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Date: 5 March 2010
To: Conference Participants
From: World Board
RE: Living Clean Chapters Three, Four, and Five Review & Input

We are happy to present you with review drafts of Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the book, "Living Clean: The Journey Continues." This cover memo will provide you with some background about the project and a set of questions to guide your discussions as you review the draft material. **The deadline for input on these chapters is 30 June 2010.**

Project Background and Purpose

This book is to aid members with the long-term process of living clean and walking through life on life's terms. The project plan for this book-length piece was adopted at WSC 2008, but has been an item on the "literature wish list" since 1983. This project remained on the back burner until other literature priorities were completed.

This book will allow us to include many of the ideas gathered from the fellowship over the years regarding new literature. While "Living Clean" will not be able to capture all of the ideas submitted, it will touch on relationships, spirituality, living with success, dealing with challenges, health/illness, practicing principles in our daily lives, etc.

In order to realize the vision for the book, we need input from our members. We are seeking examples of practical application of the tools of recovery, some real "boots-on-the-ground" experience, things we hear that positively affect our recovery, and the results of applying the principles.

We want this book to sound like us in much the same way that the Basic Text speaks to us—a lofty goal to be sure, but one that is attainable if we all work to contribute to the project. As with any literature development process, the beginning of this process is the best time to offer input which may affect the overall scope of the book.

Opportunities for Involvement by the Fellowship

Currently the fellowship has several avenues for participation in the project. In addition to commenting on these drafts in this process, members can support us in its creation by submitting ideas and concepts using one of the methods outlined below.

- There is a session profile for development of input for the project posted at: http://www.na.org/?ID=Living_Clean_Project so that members in local NA communities can have their own input sessions to assist in creating some of the material.
- There is also an online discussion board open to all members of the fellowship. The link is: <http://naws.org/lc/index.php>. Registration is required to keep spammers off the

board. Upon registering, you have the option to hide your email address and develop a screen name of your choosing. The discussion board is divided up by chapters, and the topic outline is posted there for easy reference.

- Members can also send input to: LivingClean@na.org or to our regular postal address: World Board; Attention: Living Clean; 19737 Nordhoff Place; Chatsworth, CA 91311.
- Provide specific input to the review draft of Chapter Three, Chapter Four, and Chapter Five at <http://questionnaire.disc.na.org> or by mail or email to the addresses above.

The Drafts

In this packet are drafts of Chapter Three “Living Spiritually”, Chapter Four “Our Physical Selves”, and Chapter Five “Relationships”. There are two more chapters in development. The remainder of the book will be sent out for review and input in late 2010. The approval form of the book will be released in April 2011 according to conference policy. **The deadline for input on these chapters is 30 June 2010.**

Review and Input Questions

It is our hope that this book will speak to all NA members. This will necessitate discussing all elements of our lives and may encroach on topics that, at first glance, may appear to be outside issues; yet as NA members, we navigate those issues on a daily basis.

Please keep in mind that these drafts have not been fully copyedited, so they may contain spelling errors or erroneous punctuation. The approval form will have been fully edited, so the focus of your review sessions can remain on the concepts being communicated rather than spelling or punctuation. These questions will help to focus your review sessions.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five

Take each chapter separately. Many times it is helpful to read the material aloud as a part of the review process.

1. What are your overall impressions of the chapter? Please rate this chapter on a scale of 1 to 10; with 1 representing “don’t like it at all” and 10 representing “loved it.” Try to be specific about what you particularly liked or disliked in the chapter.
2. Are any ideas or concepts missing from this chapter? If so, what specifically is missing?
3. Are there concepts or ideas that should be elaborated upon or expanded in some way, including ideas that are inadequately explained? Please be as specific as you can be.
4. Is there anything in the drafts that should be removed or modified, including anything that is not consistent with our NA principles? If so, what specifically should be removed or modified, and why?

The deadline for input on these chapters is 30 June 2010.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

Chapter 3 – Living Spiritually

1 As we live in the world with spiritual awareness, we can live in harmony with the God of our
2 understanding, with ourselves and with others. There is no one recipe for spirituality. Each
3 of us has our own spiritual path, and as we explore our spirituality we find ourselves on a
4 journey of self-discovery. Each of us finds our own way to live spiritually and that allows us
5 to make choices about how we live. Freedom means that we are no longer living life by
6 default. When we practice principles in our affairs, we are living spiritually and learning to
7 act on something other than our defects. It's not very complicated, but this is one area of
8 our recovery that we love to complicate. We can have philosophical discussions all day long,
9 and never make any progress in our spiritual lives. On the other hand, some of the most
10 spiritual people we know have very little to say about spirituality. Their quiet example is
11 more powerful than words.

12 It would be dishonest for us to pretend that spirituality is not central to the NA program or
13 the NA way of life. But there is room within that for people of all beliefs – including no belief
14 at all. Our right to our own spirituality in NA is unconditional, and that also means we must
15 allow that right to others. Our Tenth Tradition reminds us that NA must not be a place
16 where any single spiritual path is endorsed. While we may pursue a religion or path which
17 uses specific language to refer to spiritual concepts, we can ask ourselves how we can
18 express that in a way we can all understand and connect with. We use that language out of
19 respect for all the various perspectives in the fellowship, even though in another setting we
20 might use language more specific to our own faith. We do our best to share our deepening
21 spiritual experience in a way that makes it available to everyone in the room. It can be
22 difficult to find a way to talk about our spirituality and still leave the door open for everyone
23 to have their path, as well. The principles we share in the steps, the traditions, the concepts
24 and the rest of our literature go a long way toward providing us with a common language
25 we can all understand and identify with.

