be vulnerable and open to suggestions. No matter what Step we're officially on, we can do a spot-check inventory and talk about it with a friend or our sponsor. We can branch out in our approach to working a program: talk to more newcomers, end a commitment without re-upping on the same committee, or take on a new challenge. Or hit our lit—work the Traditions in *Guiding Principles* or reflect on these entries every day.

As with much of recovery, we don't practice vigilance alone. Often, it's NA members we're close to who notice—before we do—that we are veering off into the wilderness. It's a fellow member's keen, protective eye and each other's wisdom that help us keep what we have and give us courage to walk down a different path. We create new patterns. Again.

Vigilance keeps me on guard, on track, and free. I will examine my choices, open up to another addict, and be open to suggestions that can keep old patterns from becoming new problems.

28 SEPTEMBER

Connecting the NA Way

Sharing our recovery restores our faith and gratitude. Seeing that we are not alone frees us from the isolation and alienation of addiction.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Eight, Opening Reflection

When studying Tradition Eight, we often focus on understanding terms like “special workers” and “service offices,” overlooking the significance of “nonprofessional.” It’s as though we can’t see the forest for the trees. The heart of this Tradition and its relevance to our personal recovery lies in our nonprofessional approach, which makes it possible for us to relate and connect. Most of us interacted with all sorts of people who had a professional interest in helping us before coming to NA—counselors, therapists, psychologists, police officers, probation or corrections personnel. There’s a very long list of people whose job it was to try to handle or manage us when we were so very unmanageable.

And yet we still ended up here, in NA. In our very first meeting, we were greeted by people who weren’t “on the clock.” These NA members shared the message of recovery with us not because it was their job to do so, but because that’s how we stay clean and recover. Our approach is nonprofessional. It doesn’t require formal training, degrees, or certifications; we have our experience with addiction and recovery. That’s all we need.

This process of sharing freely shows us that we are not alone. As newcomers, we discover our connection. When we stay and share the message, we are reminded of our connection over and over, each time we share with another member. Addiction thrives on isolation and alienation, and no amount of cleantime will render us immune to the tendency to disconnect. Connecting is an active process, and we do it by sharing freely with other addicts.

Sharing in recovery is the antidote to alienation and isolation. By connecting the NA way, I will keep gratitude and faith alive.

Goodwill and Our Relationships

In fact, the pyramid that is in our symbol is made up of relationships: with self, society, service, and God. Rooted in a base of goodwill, these are the relationships that bring us to a point of freedom.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Conscious Contact”

“A pyramid? I thought the NA symbol was just a square inside a circle.”

There are certainly many of us who are well acquainted with our symbol, who understand its meaning and its potential application to our recovery. We make sure that sponsees and other newer members are just as familiar with it as we are. There are probably far more of us in the Fellowship who are far less familiar. We see the depiction of the symbol and read the accompanying explanation when we first crack open the Basic Text. It looks like something from geometry class, so we glaze over it. But it’s important, right? Our predecessors placed it right after the Table of Contents, and it’s emblazoned on T-shirts and other NA memorabilia all over the world. Yet, for many of us, the symbol remains two-dimensional, just as it appears in print and also in the sense that we haven’t given it much thought. On closer inspection, we can see that the diagram depicts something *three-dimensional*: a pyramid.

While a pyramid’s sides are vital to its strength and endurance, its weight and stability rise from the base. In our NA paradigm, that stability comes from goodwill. As the NA symbol depicts, goodwill is the foundation of all the relationships in our lives. Ideally, the Steps help us build a relationship with ourselves. The Traditions strengthen our involvement with society—other NA members, our loved ones, our work lives, and so on. The spiritual principles bring us closer to a Higher Power, and NA’s Twelve Concepts ignite and support our relationship to service. The circle that wraps around the base, the “Universal Program,” shows that there is room for all recovering addicts. Goodwill reinforces all this interconnectedness, and freedom is the resulting gift. Freedom is where the reinforcements have paid off, and the weight has been lifted.

We cannot have healthy relationships without the support of goodwill. And we cannot have freedom without the strength of our relationships.

How free am I today? If freedom seems too aspirational at the moment, are there any cracks in my pyramid’s foundation of goodwill that I can repair?

Unity in All Our Affairs

What we learn about unity in NA helps us to figure out how to be members of our families, members of our communities, members of a team at work or at play.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Desperation to Passion”

Before coming to NA, many of us had little experience with fitting in. We felt like extraterrestrial visitors and rarely believed that we belonged. We had a creeping feeling that we were imposters and lived in fear of others finding out that we were hiding behind a front.

This sense of loneliness and distrust made early recovery difficult. We wanted what NA members had, but couldn’t open up long enough to let anyone in. We had to start somewhere, so we tested the wisdom of the advice we’d heard by joining home groups. Soon, we found ourselves with service positions and sponsors. We began to feel a part of the Fellowship more often than not. Even when our sense of belonging shifts, we find that we’re often *doing* better than we are *feeling*. We remain works in progress.

By participating in our recovery, we learn to participate in life. We start talking to our families; we stick with a job long enough to get to know people and even let them get to know us. Thanks to NA and our experiences in the rooms, many of us have been able to reconcile with our families, serve our communities, and enjoy life. Our lives are transformed; we find fulfillment and purpose as we contribute to unity in all areas of our lives. On most days, we feel whole.

I will continue to walk through my fears and join in when it seems right. I will continue to open up and give back so that I can be a part of something bigger than myself.

OCTOBER

1 OCTOBER

Compassion as Contrary Action

Our instinct is to meet disease with disease, but when we meet it with love and compassion instead, we create an opportunity for recovery.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition One, “For Members”

As harmonious as we may wish Narcotics Anonymous to be, there are times when another member’s behavior really gets under our skin and seems to demand that we respond in kind. Maybe they tear into us verbally or try to goad us into a physical altercation. A member’s actions can place our meeting’s location in danger. We’ve also seen members try to undermine a group decision, and when it doesn’t go their way, take to social media to bad-mouth NA. And what about members who act in these ways but never make amends for their behavior? *How dare they mess with our serenity?!*

Our first impulses will likely be to respond to another’s resentment, selfishness, or accusations—with our own. We can, however, cool our own fury—and consider its source. Meeting another’s disease with compassion means that we suspend judgment. We try to separate the person from their disease. Maybe they’re going through a rough time. Maybe we unintentionally disrespected them, and they don’t know how to express their pain in another way. Maybe they are afraid of being wrong and looking uncool in the face of controversy. Maybe they’re just misinformed. And maybe we’re more alike than we care to admit. *Bingo!* At the end of the day, we are all recovering as best we can.

Having compassion for another doesn’t mean we ignore issues that arise. With unity as a priority, we end up practicing a lot more acceptance than our disease would otherwise have it. We may not understand where someone is coming from, but we can recognize the feelings and relate. Ideally, our response will consider what’s best for the common good. With practice, we spend a little less energy contemplating how we might meet disease with disease. We learn the benefits of responding with compassion instead.

Next time someone flips out on me or the group, I’ll test out meeting them with compassion instead of my ego. What’s best for the group is best for my recovery.

2 OCTOBER

Trust Is a Conscious Decision

Even though we do not know how our lives will change as we work this step, we can learn to trust that our Higher Power will care for us better than we could.

—It Works, Step Three

As newcomers, many of us struggle with the aspects of twelve-step recovery that we don't easily understand. Sure, spirituality is practical around here, but that doesn't mean it's straightforward. We describe our spiritual awakenings to newer members, but the explanations often make for more head-scratching. With most things in life—and count Step Three among these—we can't know the outcome before having the experience. The meaning of our decision to turn our will over to a caring Higher Power is lost on many of us. Instead of applying our brainpower, we need to nurture hope, faith, and trust.

Hearing about the changes in the lives of other addicts gives us something to go on as we begin to develop some trust in NA. We listen to other members talk about trusting in a Higher Power they don't completely understand. We hear from people of faith, people who eschew religion, and everyone in between. According to one member, "Working Step Three is a decision to open a door. I may not know what's on the other side, but I've gained a measure of trust in that decision because I know my life hasn't fallen apart whenever I've cracked open that door."

Trust is a conscious decision we put into action daily in some way or another by sidelining fear and taking a risk. We do our best, but some days acting as if we trust in a Higher Power is all we have to go on. Lots of us abide by a "fake it 'til ya make it" attitude. Along with faith, we take a leap of trust. Sometimes we fly; sometimes we flop. Growth can be a bruising process. We experience rejection or not getting what we'd planned for so carefully. "Sometimes the gifts we receive in recovery come wrapped in dirt," a member teased. But we're okay because we're learning to trust the process. We'll turn it over again tomorrow.

I don't have to rely on what I think I know because I am learning to trust. Whatever happens today, I'll practice loosening my grip on results and muster some faith that I'll be okay.

Surrendering to Group Conscience

How do you know when it's time to speak up against a decision of the majority? When it's time to accept a decision and surrender to group conscience?

—*Twelve Concepts for NA Service, Study Materials, "Ninth Concept"*

Once a group or service body makes a decision, we are all *supposed to go with the flow*, right? But what if the decision goes against our gut, isn't in harmony with the Traditions, lacks compassion by excluding some members, or puts a Band-Aid on a larger issue? Maybe the decision wasn't made with all pertinent information available. Was it truly an informed group conscience, or was it more like a popularity contest? What if we know for sure that the content of the decision has been tried before and it failed miserably? What if the group is wrong and we are right?

We have a process, and once that process is complete, to thwart group conscience creates disunity and confusion. Members then have to take sides, or not. Some leave the group or resign from their position instead, telling us "personal recovery depends on NA unity" on the way out.

The Ninth Concept of NA Service is clear that hearing all points of view is essential to developing a group conscience. But it's up to us as members to determine which perspectives have the most validity. The time to accept and surrender to a decision occurs immediately after our point of view has been heard, and the group elects to stay the course—despite what our gut is telling us.

If we are right and things fall apart later, we can be part of the solution—with humility. Even as we are reminded time and time again that we're not always right, we must also accept that others are sometimes wrong and there isn't anything we can do about it.

Today I will participate in NA service with as much surrender and acceptance as possible. If need be, I will say to my group, "Well, I hope I'm wrong!" and do my best to mean it.

4 OCTOBER

Hope and a New Way Forward

Hope begins when we think that it might be possible for us to stop using against our own will and stay clean.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Living Our Principles”

By the time many of us show up to our first meeting, we have broken the trust of many people in our lives. For some of us, there wasn't a single person left in our lives who would believe us even if we told them the sun rises in the east. No matter how many people we burned in active addiction, over and over again, one person was more likely than any to be skeptical of anything we said—ourselves.

This is one of the huge stumbling blocks that stops many of us from truly feeling hope when we first get clean. We know ourselves! We can't be trusted. Sometimes people in our lives looked at the way we used and accused us of having no willpower, but the truth of the matter was that we had so much self-will that we had lost all freedom to choose. There was no space between our impulses and our actions. Getting clean? Sure, no problem—we can do that just fine; that is, just until we feel like using. Then, all bets are off.

One of the most courageous things we have to do in order to get clean is to allow a little bit of hope into our spirit, defying all of the evidence to the contrary we have amassed in our active addiction. People who use the way we use don't get clean. But then, we find ourselves in rooms filled with people who used the way we used. And they're clean . . . allegedly. Maybe, is it possible?

Self-will, impulsive behavior, obsession, and compulsion—even though many of us came to NA blaming the world around us for our problems, a lot of us felt, deep down, that we were too flawed to have the lives we wanted. In NA, we found people with flaws just as deep as ours, and they taught us how to become free.

It's hard to see a way forward when I am standing in my own way. I will let other addicts show me how to step aside and find a way out.

Powerlessness, Step One, and Tradition Five

The First Step of Narcotics Anonymous is unique. Rather than addressing a single symptom or substance, we admit our powerlessness over the disease that drives us.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Five, “For Members”

Depending on who’s telling the story, our First Step’s focus on the disease was either (A) a stroke of genius, (B) tremendous good luck, (C) the work of a Higher Power, or (D) all of the above. Our founding members knew that identifying a specific drug as the object of our powerlessness wouldn’t work for this motley crew. They were intent on creating a place for all drug addicts, where all of us could find identification. If refraining from naming a substance had been their only concern, our First Step might have just stated that we’re powerless over drugs. Instead, Step One points to the disease of addiction as our problem.

Powerlessness over the disease gives our First Step lasting relevance. Our focus on addiction—instead of an apparent symptom—makes Step One as relatable before we detox as it is when we have decades clean. Sure, drug use was the most prominent and destructive manifestation of the disease, but unmanageability can bubble to the surface long after we’ve stopped using. When reaching outside ourselves to fix what’s within seems like a good idea, we may be in trouble. “When I admit my powerlessness, I interrupt that outward reach and turn to my Higher Power instead,” one member observed. Surrendering to the First Step acts as a circuit breaker on our diseased thinking. This pause in the action is what’s needed for us to dodge some unmanageability.

Step One’s ongoing relevance influences how we think about the Fifth Tradition, too. Knowing we’re all eligible to be the still-suffering addict reminds us to be more inclusive as we address our primary purpose. War stories may illustrate the unmanageability in our past, but our present-day, squeaky-clean powerlessness also deserves some attention. Talking about our struggles confirms that last element of our message: We keep coming back and keep finding a new way to live.

I will recognize my powerlessness in some present-day situation, flipping the circuit breaker on some distorted thinking and opening myself to spiritual solutions.

Safety, Security, Solidarity

*The safe environment of NA gave me the chance to face my own fear. . . .
The security and solidarity that I get from the program gave me room to
breathe.*

—Basic Text, Coming Home, “Sandwich”

We aren’t all strangers to experiences of solidarity before getting clean. Frequently, however, our safety was tied to keeping our mouths shut, a code of conduct that valued secrecy over good judgment. We’d have your back, all right, as long as that kept us safe and our behavior under wraps. We were constantly looking over our shoulders, barely breathing for fear of getting caught.

Coming to NA is, on some level, a rejection of our previous sense of security, an admission that we need help. Many of us are holding our breath when we enter the room of our first NA meeting. We fear we’ll see people we had used with, people we’d wronged, people who might out us as addicts outside the meeting. Immediately, we see the appearance of solidarity in meetings, but can we trust it? We are encouraged to share about our past, what’s going on with us today, and what we envision a new life to be. But when we are used to solidarity having so many variables, how do we know it’s stable and secure *now*?

In time, we breathe a sigh of relief, realizing we’ve made it home. A renewed consideration of solidarity may be to view NA as a group of survivors collectively fighting our disease, bonded by our recovery. We’re told that we don’t have to go through anything alone, and, as we witness that very thing happening among members, eventually we allow ourselves to become a part of it. We strive to overcome our fears of not fitting in, of being vulnerable and intimate with others, of being honest and open and still. Sometimes we’re successful in these attempts; other times not. But, make no mistake, we are in this together, striving to make NA a safer place for every addict seeking a place to belong.

*As I continue to face my own fears, now in solidarity with my fellow NA
members, I will make every effort to give others the same chance to breathe
that I was given.*

7 OCTOBER

Harmony, Alignment, and Balance

When our bodies, minds, and spirits are in harmony, our lives show the difference. We are able to live in balance.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “A Spiritual Journey”

Addicts arrive in—or return to—NA with our lives in turmoil and out of balance. Our health is in the toilet. Mentally, we are all over the map. Spiritually, we are in a blackout.

Though we may not all be at the same degree of chaos, no one bounds happily through the door of their first NA meeting—or our first one after a relapse—feeling stable and whole. We stagger or slink or sidle in. We come to NA after a brush with the law and sometimes while incarcerated. We’re pushed in by family or rehab or dragged in by an NA member we used to get high with—or stayed clean with. There’s some truth in the familiar wisecrack, “We are some sick puppies!”

Since our journeys in recovery most often begin with the elimination of substances, our health often improves first. Our minds dip back into friendly territory, though the visits may not be as long as we’d like. Through attending meetings, working Steps, and building relationships with other members, we begin to awaken spiritually. Not all of us label it that way, or maybe we don’t have words for it, but something inside of us is shifting. Outside of us, our behavior is definitely shifting. By taking commitments, showing up for others, acting “right,” we stay clean.

Whether we believe this is the work of a loving Higher Power or we’re doing it because our sponsor told us to (because it’s “spiritual”), our inner chaos lessens, and our outward stability increases. The lights come on, and they aren’t so easily extinguished by the wind and rain that keep coming at us—because that’s life.

I will take stock today of how I am physically, mentally, and spiritually. What can I do to establish some balance and spark some harmony?

8 OCTOBER

Accepting Others

Our attitude ought to be one of loving acceptance toward all addicts, regardless of any other problems they may experience.

—*It Works*, Tradition Three, “Applying Spiritual Principles”

Many of us crawl into our first meetings totally paranoid and not having bathed for weeks or fresh from getting high in the hallway bathroom. Or we’re surrounded by a 50-foot concrete wall with *DON’T EVEN THINK ABOUT TALKING TO ME* graffitied across it. Others slink in with a court card, counting days until they can get back to the business of getting and staying high. Still others waltz in, heads held high with enough entitlement, defensiveness, and been-there-done-that to fill all the dried-up wells in hell.

Tradition Three tells us that the only requirement for NA membership is a desire to stop using. It calls on members to welcome anyone who enters the room. But how do we know that someone else *really* has the desire to get clean? How do we measure it? We can’t.

No addict is a sure bet for staying clean, and none of us can predict the future. We all know that perpetual newcomer who everyone thought would never “get it”—until they did. And what about the other situation we never saw coming? That revered oldtimer, who helped countless newcomers to dismantle their 50-foot walls, did every service commitment, and was the most beloved circuit speaker—until they relapsed.

It’s human nature to judge each other and compare ourselves to determine where we fit. But it’s only our personal recovery that we can truly assess and take responsibility for. And one of the most important measures of that recovery is our willingness to accept others for who they are—not for who we think they should be—just as we were accepted.

Despite my judgments, I will practice our Third Tradition by accepting and welcoming others, regardless of their appearance, circumstances, or reputation.

Staying Open-Minded to New Ideas

Being open-minded allows us to hear something that might save our lives. It allows us to listen to opposing points of view, and come to conclusions of our own.

—Basic Text, Chapter 9: Just for Today—Living the Program

There are a lot of opinions in NA about NA, and yet, there are few beliefs about recovery in Narcotics Anonymous that are universally held by all of us. Certainly, we are an abstinence-based program, and the NA basics are made clear in our literature: meetings, Steps, sponsorship, service, and a relationship with a Higher Power. Our primary purpose of carrying the message to other addicts is also plainly stated. In addition to our Steps, we have the Traditions and Concepts to assist us in meeting that purpose.

While NA's basics are explicit, how we apply them is not. As newcomers, we are told to listen as if our lives depended on it—because they do. It is through practicing open-mindedness that we can find our personal journey in recovery using the basics in the ways that work best for us. When we're new, we have no idea how to work a program of recovery—though sometimes we think we do and have no problem saying so. Mostly, we rely on sponsors and other more experienced members to show us how they do it. This is where some members' very passionate and sometimes opposing views arise—for example, how many meetings we should be attending, how to work Step Ten, or how long to hang on to a service position. But there's no exact blueprint for working a program of recovery, no model of the recovering addict. All we know is what has worked for us.

The longer we stay clean, the more difficult it can become to stay open-minded, curious, and flexible. True, we find things that work for us and keep doing them. But we need to be mindful of becoming rigid in the face of our evolving lives. A new job or relationship or a sudden hardship might merit a different approach from what we're used to. We may find ourselves, just as we did in early recovery, asserting what we think we know, instead of listening and being open to others' perspectives and input. Wherever we are in our recovery, open-mindedness doesn't mean that we have to change our views or our actions, but it means we are listening and exploring different options.

When I find myself reluctant to hear others' ideas, I'll take note of what's getting in the way. Then I'll listen with an open mind and draw my own conclusions.

10 OCTOBER

Connected to Our Purpose

We begin to feel connected to the world around us and our lives have purpose.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Creative Action of the Spirit”

Disconnection is one of the hallmark features of addiction. Whether being disconnected leads to drug use, or the use of drugs causes us to lose connection, most of us ended up feeling pretty isolated and alienated by the time we first came to NA. Some of us feel connected right away when we get clean. Others keep coming back for months or years to get there—but when we stop using and start living the program, that sense of connection begins to grow.

“The members who immediately directed me to service helped me feel like I had purpose,” one member wrote. “They carried a message to me, and then right away they involved me in carrying a message to others. I became part of something bigger. I felt connected in a way I hadn’t felt before.”

What we connect to and what our purpose is may not be the same for every addict or for every phase of recovery. Feeling reconnected to humanity by virtue of being an NA member is a big part of early recovery for many of us—and we find an abundance of meaning and purpose in sharing our recovery with other addicts. Usually, as long as we’re still clean and still coming to meetings, this sense of purpose stays with us. But more is available, too.

Many of us develop a sense of connection and purpose in other areas of our lives, as well. We may get involved in a particular religious practice, begin volunteering in our community, or find meaning and beauty in art, fashion, fitness, or a career. The opportunities to find purpose in our lives are as varied as our membership, and they need not diminish the sense of purpose we gain by sharing with others in NA. In fact, they often enhance what we have to offer.

