



Narcotics Anonymous®

NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

SIXTH EDITION



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Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions
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*The process of recovery and the spiritual principles of NA
are a power greater than himself for this atheist addict.*

Atheists Recover Too

I grew up without a teaching of god. My father, though raised in a very devout family, renounced all faith in the religion he had been taught. I too couldn't believe that there was something out there that had some magical power to do the impossible—to defy the laws of physics. There were many things beyond my understanding, but to attribute them to a deity was, in my mind, just another way of avoiding the fear of the unknown. Too many people used god, or the devil, as it were, to deflect credit due or to avoid taking responsibility for their mistakes. I viewed the institution of religion as a means of controlling the masses, and I didn't want to be controlled.

I made it my mission to refute this god in which other people believed and put their faith, but they resisted. In fact, in spite of all my efforts, I convinced not one person that they were wrong and that I was right. I just isolated myself all the more.

So, when I got clean I was apprehensive, to say the least. However, I was ready for a new way of life, so I just focused on today, and just for today I was on Step One. And there was no god in Step One. I got a sponsor who taught me about showing up and being dependable. He taught me about how to be available and not to be judgmental. He shared his experience and allowed me mine. The foundation of my recovery was laid in our relationship. I wanted what he had and was beginning to get it.

We moved on to Step Two, and it was time to cross the god bridge. I went on a quest to find a power greater than myself. I stepped out of my comfort zone and sought out people of both conventional and unconventional religious faiths. I opened my mind to what worked for others. I questioned, I listened, and I practiced. My search brought me to a number of different spiritual

and religious groups, but I didn't find my place among any of them. What I was looking for was something quantifiable, something tangible to put on display—"See this? This is what I believe. This is the god of my understanding." Maybe if I could find that god, recovery would be easier. But that's not what I found.

With no breakthroughs, feeling lost and dejected, I decided to approach Step Two another way. Perhaps the steps, the fellowship, service, and my sponsor would be enough to help me find recovery, without a god.

Steps Three, Seven, and Eleven posed the greatest challenge because of their references to god and prayer. Steps Two and Six required some creative thinking as well. In practicing the Second Step, NA and the group became a power greater than me. By participating and being of service I was able to put the needs of the group and the suffering addict before my wants. My self-centeredness began to ease, and a restoration to sanity began to take place. I was right where I was supposed to be. I could see that my struggles weren't in vain, even when times were hard. I was experiencing life and growing as a result.

In the Third Step, I began turning my will and my life over to the process of recovery and to the spiritual principles that could be found in the steps. I was told to be honest about my belief, even if it was devoid of a god; otherwise the remaining steps would be of no value. I started to have faith in what recovery could offer me. With the strength and courage I found, I continued with the rest of the steps.

In Step Six, my defects of character were in the forefront of my mind. As I became more aware of their effects on my life, I tried to control my defects by suppressing them. The result was that they seemed to become worse, causing more harm, both to those close to me and to myself. I reached the place where I was entirely ready to be rid of my defects, and I moved on to Step Seven.

Believing that humility was an important aspect of the Seventh Step, I went to others for their experience. By earnestly seeking the experience of others, including those with whom I had little in common, I was performing acts of humility. I endeavored to live life by spiritual principles in order to relieve my shortcomings. Instead of merely trying to be rid of my shortcomings, I sought to replace them with something positive.

Step Eleven was a bit of a conundrum. "I'm an atheist who believes in the power of prayer," I became known for saying. The statement, meant to shock people, became a conviction. Prayer wasn't getting on my knees and petitioning a deity. Rather, it was how I lived. As a prayer, all my decisions became important and relevant, regardless of how insignificant they might seem on the surface. I saw meditation as a tool or exercise to help expand my awareness. It helped to put me in the moment and to maintain my presence of mind throughout the day.

The result was a spiritual awakening, a realization that I could stay clean, work the steps, be an upstanding member of Narcotics Anonymous, have a life worth living, and carry a message of recovery. All this was possible without a god. My initial fear of not being able to stay clean because I could not "come to believe" in a god had passed. I now had proof that it was possible, and the proof was in how I lived.

