

Personal Responsibility

Many of us arrive at our first NA meeting spiritually dead, emotionally crippled and in poor physical health. Overwhelmed by shame, guilt, self-hatred and the painful rewards of our self-centered lifestyle, we are relieved to find that we have a treatable disease. In NA, we have evolved a concept of the disease of addiction as arrived at by addicts recovering in NA. Our moral values, which we thought were long gone, can be revived by living in harmony with the principles found within the 12 Steps and Traditions of NA.

One of the first and most important tools we are given in our struggle to overcome addiction is an understanding of the disease. A thorough grasp of this new-found reality has opened the door to recovery for countless addicts worldwide.

Clinging to any reservations we may have in accepting the fact that we have a disease called addiction is referred to as denial. Denial of our condition is nothing more than an invitation to further pain and confusion. Denial is the mind game that all addicts play to avoid dealing with reality and the consequences of our using. Often times our life-styles have become quite bizarre, yet we remain convinced that everything is normal. Denial is a mental operation of rationalization and justification used to shield us from the pain of our current situation.

NA offers a solution to those who stubbornly embrace denial and who doubt the fact that this disease is the source of our unmanageable lives. Having accepted our disease, we must be careful to realize that our addiction can be easily transferred to other destructive behaviors such as going to extremes in the areas of; compulsive spending, over-eating and sexual acting out. New members are especially susceptible as many will use almost anything in an attempt to fill the void and emotional emptiness left as a result of giving up the primary symptom. Although applying the steps, going to meetings and using a sponsor does not offer the immediate gratification found in addictive lifestyle, it does offer the long term solutions we truly seek.

We know that addiction is the four-part illness. It is physical, mental, spiritual and emotional disease. There is no greater advantage to the addict seeking recovery than learning the disease concept of addiction. This has enabled hundreds of thousands of NA members to recover. The more we understand the direct connection between our pain and our disease, the less likely we are to allow ourselves to drift back into the patterns that precede relapse. We have to take care that those symptoms of our disease such as; exerting powerless situations, credit taking, judgment of others, and reluctance to do our part do not taking,

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judgment of others, and reluctance to do our part do not gain control again. Pain does not cure our illness; it does motivate us to seek solutions.

The most solemn vow and the strongest will power offer only temporary solutions. In our experience, until an addict finds the sincere desire to stop using, there is little hope for recovery. It is this desire that fuels our recovery.

We have come to understand that we suffer from a disease called addiction. This disease tells us that we do not have a disease, and therefore our minds work against us. That is how it fools even the most intelligent people. If we cannot grasp the concept of addiction as an illness, as in a medical text book, we may think of it this way: the belief that this illness exists and is treatable will help us get results while denial of its existence will kill us. While we readily admitted to powerless over our addiction, our addiction exists with or without drugs. Even without drugs, the disease often shows up in compulsions such as; arrogance, gambling, spending, eating, lust and generally overdoing anything that makes us feel good.

Expressing love opens the door for us to obtain freedom. We learn how to love by working the Steps and the Traditions. We learn to apply the spiritual principles embodied in them into our lives. It takes time, repeated effort and a willingness to learn real love. Many addicts have said that working with others got them through particularly tough times. When we show concern for another, we manage to divert attention from ourselves and our compulsions. We identify with the feelings that many addicts share because we have been there and done that. We have found that the only way out is by total surrender. In spite of all the denial, evasive actions and repeated attempts to use successfully, nothing seemed to work. We came to a place where recovery started sounding good, even though it meant we could not continue using. Of course, we knew there would have to be a few changes.

