

CHAPTER FIVE
WHAT CAN I DO?

Begin your own program by taking Step One from the previous chapter "How It Works". When we fully concede to our innermost selves that we are powerless over our addiction, we have taken a big step in our recovery. Many of us have had some reservations at this point, so give yourself a break and be as thorough as possible at the start. Go to Step Two, and so forth and as you go on you will come to an understanding of the program for yourself. If you are in an institution of any kind, you have gone through complete withdrawal and have stopped using for the present. Now, with a clear mind, try this way of life.

Upon release, continue your daily program and contact a member of N.A. Do this by mail, by phone, or in person. Better yet come to our meetings. Here you will find the answers to some of the things that may be disturbing you now.

If you are not in an institution, the same holds true. Stop using for today. 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 and so you will break the habit and gain some peace of mind. The real miracle happens when you realize that the need for drugs has in some way been lifted from you. You have stopped using and have started to live.

1 It all begins with that first admission and surrender. From
2 that point, each addict is reminded that a day clean is a day
3 won. At first we can do little more than attend meetings.
4 Probably we cannot remember even a single name, word or
5 thought from our first meeting. What we do remember is the

feeling we got. That no matter what we have done or what 1
course our addiction had taken, we can relax and enjoy the 2
love that fills the room at every meeting which follows the 3
Twelve Traditions. Meetings strengthened our grip on 4
recovery. 5

Having begun attending meetings regularly, we were 6
introduced to the Twelve Steps. Working the Steps got us 7
out of our old attitudes. When we admitted that our lives 8
had become unmanageable, we didn't have to argue our point 9
of view. We didn't have to be right all of the time. We 10
could relax and allow others to be wrong. We found a new 11
source of energy to put the wreckage of our lives back in 12
working order. Things that we have done to hide our illness 13
no longer seemed worth it; and we were free to open our 14
minds to new ideas. Destructive behavior could be corrected 15
as soon as we loosened our grip on our old ways. We found 16
that the fear of change was replaced by a sense of wonder 17
and adventure. Freedom to change seems to come mainly 18
after our acceptance of ourselves. 19

Freedom from our destructiveness covering up the wreck- 20
age of the past has been the main stumbling block in relat- 21
ing to others. By recognizing the defects in our characters, 22
and letting go of them spiritually, we were ready to have 23
sanity restored to us. In applying these spiritual princi- 24
ples to our lives, we should keep an open mind. Patience, 25
humility and tolerance are well worth any price that we must 26
pay for them. It would seem that the path to spiritual 27
recovery involves spiritual principles. Spiritual indiffer- 28
ence will surely lead to relapse. 29

As we went to meetings regularly, we also learned the 30
basic value of talking to other addicts who shared our 31
problems and goals. As we became responsible for our own 32
recovery, we became responsible for our fellow addicts. We 33
found this responsibility was two-edged. As recovering addicts 34
we must share what we have found with other addicts, because 35
we know how important it is for one addict to talk with 36

1 another. If sharing the pain we have been through helps
2 but one person, it will have been worth the suffering. The
3 other edge is our own need to preserve our recovery. We
4 found from experience that our own recovery is strengthened
5 when we share it with others, who ask for help. If we
6 keep what we have to share, we lose the meaning. Words
7 mean nothing until we put them into action.

8 We often miss what we are looking for because it isn't
9 hidden. Most addicts have great insights and abilities that
10 offset their weaknesses. Gratitude for our assets shouldn't
11 keep us from growing in areas where we are weak. Being
12 grateful begins when we realize that something other than
13 ourselves blessed us with what we have.

14 Facing problems is a necessary ability to stay clean.
15 If we have had problems in the past, it is unlikely that
16 simple abstinence will eliminate the defense mechanisms
17 and emotional walls that enabled us to live in past days.
18 In searching for the end we often miss the journey.

19 These old ways have to go if we are to find new lives.
20 We will successfully face the days to come if we take advan-
21 tage of the help the program of Narcotics Anonymous has to
22 offer. Help from one addict to another; help that says, "I
23 had something like that happen to me and I tried so and so".
24 Not preaching or judging but sharing the experience, strength,
25 and hope that comes to anyone who accepts our way of life.
26 The willingness to try new ideas and possible solutions will
27 help open the door to our recovery. One discovery leads to
28 another, and soon we are established in a new way of life
29 where people, places and things are kept in proper perspec-
30 tive. The old "all or nothing" point of view will no longer
31 seem a useful idea.