Where addiction is isolation and alienation, recovery is connection and purpose. I will seek out greater connection to the world around me to deepen my sense of purpose in it.

11 OCTOBER

Thoughtfulness Is a Gift

When we share in a meeting and the room is quiet, attentive, and present to us—that's a priceless gift.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, "For Groups"

Thoughtfulness is baked into the culture of NA meetings. We take turns sharing, and we share the time. The rest of us participate by listening, though that doesn't necessarily mean we do so in silence. Many of us find healing in the laughter we share. That phrase—"participate by listening"—is sometimes used as a polite way to decline when called upon to share. But it's more than that—it's a real and valid option. Listening is an act of love.

When we're new, our chameleon-like instincts set us up for thoughtful and empathetic listening. Even as we focus on blending in, we find ourselves responding instinctively with laughter, knowing nods, tearful eyes, or words of affirmation and encouragement. We bring the body, and the mind follows; we might start by faking empathy, only to realize we're acting our way into better thinking. We find ourselves establishing new values. When we thoughtfully listen and engage, we show ourselves and each other that our stories matter.

Practicing thoughtfulness can really be as simple as "kind thoughts, kind words, kind deeds," as one member put it. "My outlook changes when I'm looking for that magic moment when some small act will make a difference for someone else. When I lift someone else up, we both feel better." Our thoughtfulness is a gift we give and receive. It contributes to our sense of belonging and helps us to experience unity.

I will look to be more thoughtful today. I will offer my undivided attention, a kind word, or a compliment in the hope of making someone else's day a little better.

Practicality in Action

It's not what we think about our recovery that matters; it's what we do.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1: Living Clean, Opening Essay

When we first come into recovery, we may think everyone in the room is lying. A member recalled thinking, “They can’t possibly be *that* happy . . . and really, no one can stay clean for 30 years, let alone 30 days *in a row*.” We may even tell ourselves there is no way we can stop using and have a fulfilling life. Despite our internal monologue, we continue showing up to meetings and putting some cleantime together. We take suggestions, pick up a commitment, get a sponsor, and begin working Steps—all the while thinking, *This won’t work for me*. We do our best to ignore that devious little voice inside us. After all, what we have been doing up to this point hasn’t really been working either.

As we take these practical actions, the heaviness lifts from our hearts. We experience moments of joy and freedom—clean. We realize that we have been doing all of the things we’d told ourselves were not possible. Now we have six months clean and our lives are so much fuller than we thought they could be. When we share in meetings, we realize that we’ve become *those* people who we thought were lying to us.

One of the most practical things we do is to show up and tell the truth about our lives. When we no longer need to fabricate stories and justifications, it frees up a lot of mental energy. We share our victories, our process, and our mess as they are happening. While the disease still talks to us, nowadays our recovery also chimes in to remind us that we’re right where we’re supposed to be.

Doing the footwork frees us to live in the present. We have a solid foundation and a network of connections in our recovery community. Our world has become fuller and more fulfilling. We have found a family in Narcotics Anonymous. We want more of these gifts, so we continue to put one foot in front of the other, doing the things that brought us to this point.

I will take a practical approach to my recovery today. I’ll thank “the committee” in my head for sharing and take positive actions that enhance my recovery and my life.

Not Too Cool to Be Willing

Our ability to enjoy our lives is directly related to our willingness to let go of our self-obsession.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Love”

The very idea of dancing without some chemical courage sounds intimidating if not absurd when we’re newly clean. Clubbing might have been in the early chapters of our stories, but as *fun* turned into *fun with problems* and later into simply *problems*, any dancing we did was more often about commerce than enjoyment. Going to our first NA dance, therefore, can be a rite of passage, especially for those of us who danced for fun or a fix in our using days.

As the saying goes, “We’re fools whether we dance or not, so we might as well dance.” We might warm up to the idea by lurking outside with the smokers after a speaker meeting. A familiar face from meetings asks if we’re going in. Not wanting to disappoint, we lean into willingness and say, “Ugh. Okay.”

We might muster enough willingness to get through the door and still come up short when it’s time to dance. We’ll be lining the walls: too tough, too cool, too self-absorbed to give dancing clean a try. When and if we do, the self-doubt of adolescence returns to inquire, “Am I doing this right? Do I look attractive?” and other obnoxious questions that poke at our insecurities.

We retreat to the bathroom where we encounter a home-group member. They practically read our minds and offer this sage advice: “Remember that we’re all self-obsessed. I just assume that everyone’s too busy thinking about themselves to worry about my dancing.” This practical advice helps us combat our self-obsession and find the willingness to get back out on the dance floor.

It’s not as though our preoccupation with ourselves ends with one NA dance. If we’re paying attention, though, there’s a lesson on willingness that we can apply to other pursuits. Acknowledging that if we’re thinking about ourselves, we’re not really enjoying what we’re doing is a good place to start. With that, we can rally the willingness to release those unhelpful self-concerns that are the enemy of joy.

I won’t let self-obsession constrain my choices or limit my joy today. I will set aside unhealthy thinking that interferes with being in the moment and enjoying life clean. Might as well dance.

Restraint as an Expression of Freedom

Just staying in our seat without checking our phone or creating side conversation can be surprisingly difficult, especially when we are having feelings we'd rather avoid.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Six, Opening Reflection

The idea of a bunch of addicts sitting in a room together showing restraint sounds like the start of a bad joke, but, hey, recovery in NA is full of miracles! It's truly an achievement that we're able to create and sustain an atmosphere of recovery considering our individual and collective capacity for being distracted. Many of us have to work especially hard to sit with any degree of stillness and patience—and just be present—because of how our brains work or, of course, how new we are. And yes, there are many tools and avenues that may divert our attention from our primary purpose in a meeting—our smartphones, our fellow addicts, a noise outside, a technological glitch, a moment of boredom or overstimulation. Out of respect for the speaker, the newcomer, our group, and ourselves, we try to stay focused. Showing restraint in this manner is the respectful thing to do.

There are other times when our diversion is a sign of something deeper, and our tendency to deny or avoid our feelings gets ignited. Identifying with a member's share can be a lovely moment of connection, but it can also make us want to crawl out of our skin. We addicts seem to be allergic to discomfort, and yet pushing through it will often bring us to a place of more profound comfort—with ourselves and our surroundings. Glancing at our phone won't give us that. It does help to have some guidance here, as not all discomfort has that potential to be productive. We need a sponsor and other trusted NA members to help us distinguish between a moment when we should rein in our desire to scoot and stay with our feelings—and when we should honor our need to remove ourselves from a potentially harmful situation.

Restraint is an expression of freedom. The freedom "to do" is also the freedom "not to do." I'll practice that today by not being rude or running from my feelings.

15 OCTOBER

Giving Generously, Expecting Nothing

One small act of generosity can work wonders . . .

—It Works, Step Twelve

When we talk about “keeping what we have by giving it away” in NA, many of us are thinking about the way we freely share our experience, strength, and hope. After all, sharing is one of the most obvious ways in which we carry our message. But it isn’t the only way. We often don’t realize how we affect others simply by showing up and being ourselves.

“I sometimes go to an out-of-town meeting when I’m visiting family,” a member wrote. “A woman I didn’t recognize celebrated two years clean. She came up to me after the meeting and told me I remembered her name at her first meeting two years ago. She said she felt seen for the first time in a long time, and that’s why she kept coming back.”

Experiences like this are incredibly common in NA. Most of us still have a memory of a small act of kindness shown to us in our early recovery. We carry that kindness and generosity forward—sometimes without even noticing that we are doing it. Other times, it’s very much a purposeful and deliberate choice we make to ensure that newcomers have a chance to feel the love we felt. “I can’t tell you how many Basic Texts I have bought in all the years I’ve been clean. And I still have just a single copy.”

Giving of ourselves in acts of empathy is what we do in NA. We carry the message when we share in meetings, and we carry the message by being who we are in all that we do as members of NA. Whether it’s holding the door open for someone coming into a meeting for the first time, holding a friend’s hand as they share about a difficulty they are going through, or holding space for others to hear the message in their own time—our generosity can work wonders.

Part of recovery is giving generously and expecting nothing in return. I will give freely today, knowing I might not see the reach of my generosity.

Honesty Versus Denial's Fancy Footwork

When we fully concede to our innermost selves that we are powerless over our addiction, we have taken a big step in our recovery.

—Basic Text, Chapter 5: What Can I Do?

One member shared their favorite NA metaphor: “Fighting our addiction without recovery is like entering the ring with the boxing world champion. We think we can get in just one good punch, but repeatedly we’re pummeled to the ground. After many tries, we finally concede that the disease will eventually knock our lights out permanently. Admitting powerlessness is the first of many strategies we’ll need to fight it.”

It didn’t matter how practiced we were in our fancy footwork of denial. No matter our clever cunning, our brute strength, or our fearlessness in the face of danger, we did not succeed in managing our drug use. We lost that fight and came to NA cut, bruised, and beaten down. Admitting “I am an addict” the first time and many times thereafter is a big step, but to fully concede our powerlessness, we go deeper than that honest admission.

Our first approach to Step One shows the value of getting honest. Honesty loosens our grip on denial and unlocks surrender. In time, the same line of attack will help us examine other areas of our lives. As we work the Steps, we discover more truths about our innermost selves. Other members help us make sense of what we find and, eventually, we’re able to help others do the same.

The member continued with their metaphor: “The recovery process involves struggle, strategy, and triumph. Striving for complete honesty and ongoing surrender, we have a fighting chance. But we never fully retire from the ring.”

Years on, we’ll struggle with new (or old) areas of our lives where our nemesis of denial rears up again. We get in the ring—and *bam!* We get hit with a lights-out combo of relationships, sex, or other compulsive behaviors. Confronting our denial about these issues, surrendering and admitting powerlessness in these arenas—and doing the necessary work—further our progress in recovery. To stay clean, we have to.

I don’t need to get back in the ring with the champ or suffer denial’s low blows to know there’s still work to do. With the Steps as my strategy, I won’t be beat down.

17 OCTOBER

Commitment to Our Common Welfare

In joining together in a commitment to the greater good of Narcotics Anonymous, our own welfare is enhanced beyond measure.

—*It Works*, Tradition Twelve

We are people who have a fair amount of direct personal experience with single-minded devotion to a particular cause. Before we came to NA, the cause to which we were so devoted was getting and using drugs. Or, perhaps more precisely, we were committed to our efforts to change the way we felt, predict or control our feelings, or try to stop feeling altogether.

Once we find NA and surrender to the process of recovery, we begin to shift our devotion from changing how we feel to staying clean, no matter what we feel. Commitment means sticking with something even after our enthusiasm for it wanes or our mood changes. We commit to our own recovery, and we commit to serving NA. Often it starts simply with choosing a home group and committing to attend regularly. We take a formal commitment, such as greeter or clean-up person. Commitment involves both our feelings and actions. Because we are grateful for our recovery, we feel a sense of commitment to helping NA. That feeling shows in what we do for the greater good of the Fellowship.

For many of us, our commitment to NA is a result of what the program has given us. As we give back, we receive much more. The first gift is the chance to stay clean and find a better way to live. We make many commitments to NA—showing up regularly, being part of one another's recovery, serving our group and service bodies. Our commitments help the Fellowship grow and thrive. The more vibrant and thriving Narcotics Anonymous is, the more we are able to flourish and grow in our own recovery.

When I follow through on my commitments to NA, the Fellowship is better for it—and so am I. I will honor my commitments today.

18 OCTOBER

Faith When Times Are Tough

Getting through hard times strengthens our faith.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Growing Pains”

Getting those first 30 days clean is a milestone for many reasons, not least of which is that it gives us some resolve to get 31, then 32, and so on. We didn’t think we could, but here we are. And the unpredictable journey continues . . . As difficult as that period of time may have been, we are going to need the faith that got us through it—a day at a time, sometimes an hour, or a minute—as life continues to reveal itself.

We may not view practicing faith as essential to our early recovery as it’s happening. In retrospect, we understand that it took faith to surrender, ask for help, and allow ourselves to be supported. Something else is revealed as well: We are stronger for it. That awareness becomes very useful when we experience life’s inevitable misfortunes. We’ve all doubted, at some point, that we can make it through certain challenges clean—death of a loved one, prison, divorce, severe illness, financial ruin, natural disasters; the list goes on. The longer we stay alive and clean, the more likely it is that we will be exposed to life’s hardships.

We watch others stay clean through the worst. We hear them share about the strength they’ve gained by relying on faith to pull through. Witnessing their resolve strengthens our own—and our faith in NA. If someone else can do it, we can, too. And we, who at one time were emotionally unavailable or unreliable in relationships, are now able to help people we love through their suffering.

It’s true that many of us have discovered that experiencing adversity can be one pathway toward gratitude, peace, and serenity. We grow through the pain. But let’s also be realistic about how this may manifest. Many of us will smile and have some relief to share. Others will undergo unbelievably crushing experiences that we will have to manage daily—at times, by the hour or minute—for the rest of our lives. Most days we will be able to get out of bed, go to work, care for our families, and help others. Some days, just continuing to stay on this earth will be the best we can offer. Recovery in NA doesn’t eliminate pain and suffering from our lives, but our faith gives us a way to endure it.

No matter what I’m going through, I have enough resolve to stay clean one more day. Today I have faith in NA and in myself.

19 OCTOBER

Tapping into Creativity

... when we are spiritually connected, creativity flows through us. This doesn't necessarily mean that we paint or make music (though it can), but that we can see solutions to problems and find satisfaction in doing whatever we do as best we can.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Work”

Many of us develop a deeper spiritual connection as we dig into our stepwork, especially when we get to Step Eleven. We explore creative ways to meditate or connect to our Higher Power, and we discover multiple avenues for inspiration in our lives. Creative expression takes many forms.

One member shared, “Creativity is not just about art or music; it can be that spontaneous kind gesture we do for another human being.” We learn that it doesn’t cost a thing to carry our passion for living with us everywhere we go.

When we tap into a spiritual connection, it can be like hitting our stride in a marathon. Somehow the world seems quieter, and our purpose in it takes on new clarity. Our path through recovery comes into focus, and it leads us into lives filled with meaning. We find joy in being useful to others and enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done.

Our connection to our Higher Power helps us access our creativity and use it to amplify our service. We’re increasingly able to discern the quiet voice of our conscience, a voice many of us identify as a direct connection to our Higher Power. Letting our intuition guide our creative acts of kindness is an art in itself.

Today I will look for ways to harness my creativity in service to the Fellowship and the rest of humanity. I will cultivate my spiritual connection to allow creativity to flow through me.

20 OCTOBER

Anonymity as Our Spiritual Foundation

Our spiritual foundation is not a question of whether we know each other's last names; it's that we accept each other regardless of who we are and what we have done.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Twelve, Opening Reflection

What's in a name? Well, "Anonymous" is half of ours. In not using our last names, we end up sharing the same one: "Addict." But practicing anonymity doesn't end with a last initial. A principle can't be *that* simple—not when it's a word that's so hard to pronounce. Go ahead, try it: *Anonymity*. . . . See? The struggle is real for so many of us!

Because anonymity is, according to our Twelfth Tradition, the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, understanding what it means and how to practice it is essential to our ability to work with, relate to, and love each other, unconditionally. Our spiritual foundation is "the very rock we're all standing on," a member wrote. "But any rock can be pounded into sand by relentless forces. A slight here, a direct insult or backhanded compliment there, and on and on."

Anonymity ensures equity among us, and we can't have unity without it. None of us is too bad or too good for NA. We don't merely tolerate each other's differences and ignore our difficult pasts. Instead, we honor and embrace the people we are today. We do our damndest to rise above personality differences and having-a-bad-day reactions. We give each other the benefit of the doubt, roll up our sleeves in unity, and get to work.

Acceptance doesn't mean we endorse each other's every action. There's space for all of us at the NA table, but we must hold ourselves and each other accountable. Anonymity requires that we all have equal access to the message. So when a member's behavior prevents that from happening or otherwise interrupts the atmosphere of recovery, we need to be clear: "You are welcome. Your behavior is not." We can't expect ourselves to practice the unconditional love aspect of anonymity perfectly, but we can't let that stop us from ensuring that every addict who comes to our group has access to a message of recovery, no matter who they are or what they have done or perhaps will do.

Today I aim to give my fellow addicts the benefit of the doubt. Practicing anonymity means I have faith that we can all grow, personalities and pasts aside. It also means I'll get better at pronouncing it over time!

21 OCTOBER

Optimism and That Storied Glass of Water

Just for today my thoughts will be on my recovery, living and enjoying life without the use of drugs.

—Basic Text, Chapter 9: Just for Today—Living the Program

People often talk about pessimism and optimism in terms of seeing the glass as being “half empty” or “half full.” As addicts, many of us think about it more in terms like, “What’s in the glass, though? Is it any good? When can I get more?” or “Do you have more than I do? Let me have some of yours.” No matter how many glasses we have or how full they are, we addicts tend to always be concerned with where the next one is coming from and/or what the people around us have in theirs. We often forget that before recovery we either didn’t have a glass at all or couldn’t keep one, full or not.

We hear “Just for Today” read so often that we may forget how revolutionary the shift in thinking it proposes is for us. Instead of focusing on what’s next or what’s going on around us, we are called to focus on ourselves, right here and right now. The principles of optimism and hope often seem to be forward-looking, directing our attention to what is yet to come. However, as anyone who has ever been assigned to do a gratitude list can tell you, focusing on what is going well for us in the present moment can dramatically change our outlook on our lives.

When we focus on our recovery, on living and enjoying life without the use of drugs, our fears and anxieties tend to melt away. We become less concerned with matters like when our glass is going to get refilled. If we look into the glasses of those around us, it’s to see whether we can share what we have with them. Focusing on our glass—our recovery—gives us optimism by reminding us that we will be okay, no matter what.

Being in recovery means I no longer have to wonder whether the glass is half empty or half full. Not only do I have what I need, I have enough to share. I no longer need to compare with others.

22 OCTOBER

Finding Humility in Unity

We learn when it's important to stand for principles, and when it's best to step aside in the name of unity, knowing that a loving God is ultimately in charge.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Why We Stay”

We encounter different points of view in recovery and NA service. We may all be on the same path, working toward a common goal, but we're ultimately in different places along that road. For example, some of us take years to get through the Steps, while others work one Step per month. Some groups vote and others make decisions by consensus. Guided by our mentors, we take up an approach that works. It's only natural to believe that we're going about things the right way. From there, it's a short leap to believing that ours is the *only* right way, and that's a slippery slope to self-righteousness.

Accepting that members hold various perspectives and apply the tools of the program differently helps us understand the difference between unity and uniformity. There is, after all, more than one way to eat an apple. We learn to choose our battles and let go of our need to be right all the time. A wise sponsor once said, “Would you rather be right, or would you rather be happy?”

Knowing when to stand firm and when to bend is a sign of maturity in recovery. We learn to trust the process, and this takes away the burden of having to be right all the time. We come to rely on the good or God we find in NA. We bring unity to our groups and our relationships by allowing others—and ourselves—to be wrong, steering clear of self-righteousness, and holding firm to our beliefs.

When I feel contrary and stubborn, I can take a deep breath, let go of self-righteousness, and step aside. In quiet surrender, I will seek humility and understanding in the name of unity.

Expressing Our Autonomy with Integrity

Autonomy allows us to express who we are with integrity and to carry a message: the truth of our own experience, in our own way.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Four, Opening Reflection

The autonomy spoken of in Tradition Four has a strong appeal to many of us in NA. We are people who tend to put a pretty high value on self-determination. In active addiction, insistence on doing things our way often led to poor results, usually because “our way” had a lot to do with self-centeredness, rather than integrity. In recovery, autonomy becomes an asset rather than a liability—as our Basic Text puts it, “Our real value is in being ourselves.”

It’s the second half of Tradition Four that keeps us on track: “except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole.” For NA groups, this means we think about our role as part of the Fellowship, not just what our own group wants. As individual recovering addicts, we balance our right to do as we please with our responsibilities to those around us: family, friends, the Fellowship, and society. One way we begin to learn that balance is in how we share in meetings.

“As a newcomer, my sharing was super-aggressive and put some people on edge,” a member wrote. “My justification was ‘Hey, this is who I am!’ After a while, I tried to mimic the way others shared, but it wasn’t my own voice, and it always came out wrong. Eventually, I got comfortable being me while also thinking about the feelings of those around me. . . . I finally started to connect.”

If any group of people can sniff out a fake, it’s addicts. Authenticity is a message that lasts, whether it comes in the form of a riveting performance or an understated, soft-spoken share. Whether we’re trying to reach a still-suffering addict or save our own life, we try to strike the right balance between autonomy and responsibility, freedom and self-control, self-determination and connection.

Being autonomous doesn’t mean disregarding those around me. I will practice balancing personal freedom with social responsibility.

24 OCTOBER

Conscience and Step Ten

We need to stay in tune with the voice of our conscience and listen to what it's telling us. When we get a nagging feeling that something isn't quite right, we should pay attention to it.