I have sponsored many people, some who struggle with believing in god and others who have a firm religious faith. Those who struggle find that they are not alone and are accepted as they are. Those with strong faith find that they too can share openly with me, and their beliefs are welcomed and accepted. Either way, my sponsees and I have the opportunity to grow together. I trust that what they come to believe has the power to help them, and they have the same trust in what I have come to believe. Sometimes we disagree on the particulars, but the particulars aren't what keep us clean. What keeps us clean is the choice that each of us makes not to pick up and to live this way of life to the best of our ability.

This is a spiritual program, not a religious one. I try different approaches to working the steps. I still read and try to expand my knowledge on spiritual topics, and I constantly review my experience and contemplate its meaning in my life. This isn't to say that I don't question what I believe from time to time, or that I don't struggle, because I do. Life isn't always easy. Sometimes I feel alone during hard times. Believing in a god is alluring, because I know others find comfort there, but I do not. Today I do have a spiritual solution, however. The steps provide me with a framework for applying spiritual principles. Service acts as a conduit to relieve my self-centered thinking. The fellowship reminds me that I'm not alone, and my sponsor is a guide through the process. I continue to be a seeker. Anyone with a desire to stay clean can stay clean.

*She got clean with her husband of twenty years,
and eight years later nursed him through terminal cancer
while both of her parents were terminally ill. Now,
at sixty-one, she shares that the program can help
any of us, regardless of age or circumstance.*

Never Alone

I am sixty-one years old and have been clean for fifteen years. My husband and I got clean at the same time. He was fifty-two at the time and I was forty-six. We had children older than most of the people in our meetings. NA seemed to us to be a bunch of young kids. I didn't think we could relate.

Even though we were the oldest people we saw at meetings, we stayed and heard the message of recovery in NA: that any addict can live clean and lose the desire to use. We went to a meeting every evening. Sitting in the rooms day after day with the same bunch of kids, we heard them telling our own stories. We heard people talking about the feeling of despair their addiction had led them to and the pain of trying to quit and not being able to. Hearing these stories, we knew that regardless of age, the pain of addiction was the same for everyone, and this was where we belonged. Eventually, we even met a few other folks our age.

I had been using since I was a small child when I'd raid my mother's medicine cabinet. In high school my best friend's father was an anesthesiologist. We would use the *Physicians' Desk Reference* like a catalog to decide what to take. Around this time, another friend turned me on to pot. She said, "Smoke this." I wanted to be as cool as she was, so I did. For the next thirty-three years I chased drugs from coast to coast and made them the center of my existence.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s it seemed that all of America had discovered drugs. I felt like I was in the vanguard of culture.

But when the rest of the country seemed to stop using, I didn't. When I finally wanted to, I couldn't.

Finally, at some point in the late 1980s, my husband became depressed. Imagine that! You fill your body with depressants and wonder why you're depressed. He went to treatment for his addiction and was introduced to NA there. He moved into a boarding house and went to meetings and tried to stay clean even though he was still buying drugs for me. He lasted three months that way, and then relapsed and went on a three-year run.

Meanwhile, I was using more than ever. I was strung out on something I didn't even like. Eventually the day came when I realized I couldn't give up the drugs, so I gave up on life. I knew there were people who didn't use drugs, and clearly their lives were better than the lives of anyone I knew who did use, certainly better than my life. But it never occurred to me that I could change, that I could be a different person, one who didn't use. I didn't want to do this anymore, and I couldn't see any way to stop. So I bought a huge piece and did it all. And God stepped into my life.

Even though it was the middle of the day in the middle of the week, my son stopped over at my house. To this day he doesn't know why he dropped by. He found me passed out but still alive and called an ambulance. This had not been a cry for help like I'd done in times past. This time I was seriously trying to die. I woke up in the hospital in five-point restraints.

I was given a choice between a ten-day voluntary commitment and an indefinite involuntary commitment. I chose to go voluntarily. The big surprise was the sense of relief I felt. I didn't have to pretend that I was okay. I didn't have to struggle to keep it together anymore. I needed help, and I was going to get it.

My husband had been to NA before, so he knew what to do. He would come to the hospital, pick me up on a pass, and take me to a meeting. Then he'd drop me off back at the hospital, go

home, and get loaded. When the ten days were up and I was ready to come home, he realized that he would have to stay clean if I were to stay clean. So we both went to a meeting. It was his first day, and I had ten days more.