Our actions define our personalities to the world and our choices can rebound to us as pleasure or pain. Attitudes are the way we look at things. Attitudes are the basis that we use to form our strategies for dealing with reality and other people. An attitude is a group of potential choices. As we change, these attitudes change. If we see something wrong within our thoughts or actions, it is our responsibility to correct the faulty perception or wrongdoing. This is one way that God assists us in the constant improvement of our surroundings and ourselves. "Houses can only make a town, it takes citizens to make a city", reminds us that if there's nothing living inside, we are just a shell. Some of us are still tender from the scars of active addiction and hold back from general involvement in society as a whole. As we grow in recovery, we will find ourselves taking on responsibilities before we know it.

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A gradual disassembly of our lives resulted as our disease progressed. We reverse this process in recovery and re-integrate into general society. Many of us have to develop restraints that we never felt like we needed before. Some of us have to develop their ability to assert themselves personally.

Our personal responsibility does not go on forever. Our disease tells us that we have power beyond the tip of our nose. We need to remember that the universe is for God to deal with. Many times, we have heard, "Through our inability to accept personal responsibilities area as simple as paying bills such as telephone, gas and electric but 'personal responsibility' goes much further than that. Personal responsibility in recovery means the process of using the tools of the Fellowship in all areas of our lives. We must do this in our home groups, with our sponsors, in service work, and in our personal recovery. It involves honest sharing. We create our own problems when we do not share what is going on with us. Sharing everything is okay when we are hurting inside perpetuates a fraud on the listener who cares about us because they expect to hear the truth from us. This is how we create our own problems. "I'll show them," became the battle cry of our self-pity. Self-pity is a game that we can only win by being a loser! This is how we extinguish the light in our soul without even picking up the drugs. We recover by being able to reach out when the walls are closing in on us.

Part of our disease tells us to avoid taking responsibility for our own lives. We have become quite adept at avoiding personal responsibility for our actions. We have learned to be angry and resentful of others so it seems quite normal when we immediately seek someone to blame and resent. This is just one more way that our disease keeps us from growing and changing. "Look what they did to me," became our war cry. We are not 'the disease' that we suffer from, nor are we 'God.' We discover what the rules are for us and strive to become ready to have God heal our defect of character and remove our shortcomings. We surrender and allow God to heal us and remove our shortcomings, and we are able to respond to life in the moment. We no longer have to live in resentment, anger and fear because we are freed from the pain of contradiction in our lives. The pathway to being the people we want to be is clear because we have a loving God working in our lives today. Knowing our disease, developing a relationship with God, and coming to know ourselves are a few of the miracles of recovery.

After working the First Step, most of us experience a sense of humility and relief that we are not in control of our addiction. This knowledge allows us to stop beating ourselves up over the things that our disease made us do. There are however, some things that we do have control over, namely our attitudes and actions. Responsibility and autonomy go hand in hand; we can no longer do whatever we want to with no accountability.

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The more responsible we become, the less often others have the right or need to correct us.

Actually, we may find ourselves in positions that generate harmony and order instead of disunity and chaos for the first times in our lives. We find out exactly how our lives intertwine with the lives of others and theirs with ours. Each part ultimately affects all others and a frayed edge will destroy the whole cloth if not mended.

The Steps guide us in changing until our inner reality matches up with life around us. Things work out better if we adjust our attitudes to match reality. By a simple process of evaluation, we can respond personally. We work ourselves back into the fabric of life by doing what we can, when we can. We no longer strive to be the person we should be or even the person we could be, but to be the person we are. Personal responsibility is a duty we have to ourselves as well as the Fellowship. Responsibility requires action, both spiritual and physical. Maintaining recovery is our first responsibility. Daily maintenance evaluates our response to responsibility and we can see progress. The gifts that come from our new image of being responsible are a direct result of our meeting the needs of our fundamental obligations. As with other concepts of recovery, when we practice personal responsibility we become personally responsible for our lives and recovery.

“God, grant us the knowledge that we may write according to Your Divine precepts; instill in us a sense of Your purpose, make us servants of Your Will and grant us a bond of selflessness that this may be truly be Your work, not ours, in order that know addict, anywhere, need die from the horrors of addiction.” {Grey Book 1981}

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