—It Works, Step Ten

Thanks to the NA program, our days of justifying our own bad behavior are mostly behind us. Sure, we still make mistakes, sometimes big ones, but we're quicker to clean up our messes. Instead of doubling down or making excuses when we lash out or self-destruct, we let our missteps remind us that we remain acutely human and in need of regular spiritual maintenance.

"That's the thing about being in recovery, innit?" a member shared. "I'm aware of myself and the world around me. When I screw up, I can't pretend that everything's hunky-dory—though sometimes I still try." A short memory can seem like an appealing proxy for a clear conscience. It's not. Too often this leads us to reach for new distractions to help us forget. Fortunately—though it may sometimes seem otherwise—we can't un-know what we know about ourselves. We recognize our part in all of our difficulties and can spot our shortcomings even as they appear in new disguises. Try as we might to shut down and soldier on, we've developed a conscience.

Instead of waiting for a 3:00 am wake-up call from our conscience, Step Ten offers us a way to stay clear and current. We get into—and sometimes, get back to—the habit of regular reflection, taking the time to stay in tune with the internal gauge of our conscience. We examine our behavior with empathy, asking ourselves, "Have I treated others as I would like to be treated?" We tell ourselves the truth, taking note of when we've responded admirably and where we need to work out a better approach for next time. Cultivating a conscience is a by-product of this practice, and living a conscience-guided life is worth the effort.

I will live according to my conscience today, taking time to develop it further as I reflect on my mistakes and enjoy the good that comes from living by my values.

25 OCTOBER

Cultivating Curiosity

We keep learning and growing, finding ways to live and to use our experience to help others. No matter how long we have been clean, there is still more for us to learn and more for us to share.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Love”

Active addiction shrinks our worlds, and our curiosity often withers from inactivity. For many of us, that first exposure to NA wakes up a dormant sense of wonder. We may be somewhat puzzled by what we observe at our first encounters with the Fellowship, but we find it pretty compelling. As one member put it, “Looking back now, I could tell that you all had experienced the agony of addiction and then found a way to live clean and still be yourselves.” Curiosity about how NA makes that possible is one of the factors that keeps us coming back.

Without the constant numbing of drug use, our curiosity is reinvigorated. It may seem like a minor player given all the changes we experience, especially early on, but it’s also a consistent, reverberating background to our awakening. In retrospect, we can see how that curiosity nudged us onto this new road of discovery. As we make our way down this road, again and again, curiosity helps us find the necessary courage to ask for help and learn from others.

The NA message starts with abstinence and ends with “find a new way to live.” The meaning of this final phrase evolves just as we do. It applies to every stage of our growth and change as we place one foot in front of the other on the path of recovery. We get older, yes, and that beats the alternative. We meet each phase of life head-on, curious to see where our journey will take us and how our assets and abilities can lead us to serve in new ways. “Even as she was dying, she was teaching us how to live,” one member shared about her beloved sponsor.

The road narrows as we become less inclined to follow the dead ends of our old escape mechanisms. But a leaner road opens up to a world of genuinely nourishing practices and healthy connections. We follow our curiosity along interesting back streets and we’re set free to find a new way of life that fits our current chapter.

I will cultivate a curious and open mindset and keep on discovering what I need to navigate each phase of this new way of life.

26 OCTOBER

The Impact of Consistency

... a group needs the consistent commitment of its members to show up and take part in its meetings. Upon that commitment rests the group's stability; without it, no group can survive long.

—It Works, Tradition Seven

Consistency is a key part of the messages we first receive in NA. *Keep coming back. 90 meetings in 90 days. Meeting makers make it.* It's suggested that we find a home group—and become a homegroup member, not merely visit it. We're encouraged to get a service commitment there—and to show up for that commitment.

When we lack consistency in our groups, when we're not kept informed by our service body reps, when we don't provide the human or financial resources needed to carry out our requests, our groups and services aren't as strong. NA suffers as a result, and we miss potential opportunities to help newcomers.

The direct impact of our consistency may occur beyond the walls of a meeting. Many of us live in densely populated areas with plenty of groups to participate in. Many other NA communities are limited: only a few meetings—sometimes days and considerable distance apart—and perhaps too few members to fill service positions. Many groups thrive for decades, never dark for any reason; others burn bright, then falter; others struggle to stay afloat week by week. At times, it's a real misfortune to lose a group. Other times, a loss blooms into a new opportunity.

There are way too many homegroup scenarios to describe here, but one thing we know is true: It takes reliable and committed NA members to turn and keep the lights on at any meeting, service committee, or NA event. And it's no exaggeration to say that being consistent saves addicts' lives, including our own. To carry the message of recovery and to conduct necessary NA business, we need to show up with our time, funds, skills, and willingness. We take on tasks of all sizes and shapes, and, in the spirit of rotation, we mentor others to step up.

What can I do to keep my home group more stable? How can I help others become more involved and consistent in their contributions to homegroup stability? Where do I need to step aside in the spirit of rotation so that others can grow from consistent service to our NA community?

27 OCTOBER

Accepting All of Me

We make peace with ourselves—with all we have gained, and lost, and learned, and become.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “A Vision of Hope”

WHO AM I?

As clichéd and psychobabbling as that question may seem, many of us will identify with having asked it—and having not known the answer. Or, more to the point, we didn’t want to know.

In active addiction, many of us could have answered the question like this: “Anyone you want me to be, baby.”

And right after getting clean, “Nobody!” might have been the most accurate response, considering the shame we were feeling and how invisible we wanted to be in meetings.

Denial had kept us from accepting the truth of our actions and their impact on ourselves and the people who love us. Many of us paid the price for this lack of self-awareness with the loss of relationships, careers, assets, even our freedom.

The recovery process allows us to start contemplating our true identities, and it takes all the honesty we can conjure up, along with a healthy dose of courage and humility. We learn to accept that we’ve caused pain and injury, have done damage to ourselves and others while on our destructive paths. We also learn to accept that we aren’t the sum total of those actions.

Recovery affords us the opportunity to use the hardships we’ve endured to help others. We divulge our deep personal struggles—those from our past and those that will inevitably arise while clean—in order to deepen our relationships with other addicts. In doing so, we show our fellow addicts that we can stay clean—no matter what.

Today I strive to accept who I am, what it took to get here, and where I am now. My past does not own me. Instead, I will use it as a tool to help others.

Freedom, Wherever We Are

The ability to grow spiritually enables us to find freedom, even within the walls of a cell. Our greatest freedom is not outside ourselves but within.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Five, Opening Essay

Many addicts first hear our message of hope while incarcerated, often thanks to the hard work of our H&I trusted servants. One member shared, “When I got out, I heard someone share about a ‘self-made prison,’ and I was mad at first. They didn’t know what it was like to be on the inside. But the more I came to meetings and heard addicts share about the disease, I realized that we had more in common than I thought. Just being out didn’t mean I was free . . . yet.”

Freedom comes in many forms. The ability to come and go freely as we wish, a right denied when or if we are incarcerated, is just one of those forms. We can experience mental, emotional, and spiritual freedom wherever we go—or wherever we stay. One member wrote, “I thought freedom meant doing whatever I wanted whenever I wanted, as long as I stayed clean. But I felt trapped by my impulses. I found it impossible to say no to myself, even when my behavior had consequences. When I told my sponsor I wanted to stop _____ but didn’t know how, they told me to sit with the impulse and see if I could learn something from it. I sat with it and didn’t act on it, and I learned that I could survive the feeling. The feeling passed, and I felt light. I felt free.”

The most obvious freedom we gain in recovery is physical—we gain freedom from our compulsive use of drugs. That physical freedom, that changed behavior, has a corresponding inner component—the peace of mind that comes with no longer being trapped in obsession and self-centeredness. We are free to think of something other than where our next fix is coming from. We are free to feel something other than despair. We are free.

Wherever I am, whatever is going on around me, I will seek inner freedom by letting thoughts and feelings come and go without disturbing my peace, without throwing me off balance.

29 OCTOBER

Integrity through Personal Responsibility

Everyone makes mistakes; promptly admitting when we are wrong shows integrity and responsibility for our actions.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Work”

Perception is a funny thing. Self-centeredness shapes the way we experience our lives, magnifying our own wants and minimizing our responsibility and accountability. It can be like walking through a carnival funhouse filled with distorted mirrors or echo chambers—our senses deceive us. We have a hard time perceiving reality for what it is, especially when it comes to responsibility for our lives and our actions. Checking our perspective with other addicts helps.

Working the program—especially the daily inventory of Step Ten—helps us make our way through the funhouse of personal responsibility. As we come to terms with our powerlessness and unmanageability, we blame others less for the wreckage of our past. We begin taking personal responsibility. As we take inventory and ask for help letting go of our defects and shortcomings, we lose the need to make excuses for current actions and choices. We take responsibility for making past wrongs right, and we make a practice of checking our perceptions regularly. We shift our senses away from the carnival distortions and get a better perspective on ourselves and our lives. The Steps help us get better and better at being the type of people we can be proud of being.

When we make a wrong turn on our way through the funhouse and find a dead end, it doesn't do us much good to pretend we're not lost. We ask for direction, and we backtrack if we have to. We make mistakes because we are human; we correct them because we have integrity.

My disease distorts my view of myself and the world around me. I will use regular inventory to adjust my skewed perceptions so that I can find my way out of the madhouse of addiction.

30 OCTOBER

Contemplating the Gift of Grace

Each day, we are faced with new challenges. And each day, through working our program of recovery, we are given the grace to meet those challenges.

—*Just for Today*, “Meeting the day’s challenge,” May 27

Life is beautiful—and we may experience immense joy and serenity and love and all that good stuff—but it ain’t easy. What addict will argue with that point? However, by getting and staying clean in NA, we develop the competence to deal with life on its own terms. Those “terms” refer not only to immense life-changing events but also to daily challenges that arise in work, family, and relationships. Ideally, meeting those challenges involves acceptance of our limited power, the courage to act in spite of this, and surrendering to the result. We do this with the gift of grace.

For some of us, the challenge we experience with grace is its intangibility. We don’t really know what it is or where this gift is coming from. But maybe we don’t have to fully understand grace to receive it.

Many of us are reluctant to use “grace” in our everyday language about recovery. We may bristle at its religious undertones, given that it’s most often paired with “God,” as in “God’s grace.” What if we don’t conceive of our Higher Power as an almighty giver of gifts like grace or staying clean or life itself? Members who hold more traditional conceptions of a Higher Power may find it easier to accept the gift of grace. The rest of us may hesitate, especially if we feel ill equipped to define a gift we’re supposed to be getting and then complicate matters by obsessing about the source of this gift.

Perhaps we can look at NA itself as the source of the gift of grace because it teaches us to surrender, be humble, and act with integrity. In essence, the program shows us how to live in accordance with our values. We can achieve a state of grace by striving to do just that.

Today I will put grace into action by approaching life’s challenges with integrity and being grateful for the opportunity to do so. Even if I don’t fully understand the gift of grace, I will accept it anyway.

Interdependence and the Spirit of Unity

When one addict helps another, NA is there. NA isn't one addict or the other; it's the helping, the sharing, the spirit of unity, the feeling of hope shared between us.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Nine, Opening Reflection

Tradition Nine begins with “NA, as such, ought never be organized.” While it’s true there are aspects of delivering the NA message that do require organization, what can never be organized is the *spirit* of our Fellowship. The active energy of that spirit, the flow between and among individual addicts and groups and service bodies—the “as such” part of NA—is our interdependence. We can’t organize the magic that happens when one addict supports another.

We tell our stories of how we got here, despite the odds, despite our prejudgments, despite fear. Doing so helps us and it helps others. Same with sharing our experience of how we got through illness or grief—and how we had dreams, set goals, and then achieved them—or how we didn’t get what we’d worked for and hoped for and survived that pain, too. Flawed and human, we mutually depend on each other; we’re interdependent.

We can’t ever predict when an idea that one group has will reverberate to another corner of the world where it’s picked up and used by another. We don’t have NA bosses, handing down edicts from on high; instead, our service bodies are created in response to issues that emerge. And the solutions to our problems are gleaned from the hard-won experiences and brand-new ideas of recovering NA members. We can’t govern our way into unity or cooperation or participation. Or love. Instead, everyone pitches in however they’re willing. We’re a growing, evolving movement. When we band together, we are a power greater than the disease of addiction. Interdependence is our collective restoration to sanity.

I will practice interdependence by relying on others and allowing them to rely on me. NA, as such, only becomes stronger with our collective empathy, our creativity, our hope, our unity. Today I will participate in all that.

NOVEMBER

Acceptance Takes Practice

Acceptance is not an all-or-nothing event, and it doesn't necessarily happen all at once.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Growing Pains”

We talk about “practicing spiritual principles” because they take *practice*. That’s certainly true of acceptance. At times, the only thing we fully accept is the fact that we’re addicts. On those days, that’s good enough. We practice acceptance by not picking up. And if we don’t pick up, we won’t use.

As we grow in recovery, we start to recognize where our acceptance falls short. Sometimes we might acknowledge a problem, but not fully accept its implications, especially when a solution requires us to take responsibility and make an effort. For example, we might sense relationship trouble, but may or may not adjust how much time we spend with a partner. Some of us can’t accept, or even recognize, that we’ve been dishonest until we do a Tenth Step; the disease calls us to stop writing.

Our ability to practice acceptance sometimes wavers depending on who else is involved. We may be able to accept relapse from others, but not when it’s a family member. Maybe we can accept the blunders of newcomers but not those mistakes made by oldtimers.

We celebrate the progress we make, no matter how small: “Today I told my boss why I was *really* late; that was a first!” Or big: “The loss of my beloved dog opened the floodgates, allowing me to revisit the grief of other losses and come to new levels of acceptance.”

As we recover just a little more each day, practicing acceptance pays off. We experience rare and remarkable epiphanies with acceptance and recognize the path it took to get there. We can hear other members’ struggles with acceptance and think, *Yep, they’re right where they’re supposed to be.*

Today I’ll look at the conditions I place on acceptance and try to practice this principle more fully.

Being Vigilant in the Here and Now

We must be willing to do whatever is necessary to recover.

—Basic Text, Chapter 9: Just for Today—Living the Program

“I always remind myself: Yesterday’s recovery won’t keep me clean today,” a self-described chronic relapser shared as they celebrated a major milestone. “Vigilance—right here, right now—has been key for me,” they explained. “I learned the hard way that the real work of recovery is that I have to be willing to do whatever’s necessary. And I need to take time to be still and figure out what that is at any given moment.”

As spiritual principles go, vigilance is kind of a rock star. It’s thick with meaning, pairing watchfulness with deliberate action. We start our practice of vigilance simply by paying attention. We level up from basic abstinence to a meaningful recovery when we choose to be active in our program, self-reflective, and flexible, fine-tuning our approach as our personal program evolves.

In the beginning, going to lots of meetings and not taking anything between them has the desired effect; a clear head and a bit of hope make for a great start. It’s enough to keep us coming back. Listening to other members’ stories makes us want more. A member shared, “If I want more out of my program, I’ve got to put more in.” Inspired, we get a sponsor, cultivate a relationship with a Higher Power, and make steady progress through the Steps. As a result, we get more and more comfortable in our own skin.

Vigilance helps us to settle into our new way of life, applying what we’ve learned about spiritual principles in our daily affairs. We make time to reflect and fine-tune our approach as we move through life clean. As we remain watchful, we may notice that our emotional life, our thinking, our physical selves, or spiritual condition will still get out of whack from time to time. That’s because we’re human and because things change. But life’s lessons have revealed a process for navigating through our difficulties, regaining focus, and reconnecting with ourselves, those who care about us, and a Higher Power.

I am an addict every day, but today I choose to be a recovering addict. I’m willing to do what’s necessary to care for my spiritual condition and stay watchful over my program.

Service Brings Out the Best in Us

Just as making amends teaches us to be more forgiving, selfless service brings generosity, compassion, and awareness of purpose.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Two, “Word by Word”

Service gives us practice at interacting with others and becomes the basis of mutual support and connection. Whether we show up early to make coffee, take a panel into a mental health facility, or contribute our experience to a new literature project—each act of service offers lessons we can carry into our daily lives.

Some sponsors have a way of tricking us into service. We tag along to fill literature orders and the next thing we know, we’re committee members. We become more generous with our time and energy because we find some satisfaction in helping out. Plus, the company’s good and it doesn’t cost a thing. Our generosity extends to the rest of our relationships as well—going the extra mile to help friends, family, and, at times, even strangers. We feel ourselves changing as we become more bighearted and less self-obsessed.

We show up early to open the meeting facility, knowing we may be the first person a newcomer encounters. One member shared, “I know that the seats I’m setting up in my home group are the same seats that were set up for me before I got here.” We remember how we felt when we set foot in our first meeting: anxious, guarded, and just a little hopeful. We see ourselves in these potential new members. Our hearts swell with compassion as we welcome them.

Service gives us a sense of purpose. Each time we say yes to a service opportunity, we connect with and contribute to something greater than ourselves. Acts of service to the Fellowship deepen our devotion to Narcotics Anonymous. We are thoughtful and caring individuals—qualities we discovered and honed in NA service. We have built a life worth staying clean for.

I will nurture my humanity by serving Narcotics Anonymous, my family, my friends, and my community.

Intimacy Is Complicated but Worth It

For those of us who used sex as a way to move through the world, it may take quite some time to figure out the difference between being sexual and being intimate.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Sex”

“Wait, so . . . sex and intimacy are not the same thing?” This is news to many of us.

What isn’t news is the complex and often contradictory relationship at play when it comes to our sexual behavior, our addiction, and our capacity for intimacy. For many of us, sex has been a useful tool, a bargaining chip. We’ve used it as a shield to deflect intimacy rather than experience it.

Sex can be so intricately entwined with our use of substances that we may need to learn how to have sex without using. Will we be able to perform? Will we even enjoy it? How can we fulfill our sexual desires without taking advantage of others or putting ourselves at risk for the same?

Learning how to have sex clean is one thing. Being intimate with others in a nonsexual context is another. True intimacy requires mutual honesty and willingness from all involved parties—quite literally, baring our souls instead of baring our bodies.

How on earth do we approach this? It’s overwhelming, and who says we even *want* intimacy, anyway? Is that a requirement for staying clean?

We approach this jumbled human mess with patience for ourselves, no matter how long we have clean. We approach it with some resolve to understand and communicate our desires and our truths. And, if possible, we approach it with the understanding that our relationship to sex and intimacy will continue to evolve as we mature in our recovery—and grow older.

Intimacy is complicated, and I can’t possibly figure it out today. Instead, I will focus on getting to know myself and being considerate of others. I’ll aim to practice spiritual principles in my sexual affairs, too.

Caring and Listening

Even with many years clean, separating and reconciling what's in our heart and what's in our head doesn't come automatically. We need another set of eyes; we need a caring, attentive listener to help us sort things out.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Romantic Relationships”

Our relationships with other addicts in NA can teach us a lot about how to practice care in the way we relate to the people in our lives. Most of us have distorted ideas about exercising love, kindness, or concern for others when we get here. No matter what habits or hang-ups we come in with, recovery improves our ability to give and receive care.

Having a sponsor teaches us about letting others care for us. When we find a sponsor who's right for us, we soon get the chance to experience the genuineness and generosity described in the quotation above. Sponsors are often able to balance compassion with honesty as they help us to reconcile what's in our head with what's in our heart. We get to know what it feels like not to be in control of how another person demonstrates their care for us, which can be surprisingly freeing. Accepting help others offer, each in their own way, is a practice we can bring to all of our relationships.

Similarly, showing our concern for newcomers or sponsees teaches us how to practice care as a spiritual principle. Deep down, we know we truly want others to feel the hope and experience the freedom we've received in NA. Our care for newer members helps us listen deeply and then share our relevant experience. We learn to do our part and leave the results to a power greater than ourselves. Instead of filling every conversation break with our opinions, we practice our skills as caring, attentive listeners.

These lessons profoundly enhance our ability to develop and sustain loving relationships. We allow people to be there for us, and we're there right back.

Giving and receiving care is a skill I can constantly improve upon. I will practice being a caring and attentive listener in my relationships.

6 NOVEMBER

Honest Self-Reflection

Honesty begins with not lying, but that's not where it ends.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Ten, Opening Reflection

With any luck, we're challenged to practice a bit of "cash-register honesty" early in our recovery. When a cashier gives us too much change, it's tempting to quietly pocket it, but we do the right thing instead. We hand the money back rather than lying by default. Damn, that feels good. We get an "attaboy" from the clerk and have some righteous experience to share at the next meeting. We revel in the positive attention, and, even better, we feel proud of ourselves.

This is a great start to practicing honesty, but it doesn't end there. The Steps offer some important guidance for us as we sift through our past and examine our present state of mind and behavior. Personal inventories—long-form as well as the frequent spot checks—help us develop a habit of honest self-evaluation. We take stock of our assets and liabilities, refining our lists in consultation with a sponsor and Higher Power. Knowing—really knowing—ourselves is a crucial element of recovery.