For the first year, we went to a meeting every day—sometimes two or three. We got sponsors, worked the steps, and did all of our socializing in NA. We had service positions. We got a home group. We made friends. We realized that the age difference was irrelevant because our feelings were the same as everyone else's.

It was hard at first doing the step work. Steps One, Two, and Three weren't too hard because the powerlessness and unmanageability were self-evident. I knew that I was alive because of a Higher Power. But Step Four was a different matter. How was I supposed to write about forty-six years of resentments and bad behavior? I had no idea whom I had hurt, ripped off, or damaged. I figured it was pretty much everyone I'd ever been near. I was guided by a more experienced member who told me my Higher Power would reveal what I needed to see at that time. I'd get to do the steps again, and more things would come up then. That made it possible for me to move on.

When I was in the middle of my Eighth Step I was invited to visit my family for a week. They lived 3,000 miles away from my home. I quickly went over my Ninth Step work with my sponsor so that I would be able to make amends to my mother, stepfather, brother, and sister-in-law all in one week. They all said the only amends I could make for them was to stay clean.

Life got good. I went to school and got a bachelor's and then a graduate degree. I started my own psychotherapy practice. My father even said he was proud of me, something he'd never said before in my life.

When I had six years clean, a friend with more experience in NA died of cancer. The fellowship gathered around him and supported him through his illness. In addition to the home health

care provider, two addicts were with him at all times. One of his sponsees moved in and slept there. He talked about his experience as he was dying; he said he was growing from a thorn into a rose. He died clean, with great dignity and strength. He had taught us how to live clean, and he taught us how to die clean.

Two years later my husband was diagnosed with cancer. My father was dying of cancer, and my mother was ill with heart disease. Getting clean gives us the opportunity to deal with the conditions of our lives, whether we like them or not, in a way that we can feel good about. It doesn't matter what happens; it matters how I react when it happens. Losing my husband or my son was the only reservation in my First Step.

I went to meetings and talked about my reservations. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to stay clean without my husband. I wasn't sure I wanted to stay alive without him. We had been together for twenty-eight years, raised children together, traveled together, cared for one another through the worst years of our addiction, and gotten clean together. Since we had gotten clean, our relationship had deepened and flowered into one of deep mutual respect and unconditional love. He was my heart. I couldn't imagine life without him.

My husband was ill for six months. During that time we traveled to Mexico and to Hawaii. We went to the world convention in San Jose. It was there that I first learned how to reach out and ask for help. The people in the program were wonderful during his illness. His sponsees, my sponsor and sponsees, and friends from the fellowship all called often and came frequently to visit. One of my sponsees is a nurse. She wasn't working at the time, so she would come on a moment's notice to relieve me if I needed to go out. Loving, caring people surrounded us all of the time. Our hospice social worker, who had nursed another NA friend, told us that NA was the best support system he had ever seen.

I wasn't able to see my father before he died, because he died only eleven days before my husband. My mother died eighteen

months after that. I was terrified that now I would be alone. I thought the pain of all that loss would turn my heart to ice. I thought I would suffocate because I couldn't breathe. The only thing I could think to do was to go to a meeting. I talked about my pain. I continued to talk about it until I thought people were running away when they saw me coming. I reached out to my Higher Power. I stayed on an Eleventh Step for the next several years. I came to know and to trust my Higher Power, whose only wish for me is that I use the opportunities life provides me with to heal and grow.

It was, and remains, very difficult. But I have not had to use. I've stayed connected to my program. I go to three to six meetings every week, even now. I have a sponsor. I work the steps. I sponsor many women. I do service, and I read the literature. I have a spiritual community and my faith, trust, and relationship with God have deepened and grown strong. I have good days and bad days. I still have so much to learn about how to live clean. When it gets tough, I go to a meeting or call a friend or work with a sponsee or help someone else or pray and pray and pray. I work Step Twelve by trying to practice the spiritual principles I have learned in NA in all of my affairs, both within and outside the rooms.

My life is full. I am so grateful to NA for taking a wounded, sick little girl of forty-six and teaching her how to live—clean.

Many books have been written about the nature of addiction. This book primarily concerns itself with the nature of recovery. If you are an addict and have found this book, please give yourself a break and read it!

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