32 Now we have learned that we can, and must, go to our
33 Higher Power for help in solving problems. Fortunately,
34 many problems can wait. The program doesn't work when we

adapt it to our life, we have to adapt our life to the 1
program. 2

When you can feel the program beginning to work, don't 3
freak out. Personality change is a natural progression set 4
in motion by our surrender to the program. The slogans 5
are the sayings that seemed to help us most when we first 6
came to the Fellowship. They apply to the little, dangerous 7
daily situations that seemed so heavy at first. Things go 8
smoother if the newcomer finds a sponsor to confide in, 9
someone whose judgement he can trust. We do not think it 10
weak to put a little faith and trust in a person with more 11
experience on the program. 12

We may still, however, feel that we cannot have a 13
happy life without drugs. We may suffer from the fear of 14
insanity and feel we have no escape from using other than 15
an insane and depressed existence. We may fear the re- 16
jection of all our friends if we go cleaning up our act, 17
this is common. We could be suffering from an overly 18
sensitive ego and many of those things within us that we used 19
drugs to escape from. 20

Obsession is the fixed idea that takes us back to a 21
particular drug, trying to regain the ease and comfort we 22
once knew. We know that the comfort we once experienced 23
from using can no longer be obtained. When we accepted 24
that we were addicts, we realized that never again could we 25
use successfully. Try not to think about drugs, old 26
friends or old hang outs. But when the obsession hits us, 27
we improve our conscious contact with our Higher Power 28
through fellowship in N.A. 29

Just as we went to any length to get drugs, so must we 30
go to any lengths to learn to get clean. This involves 31
the honesty to admit our need for the help of others, who 32
have been where we have been, and have learned to live with- 33
out chemicals. The essence of addiction is that it is 34

1 easier to change our perception of reality than the reality
2 we perceive.

3 Cash register honesty, honesty in giving a "fair day's
4 work for a fair day's pay", can help us begin. As the
5 benefits of basic honesty in the world begin to roll in,
6 we are ready to consider honesty at a deeper level. Self-
7 honesty is being in touch with the way we really feel and
8 the way we spend our time.

9 As we began to learn how to change our perception of
10 reality, we, as newcomers, were encouraged to avoid making
11 any major decisions on our own. The ego of the addict
12 must be busted for him to have a chance at recovery.
13 "Terminal hipness" and "fatal cool" are symptoms of the
14 addictive personality. We should be very intent and watch-
15 ful. Old ideas and street practices won't help us stay
16 clean.

17 After establishing our new desire to live clean in
18 the Fellowship and acquainting ourselves with the tools
19 which have helped other suffering addicts to recover, we
20 can then proceed with the business of living.

21 At least one meeting a day for ninety days seems to be
22 a good guide for those who are going to any lengths. There
23 is a special calm that settles over a person with our disease
24 when they find out there are many others who share their
25 difficulties, past and present. We should begin to work the
26 Steps in earnest, going over each Step word by word. Reading
27 our literature and talking over the implication of each Step
28 with our new friends and our sponsors and asking God's help
29 improves our understanding of the program. A meeting a day,
30 getting and using phone numbers, and reading literature each
31 day are good forms of insurance for cleanliness. It has
32 been said that no one who has asked their Higher Power for
33 help in the morning and worked the steps has ever gotten

loaded that day. 1

 Guilt and worry keep us from living in the here and 2
now. The denial of our disease, or reservations, keep us 3
sick. We lack humility, clinging to old ways. Not from 4
preaching nor from judgement, but from sharing our exper- 5
ience, strength and hope do we recover. Our willingness 6
to try new ideas and possible solutions to problems will help 7
open the doors to recovery. 8

 Let us apply our efforts to the obtainable and let the 9
rest go. As we do the job at hand the balance changes and 10
new opportunities for improvement present themselves. 11
Opportunities now in sight did not even exist until we got 12
the ball rolling. Life then becomes for us what we always 13
wished it to be -- a constant state of awakening. As soon 14
as we became acquainted with the Fellowship and the basic 15
ideas of the program. We began to put these ideas into 16
action. A good tool to remember is to counter our natural 17
tendency to saddle ourselves with concerns that go beyond 18
the twenty-four hours of each day. 19

 Living clean each day at a time will reveal to us the 20
things that truly come from within and give us better 21
understanding over things that would interrupt our flow. 22

 Recovery will provide for our re-entry into society. 23
We can always find people who have had difficulties similar 24
to our own and do succeed. It is difficult to get rid of 25
the notion that we must be great or do great to be O.K. As 26
we recover we will often find ourselves saying and doing 27
things that suddenly make no sense to us, even if we've 28
been doing them for years. We literally see our mistakes. 29
This is necessary for our recovery. Self-condemnation has 30
little place here. When we see our errors, we should 31
simply correct them. 32

 As we go about the task of changing our lives, we are 33

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1 confronted with our character defects. Letting go of
2 character defects should be done with love. It is impor-
3 tant we think, to be gentle with ourselves when putting
4 our ego to rest.