Our relationships—with ourselves, with others, and with our lives—are enriched by our willingness to be honest. When we're in a good groove with honesty, we tend to surrender a little more and have fewer amends to make. Clarity about our character, our motivations, and our emotional lives means we're less defensive and more introspective. It turns out that having access to our feelings makes it easier to connect with others. We build deep and lasting relationships with others who are also emotionally available.

When we understand ourselves and our lives, it's easier to respond to the world around us in a way that's consistent with our values. For some of us, conscious living means that we find our voice and become advocates for causes that are important to us. We can hold strong opinions on difficult issues and still take care not to complicate the NA message. Clarity comes from honestly reflecting on our experience and sharing how living by spiritual principles keeps us grounded and growing. Our experience offers a vision of hope.

Being myself is my best asset in carrying the message. I will take time for some honest self-reflection today.

Purpose and Our Path Forward

Faith in the process means believing that we are moving in the right direction, even if it's not where we thought we would be going.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Desperation to Passion”

On the day of our first NA meeting, we may have predictions about what our lives will look like without drugs, but what if our dreams don't come true? Desperation has forced us to strive for something new, but what will it be? We now have choices about how we live that we didn't have before, but how do we know which is the “right” path and if we're following our life's “true” purpose? If we don't have a whole lot of faith in the future, how can we get more?

Whatever questions we have about finding our true purpose, the same crystal ball that didn't work when we were high doesn't when we're clean either. Thankfully, more is revealed as we stay clean. Through the Steps, we discover our values and convictions. For many of us, that means our purpose radically shifts, or we find one at last. Recovery gives us a chance to revisit goals that addiction interfered with, or we start from scratch. Hope helps us to believe we're headed down the right path, and faith keeps our feet moving in that direction.

We find purpose (or many purposes, as time passes) in NA, in a career, in relationships, in our communities, on a mountaintop, in a foreign land, or in sitting still. We learn to serve others more than our egos. We practice self-acceptance and model it for newer members who think that being okay with themselves is unattainable. Many of us also have—or regain and revitalize—our faith in a God who has a plan for us that we can't predict, ardently believing this plan is better than one we could create on our own. Others find purpose in a life guided by spiritual principles or believe the universe conspires in our favor, cheering us on. Having faith in finding and living our purpose takes practice. Recovery in NA provides us with tools to manage our discomfort with trial and error, impossible without plenty of open-mindedness and willingness along the journey.

I can't predict the future, but I believe I have one. I will move in a direction and see where the path leads. It's worth staying alive to find out.

8 NOVEMBER

Praying for Tolerance

We have found tolerance to be a principle that strengthens not only our own recovery but also our relationships with individuals who are a source of irritation to us.

—*Just for Today*, “Tolerance,” June 24

So many of us have had the experience of calling our sponsor to complain about that terrible person at work or that loathsome family member or that insufferable fool at the area service committee meeting. If not for them, how peaceful and pleasant our lives would be! Our patient and loving sponsor gently asks, “Have you prayed for them?” So clichéd!

Of course, sponsors tend to speak from experience—they know that when we pray for the people who bother us, we are often the ones who change. Sure, sometimes people around us do become more tolerable; people grow and change all the time—even insufferable fools. But when we pray for the people who bother us, we increase our own tolerance and compassion.

While everyone in the world has room for growth, tolerance is a much surer way for us to experience peace and harmony than simply waiting for those around us to get better. Some people will take a long time to change; others may never improve at all. If those around us aren’t going to become more tolerable, our best solution may simply be to become more tolerant. This doesn’t mean accepting unacceptable behavior; we still set healthy boundaries as appropriate. Our sponsor can help us sort out the tolerable from the unacceptable. We remind ourselves that we don’t need to be friends with everyone—we just need to be able to play nice with others when we’re at work, at family gatherings, and at service committee meetings.

I can’t make the people around me grow on my schedule. To get along with difficult people, I will pray for tolerance.

Kindness and the First Tradition

We learn to treat others with kindness and respect and do what we can to support each other and our group.

—*It Works*, Tradition One

Few of us come into Narcotics Anonymous with effective social skills; we often acquire them by trial and error—mostly error. When we unintentionally mistreat others, we feel terrible and become teachable. The good news is that some of our best lessons come from our mistakes. We call our sponsors, tell on ourselves, figure out our part, and determine better ways to handle similar situations in the future.

We are at our best when kindness inspires our words and actions. When kindness is a priority, we're more likely to be supportive, and that helps us grow as individuals and as NA groups. Naturally, it's easier to be kind to those we love. But we don't have to open our homes and share holiday dinners to honor our mutual stake in Narcotics Anonymous.

Being a home-group member challenges us to practice kindness with folks who aren't in our immediate circle. Our investment in the well-being of NA is more important than our personal feelings about any specific member. We put the welfare of the group first and treat all of our fellows with respect regardless of baggage or bitterness. Friendship is not a prerequisite for kindness. Rather, we are kind in order to foster unity within the group and to support personal recovery—our own and that of our fellow members.

The simplest gesture of kindness can make a world of difference when we are feeling stuck. "I was isolating and thinking about using. I got a text from a fellow home-group member who asked if I was going to the meeting. It was just the push I needed," a member shared.

Our actions have a profound effect on others as well as an impact on our self-image. By choosing kindness, we improve ourselves as we contribute to NA unity. Our actions make NA meetings safe and respectful places for personal growth. The way we treat each other and our groups is a reflection of how we put "we" before "me."

I will treat other members with respect and kindness today. I will act in ways that support recovery—yours, mine, and ours.

10 NOVEMBER

Our Foundation of Goodwill

When Good will supports and motivates both the individual and the Fellowship, we are fully whole and wholly free.

—Basic Text, “Our Symbol”

Before coming to NA, we were chiefly motivated by selfishness with a reckless, feverish focus on finding ways and means to get more drugs. A desire to stop using brings us to the rooms; it may be desperate or minimal, inspired by a nudge from the judge, our parents, our conscience, or the consequences of continuing to use. We had little use for integrity when we got here. And goodwill? Never heard of it.

And yet, recovery is available to us all. We start learning to serve when we have precious little time clean. As our journey continues, service becomes a staple of our program. We come to understand the meaning of integrity as we serve with other recovering addicts. We learn about goodwill by watching their walk. We explore how integrity fits into our new lifestyle and begin to examine our motives on a deeper level.

Sometimes the driving force behind our initial interest in participating in a service committee or taking a commitment is motivated by our desire to look good or our need for the validation of others. We may be doing the right thing, but we may not be doing it for the right reason. It’s a start.

The seeds of goodwill are planted as we continue to serve. We greet newcomers at our home group, help fill literature orders at a local service committee, or attend the regional service committee for the first time as we develop our relationship with service. We continue showing up and find that *why* we stay committed is different from what brought us to that commitment in the first place. Freedom springs from the newfound passion when we find our niche in service. When we serve from a place of selflessness and goodwill, we tend to find fulfillment and gratification in our efforts, in and out of NA.

The foundation of our program is rooted in goodwill. As we continue to give of our time and effort with more principled intentions, our understanding of generosity broadens, and our personal freedom grows proportionally.

I will bring a spirit of generosity and service to my NA community, my family, my work, or my neighborhood today. With goodwill as my motivation and freedom as my goal, I will wholly commit.

Willing to Explore New Directions

With self-acceptance comes a willingness to creatively explore new directions.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Wellness and Health”

Our willingness to stay clean triggers willingness to improve our lives. In turn, we’re able to look at ourselves with greater clarity and a realness we never imagined possible. Our minds become open to an awareness of our shortcomings and our limitations. We humbly evaluate and acknowledge our assets. Acceptance of where we are right now creates a willingness to move forward. And like everything in recovery—and in life—we won’t experience self-acceptance perfectly. Rather, it’s something we strive for daily.

In recovery, accepting ourselves doesn’t mean we accept our conditions. Instead, we can pursue new goals that better mirror the self we have come to accept. Many of us who find some stability in NA also find the willingness to create new opportunities for ourselves or take ones that are offered to us. We now know that we don’t have to be held back or be victimized by our past. We follow through on a long-held dream, rent our own place for the first time, enroll in or finish college, or start a family.

We also can be led by a deep-seated knowing, or what one member called “divine dissatisfaction.” A motivating, self-affirming voice tells us it’s time to move on from the relationship that we’ve used all the arrows in our quiver to save. It tells us to move on from a job that’s no longer fulfilling us, to move to a new city, to just move our lives in some significant way. We learn to trust our instincts.

Our self-acceptance helps us to be willing to make mistakes—and then be willing to forgive ourselves and learn from them. We find ourselves often being more flexible, knowing that we’ll be okay no matter what, more resilient and responsible, less of a perfectionist. If one endeavor doesn’t work, we’re willing to feel the pain of failure and then seek an alternative strategy to reach our goal.

I am determined to accept who I am and who I’m becoming today. With those arrows in my quiver, I’m willing to point my life in a new direction and take aim.

Removing Barriers to Inclusiveness

We start to look more carefully at what makes a meeting feel safe and welcoming.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Disability”

We know the struggles of addiction firsthand, the danger and degradation. We remember what it was like to walk into our first meeting—to feel that initial spark of hope. We pray for the addict who still suffers, and we feel for them because we’ve been there. Our empathy helps us see our meetings, meeting places, and all of the social interactions surrounding them through others’ eyes.

We genuinely want every addict seeking recovery to feel safe and welcome when they walk through the doors. When we’re on our spiritual A-game, empathy guides our choices and ensures that we are inclusive. It’s easy to get lazy, however. We neglect the proper consideration of others’ needs. We may even justify our complacency and squash new ideas with the classic: “This is the way we’ve always done it.”

Experience has a way of nudging out such smugness. When a homegroup member comes to need a wheelchair, it highlights the necessity of an accessible meeting place. When a hard-of-hearing member explains the importance of visual cues in communication, we follow their lead. We change the room setup with attention to lighting, acoustics, and sight lines. When new members come from outside the dominant culture, we go out of our way to welcome them. If diversity challenges us personally, perhaps we need to examine our reservations about the NA message. We recommit to the proposal that *any addict* can find recovery in NA. Empathy, generosity, and inclusiveness guide us toward a new perspective on helping addicts find a safe and welcoming place to surrender.

As the First Tradition suggests, we put our common welfare first. We plan for needs that haven’t yet surfaced. We remove barriers to participation—physical, perceptual, or cultural—and do what’s in our power to make NA truly available to us all.

I will look at my home group with fresh eyes and imagine how someone different from me might experience it. What can I do to make first-time attendees feel safer and more welcome?

Balance Through Meditation

Emotional balance is one of the first results of meditation, and our experience bears this out.

—Basic Text, Chapter 4, “Step Eleven”

Life can be an emotional roller coaster. Before we found recovery, we could exit the ride by getting high. With that option off the table—just for today—it’s up to us to find ways to handle life’s ups and downs, twists and turns. “If I’m going to ride this roller coaster called life,” a member shared, “I want to be one of those screaming, giggling fools in the front car. They are truly in the moment.”

We learn the usefulness of living in today in early recovery. One oldtimer put it bluntly: “If you’ve got one foot in the past and one in the future, you’re pissing all over today.” Truly being in the *moment* is some next-level stuff, and few of us have regular access to an *actual* roller coaster to practice that mindset.

Fortunately, we have an Eleventh Step that encourages us to give prayer and meditation a try. Practicing some form of meditation can help us to let our feelings come and go like waves on the beach. Practice pays off, and it becomes easier to roll with the punches when we’re a little less attached to our emotions.

We learn to be fully feeling human beings and to be all right with that. More often than not, we can be attentive to our emotional lives and not want to check out. One member shared, “Finding even a minute or two to slow down and breathe can drastically improve my emotional well-being.” As we weave meditation into our recovery repertoire, emotional balance feels increasingly attainable.

I will remind myself that the balance I have experienced in my recovery is a result of my emotional well-being. I will sustain this state of being by meditating today.

Living Lives Worthy of Self-Respect

As we clean up our wreckage and live differently, we can respect our actions and find respect for ourselves in the process.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to Ourselves”

Many of the stories we tell about our active addiction depict us thriving on our lack of respectability. *Who needs a real job, an education, a place to live, or even a bath?* We scoffed at others’ boundaries, the rule of law, authority, and institutions. We turned our backs on many of the values we were taught by our families, cultures, and society. Hiding all our fears behind bravado, a lot of us paid a steep price. We jeopardized relationships and careers, if we had any. In many cases, we lost our freedom. Did we lose our self-respect, too? Or did we just have none to start with?

When we get clean, the rebel in us may be tempted to dismiss “meeting etiquette” as an attempt to make us conform. At some point, most of us notice that being a rebel in NA doesn’t have the payoff it did on the streets. We don’t gain credibility by being disrespectful. “I thought I was a badass but came to find out that it was just a front to protect myself,” one member shared. Once we start to listen in meetings, get to work on Steps, and are of service, we find ourselves inspired to loosen our grip on our past lifestyles and the version of ourselves in the stories we tell.

We want to move on from the past, and our willingness to understand it and grow from it increases. We take actions that build our lives and help other people. We set boundaries for ourselves and respect those held by others. Our dignity and self-respect are being restored, like our sanity. Perhaps for some of us, this is the first time we have experienced these feelings or this state of being in our lives.

Not only do we change our actions, but many of us find we have to alter the stories we tell about ourselves. We focus less on being the product of our wreckage and more on being the product of our recovery. We learn that we are worthy of the lives we have now. We begin to live a life that reflects values we can be proud of. That’s pretty respectable. And before recovery, who knew we’d ever want that?

Today I’ll step back for a moment and look at the life I’m building with some pride and self-respect. It’s working, and I’m worthy of it.

Love for the Sake of Our Growth

The love we share in NA means we care enough to save each other's lives.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Two, “Spiritual Principles”

Attending meetings lets us see the myriad ways in which members practice the spiritual principle of love. We observe the pre-meeting rituals with warm welcomes all around. We recognize the love and trust it takes for us to share our pain, our breakthroughs, and our misadventures or to offer loving support by listening, nodding, and passing tissues.

After the meeting, we may catch a glimpse of a small group of two or three members who have stepped away from the crowd for a private conversation. Some of us have been pulled into such a discussion only to discover that our behavior was the topic. This may not have struck us as loving at the time.

As one member shared, “A couple of home-group members ‘suggested’ that I get to the meeting on time if I wanted to hug all my friends before I took a seat. I was a bit embarrassed, but learned to enter a bit more discreetly when I’m late.” With hindsight, we can see the loving action members like these take to protect the atmosphere of recovery in our meetings and teach newer members how to behave. Love isn’t always gentle. Sometimes we show love by saying, “We love you, but not your behavior.”

Another addict shared, “Love is not simply an emotion; it’s also an action.” The action of love is the effort we choose to put into how we carry the message of NA. We share our recovery to save another addict’s life, and it’s one of the most loving actions we can take. It may not be convenient or easy, but the work is well worth it when we see a fellow addict grow into a productive member of society and pass the NA message on to other suffering addicts. This is the work of love.

I will share the lessons I was taught when I first came around. Today I will pass along the love that saved my life.

Resilience Keeps Us Coming Back

It's never too late to start over, reconnect with the fellowship, work steps, have a spiritual awakening, and find a new way to live.

—Living Clean, Preface

For many of us in active addiction, starting over from scratch was practically a lifestyle choice. Things got tough, we owed back rent, our relationships or jobs got in the way of our drug use—and we were gone! We got a new place, a new job, and someone new to put up with our crap. Some of us carried that behavior into NA. Instead of staying clean through snags in early recovery, we'd press the reset button and clear the board. Day One again. We'd change road dogs, sponsors, and home groups. This wasn't the healthiest or most spiritual way to be resilient, but that was our strategy to survive and bounce back from conflict and hardship. Still, we kept coming back.

When we get some time in NA, starting over might look very different. Many of us will hit major low points in our lives, but when we stay close to NA, we can immediately turn to Step One—not Day One—when our life becomes unmanageable.

Others of us accumulate years of cleantime and are so busy being functional that we don't realize how isolated we are from NA. We haven't relapsed, but our recovery has all but flatlined. "I woke up today and realized that it was my 25th cleantime anniversary, and I don't even remember the last time I marked the occasion," a member shared. "I came today because I didn't even know I was miserable. I thought, *Maybe I should use so that I could come back to meetings*. Though I'm embarrassed about how long it's been, I'm grateful my next thought was, *Just go to a meeting and start over.*"

How do we come back when we haven't *really* left? Instead of pulling the plug on our program, we can jump-start it. We may feel some regret at taking NA for granted, but we are back—and can keep coming back.

It doesn't matter when we start over or why; it only matters that we do.

How close am I to the Fellowship today? I will remember that I can push the recovery reset button anytime but don't have to throw a grenade in order to start fresh.

Affirming Our Step-Three Surrender

Striving to maintain and build on our surrender, we are better able to live and enjoy life in the moment.

—*It Works*, Step Three

Before recovery, we had one primary strategy to help us deal with life's stressors: feeding our addiction. Drugs helped us escape from an abusive household or the feelings of loneliness from our partner's death. They soothed the anxiety caused by our job, our rent, or the fact that we had neither. We fled from the anguish of raising teenagers or the loss of a pregnancy. However well this strategy worked at first, ultimately, it was not sustainable. The drugs stopped working, the money ran out, incarceration, overdose, degradation. . . . We know the drill.

In recovery, we are shown new approaches to handle life's challenges—and even our successes. We learn to surrender our uncomfortable feelings, to accept the outcome of the day's events, to cope with the grimmest of tragedies just to be in the current moment. Practicing the Third Step daily, from the moment we open our eyes, helps many of us to deal with life on life's terms. We “turn it over” by whatever method or ritual we find works for us—praying, meditating, sending a gratitude list to our network, calling a fellow addict who's struggling, or just taking a moment to acknowledge Whatever's Out There or Within Here. We affirm our Step Three decision and surrender just for today, every day.

We find that the practice of a daily surrender is sustainable. This process of surrender is a muscle that we build so that we can rely on it during our toughest moments. Just as critically, surrendering makes space for us to thrive. Turning over our will is metaphorically taking out the trash, clearing the cobwebs, airing out the sheets. It's washing the windows not merely to see out but to get out there and make our mark on the world.

Today I will use the Third Step as a strategy to engage with life right here, right now. I can deal with the hardships of this moment—and the good stuff, too.

Unity, Our Practical Foundation

With unity as our practical foundation, we find that our relationship with one another is more important than any issue that may arise to divide us.

—*It Works*, Tradition One, “Applying Spiritual Principles”

Addicts tend to be creative and bright, with brains chock full of . . . endless opinions. We are passionate and often have a strong sense of justice . . . the flip side of which can be profound self-righteousness. Lots of us are charismatic individuals blessed with considerable leadership qualities . . . who can be manipulative, giving others the smack-down with our encyclopedic knowledge of the Traditions. We are curious sorts who ask a million questions . . . about issues addressed in the subcommittee chair’s report that we didn’t read. We can be wonderfully flexible in weighing all the options about an issue . . . and change our minds and alliances many times in a single discussion. We can be calm, deep listeners who reserve offering opinions until all the facts are in . . . and then passive-aggressively subvert the group’s conscience.

All of these personalities (and many more) are charged with ensuring that NA remains steadfast in its purpose to support the newcomer by carrying a message of recovery. Conflicts arise at group business meetings, during learning days, when planning a regional convention, and in NA World Services. Putting the principle of unity before personalities can be a challenge in practice. But it’s our commitment to each other and to our shared purpose—the very essence of unity—that helps us grow as individuals and strengthens the Fellowship of NA.

At the end of the day, it’s our relationships with each other that get us through personal upheaval, financial peril, professional concerns—through every aspect of our lives. We strive to safeguard those relationships, especially when we can’t agree on whether or not it’s cool to buy cakes with the Seventh Tradition cash.

Instead of obsessing about our differences of opinion, I will focus on strengthening relationships with other members. I will seek opportunities to give or receive support from another addict.

Healing with Empathy

One of the benefits of reaching out is finding that our most painful experiences can help someone else.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 1, “Growing Pains”

Being clean doesn’t give us immunity from life’s struggles. Fortunately for us, we don’t have to navigate life on our own. When we ask for support and allow people to be there for us, we access perhaps the Fellowship’s greatest resource: each other. If cleantime and other successes have caused us to lose touch with this asset, life’s difficulties can provide a gentle nudge in its direction. When we summon the courage to reach out for support, our NA communities respond with empathy. It helps to have someone to lean on, to sit with us as we sit with our feelings, to cheer us on as we put one foot in front of the other, and to empathize as we heal, regroup, and start again.

Our fellow members understand our urge to run away or to find some temporary relief in food, sex, or spending. We can identify with that impulse to shut down or be massively controlling or lean into other character defects to manage our troubles and feelings. We empathize because we’ve been there emotionally—or at least in the neighborhood. We can connect deeply and share the burden of each other’s sorrows and emotional pain. Even if we don’t have direct experience with a specific way in which life has shown up for a fellow member, we’re all capable of listening, bringing a hot dish, or taking the kids out for ice cream. Sometimes, a reminder that there will be sunshine after the rain helps us get through the day.

When we share with an addict in pain, we’re able to get outside ourselves. The empathy we experience creates identification, gratitude, and perspective. “The therapeutic value of one addict helping another” is beneficial to both the helper and the helped—we know this because we’ve been both. One member’s comment to another captures this dynamic: “Someone told me that my struggle would give me the strength I’d be needing down the line. That strength was for you, and when my experience helped you, I got to heal on a whole new level. Your call for help was a real mitzvah.”

The well of empathy runs deep in NA, and I will keep returning to it. I will share my burdens with another addict today, knowing it will provide a source of healing for both of us.

Humor as a Practice of Surrender

One of the gifts of recovery is regaining our sense of humor.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter Seven, “The Lifelong Practice of Surrender”

When we were using, everything was life-or-death serious—that lifestyle of getting, using, and finding ways and means to get more! Some of us felt like we hadn’t laughed for years when we first got to NA. Others of us experienced plenty of laughter out there—directed right at us. “You’re so thin-skinned,” our mates would mock us. “Get a sense of humor.”

While actual events of our using history stay the same, our relationship to them evolves as we grow in recovery. We see fellow NA members finding humor in their pasts, and we begin to lighten up about the darkness in ours. Our stepwork reveals a long list of defects that still affect us today. And being able (finally) to laugh at ourselves as we act out on that shortcoming—yet again!—is a strategy that can help us to not beat ourselves up and to be okay with where we are right now. Humor becomes a way we identify, connect, and express empathy and forgiveness, for others as well as ourselves. Humor is a practice of surrender.

For many of us, humor can also be a hazard. It’s a strategy we may use to escape our feelings or avoid being real in our relationships. We sometimes use it to put people down, including ourselves. Self-deprecating humor has a place, but self-ridicule breeds self-doubt. Some of us used humor to survive out there, but in recovery we aren’t living in that life-or-death cycle. As we become more aware of these issues through working our program and receiving input from our sponsor and others we trust, our relationship to humor may shift. Ideally, the sense of humor we gain in recovery becomes less self-pitying, protective, or aggressive than the one we came in with. And we can finally breathe because we don’t take ourselves quite as seriously as we used to.

I will try to surrender to levity today. I can laugh at myself without putting myself down, and do the same for my fellow addict, with love, sensitivity, and wit, if I have a bit of that.

Discernment and Group Conscience

We trust—and we use good sense. Living in fellowship with other addicts, we learn discernment.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Two, Opening Reflection

The spiritual principle of discernment—exercising good judgment—is central to practicing Tradition Two. In our personal recovery, we work on developing a guiding conscience in our own decision making that helps us decipher what’s healthy for us and what isn’t. Many of us have described that conscience as a voice in our head that tells us right from wrong. Many others say it’s our loving Higher Power working in our lives.

We bring this awareness into our groups and try to practice it there, in fellowship with each other. Discernment is group conscience in action; using it requires some common sense, experience, and, hopefully, clarity about what’s our opinion, what’s factual, and what’s actually important. Some of our groups develop trust and a collective conscience over time, but we need to stay open-minded as our membership evolves. To sustain our practice of Tradition Two, we need unity, faith, goodwill, and even more trust.

Speaking of trust, discernment helps us choose our trusted servants and guides us in our efforts to be trustworthy as we serve. We create guidelines that outline preferred qualities for particular roles in our groups. These may aid the process but aren’t the whole of it. Other circumstances that aren’t on paper and still meet our need to serve the greater good may play a role in our decisions. We listen to our fellow members offer qualifications for a position, learn about each other’s capacity for effective leadership, and then use discernment, expressed through our group conscience, to match talent to task.

As trusted servants, we’re trusted to serve the needs of our group and NA as a whole, rather than our own egos, individual opinions, and desired outcomes. To keep our leaders in check, we are each other’s eyes and ears, shining light on one another’s blind spots and turning up the volume when we aren’t listening carefully.

I am committed to serving the greater good. I aim to do so by exercising good judgment, inviting my own conscience to contribute to the group’s, and letting go of the outcome.

Facing Life with Courage

We find the courage to follow our heart, to listen to the voice within, to create, to commit, to explore, and to live.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Creative Action of the Spirit”

It takes courage to give this NA way of life a try. Whether it’s for the first or the fourteenth time, walking through the doors to our first meeting—or first meeting back—takes real determination. And that’s just the beginning. Once we stop using, and our obsession fades, the challenges of living life on life’s terms will call on us to be courageous again and again.

Lucky for us, the NA way gives us the gumption to persevere despite life’s difficulties. We forge lasting friendships, learn from our fellow travelers, and find in them enough courage to transcend the challenges of each day. NA literature can be a source of strength and courage, too. We each find our own understanding between the lines and in the tough questions we ask ourselves. As we contemplate and apply the collective wisdom found in NA literature, we are emboldened to be more fully ourselves, drawing strength from our Higher Power.

With a firm foundation in recovery, we can move through the world with courage and confidence, though sometimes we decline opportunities to do so. “My ‘fear goggles’ kept my focus on the potential for failure or rejection,” a member shared. “I was afraid to start or end relationships, to express my feelings, to come out. I was unwilling to be fully myself and paid a price for my lack of courage. In my effort to avoid pain, I’d also sidestepped chances to find real joy.” That’s no way to live.

The example of others and our faith in a Higher Power inspire us to live courageously, despite a lack of certainty. Life is a risky business, and things won’t always work out in our favor. As one addict put it, “I’m not God’s little honey bunny, and the answers to my prayers aren’t always ‘yes.’ But even when things don’t go my way, I still walk with courage. It helps to know that you folks will pick me up if I stumble.” We dare to dream—to try and fail and try again.

If I don’t risk anything, I risk everything. I will muster the courage necessary to take a leap of faith today, big or small.

Maturity Calls for Some Humility

Doing the right thing when no one is looking is an act of service to what we believe in. Some of us call this integrity; the Sixth Step calls it character. Whatever we call it, this practice is the discipline that forms the basis of our growing maturity.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Commitment”

Integrity. Character. Discipline. Maturity. Not often were these words used in reference to us when we were in active addiction, except perhaps to note the lack thereof.

While many NA members completely reject being the center of attention, there are just as many of us who adore the spotlight or who, at the very least, undertake commitments to be acknowledged and praised. In the course of our recovery, we’ll have ample opportunity to dissect what motivates our choices. As a practical matter, we might simply concede that active addiction left us with many regrets. We were ashamed of many of our actions and inactions. In recovery, we have the opportunity to get things done—in NA, in our jobs, and in our family life—because those things *need* to get done. Adhering to that sense of practicality and work ethic—rather than the attention-grabbing “Look at me!”—is a sign of maturity and integrity. It shows character and discipline, too. All of it.

And, sure, if we have a commitment that we do consistently, competently, and maybe with our own creative spin on it, our efforts may draw some positive attention. Accepting others’ gratitude is also a sign of maturity.

We don’t need to plan our service entirely around making sure no one is looking. That would be anonymity overkill. We don’t need to hide our talents or skills in order to do the right thing. We embrace our capabilities so we can stay clean and help others do the same.

Today I’m deciding to let my contributions to the world speak for themselves. If they speak only to me, so be it. If others notice and express their appreciation, I will be gracious.

Hospitality Counters Self-Centeredness

Simply making eye contact or offering a hug to a newcomer can make all the difference to them—and to us.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Three, “Spiritual Principles”

To those of us accustomed to being unwelcome nuisances to family, friends, and others, the hospitality we encounter in NA can be both unexpected and unfamiliar. “People I used with stopped wanting me around even when I was willing to share my drugs,” one member shared. “Talk about feeling like an outcast!”

That special welcome we felt as newcomers in NA inspires many of us to go out of our way to help other newcomers feel welcome. “When I was in early recovery, I asked my sponsor how to be a homegroup member,” one addict wrote. “My sponsor told me I could start by making sure that no one new to the meeting ever leaves without being welcomed.”

The act of welcoming others has a big impact on us, too. For people prone to self-centeredness, it’s a great relief to put our own wants, needs, and feelings on the back burner long enough to concern ourselves with how others feel. Our sense of attention and concern expands, allowing us to notice who is around and what they might be feeling. As many of us have heard, we build self-esteem by doing esteemable things. We don’t even need to do much to help anxious, scared, or alienated addicts begin to feel calm, safe, and welcome in NA—and doing so rewards us in ways we cannot measure.

My feeling of connection and belonging in NA increases by leaps and bounds when I welcome others. I will go out of my way to make someone feel welcome today.

Practicing Forgiveness, Foregoing Resentments

Forgiveness is an action and a decision. We need a lot of forgiveness, and we also get to provide it.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Love”

Working the Twelve Steps of NA teaches us to make decisions for ourselves and take deliberate actions in our lives. We no longer allow circumstances and our disease to dictate our every move. We choose to practice forgiveness and try not to worry too much about when and if our loved ones forgive us. (We’d been pretty rotten at times, after all.) We focus on matters that are in our control and do the work necessary to forgive ourselves and others.

NA service provides plenty of opportunities to apply this spiritual principle. As we serve alongside fellow members, it’s almost inevitable that we’ll bump heads from time to time. For the most part, we manage to set aside our disagreements, uniting to support the addict who still suffers. But practicing unity does not neutralize the need for forgiveness. “Despite acting in unity, I was still holding a grudge,” a member shared. “It occurred to me that service might be more pleasant if I would forgive some of those I serve with.”

Many of us have taken a turn standing on the NA soapbox in defense of what we believed was best for the Fellowship. We can forgive others for being irritatingly passionate because we’ve been that, too. Instead of keeping a record of each other’s worst moments, we can make a decision to focus on the good work they’re doing. We adjust our perspective to take the bigger picture into account.

None of us is *all* good or *all* bad. By practicing forgiveness, we allow ourselves and others to be human. Sure, we make mistakes, but our worst moments don’t need to define us. By practicing forgiveness, we can shift our focus and appreciate the strengths each of us brings to the table.

I choose to practice forgiveness today. I’ll revisit some old resentments, take positive action on any unresolved issues, and let go of any lingering bitterness. I will accept people as they are now.

Reliability and Reasonable Expectations

We make a commitment to our home group, and if we are absent for some reason, we will be missed.

—IP #2: *The Group*, “Home group”

When we were using, reliability was as rare as hen’s teeth. We showed up when it was convenient, and only if we were getting something out of it. We might have made it home for the holidays but stayed just long enough to get gifts that we could return for cash. We might reliably show up to work, but mostly to steal from the till or take our patients’ meds. The gratification of spending time with family or giving an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay was lost on us.

It didn’t take much cleantime to figure out this way of doing things wouldn’t serve us well in recovery. The idea that we could live clean and enjoy stable, happy lives inspired us. We understood that reliability would be an important part of becoming a responsible, productive member of society.

For many of us, becoming reliable starts with finding a home group, accepting our first commitment, and then doing our best—as one member put it—“to live up to the trust placed in me. My sponsor told me that reliability precedes trust. As suggested, I learned to show up and do what I said I’d do.” By keeping our word, we practiced the essence of reliability and built a foundation for integrity.

Our reliability makes us real assets as members of a home group. Beyond any specific duties we perform, home-group members steady the atmosphere of recovery. We think of some members as “fixtures” at certain meetings—the same people, often in the same seats, week after week—and, in time, we become them. “It’s okay to take us for granted—that’s what we’re here for,” one home-group member explained. “We’re like candles you keep on hand just in case. We’re here to produce some light if needed or to set the mood.”

I will be true to my word today. I will show up and do what’s expected of me at home, at work, in the community, and in meetings.

Humbly Asking for Help

We all go through times when we need help of one kind or another. Asking for help may be as principled and as difficult as anything we ever do.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Seven, “For Members”

Moving into our first apartment clean, learning how to pay bills on time, going to a funeral or a wedding for the first time in recovery, asking someone to sit with us while the craving to pick up passes—life on life’s terms presents us with opportunities to ask for help on a daily basis. Our old way of thinking—shaped by self-centeredness and denial—guards a myth that equates asking for help with weakness.

It takes a great deal of courage to push past the impulse to do all of this on our own. We cultivate humility as we surrender our excessive pride. We ask for and receive support from other members and find the courage to face new emotions and experiences. One member shared, “Today, I see that asking for help is our greatest source of strength.”

At times, life shows up and hits us square in the face. No matter how good a program we work, life still has its ups and downs. We all suffer losses. Success, at first so unfamiliar, can be challenging as well. And often we feel ill equipped to handle life on life’s terms alone. The good news is that we don’t have to.

The hardest part of getting help may be asking for it. We don’t feel worthy and may think of ourselves as a burden. We swallow our pride and turn to more experienced NA members for help. As awkward as that might be, our requests are typically met with graciousness. Having navigated many of life’s obstacles clean, they’re usually delighted to share their wisdom and offer support. The joys of helping another addict don’t end when we attain X number of years.

Learning how to be self-supporting does not mean that life’s challenges become a solo endeavor. By practicing humility, we learn what our limitations are, establish some healthy boundaries, and set out in new directions that develop our strengths.

Today I will challenge my old ways of thinking by asking someone about their experience and opening myself up to their support.

Sharing Hope Freely

We have a message of hope to carry. It's a gift and an obligation.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, "Connection to Others"

After coming to NA for a while, most of us eventually hear that question from family or friends: "How long do you have to keep going to those meetings?" Maybe we have even wondered the same thing ourselves. And then we're lucky enough to see a sponsee, right in the middle of working Step Two, open up to the idea of staying clean, just for today—for the rest of their life.

One of the first gifts most of us receive in NA is hope, and it's one that we continue to carry to newcomers even as other gifts pile up around us. NA promises only freedom from active addiction. For most of us, that freedom often makes it possible for us to achieve so much more—repaired relationships, self-esteem, employability, trust, the ability to love and be loved, financial security. When our lives, hearts, bank accounts, and bellies get fuller, we might find ourselves showing up to meetings a bit less regularly. In some cases, we might even feel like life is so good that we don't even *need* meetings.

We say it over and over: "We can only keep what we have by giving it away." The more regularly we share our experience with others, the more regularly we are reminded of the hope we found in NA. A member shared, "I need to tell lots of newcomers what worked for me when my ass was on fire so that when I start smelling smoke again, someone will be here to remind me how to put it out."

Our first dose of hope was about getting clean, and we saw many other hopes become reality as we stayed clean and worked the Steps. We owe it to ourselves and to NA to share our hope with other addicts. We share how we get through our difficulties and how we achieve our successes. We share not just so that they will gain some hope, but so that we will keep some, too.

To keep my hope fresh, I will keep sharing about how I'm living clean today. I share my hope freely with others, knowing that I always have somewhere to go when I need someone to share hope with me.

Flexibility through Life's Storms

The open-mindedness we practice in our recovery gives us the ability to be flexible when things change in ways we hadn't expected.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, "Getting Out of Our Own Way"

Trees are commonly associated with qualities like strength and resilience, qualities that can help us endure the difficulties of getting and staying clean. Living life on life's terms involves experiencing all sorts of weather patterns—plenty of sunshine and warmth, followed by patches of cold, rain, storms, and snow. Some of us work so hard to hold everything in our lives together, only to find ourselves having a complete breakdown when someone takes *our* seat at the meeting. If we take a lesson from trees, we'll see that the more rigid and inflexible we are, the more easily we can be shattered.

Palm trees might not strike us as especially strong. They are often associated with beaches and easy breezes—and do they even look all that sturdy compared to, say, an oak? However, those skinny, seemingly weak palms lay down firm root structures and, when a powerful storm comes, they are able to lean with the wind. The visible part of the tree above the surface is flexible and resilient, as strong roots secure it from beneath.

Our lives will become tumultuous from time to time. We have disagreements with coworkers or partners. People in public annoy us. We find our usual seat at our home group occupied and have to sit somewhere else. We can become rigid and defiant, refusing to bend. Or we can move toward open-mindedness, willing to give a little here and there as needed, so we don't snap when the pressure is on. When our roots are firmly secured in recovery, we tend to find the flexibility we need.

I cannot control the weather, but I can practice flexibility. I will plant myself firmly in the NA program, knowing that I can bounce back from any feelings that may come to pass.

Listening with an Open Mind and Heart

We learn to actively cultivate our listening skills, using our ears more than our mouths in conversation.

—*It Works*, Tradition Two, “Applying Spiritual Principles”

Being open-minded is a key spiritual principle of Tradition Two in which we invite a Higher Power to develop and guide our group’s conscience in decision making. One helpful step toward getting our minds open enough to participate in this process is to open our ears to each other. And, as the cliché goes, we’re not just *hearing* words (*blah, blah, blah, waiting for my turn to speak*) but *listening* to them. For that to happen in earnest, we need to take a break from talking, or thinking about what we’re going to say when it’s *finally* our turn.

A mistake we often make in relationships—and this easily applies to service in NA—is believing that being heard and getting our point across is the most important contribution we can make. There are times when we confuse listening with telling someone how much we understand and immediately sharing our own story of identification. And other times our evidence for listening is a hefty list of solutions to the challenges a member has just shared with us. Sometimes an addict just wants to be heard. Our sage advice can wait until it’s asked for.

When we actively listen in conversation or in a group discussion, we’re able to make more meaning of the topic, have more empathy, be more inclusive and curious. We tap into the conscience part of Tradition Two when we listen to—and absorb—the voices of our fellow members. Our perspective broadens, context deepens. At our most open, we can see things as others see them, maybe even clarifying our own viewpoints in the process. We can be influenced. An addict shared, “I feel much more at peace when I am listening and not trying so hard to be heard—and isn’t serenity what all this is about anyway?”

Today will be a day when I’m going to open my mind and my heart by opening my ears and not my mouth. Be quiet, brain, I’m listening!

DECEMBER

Unconditional Love and Sponsorship

I think that the most valuable lesson sponsorship gives me is the opportunity to practice unconditional love. It deepens my appreciation for what has been given to me.

—Sponsorship, Chapter 1, "The Twelfth Step in action"

It takes a lot of courage to ask someone to be your sponsor. It takes even more courage to *be* a sponsor, and more patience with ourselves and our sponsees as well. Whether we admit it or not, some of us avoid newcomers because we see ourselves in them. We know we drive ourselves nuts, so how can we deal with more than one of us? Also, what happens if we mess them up worse? And years later, when we have time and a reasonable amount of experience, someone we respect asks for our guidance through the Steps. Those feelings of fear resurface. *What if I'm not good enough?*

Our sponsor's steadfast support plays a huge role in our recovery, especially when we are the knuckleheads we can sometimes be. At times, we are also aware that our sponsor is just another human being—an addict with character defects like ours, who can offend us or come up short. The mutual love, respect, and acceptance that flow back and forth within that relationship are instructive in our decision to sponsor others.

"Yes, of course, I'm so honored you asked." And we won't do it perfectly. For some of us, even with experience, our patience might wear thin when a sponsee doesn't take our suggestions. We have to confront our powerlessness when someone we sponsor relapses or acts out. There are times when our own lives are unmanageable and we have to dig deep to be able to show our sponsees the unconditional love they need.

Sometimes we make mistakes. But just as in the relationship with our own sponsor, we make it work because we need each other to stay clean. Or, we can't make it work. Sometimes going our separate ways is itself an act of love.

Today I will give back some of the unconditional love I received—to a sponsee, my sponsor, or any addict who needs it.

Accepting Reality

The fantasy world that we lived in during active addiction fades as we begin to see and accept life as it is.

—IP #10, *Working Step Four in Narcotics Anonymous*, “General guidelines”

It took a lot of effort to create the alternate reality we lived in for so long. We invested in false perceptions and delusions about our lives and went to great lengths to maintain them. We became isolated from everyone and everything outside our self-made prisons.

As one addict put it, “My world had become so small. To live with that fact, I convinced myself that nothing outside my little sphere was relevant.” In truth, we were only kidding ourselves. Denial and dishonesty protected us from seeing the harm we were causing. Once we raised the curtain of self-deception, we recognized the lies we’d been telling ourselves.

In Step One, we discovered many truths, but seeing the truth doesn’t always lead to instant acceptance. It takes time to accept our addiction and life the way it really is. As one member said, “I was a legend in my own mind, and I didn’t want to let that go.”

By working Steps Four and Five, we identify the exact nature of our wrongs—as well as what’s exactly right with us. And as we stay clean, the fantasy world fades, and we see ourselves and our lives more clearly. As we let go of the make-believe world we created, our real world expands. We don’t have to cover up the shame and guilt created in active addiction with more “plausible but untrue reasons for our behavior.” Reality becomes a relief.

I will be honest with myself and practice living in the moment. I’ll let go of my unrealistic fantasies and delusions so I can gratefully accept all that this life has to offer today.

The Discipline to (Sometimes) Say No

Discipline is not a practice that comes naturally to most addicts, and the need to say “no” to ourselves can be quite a challenge.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Seven, “For Members”

The freedom we find when we stop using drugs is incredible. We regain so much in terms of the time, energy, and other resources that were previously devoted to sustaining our addiction. Saying “no” to our disease frees us up to say “yes” to things we’d been missing out on. As we revel in our newfound ability to say “yes” to ourselves, some of us find ourselves looking for relief from other behaviors. “Getting clean saved my life, but I gained so much weight my first year clean that I got stretch marks!” Another member shared, “The money I’d been spending on drugs was diverted to buying crap I didn’t need. I tried to fix myself with retail therapy—but I was still unhappy.”