5 In our addiction, we feared change because we had
6 lost control of our lives and most changes were for the
7 worst. Clean, we had to learn to face another enemy -
8 boredom. If we allow ourselves to stagnate and cling to
9 our old ways of desperation and fear, our chances of a
10 real and lasting recovery decrease. We had to reach out
11 and to accept the love and understanding the Fellowship
12 had to offer. Clean, we face the world together. No
13 longer do we feel backed into a corner and at the mercy of
14 events and circumstances. We can expect to succeed in
15 many areas of our lives where we have known only failure
16 and despair. Our new friends and the tools for living in
17 the program of Narcotics Anonymous will enable us to
18 experience these changes. Working the Steps will broaden
19 our horizons and practicing the principles will reduce our
20 commitments to some manageable level. Our new friends and
21 awakened spirits will help us. Our common effort is
22 recovery.

23 Being clean we will eventually have to learn to cope
24 with success. Success scares us because in the past it
25 preceded failure. We could not afford to feel good because
26 we remembered the pain of disappointment. It was better,
27 we concluded, to keep moving on and holding back. Actually
28 this made a great deal of sense when we were using. Now,
29 it makes no sense at all.

30 In time we may become a trusted servant. We can parti-
31 cipate in Twelfth Step work, and try to share the message
32 of recovery, with the addict who still suffers. It has
33 been our experience that personal problems will be resolved

when we are willing to accept responsibility for them. It 1
is good form to allow others in the group to help us with 2
them from time to time. Service will get us out of our- 3
selves, and our concern for others will be reflected in 4
our own ability to accept concern from others. When we 5
find ourselves opening up and facing difficulties that 6
used to have us on the run, we will experience periodic 7
surges of good feeling that can give us the strength to 8
begin seeking God's will for us. 9

Well before we surrender, we have ceased to feel as 10
if we are participating in the human race. Our tenuous 11
grasp on reality is invaded by fears and self-hatred, 12
which leads to paranoia, and away from the rest of human- 13
ity as a whole. 14

When we finally became desperate enough to seek help, 15
we, once again, sought out the company of our fellow 16
addicts. But, this time, the addicts were clean. The 17
acceptance we found in the Fellowship was amazing to us, 18
since we had known only loneliness. N.A. reawakened old 19
memories of what it felt like to be a member of the human 20
family. Slowly, we opened up, reached out, warmed up, and 21
let ourselves love and be loved. The original desire to 22
be clean leads us to a desire to help others. Touching, 23
sharing, and loving are actual tools of recovery for us. 24

The only way we keep from continuing a habit is not to 25
take that first fix, pill, drink or toke. People like us 26
know that one is too many and a thousand are never enough. 27
We put great emphasis on this for we know that when we 28
use drugs in any form, we release our addiction all over 29
again or create a new one. 30

Abstinence is the basis of our program. Any mood or 31
mind-altering chemical, prescription or not, is poison to 32
our bodies. Those who relapse and live to make it back, 33

1 keep us well informed of the fact that there is nothing so
2 bad that a relapse can't make it a whole lot worse.

3 If we clean our bodies by daily abstinence we should
4 clean our minds of preconceptions based on past experien-
5 ces. It is those who stay clean when it seems like it
6 isn't worth it who make it. It means remembering that we
7 are just one fix, pill, drink or toke away from total
8 disaster. It's amazing the power that total abstinence
9 has in changing our life. The bottom line of Narcotics
10 Anonymous is staying clean. When we realize that we can't
11 use drugs in any form and live, we are ready to admit our
12 powerlessness. It takes some of us a while to realize
13 how unmanageable we were and are still. For others this is
14 the only thing that which we can be sure. We as adults are
15 allergic to all drugs, although individual tolerance can
16 play a valuable role. Generally the effects of any amount
17 of usage are immediate and devastating.

18 Some of the most common excuses for using are loneliness,
19 self-pity, and closed-mindedness. Past thinking patterns,
20 known as "stinkin' thinkin'", have proven lethal. Our
21 experience shows that we do recover from these old games.
22 We simply live each day at a time without drugs. We believe
23 the solution for the problem of having drug-fogged minds,
24 sick bodies and tormented emotions is in a spiritual way of
25 life. This is why the Twelve Steps are used as a program
26 of recovery and ultimately a method of trusting in a Higher
27 Power that we can have faith in.