Discipline can sometimes feel like a punishment—like we’re denying ourselves things we really enjoy. If we’re free, why do we have to say “no” to ourselves? Our freedom has its limits, as do our resources. Discipline helps us shift our thinking. Instead of focusing on what we deny ourselves—that extra piece of cake or the quick fix of an online purchase—we think about what we gain by using our resources wisely and keep our eyes on the financial security and peace of mind we’re striving for.

Discipline is the willingness to say “no” to things that feel good in the moment but cost us later. We do so as a Fellowship when we say “no” to money from outside NA—and “yes” to our ability to make our own choices as a Fellowship, remaining free from the influence of outside entities. In our personal recovery, we say “no” to momentary impulses for the sake of our longer-term peace of mind. Would we rather have a little bit of fleeting comfort right now or a deeper, lasting sense of comfort and security over time? The choice is ours.

I can’t say “yes” to everything—I will reserve my “yes” for what’s truly important to me today.

Vulnerability Builds Bonds

Honest self-assessment is essential to recovery, but it is only possible if we are vulnerable enough to let someone in.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Anonymity”

Practicing vulnerability runs counter to our “terminally hip and fatally cool” self-image. Our instincts still tell us to hide any hint of frailty for fear that others will take advantage of us. It takes a conscious decision to drop the defenses that once kept us safe. We choose to share our pain with others, taking risks in defiance of diseased thinking and deeply rooted behavior.

Our willingness to trust the process increases over time. We may confide some of our darkest secrets to new friends in recovery even before we write an inventory. We notice that practicing vulnerability brings us closer to others.

Although legend has it that a member once shared their inventory with a taxi driver, we’d be hard-pressed to find someone who unloaded their Fifth Step on someone besides their sponsor. By the time we get to Step Five, we’ve grown to rely on our sponsor for good guidance and have learned to trust that what we share will be held in confidence. Perhaps most importantly, our sponsors don’t judge us or condemn our behavior—we do enough of that ourselves. Rather, sponsors try to help us work through our shame and embarrassment and move into acceptance.

We reflect on how we’ve opened up over time and realize the benefits of practicing vulnerability. Experience emboldens us to meet our fears head-on. We’re free to be real and raw and vulnerable in meetings. We come to realize the walls we built to keep us safe kept us imprisoned. We aspire to build our relationships on a foundation of trust, honesty, and openness.

When we share from our hearts, others meet us there. Our sponsees, friends, and partners open up to us, and the value of vulnerability is reinforced. Experience confirms that we can feel vulnerable without shutting down. As one addict put it, “Vulnerability is like a super-strength adhesive. It bonds us together like nothing else.”

I will have the courage to be vulnerable today. I will share my true thoughts and feelings, letting those who love me know all of me.

Uncomplicated Faith

When we find ourselves obsessed with a complication in our lives, we will do well to sharply remind ourselves of all that is going right.

—*Just for Today*, “Making mountains into molehills,” January 19

Once we have been in recovery for a while, we discover that unmanageability can be caused by things other than the use of drugs. Some difficulties we face are the result of factors other than our disease. This can be especially frustrating after we put so much work into gaining freedom from our disease: developing the ability to make and keep plans, to set and achieve goals for ourselves. We were stuck in ruts for so long, and finally we are going somewhere!

And then complications arise. Someone cancels on us at the last minute. The bus is late. Money we were counting on doesn’t come through on time. External complications are a fact of life, and they sometimes make our lives more difficult to manage. For people who are well versed in unmanageability, our tolerance for complications not of our own making can be surprisingly low sometimes. Acceptance and faith often go hand in hand, especially in these moments.

One real danger to our practice of faith comes when we obsess over complications. Rather than simply addressing an issue head-on, we are prone to begin thinking about it. And keep thinking about it—about precisely how much the complication is interfering with *our* plans. Self-centered obsession is familiar territory for us; what better place for us to go when things aren’t going our way? A member shared, “I can have 99 things going right for me, but all I can think about is the one thing that isn’t.”

Sharing with other addicts can help us move from obsession back to faith. When our sponsor suggests a gratitude list, it’s not about pretending that difficulties or hardships don’t exist—it’s about getting a better perspective. Taking a more objective look at our lives helps us reconnect with faith. Yes, something is going wrong. But in many other areas, our lives are going better than we ever could have managed on our own. We will be okay. In fact, we already are.

When something goes wrong, I don’t have to pretend that I’m happy about it. I do, however, need to make sure I’m not giving it more attention than it deserves, especially when compared to all that’s going right.

Understanding without Conditions

Sometimes we come face-to-face with life's most difficult circumstances. Our relationships with our sponsor and sponsees can offer the support and understanding we need to keep moving forward.

—*Sponsorship*, Chapter 4, "Developing and sustaining the sponsorship relationship"

Life's realities, inevitabilities, and its bewildering tragedies often challenge our recovery. To survive such situations, we rely on our relationships with other recovering addicts. We are told: "We never have to use again. No matter what." We see vast evidence of that truth in our experiences and through the stories of other members.

When we read a quotation like the one above and contemplate how it applies to us, it's likely we'll think about the people we've helped and who've helped us when we've had terrible things happen to us. (Yes, often they are sponsors and sponsees, but just as often they've been regular ol' NA members.) Other addicts have understood and stood by us. Many have experienced similar circumstances or can introduce us to someone in NA who has.

But what about when we've created those situations, when we've committed serious crimes that result in serious consequences, when we've been the victimizer instead of the one who's been hurt? Can we stay clean through that? Are we still worthy of the support and understanding of our fellow NA members?

"No matter what."

Though we don't condone each other's every action, practicing understanding is not conditional, and we are worthy of it—no matter what. Understanding means identifying with each other and helping each other through seemingly unlivable times, as well as understanding that despite our negative or harmful behaviors we are all still addicts in need of empathy. Understanding is a critical expression of our primary purpose of carrying the message to every addict—in meetings, at home, on the streets, and in jails and institutions. With that generosity of spirit—plus some forgiveness and tolerance—moving forward and healing is possible for all of us.

Just as I have been shown understanding from those in my circle during the worst of times, I will commit to showing up for others, no matter what their particular circumstances may be.

Keeping Our Minds Open to Learning

Staying open-minded and teachable about our basic principles allows our understanding to deepen and mature.

—*Guiding Principles*, Introduction, “In This Book”

Many of us go through a phase in early recovery in which we experience what some call “Peter Pan syndrome.” Like the fictional character who refuses to grow up, some of us set out to have the happy childhood that addiction stole from us. Making up for lost time may be a natural response to the new freedom we enjoy. The laughter and fun we share with other members is a big part of what keeps us coming back at any stage of recovery. But like so many things, we can take Peter’s approach too far, refusing to act responsibly or to mature in our recovery.

As we accumulate both age and cleantime, it can be a shock to realize that new members have us in mind when they refer to “our predecessors.” A member shared, “I stick by my definition of ‘oldtimer’ as anyone who’s clean at least five years longer than me. At some point, I noticed that I fit that description for others and that they looked to me for mentorship. I felt the need to know more and do better, so I started a Traditions study to help me live up to the predecessor label.”

Also like Peter Pan, some of us might resist the idea of maturing, or we may reject the idea of pursuing a deeper understanding of our principles because we think it sounds, well, dull. Either stance might be an excuse for a closed mind-set. Likewise, “this is the way we’ve always done it,” doesn’t exactly invite discussion or allow for the exploration of varying perspectives.

Remaining teachable and open-minded, on the other hand, allows us to consider different perspectives through reading, discussion, and contemplation. With our minds open to learning more about our guiding principles, we often find new applications in our lives in and out of NA, as well as for our groups and in service. A member shared, “Before I really understood them, I viewed the Traditions as a rigid set of rules. I didn’t grasp that by protecting us from our worst impulses, they create the conditions for creativity and freedom in service to NA.”

I will remain teachable, keeping my mind open to understanding our Traditions on a deeper level. As I mature in recovery, I will consider my responsibility to mentor others.

Autonomy for Ourselves and for Others

Allowing our partners and ourselves to experience personal autonomy means we can grow and change at our own pace . . .

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Romantic Relationships”

Being a member of NA gives us plenty of chances to learn about relationships. For most of us, that starts with a sponsor and a home group, both of which offer lessons about autonomy. Every sponsor in NA, after all, eventually gets the opportunity to tell a sponsee, “Well, you’re going to do what you’re going to do, so...” Whether that comes from a place of loving acceptance or frustrated sarcasm—or a mix of both—our sponsors affirm that we are responsible for our own recovery. (And our consequences.) When we’re ready, we’ll change. And, as we often say, that might mean when we’ve had enough pain, we’ll change.

The same is true in our groups. We offer one another experience, strength, and hope; the choice of whether to accept what is offered belongs to each of us as individuals. “Honestly, I was getting really tired of a home-group member who kept sharing about the same thing all the time,” a member shared. “I got tired of being annoyed, so I just let it go and gave them space. Months later, they had a breakthrough and began to change. Today, we’re very close. I was so glad I didn’t have to wait for *their* breakthrough in order to feel better myself!”

The ability to keep our own pace and allow others to keep theirs is valuable in all of our relationships, including romantic ones. Whether or not our spouses or significant others are in recovery, a sign of an honest relationship is not being in 100 percent agreement on everything. It makes sense to experience discomfort in our relationships when we have differences of opinion, differing values, or different levels of willingness to practice principles. Practicing autonomy means knowing what we need to hold on to and what we need to let go of. If the answer to that isn’t obvious, we can look to our group and our sponsor for guidance.

I will practice autonomy by taking responsibility for my own life and recovery and allowing others the space to do the same.

If It's Not Practical, It's Not Spiritual

Our part . . . is to do the very best we can each day, showing up for life and doing what's put in front of us. . . . We promise to do the best we can—not to fake it, not to pretend to be superhuman, but simply to do the footwork of recovery.

—*Just for Today*, “The recovery partnership,” February 18

“If it's not practical, it's not spiritual.” Many of us have heard this before, but what does this mean exactly?

For starters, we can focus on living *just for today* as a practical matter. Instead of dwelling on regrets about the past and fears of what's ahead, we focus on what's right in front of us. As one member put it, “I concentrate on *this* day, and it frees me up to participate in my own life and recovery.” We may plot our days in a particular direction, but we trust a loving power greater than ourselves with the outcome. Another member shared this strategy: “I ask myself, ‘Where are my feet?’ And then proceed to move one of them in front of the other.”

We do our best. (How's that for practical?!) We follow through on what we can handle in the here and now, and shake off the impulse to achieve perfection. We learn our limits and work within them. Satisfaction comes from putting forth our best effort, even when we fall short of our goals. “To quiet my inner critic, I often need to reassure myself that I've done my best,” one member shared. Another added: “When I feel good about what I'm doing, it's easier to dismiss other people's opinions of me.”

Staying grounded with some practical, daily footwork improves our lives. “I learned everything I need to know about how to stay clean in my first 30 days around here. You people told me, ‘Go to lots of meetings and don't take anything in between.’ It sounded simple enough. ‘If you don't pick up, you can't get high.’ I thought these people were geniuses. ‘Read the book. Get a sponsor. Work the Steps.’ I followed this advice in the beginning, and it kept me clean. I follow this advice now because it keeps me in the solution.”

I will do my best today. I will do the footwork and accept that it's enough and that I'm enough.

A Focus on *We* Brings Out the Best in *Me*

Tradition One asks us to shift our perspective. For the first time, “we” comes before “me.”

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, “For Members”

Each and every addict who comes to NA and hears a message is able to do so only as the direct result of members serving NA. Plenty of NA literature discusses the paradox of keeping what we have by giving it away, and our Traditions outline a practical guide for doing so. As this Tradition One quotation indicates, it starts by thinking about the good of the group before thinking of ourselves.

As addicts, putting anything ahead of ourselves is a foreign concept. Some of the first things we do in NA are perfect practice for this. “In my first year, I never wanted to share,” one member wrote. “A home-group member told me that I had to start opening my mouth or I would be stealing. I thought I had nothing to offer, but when I shared, I realized it wasn’t about me.” Being part of NA by sharing or taking service commitments helps us, but it’s not just for us—when we share in a meeting, when we show up early to set up chairs, we are actively participating in the common welfare of NA.

The same holds true as we gain cleantime. One member shared, “When I had a few years clean, I told my sponsor that all the meetings I had been going to were pretty bad lately. My sponsor suggested I start focusing on what I was bringing to the meeting instead of what I was getting out of it . . . and wouldn’t you know, suddenly I was going to a lot of good meetings!”

Contributing to our common welfare lets us “be the we.” We focus on giving instead of getting—at the group level and beyond—and we find that the way we experience recovery gets better and better.

Shifting the focus from “me” to “we” doesn’t mean disappearing from the picture. I will bring the best of me to NA so that WE will all do much better as a result.

Creative Action Can Be an Inside Job

Creative action is not a mysterious procedure, although it is an inside job in rebuilding or reintegrating our disordered and fractured personalities.

—IP #5: *Another Look*, “Addiction is not a way of life.”

Active addiction is a mess—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual disorder in the flesh. There isn’t enough room on this page to list what we lose or risk losing while we’re using: our health and well-being, our loved ones, our freedom, our minds, and . . . our keys! We’ve all been there.

We also lose ourselves. Which selves? Exactly. Which, indeed. In the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, we often hear members say, “Out there, I was a chameleon.” While we were using, we changed our behavior, even our personalities—from situation to situation—to meet our self-centered ends, to survive. That’s some masterful creativity for sure.

As with all of our defects, if we flip the coin over, there’s an asset on the other side. We can be as curious and adaptable as we are manipulative and self-seeking. By the same token, just as we used our creativity to survive, we can rely on it now to rebuild our lives from the inside.

When we’re clean, our creative efforts aren’t squandered away on hiding who we are. We don’t have to waste energy developing new strategies to get what we want at the cost of our sanity and everything else we stand to lose. Instead, we take a creative approach to our program of recovery and change it up when we need a reboot.

In working Steps, we learn who we are, who we’re not, and who we want to be. Through sharing and listening to other members, we can figure out what’s broken in us, which parts can realistically be glued back together, and which can be tossed in the bin. As a result, we learn how to express who we are with integrity. We get to be our true selves in relationships with others—and in the ways we dig into work, our interests, and service. Some of us even find creative ways to keep track of those bloody keys!

Today I will look at what’s messy or broken inside me and use my imagination to identify what I could do to create some order and serenity in this brain of mine!

Principles and Purpose Are Portable

Being able to focus on a primary purpose and work creatively toward it is so much part of our way of life that we may not realize how valued that is in the world at large.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Bridging Two Worlds: Relationships Outside NA”

The idea that what we learn in recovery applies outside NA is not revolutionary or even surprising. There is plenty to be said about how the things we do in NA—our tools, our principles, our primary orientation toward helping others—transfer easily to other contexts and is often appreciated. We have Steps that guide us, in essence, to clear the way so we can be of service to others. The principles within the Traditions challenge us to work with integrity, goodwill, and discernment in groups and within structures. Convening around a primary purpose helps us to stay oriented and in alignment with each other. The concept of “principles before personalities” guides us through conflict when it inevitably arises.

Each of us learns these transferable skills, embodying qualities that can support many different types of structures: a family, a business, a community or faith organization, even a one-on-one relationship, romantic or otherwise. Our value as members of NA extends to our value outside. Being oriented toward generosity, kindness, responsibility, perseverance, and, of course, gratitude in all our affairs enriches our lives and touches others’ lives. Some people outside NA may know we’re recovering from addiction, but others do not. Either way, what they often see is a person who is able to act with love rather than fear, can handle adversity, and is willing to help others when tragedy strikes.

As great as the above description sounds—and as true as it often is—none of this is possible without actually practicing the principles of NA and using the tools of our program. As we often declare in meetings, “It works if you work it.” But it doesn’t when we don’t. Working the Steps and Traditions helps prepare us to serve beyond NA. And we know that when we make mistakes, in NA and outside of it, we always have each other’s experience, strength, and hope to rely on to help us get back on course.

How am I applying what I’ve been learning in NA to other parts of my life, and what can I do today to further that purpose?

Individuality and Our Spiritual Awakenings

The idea of a spiritual awakening takes many different forms in the different personalities that we find in the Fellowship.

—Basic Text, Chapter 4, “Step Twelve”

Step Twelve speaks of the spiritual awakening we have as a result of working the Steps. By the time most of us begin our work on Step Twelve, we typically have had any number of awakenings of a spiritual nature. Some awakenings might seem small, like recognizing an asset we’ve never noticed when we write our Step Four inventory. Other awakenings are more profound, like realizing how a handful of behavior patterns all trace back to a particular character defect we are just now coming to understand. As long as we keep moving through the Steps, we will continue learning about ourselves.

The Basic Text mentions that we differ in degree of sickness and rate of recovery, so it stands to reason that the types of awakenings each of us needs may be quite different, as well. We all have our own stories, including how we got here and where we are going. Hearing others share about their awakenings can be inspiring and instructive, but having our own experiences—even if they differ from what we hear others share—is what really matters. If we wait to have the same experience we hear others share, we may be disappointed. Worse yet, we may miss what’s happening in our own heart and spirit if we look only for what others have described to us, rather than seeing what we see for ourselves.

The prospect of having a spiritual awakening that is truly our own can be both awe-inspiring and intimidating. While our awakenings may not be identical to anyone else’s, the better we get to know the truth of our own experiences, the better we will be able to recognize the truth shared with us by fellow addicts. We are each on our own journey, but much of the terrain we cover is the same.

The awakenings we experience in the Steps may be different, but the message we carry is the same. I will honor the truth of my own awakenings as well as those shared by fellow NA members.

14 DECEMBER

Imperfection, Humanity, and Humility

Beyond our addiction, we are human beings: members of society who have gifts and flaws like everyone else.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Friendship”

We are recovering addicts with the disease of addiction. This is not news.

We have pasts (do we ever!), the present (especially when we can be in it), and futures (hopefully). We have attractions, virtues, and abilities, and yet we have limitations, vices, and liabilities. We do good in the world—sometimes a lot of it. We also make mistakes—sometimes horrendous ones.

We’ve been shaped by our cultures, societies, and environments. We have religious beliefs or nonreligious ones. We have relationships, jobs, interests, causes, ailments. We have multiples of any and all of these. None of these elements completely defines us. Instead, they make us human.

As addicts, we tend to focus more on what’s wrong with us than what’s right. But we are no more flawed than other people, even nonaddicts. We are not pathological, nor are we deserving of stigma because of our addiction.

Being an addict is only one aspect of our humanity. Through working the Twelve Steps, we learn that the story of our drug use isn’t as important as the one we create in our recovery. We have the opportunity to identify our gifts as well as our flaws, and we come to understand that our flaws do not negate those gifts. This concept is the core of humility.

Some of us really grapple with perfectionism as one of our character defects. But we are all imperfect because we are human. Recovery won’t make us perfect because perfection doesn’t exist. It can, however, help us humbly embrace our humanity.

Today I will honestly assess where I fall short and accept that I’m imperfect, like everybody else. My aim is to lead with my assets—with humility.

Perseverance and the First Step

The process of recovery isn't easy. It takes great courage and perseverance to continue in recovery day after day.

—It Works, Step One

The gift of desperation gets many of us through the door and propels us into the footwork of early recovery. If we're very lucky, we might experience a bit of elation and optimism sometimes referred to as a "pink cloud" in the first weeks of recovery. Enjoy it while it lasts!

In time, the challenges of life in recovery present themselves. Some of us have faced a lifetime of difficulties so we're no strangers to trouble. The difficulties we face in recovery have a different feel to them, however. As one member described it: "I could see a light at the end of the tunnel and I knew it wasn't a train coming the other way." Inspired by that light—our faith that our efforts will pay off—we persevere by putting one foot in front of the other.

A foundation in recovery helps us to endure life's difficulties. Even with some time clean, our choices don't always pan out. Working a program doesn't make us immune from life's struggles: Financial problems, relationship trouble, health concerns, and housing instability plague clean addicts, too. We try to be honest and reflective, owning our part in the problems that come our way.

The disease may rear its ugly head during tough times. We might be drawn to act out in new ways, reaching outside of ourselves to soothe the angst within. Our character defects sometimes put on new disguises and find different hiding places. We hit new lows clean.

The good news is that our tolerance for spiritual or emotional pain lessens over time, so we're quicker to get into the solution. We know the Twelve Steps are a reliable source of relief. We return to the First Step again and again and surrender in different areas of our lives. It takes guts to face the various manifestations of our disease. We summon the necessary courage and persist.

I will be steadfast in my recovery and have the courage to look at where the disease is showing up today. Where do I need to apply Step One in my life now?

Embracing the Spirit of Generosity

Giving generously of ourselves, especially when we are in pain, is a path through some of our sorrow and confusion.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Death, Dying, and Living with Grief”

The connection between generosity and pain may not seem obvious right away. However, early recovery is a good example of how giving of ourselves can help us endure pain and discomfort. When we first get clean, some of us find we’re grieving many losses: our self-respect, our sense of self, the lifestyle and image that defined us, our relationship with drugs, and people we used with. Some of us come to NA mourning the loss of friends or family members to the disease. No one arrives to NA pain-free, but all of us who stay find some relief—usually by our active participation in NA.

“I hardly knew what to do with myself when I got clean,” one member shared. “I felt like an exposed nerve. Before and after meetings, I’d help with anything that needed to be done—handing out reading cards, taking out the trash, stacking chairs. Helping the trusted servants made me feel better.”

Generosity gets us out of ourselves. We stop focusing on our every thought and emotion and instead turn our attention to those around us. Even when we’re in pain or discomfort, generosity helps us do something good when we don’t know what else to do. Giving as a diversion from desperation is not necessarily the whole solution. Postponing feelings doesn’t make them go away, but a brief respite can renew our energy or refresh our thinking so that we can apply other solutions as well. Perhaps most importantly, in helping others, we can find the willingness to accept help. Life is difficult, but we are not alone—we have each other.

Grief, pain, hardship, and sorrow are all natural parts of life. To find my way through difficulties, I will embrace the spirit of generosity I find in NA. I will help others and allow them to help me.

Patience and Commitment to the Process

Having patience for discussion, or waiting until the next meeting before moving forward with a decision, saves the energy and goodwill lost when hasty actions have consequences.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Two, “For Groups”

The work we do in NA service is important. When we serve well, more addicts will have the chance to hear our message and find recovery. We make a huge difference in the lives of addicts. Our sense of urgency for helping addicts can go a long way in helping us to stay motivated to serve well. We strive to be efficient, thorough, and creative in our efforts. Lives are on the line, after all.

In our efforts to be expedient, we run the risk of making mistakes. Adhering to our Traditions, local laws, and good old-fashioned common sense may require careful planning, consideration, and, sometimes, lengthy discussion. Seemingly endless debates can put our “principles before personalities” muscles to the test. The more complicated things get, the more difficult it is to communicate well.

We want answers and solutions as soon as possible. If an idea requires more time and thought than we want to give, we either dismiss it out of hand or throw caution to the wind and just do it. In both cases, we are doing ourselves—and NA—a disservice. Scrapping a good idea we don’t want to think through can mean missing out on a chance to reach more addicts. Putting a half-baked idea into action can lead to unexpected complications or consequences.

Patience is more than simply waiting things out; it’s making the commitment to be present through the process. When we devote time and mental energy to challenging discussions—even when they’re mind-numbingly tedious—we honor ourselves, our fellow trusted servants, and the addicts yet to hear our message.

Patience is more than just waiting for something to be done. In my service, I will commit to being present for the process.

The Courage to Hope

When we can separate hope from wishing or expectation, it stops feeling like such a setup.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Living Our Principles”

In the final weekend of the football season, it’s common to hear fans utter a familiar refrain: “It’s the hope that kills you.” Maybe it’s smart to restrain our optimism if winning the championship has been elusive year after year. Football fans know that a bad decision, a lousy play, or rotten luck will crush hopes.

In life, as in football, it might seem that we dare to dream at our peril. Few of us get through life without enduring a heartbreak or two. There may be times when we swear off hope, effectively putting the kibosh on our aspirations. But that’s no way to live. A broken heart has loved, after all.

Yes, hope can lead to disappointment, but it can also usher us to new heights. “Hope is what gets me going in the right direction. It gives me a sense that I can do something to realize my dreams,” one member wrote. “Hope motivates me to persevere, to put in the effort. Hoping but not doing the work? That’s just making a wish.”

Of course, we can move in the right direction and still get caught offside. Our projections about what it takes to achieve a dream aren’t always accurate. Sometimes we get what we’d worked and prayed for only to discover that we were left wanting. Recovery can help us through all of that. We learn to survive our expectations and the emotions attached to them, not do without them. We allow ourselves to feel hope and also to tolerate disappointment or redirection.

Hope is daring to dream, doing the footwork, and landing on our feet. No matter how it pans out, we are stronger, more resilient, even more hopeful for having taken those risks.

Recovery gives me the courage to hope. I can take action and exert influence on the world around me. If things don’t work out as I’d hoped—and if my team loses again—I will cope.

Living with Our Conscience

In the end, we are the ones who must live with our conscience. In order to do so comfortably, we must decide what is, and what is not, morally acceptable in our lives.

—*It Works*, Step Ten

There's some irony in the fact that self-centeredness can make it difficult to stay in our own lane. In some cases, we disregard our own principles to give all our attention to what others think of us. Other times, we overlook our own behavior and focus instead on how other people fail to live up to our standards. Daily inventories help us focus on our own actions and motivations. We often find more clarity about our values and, as a result, the voice of our conscience becomes stronger and clearer. Whether or not we consider our own morals in making decisions, our actions place our principles out in the open for all to see.

Many of us come to NA with some baggage around the word *moral*. Much of what we know about morals and morality comes from family, society, or religion, and may not ring true for us. Maybe we misunderstood what we were taught, or it was communicated poorly. Maybe our values truly differ. In any case, getting to know ourselves better through Steps Four and Five helps many of us realign our own moral compass. We continue that work through a regular inventory in Step Ten. We learn to tap into our own inner wisdom and allow our conscience to guide our actions.

Where once our differing moral values may have led us to be defiant or judgmental, recovery allows us the courage and confidence to live according to the values that ring true for us. We might not always know the right thing to do, but as one member shared, "When I honestly check in with myself, I can at least figure out what the wrong thing is so I can *not* do that." Along with the guidance of our sponsor and our Higher Power, regular inventory helps us continually improve on our ability to live by our conscience.

Daily inventory can be a form of conscious contact with my own conscience. I will work to maintain that connection today.

Willingness to Serve

We go from simply showing up and reporting for duty each day to a willingness to serve the greater good in the best way we can.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Creative Action of the Spirit”

A lot of us describe ourselves as having been spiritually asleep, bankrupt, or even dead before coming to NA. Some of us find immediate relief when we hear NA described as a spiritual program. We may not be fully willing to let go and dive into a new spiritual journey—or continue the one that we had been on before our addiction darkened the path—but the spark is there. Others of us do not take comfort in NA being a spiritual program. We may not know what the word “spiritual” means, especially as it relates to “religious” or “not religious.” It may not feel authentic to describe ourselves as being on a spiritual path or even interested in pursuing one.

No matter what our beliefs are, or how open-minded we are to challenging them, we’re all willing—to some degree—to show up for ourselves. At the start, we report for recovery duty because we’re following suggestions made by other members and because it’s making us better: meetings, Steps, sponsorship, a service commitment or two. We build a support system in NA, and we work on developing a relationship with a Higher Power. Our understanding of spiritual principles—and how we’re already applying them to our recovery—expands.

Our willingness becomes more expansive, too. We continue to show up for our own healing and because we’ve made commitments. But our motivation to serve broadens when we follow suggestions to do so. A desire to contribute to NA and help other addicts slowly blooms within us, and we express it through service. This progress includes sharing about our awakening to the spiritual aspects of NA and our budding spiritual life.

Most of us become willing to let go of our ambivalent or negative preconceived feelings and ideas about spirituality. Though we don’t fully understand our transformation, many of us eventually can describe ourselves as spiritually awake, enriched, or alive—in no small part because of our willingness to serve.

I’m willing to show up for my own well-being. Am I also willing to do that for the greater good of NA? How will I demonstrate that today?

Honesty, Clarity, and Tradition Ten

As our thinking becomes clearer, our ability to be honest increases.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Ten, Opening Reflection

We think an awful lot when we're newly clean, and many of those thoughts are indeed awful. The idea that we'd give voice to what's going on in our heads is frightening for many of us. What will people think? Better to say what we believe others will want to hear—doesn't matter if it's true. Others of us have no filter and we spew whatever opinion we have at the moment—doesn't matter if we really believe it. Clarity in thought, word, and deed is generally not the place we're operating from. When our connection to reality isn't exactly strong, dishonesty comes naturally. Thankfully, we've come to the right place to get some clarity.

We are better able to be honest once we gain a better understanding of what's true. The Steps help us sort out what we did versus who we are. They give us valuable perspectives on our experience, so we're better able to understand it and articulate it. Our story changes because our relationship to the truth changes. We lie less because we understand more. We speak as ourselves, not for other addicts and not for NA. Some begin their share with "I'm not here representing NA. The program is in the book. This is my experience, including how I work the program in the book."

A clearer understanding of the outside issues referred to in Tradition Ten helps us stick to sharing more clearly. Although stirring controversy may be quite appealing to many of us, we try to put our common welfare first. When we're honest with ourselves, we can discern what's relevant, how to navigate choppy waters, and what may not be recovery material. The clarity we gain in NA includes the fact that as individuals we can (and do) have plenty of opinions about outside issues—and we may need to share about how they affect our recovery. We also come to understand that NA doesn't share our opinions on outside issues because, unlike us, it doesn't have any.

I'm willing to be more honest today than I was yesterday. That starts with gaining clarity about what's actually true for me and deciding what part of that is helpful to share.

Rediscovering and Redefining Joy

As addicts, we know the pain of addiction but we also know the joy of recovery we have found in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

—Basic Text, Preface to the First Edition

Many of us related very well the first time we heard the line, “We could not live and enjoy life as other people do.” Enjoyment and joy become rare when we’re caught up in the disease. “Addiction was like putting tons of salt on all my food,” an addict shared. “Quitting salt makes the food seem bland for a while . . . but then I can start to taste the actual flavors. Early on in recovery, I thought everything was boring and dull—but it turns out, it was just me!”

Being in recovery and working a program allows us to rediscover or redefine joy for ourselves. “My home-group members go bowling together nearly every week,” a member shared. “I think bowling is just about the lamest possible activity . . . and yet I won’t miss it for the world. We bowl badly, make a big ruckus, and laugh nonstop.” We experience life in a new way, and different life experiences shape our perspectives on joy.

Developing a taste for the more subtle flavors life has to offer takes time. We learn a lot by listening to other members. Joy is contagious. A member shared, “A home-group member who is a parent always shares so seriously about silly things like potty training, then laughs about it. I don’t even like kids, but those stories make me laugh, too. It’s helping me not take myself too seriously.”

The Steps offer a path out of self-centeredness toward contentment. *It Works: How and Why* describes it this way: “We’ve begun to see that God’s will for us is the ability to live with dignity, to love ourselves and others, to laugh, and to find great joy and beauty in our surroundings.” Getting to this place—living and enjoying life “as other people do”—takes a little bit of patience and the willingness not to take ourselves seriously all the time.

Life is good when I let it be. I will find something to laugh at today—even if it’s just myself!

Anonymity Gives Us All a Place to Recover

When we treat a member as an icon rather than as another addict seeking recovery, we deprive them of the opportunity to experience the recovery they may desperately need.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Anonymity”

The principle of anonymity is meant to guarantee all of us a place to recover from our addiction today. Though the symptoms of our disease may not be as acute at a given moment, we don’t stop needing to participate in our recovery. NA is meant to be free of status or hierarchies that can separate us from one another—or from our connection to our recovery.

But we don’t practice anonymity perfectly. We can put our fellow members on various pedestals: wise oldtimer, circuit speaker, service position election winner, sponsor extraordinaire, the one with the perfect relationship or family or money or status outside of NA. Those of us who are subjected to the pedestal may end up sacrificing our needs because we feel like we shouldn’t have them anymore. No thoughts of using or acting out on defects! No complacency! Gratitude and service only! We have to maintain the aura of perfection and champion NA at every turn. We don’t dare disappoint, so we don’t share our pain and doubt. We end up with secrets, and that puts us at risk.

And, honestly, sometimes we give people more credit than they deserve. Cleantime doesn’t necessarily equal recovery. Some of us end up believing our own hype and think the rules don’t apply. We use our status as a shield or even a bludgeon. But we must resist standing by, perhaps waiting for that huge ego to be brought down a peg. We’ve watched our fellow members tumble down from their pedestals. Some have lost their lives in that fall.

Sometimes we need to get over ourselves! We don’t have to participate in constructing and maintaining our pedestals—or anyone else’s. No matter who we are or who others think we are, we need willingness to share honestly, courage to call each other out, and open-mindedness when someone does. We can share pride in our successes, while staying connected to where we came from. We need NA, even when we experience life’s gifts, prosperity, and luck.

No matter what, I’ll remember that I need the message and the group. And I’ll make space to support any addict, no matter who I think they are or should be.

Interdependence Means We're Better Together

Recovery doesn't happen in a vacuum. We need one another.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 5: Relationships

Many meetings start with some readings from our Basic Text. They provide the nuts and bolts of the NA program: who, what, how, why, and other staples. As newcomers, we may find it heartening to hear that we're the most important people in the rooms. As we stay clean, we may notice the newcomer's significance—according to “What Is the NA Program?”—stems from what having new members in the room does for the rest of us: “because we can only keep what we have by giving it away.” This gem of a line from our Basic Text captures our interdependence as members of NA. We rely on each other, and our mutual needs fit like hand in glove.

We all have a lot to learn, and not just at the start of recovery. Surrender and humility keep us teachable. We can take comfort in the fact that others have faced the same steep learning curve, stayed clean, and have experiences they're willing to share. The addict who suffers—new or otherwise—invigorates our purpose and reinforces the bonds of interdependence. We all get a turn in the barrel, and asking for help is our greatest strength. Other days bring a chance to serve; we get to articulate what worked for us and fortify our ties.

We need each other—for the whole of our recovery—and our interdependence makes us better together. One member compared the strength that springs from our interdependence to the sound produced by a band: “I love a lead guitar, but it sounds even better accompanied by a rhythm guitar, a bass, and some drums. Add some vocals and a horn section and now we're cooking. Sure, there's a place for a drum solo or a wicked sax, but a great solo makes more sense in the context of the band—not in a vacuum.” Likewise, in NA, our strength relies, in part, on our interdependence. When we let others lean on us, when we ask for help from another member, when we cheer on each other's solo performances, we build on the strengths of our interdependence.

*I will contemplate the web of interdependence that I am a part of today.
How can I foster interdependence within my NA community?*

25 DECEMBER

Similar, Different, and United

Unity changes us. When we rise above our differences we start to understand who we are, how we fit, and how much we have to offer the world.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition One, Opening Reflection

When we first come to NA, it's suggested that we "look at the similarities, not the differences" when comparing ourselves to our fellow members. As newcomers, this may have seemed like a ploy to diminish our uniqueness. We wondered, *Do they want me to think I'm just like every other addict? Impossible!*

To our surprise, that recommendation has been key to saving our lives. It was important for us to see the similarities in our stories and to focus on the common ground of our solution. Instead of looking at our differences as disqualifiers, we learn that our diversity is our strength. As Narcotics Anonymous members, we have the opportunity to rise above, even embrace, our differences. Many of us find an unanticipated gift in recovering with people who don't look or sound as we do.

But even more unexpected is how we learn to draw from the assortment of perspectives that we encounter in working an NA program: frequency of meeting attendance, the right number of service commitments, the difference between defects and shortcomings, and when we can start dating again. We learn from others, figure out what works for us as individuals, and make choices to benefit our personal recovery. We also benefit from witnessing and participating in, um, *spirited* debates about NA issues at business and area meetings. A diversity of perspectives informs our own dynamic contributions to our home group, our NA community, the Fellowship as a whole, and our personal and professional lives outside NA, even in our families.

Unity *does* change us. It helps us to look for and appreciate our similarities *and* our differences.

I know who I am and what I believe today, even as I strive to be open-minded enough to consider perspectives different from my own.

Communication Is Complicated!

Taking a look at the difference between what we are saying, what is heard, and how people are responding to us can be the beginning of real change in all our relationships.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 7, “Principles, Practice, and Perspective”

It doesn’t take much cleantime to figure out that our communication skills could use some work. We find ourselves increasingly ready to connect, *really* connect, with other people. We’ll have to learn to build bridges, not burn them down. Being better communicators—and better humans, for that matter—will mean discarding some old patterns and adopting some new ones.

Indulging in gossip is one of those old habits of communication we may want to rethink. We may have believed we bonded with others by sharing information that wasn’t ours to share. Even when the news seems harmless, gossiping makes us seem untrustworthy. We learn to resist the urge to fill in every gap in any conversation with rumor, speculation, and innuendo. We get more comfortable with some breaks in our conversations and learn the value of listening more and speaking less. We adopt a new habit of asking questions and practicing empathy and open-mindedness as we hear others’ points of view.

Some of us suffer from overthinking, not oversharing. We second-guess the wisdom of speaking up, keeping what’s on our minds to ourselves instead. We may think we’re being considerate, but withholding our experience and ideas often keeps others at arm’s length. We might come off as shallow or stuck-up when maybe we’re just shy. Sure, there’s risk involved in putting our ideas on the table, but that vulnerability enables us to connect.

To complicate matters, communication involves so much more than talking and listening. All of those nonverbal cues we exchange—facial expressions, body language, eye contact, touch—all add meaning. Communication is complicated! Often the best strategy is to check that we understand correctly or have been understood.

Today I’ll take a closer look at how I communicate with others and identify one or two areas to work on.

Harmony and Our Connection to Each Other

We see ourselves as part of something greater, and seek to live in harmony with it.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 3, “Spirituality Is Practical”

The connection we share with other addicts in recovery is undeniable. We bond as we share about our difficult pasts and learn to laugh at ourselves. The common solution we’ve found in the Twelve Steps of NA keeps us grounded and growing. We need each other to stay clean. We lean into this truth in the beginning and through the rough patches that life brings. “Together we can,” as the saying goes. That’s at the heart of the simplest, most profound conception of a power greater than ourselves.

Belonging to something greater than ourselves is sweet, and we want more. We see the wisdom—sometimes with 20/20 hindsight—of the common refrain: “If you want more out of this program, you’ve got to put more in.” We seek opportunities to share the freedom we found in NA. We may pick up an extra slot on the phoneline or make a point of supporting a struggling group. These actions are symbolic of our commitment to “something greater.” They contribute to the harmony in the rooms and in our heads.

We’re motivated, at least in part, by the good feelings and good times that doing service makes possible. While some of us love doing H&I work, others may be better suited to serving on the events or activities committee or maintaining the website. Some of us simply want to do anything other than speak at a meeting, but we will do that, too, if we are asked. There are as many ways to carry the message as there are addicts in recovery. Each member has strengths that will contribute to the work of carrying the message. When we serve together, sharing recovery from the disease of addiction, we sustain our primary purpose. Living in harmony with others brings us freedom, but we can only keep it by giving it away.

I will contribute to the harmony in Narcotics Anonymous. I will help other addicts find their part in something greater, and I will enrich my own freedom by being of service.

Grace in Our Treatment of Others

Anonymity opens us to grace.

—*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Twelve, Opening Reflection

Within the rooms of NA, anonymity provides an important bridge to gracious behavior. Anonymity allows us to see each other as equals and to identify our common bond. It stands in contrast to any prejudice or old belief that might interfere with practicing grace. When we view our fellow members as peers, no better or worse than ourselves, grace helps us extend equal access to recovery.

By setting aside the things that separate us, we can allow grace to shape our actions. We are free to look past our judgments of ourselves and others as anonymous addicts. The same holds true outside of the rooms of NA. We can practice grace whether in line at the market, on the job, or in passing. We accept that others face difficulties, just as we do, and many go through life without an opportunity to learn to live by spiritual principles. We assume that others are doing their best, even when their best is sometimes terrible.

As we integrate spiritual principles in all of our affairs, it's easier to be gracious. We show up at work and do the right thing, regardless of who else may be having a bad day. We allow family members the space to be who they are. Having rejoined humankind, we recognize what grace brings to our humanity. We're inspired to be gracious in our words and actions. When we invite grace to guide our actions, we're inspired to treat others with decency and respect.

I will practice grace by treating others with kindness and respect, just as I would like to be treated.

Remaining Steadfast

We learn what is true for us, and that sets the direction for our lives.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to a Higher Power”

Early in recovery, each of us grapples with some troublesome truths about our addiction and our lives. Coming to terms with our powerlessness marks a vital shift in our perspective, and we strive to accept this reality on a daily basis. Many of us do this consciously in prayer or while meditating. We read today’s *JFT*. We write in our journal. We go to a meeting and say, “I am an addict.” Or all we do is not use that day and go to sleep clean again. Commitment to these practices, however it looks to any of us, on whatever day, is steadfastness.

Reckoning with our powerlessness leads to our unearthing many other truths. We develop new values and beliefs as we complete and share our Steps, participate in our recovery, and stay open-minded. We come to understand who we were, who we currently are, and who we want to be. We strive to live in accordance with spiritual principles we pick up along the way. Steadfastness is our anchor when we’re driven to act on a defect, harm ourselves, or lash out at others. We find that we’re better able to tame our worst tendencies or to bounce back more quickly and make amends when we do falter.

We learn some difficult lessons, too, especially when our firmly held beliefs and values are challenged. Other people can be equally steadfast in adhering to NA principles in their own ways and may have beliefs we perceive as being in conflict with our own. Being steadfast doesn’t mean we’re inflexible. Rather, we attempt to find balance in those circumstances that call for a steadfast commitment to being reliable, practical, flexible, and compassionate—yes, all at the same time! We discover ways to coexist with others with whom we disagree and contend with life on its own terms, all while standing up for our beliefs.

Whether it’s the truth of our powerlessness over our addiction, over other people, or over life’s difficulties, I can remain steadfast in the recovery practices that help me deal with it.

Letting Trust Take Root

Simply allowing someone to be with us as we go about our lives can be priceless.

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 2, “Connection to Others”

Being a member of NA allows us to experience something many of us were looking for all along, whether we knew it or not—a sense of community. We found our people! But then, we may look around at our fellow addicts and think, *I’m supposed to trust these people?* The answer is, not all of them, and not all at once. An H&I speaker often joked, “The good news is, there’s hope. The bad news is, it’s us!” Like love and courage, trust usually begins with action, and the feeling comes later. We start with a sponsor and grow our circle from there.

We don’t have to like everyone in NA, but we do need to recover with some of them. After being clean for a while, we often feel a special connection to the members we got clean with, the people who were around in early recovery. We may grow to appreciate the traits or qualities we don’t like about some fellow members—we know them well enough to trust they are who they are, and there’s something reliable about that. We show up for each other, warts and all.

“My mom was a difficult person with few friends at the end of her life,” a member wrote. “We didn’t expect anyone but our immediate family to attend her memorial service. I looked up to see members of ‘my crew’—the folks I cleaned up with—walking in. They didn’t know my mom, but they knew me.”

Being part of the NA community helps us develop a practical form of trust, which we then find useful in so many other areas. We show up for others—and let them show up for us—in our family, work, and romantic relationships. We allow others to be who they are, and we have the courage and willingness to be who we are alongside them. We share the road together.

Trust can sometimes spring up in unlikely places. I will be myself, allow others to be themselves, and let trust take root where it will.

The Compassion of Tradition Three

We reach out where we can, and make an effort to increase our compassion for those who don't match our expectations or whose recovery doesn't look like our own.

—*Guiding Principles, Tradition Three, "For Members"*

In a program where the only requirement for membership is the desire to stop using, it logically follows that there are myriad ways to *work* the program of Narcotics Anonymous. What doesn't necessarily follow that same logic is the fact that we addicts in recovery can lose our patience—or have none to start with—for addicts whose program differs from our own. For a bunch of nonconformists, we can sure be rigid. We certainly can have plenty of opinions about what works and doesn't work: how and when we work Steps, how we sponsor, what service looks like, to hug or not to hug, to medicate or not to medicate. These are the opinions of individual members, not NA's.

Our passion about these opinions comes from our passion for recovery. We know what is working for us and what we see work for others. Yet there are times when we'd do well to infuse that passion for our experience with compassion for others who don't "get it" the way we expect they should.

When we keep an open mind about the varied ways that members recover from addiction, we are honoring Tradition Three. When we become earnest in our desire to reach out to other members who are different from us, we are practicing compassion. If there's any logic here, that openness will make us more patient with newcomers because we know that everyone walks a different path. Who knows? We might even learn something.

Translated literally from its Latin roots, *compassion* means "suffering together." While some may take issue with "suffering" defining what we're doing together in NA, there's one thing that we *can* agree on: We are in this thing together.

*I am passionate about what has worked for my own recovery, but I will try to remain open-minded toward others whose paths look different from mine.
Today I strive to release any expectations I have that they should recover the same way I do.*

List of Principles, Titles, and Dates

Acceptance

Acceptance and Perspective	25 January	Acceptance and Relationships	14 July
Listening Leads to Acceptance	1 February	Accepting Others	8 October
Accepting That I'm Not Always Right	16 March	Acceptance Takes Practice	1 November
Accepting Another's Path	30 May	Accepting Reality	2 December
Finding and Extending Acceptance	15 June		

Accountability

Finding Accountability in Others' Insights	10 March	Planning Keeps Us Accountable	23 September
--	----------	-------------------------------------	--------------

Anonymity

Finding Equal Worth in Anonymity	27 January	Anonymity and Individuality	13 August
Putting <i>We</i> Before <i>Me</i> with Anonymity	30 March	Anonymity and Selfless Service	6 September
Equality in Anonymity	28 May	Anonymity as Our Spiritual Foundation	20 October
Anonymity Connects Us	8 June	Anonymity Gives Us All a Place to Recover	23 December

Attentiveness

The Gift of Attention	4 January	Attentiveness to NA's Message	23 June
-----------------------------	-----------	-------------------------------------	---------

Authenticity

Being Authentic	23 January	Free to Be Authentically Me	3 September
-----------------------	------------	-----------------------------------	-------------

Autonomy

Autonomy and Our Choices	27 March	Expressing Our Autonomy with Integrity	23 October
Autonomy and the Ties That Bind	14 May	Autonomy for Ourselves and for Others	8 December
Autonomy Balanced with Responsibility	4 July		

Awareness

Awareness Through Spiritual Maintenance	24 June
---	---------

Balance

Striking an Emotional Balance	11 January	Seeking Balance	5 July
Striking a Spiritual Balance	31 March	Living Life in Balance	18 September
Finding Balance in Our Lives	31 May	Balance Through Meditation	13 November

Caring

Caring for Ourselves, Caring for Others	26 April	Caring and Listening	5 November
---	----------	----------------------------	------------

Commitment

Commitment to Our Spiritual Well-being	14 March	Commitment to Our Common Welfare	17 October
Regular Inventory and Meaningful Commitments	15 July		

Communication

Communication is a Two-Way Street	9 June	Communication is Complicated!	26 December
---	--------	-------------------------------------	-------------

Compassion

Compassion Rather than Judgment	15 February	Compassion as Contrary Action	1 October
Compassion Toward All	25 April	The Compassion of Tradition Three	31 December
Compassion for Ourselves	11 July		

Connection

Seeking Connection Instead of Distraction	5 January	Building Connections	25 June
Feeling Connected, Finding Community	19 March	Connecting the NA Way	28 September

Conscience

Connecting to Our Conscience	18 May	Conscience and Step Ten	24 October
Guided by Conscience	15 August	Living with Our Conscience	19 December

Consistency

The Value of Consistency	30 April	The Impact of Consistency	26 October
Consistency and Step Ten	1 June		

Cooperation

Cooperating for the Common Good	27 June	Cooperation Despite Friction	5 September
---------------------------------------	---------	------------------------------------	-------------

Courage

Courage in the Face of Self-Doubt	4 February	Facing Life with Courage	22 November
Courage to Walk Our Path	9 July		

Creativity

Contributing Our Creativity	19 January	The Power of Creative Action	1 August
Connecting with Our Creativity and Higher Power	4 March	Tapping into Creativity	19 October
The Creative Action of Sharing Ourselves	22 April	Creative Action Can Be an Inside Job	11 December
Approaching Life Creatively	11 June		

Curiosity

Cultivating Curiosity	25 October
-----------------------------	------------

Discernment

Discerning When to Act	14 January	Discernment and Autonomy	27 August
Discernment Takes Practice	24 March	Discernment and Group Conscience	21 November
The Discernment Dimmer Switch	6 May		

Discipline

The Practice of Discipline	16 April	The Discipline to (Sometimes) Say No	3 December
Spiritual Discipline Builds Good Character	6 August		

Empathy

Having Empathy for Each Other	31 January	Empathy, Connection, and Identification	3 July
That Energy of Empathy	1 April	The Value of Empathy	22 September
Empathy in Hard Times	2 May	Healing with Empathy	19 November

Encouragement

Encouraging Growth	29 January	Our Commitment to Encouragement	16 August
--------------------------	------------	---------------------------------------	-----------

Equality

Practicing Equality 15 January

Equanimity

Pursuing Equanimity 27 April

Faith

Faith in the Program and Each Other	7 January	Faith to Let Go	21 August
Faith Provides Shelter from the Storm	21 February	Faith When Times Are Tough	18 October
Faith and Step Three	24 April	Uncomplicated Faith	5 December
Faith in Spiritual Principles	14 June		

Fidelity

Practicing Fidelity	28 January	Fidelity to the NA Message	31 August
---------------------------	------------	----------------------------------	-----------

Flexibility

Being Flexible through Life's Challenges	19 February	Flexibility through Life's Storms	29 November
Flexibility and Relationships	13 May		

Forgiveness

Forgiveness and the Amends Process	12 January	Forgiveness Sets Us Free	20 July
Forgiving Our Imperfections	11 March	Forgiving Others, Forgiving Ourselves	21 September
Forgiveness, Acceptance, and Healing	26 May	Practicing Forgiveness, Foregoing Resentments	25 November

Freedom

Free to Simply Be	5 March	Choosing Freedom	4 September
The Freedom to Let Go	16 May	Freedom, Wherever We Are	28 October
Freedom to Heal	21 July		

Generosity

In with Generosity, Out with Fear	20 February	Giving Generously, Expecting Nothing	15 October
The Generosity in Being Vulnerable	22 May	Embracing the Spirit of Generosity	16 December
Inviting Generosity	28 July		

Goodwill

Exercising Goodwill	21 January	Goodwill toward New Members	30 June
Goodwill and a Sense of Purpose	15 March	Goodwill Is the "Right" Reason	24 July
Goodwill for the Common Good	17 April	Goodwill and Our Relationships	29 September
The Attraction of Goodwill	3 May	Our Foundation of Goodwill	10 November

Grace

Moving through Recovery with Grace	29 February	Finding Grace in the Process	12 August
Seeing Grace in Our Reflection	10 April	Contemplating the Gift of Grace	30 October
Grace Gets Us through Hard Times	18 June	Grace in Our Treatment of Others	28 December

Gratitude

Gratitude as a Practice	25 February	We Give What We Can with Gratitude	8 July
Gratitude for Our Common Solution	23 March	Gratitude Transforms Us	8 September
Gratitude for All of Life's Challenges	5 May		

Harmony

Harmony and Our Common Good	5 February	Harmony in Spite of Conflict	11 August
The Harmony between Step Eleven and Tradition Two	4 April	Harmony, Alignment, and Balance	7 October
In Harmony with Reality	29 June	Harmony and Our Connection to Each Other	27 December

Honesty

Honesty and Reality	6 March	Honesty and Self-Awareness	25 September
Honesty Becomes Second Nature	15 April	Honesty Versus Denial's Fancy Footwork	16 October
Honest Self-Appraisal in the Steps	11 May	Honest Self-Reflection	6 November
Communicating Honestly in Service	19 June	Honesty, Clarity, and Tradition Ten	21 December
The Value of Honest Self-Assessment	30 August		

Honor

Practicing Honor the NA Way	15 September
-----------------------------------	--------------

Hope

Hope Comes with a Catch	26 January	Hope in Darkness and in Light	29 August
A Crash Course in Hope	23 February	Hope Around the World	20 September
Hope Combats Our Fears	29 March	Hope and a New Way Forward	4 October
Finding the Hope We Need to Heal	13 April	Sharing Hope Freely	28 November
We Can Rediscover Hope at Any Time	15 May	The Courage to Hope	18 December
Inspired by Hope	23 July		

Hospitality

Hospitality and the Newcomer	17 September	Hospitality Counters Self-centeredness	24 November
------------------------------------	--------------	--	-------------

Humility

Making Room for Humility	18 February	To Be Both Willing and Humble	10 August
Humility and Sticking to the Basics	12 March	Humility Is Living in Reality	9 September
Humility Grounds Us	25 May	Humbly Asking for Help	27 November
Humility Opens Us Up to Support	13 June	Imperfection, Humanity, and Humility	14 December
Striving to Be Humble Servants	10 July		

Humor

Finding Healing in Humor	24 August	Humor as a Practice of Surrender	20 November
--------------------------------	-----------	--	-------------

Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness and Our Sense of Belonging	13 January	Inclusiveness Means Any Addict	19 August
Inclusiveness, Service, and Belonging	5 April	Removing Barriers to Inclusiveness	12 November

Independence

Embracing Our Independence	22 March	With Independence Comes Responsibility	2 August
----------------------------------	----------	--	----------

Individuality

The Value of Our Individuality	23 April	Individuality and Our Spiritual Awakenings	13 December
Individuality, Openness, and Our Spiritual Lives ...	12 September		

Integrity

Striving for Integrity, Always	17 January	Integrity through Personal Responsibility	29 October
Showing Up with Integrity	27 May		

Interdependence

Interdependence and Our Primary Purpose	3 March	Interdependence and the Spirit of Unity	31 October
Interdependence Knows No Borders	1 September	Interdependence Means We're Better Together	24 December

Intimacy

Building Trust through Intimacy	22 February	Choosing Intimacy over Isolation	26 August
Intimacy as Conscious Contact and Connection	24 May	Intimacy is Complicated but Worth It	4 November

Joy

Enduring Loss, Reclaiming Joy	16 June	Rediscovering and Redefining Joy	22 December
-------------------------------------	---------	--	-------------

Kindness

No Regrets for Being Kind	30 January	Kindness Reflected in Our Growth	12 June
The Power of Kindness	11 April	Kindness and the First Tradition	9 November

Listening

Listening with All We've Got	8 April	Listening with an Open Mind and Heart	30 November
Listening for Common Ground	16 July		

Love

Loving Ourselves	10 February	A New Meaning for Love	25 August
Love and Step Twelve	9 May	Letting Love In	24 September
Learning to Love Ourselves	2 June	Love for the Sake of Our Growth	15 November
Love and That NA Hug	1 July		

Maturity

Maturity in Recovery	7 March	Striving for Emotional Maturity	23 August
Maturity Helps Us Face Reality	23 May	Maturity Calls for Some Humility	23 November
Practicing Maturity and Grace	25 July		

Open-Mindedness

Open-Mindedness Keeps Us Teachable	17 February	Open-Mindedness and Spirituality	4 August
An Open Mind is a Life Saver	2 April	Open-Mindedness and the Third Tradition	26 September
Maintaining an Open Mind	7 June	Staying Open-Minded to New Ideas	9 October
Open Mind, Open Heart, Open Spirit	30 July	Keeping Our Minds Open to Learning	7 December

Optimism

Strategies for Optimism	11 February	Optimism and That Storied Glass of Water	21 October
Facing Feelings with Optimism	21 May		

Participation

Participation, Service, and the Seventh Tradition ...	9 January
---	-----------

Passion

Finding Our Passion and Purpose	16 January	Moving Forward with Passion	6 July
---------------------------------------	------------	-----------------------------------	--------

Patience

Patience and the Process of Healing	7 September	Patience and Commitment to the Process	17 December
---	-------------	--	-------------

Perseverance

Pushing through with Perseverance	2 February	Perseverance Pays Off	18 August
Perseverance Helps Us Stay	10 May	Perseverance and the First Step	15 December

Powerlessness

Powerlessness Opens the Door	27 February	Powerlessness, Step One, and Tradition Five	5 October
Powerlessness and the Second Step	7 May		

Practicality

The Practicality of Step Three	26 February	Practicality in Action	12 October
Practicality and the “God Thing”	12 April	If It’s not Practical, It’s Not Spiritual	9 December
The Therapeutic Value of Practicality	26 June		

Prudence

Being Prudent with Our Obligations	29 July
--	---------

Purpose

Purpose and Responsibility	9 February	Connected to Our Purpose	10 October
Searching for Our Purpose	18 April	Purpose and Our Path Forward	7 November
Finding a Life with Purpose	4 June	Principles and Purpose Are Portable	12 December
Finding Purpose in One Another	5 August		

Reliability

Reliability Matters	28 February	Reliability and Reasonable Expectations	26 November
Reliability Transforms Relationships	2 July		

Resilience

Recovery Makes Us More Resilient	7 February	Resilience Keeps Us Coming Back	16 November
With Hope Comes Resilience	17 July		

Respect

Communicating Respect	21 April	Treating Ourselves with Respect	28 August
We Show Respect, Rather Than Seek It	10 June	Living Lives Worthy of Self-Respect	14 November

Responsibility

Facing Our Responsibilities	8 January	Responsibility Versus Control	12 July
Responsibility, No Matter Our Cleantime	8 March	We Are Responsible for Our Recovery	16 September
The Rewards of Responsibility	20 May		

Restraint

Restraint as an Expression of Freedom	14 October
---	------------

Safety

Creating Safety for All Members	26 March
---------------------------------------	----------

Self-Acceptance

Coming to Accept Ourselves	3 January	Valuing Self-Acceptance over Validation	5 June
Accepting Our Imperfect Selves	3 February	Accepting Ourselves as Works in Progress	8 August
Self-Acceptance and Our Sense of Belonging	1 March	Accepting All of Me	27 October
Finding Self-Acceptance with the Serenity Prayer	19 April		

Selflessness

Selflessness Brings Relief	14 February	A Bond of Selflessness	19 September
Selflessness, Self-Care, and Our Spiritual Condition	19 May		

Self-Support

Self-Support Beyond the Basket	20 March	Self-Support Takes Faith	11 September
Self-Supporting and Standing Tall	22 June		

Serenity

Serenity Brings Clarity	22 January	Untangling Life's Knots with the Serenity Prayer ...	2 September
-------------------------------	------------	--	-------------

Service

Waking Up to Service	10 January	Service Strengthens Our Foundation	6 June
Service and Carrying NA's Message	16 February	Practicing Service in All Our Affairs	20 August
Service Is Spirituality in Action	17 March	Service, Purpose, and Belonging	14 September
Losing and Finding Ourselves in Service	3 April	Service Brings Out the Best in Us	3 November
Service as an Expression of Love and Gratitude	1 May		

Simplicity

The Simple, Priceless Gift We Share	20 January	The Simplicity of Tradition Eleven	3 June
Spirituality in Simplicity	6 April	Simplicity Is Key!	31 July

Sincerity

Sincerity and Keeping It Real	13 September
-------------------------------------	--------------

Solidarity

Securing the Bond of Solidarity	13 March	Safety, Security, Solidarity	6 October
Sharing Solidarity with Our Fellow Members	21 June		

Steadfastness

Remaining Steadfast	29 December
---------------------------	-------------

Surrender

Surrendering to Change	18 January	Our Step-One Surrender	27 July
Surrender and Tradition One	12 February	Surrendering Shortcomings	14 August
Surrendering Our Reservations	21 March	Surrendering to a New Way of Life	10 September
Surrendering to Tradition Three	9 April	Surrendering to Group Conscience	3 October
Surrender to What?	12 May	Affirming Our Step-Three Surrender	17 November

Thoughtfulness

Thoughtful Awareness, Thoughtful Action	18 March	Thoughtfulness Is a Gift	11 October
Extending a Thoughtful Welcome	22 July		

Tolerance

Tolerance and Toxic Relationships	8 May	Praying for Tolerance	8 November
Practicing Tolerance and Self-Acceptance	9 August		

Trust

Learning to Trust	24 February	Trust and the Fifth Step	22 August
Trust in Our Message and Our Bond	28 March	Trust Is a Conscious Decision	2 October
Building Trust and Trustworthiness	17 June	Letting Trust Take Root	30 December

Unconditional Love

Unconditional Love and Step Five	6 February	Unconditional Love for Fellow Addicts	7 August
The Journey toward Unconditional Love	20 April	Unconditional Love and Sponsorship	1 December
Unconditional Love Brings Healing	28 June		

Understanding

Opening Up to Understanding	13 February	Open-Mindedness Leads to Understanding	26 July
Inspired to Understand	28 April	Understanding without Conditions	6 December

Unity

Unity Keeps Us Coming Back	2 January	Unity in Our Shared Purpose	3 August
One Addict Helping Another in Unity	9 March	Unity in All Our Affairs	30 September
Unity, Not Uniformity	14 April	Finding Humility in Unity	22 October
Love for Unity's Sake	17 May	Unity, Our Practical Foundation	18 November
Unity in Loving Care	13 July	Similar, Different, and United	25 December

Vigilance

Vigilance and the Second Tradition	6 January	Vigilance and the Path of Recovery	27 September
Vigilance in Balance	2 March	Being Vigilant in the Here and Now	2 November
Vigilance for the Long Haul	29 May		

Vulnerability

Vulnerability Teaches Us to Trust	7 April	Vulnerability Builds Bonds	4 December
Growth Takes Vulnerability	18 July		

We

The Practical and Spiritual Application of "We"	7 July	A Focus on We Brings Out the Best in Me	10 December
---	--------	---	-------------

Willingness

We Need Willingness Every Day	24 January	Tempering Willingness with Humility	19 July
Willing to Walk in Faith	8 February	Willingness to Change	17 August
Willingness Propels Us Forward	25 March	Not Too Cool to Be Willing	13 October
Our Willingness Makes a Difference	29 April	Willing to Explore New Directions	11 November
Willingness Gets Us into Action	4 May	Willingness to Serve	20 December
Willingness to Give It a Go	20 June		

Wonder

Recapturing a Sense of Wonder	1 January
-------------------------------------	-----------