26 **Awakening to Our Spirituality**

27 We see the miracle of recovery in action when an addict we didn't think would make it
28 actually gets the message. We see a light come on inside of them. We can see new hope in
29 their eyes. The contrast is so sharp we can't pretend we don't see it. We can also recognize
30 the miracle when we find that we have words a suffering addict needs to hear even though
31 we didn't think we did. When we hear ourselves carry a powerful message, we know we are
32 being helped as surely as the person we're reaching out to. Often we say exactly what we
33 ourselves need to hear. Finding the answers within ourselves is like finding a gift on our
34 doorstep. The message we were trying to carry may have been aimed at us. When we're
35 having a hard time, the best thing we can do for ourselves is to help someone else.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

36 There is no separation between the “spiritual part” and the rest of our program. It’s all
37 spiritual. Our understanding of what that means may change over time. Sometimes we
38 think of the spiritual principles as separate from the actions we need to take, but in fact it’s
39 all connected. The principles describe our beliefs, our actions and the reasons we act.
40 When we understand our principles better, we are able to act more consistently with what
41 we believe.

42 The spiritual awakening we all share is simply an awakening to our own spirituality. The
43 steps are a path to this spiritual growth. We are not the only ones who have spiritual
44 awakenings, but there is a particular awakening we experience as a result of working the
45 steps. We are newly alive to the world around us. We see more clearly and feel more
46 acutely. This isn’t necessarily comfortable.

47 Our relationship to the principles we practice is creative we learn from day to day to use
48 them in new ways, in new combinations, to better express who we are and to help the
49 people around us. As we practice spiritual principles, we discover to our surprise that this
50 doesn’t “make us spiritual” at all. Instead, we are awakening to what has been going on
51 inside us our whole lives. Spirituality is our natural state. The effort we put forward simply
52 pulls away the things that keep us from recognizing that. Some of our members believe
53 that the most important spiritual awakening occurs when we walk in the door of Narcotics
54 Anonymous. We spend the rest of our recovery understanding what happened. For others
55 of us, awakening like so much else in recovery seems to happen in layers: “the fog pulled
56 back to where I could see how much fog there was,” said one. “Each time it pulls back, I see
57 more on the horizon, I have a sense of how big it is and how much I still can’t see. With a
58 little luck, I’ll be waking up more and more my whole life.”

59 Some of us have awakened spiritually with an overpowering sense of a power greater than
60 ourselves. Others have shared a slow, gentle reviving of spiritual awareness. Some of us
61 never experience a sense of a Higher Power as such, but we do see that there are powers
62 greater than ourselves out there. The discovery that others care about us can be an
63 awakening. For the first time we recognize that *we matter*. Living according to principles
64 leads us to humility: a greater awareness of our place in the world and our ability to live
65 comfortably in it. We often hear at meetings, “the most important thing to understand
66 about a Higher Power is that you ain’t it!” Whatever it takes for us to realize that we are not
67 the center of the universe, it’s worth it. We may be too clever to declare ourselves the
68 Supreme Being, but our self-centered disease still tells us that we are responsible for much
69 more than we could possibly control.

70 When we practice living in harmony with our world we become wiser about choosing our
71 battles. We learn where we can use our energy to make a difference and where we need to
72 let go. This is discernment, and it doesn’t come to us from nowhere. It comes from our

Chapter 3 – Living Spiritually

73 experience. We learn to tell the difference between a principle we need to stand for and an
74 opinion that we just won't let go of. Learning to step away from a conflict once it's started
75 is sometimes harder than not getting into conflicts. That doesn't always mean that we agree
76 with anyone or with everything, or that we suddenly lose the power to stand up for what's
77 right. Quite the contrary, we learn when to step forward and when to back away. Some
78 struggles are worth fighting even if we know we cannot win, just as some are not worth
79 fighting even though our victory is sure. We are able to choose for ourselves when to stand
80 up and when to surrender, and as we practice we get better at determining which is right
81 for us.

82 Learning to accept the things we cannot change and take action where it is appropriate is
83 not just part of recovering from addiction; it's part of growing up. One of the great
84 challenges of recovery is that so many of us are overgrown children, still wanting to have
85 things our way without regard for anything else. Often this means that we go through a
86 painful adolescence in the rooms, whatever our age. It is part of the process of recovery.
87 We mature as human beings. Maturity comes through using spiritual principles rather than
88 defects to deal with reality. Incorporating principles into our lives allows us to understand
89 the difference between right and wrong.

90 Spiritual principles seem abstract until we put them into action. Our values are the
91 principles we adopt to guide us. They may change over time, but when we change them for
92 convenience or to please others, we know it. We make that mistake a few times before we
93 learn to recognize it. Often we stop acting on our defects not because it's wrong but
94 because it just gets too uncomfortable for us. We can't stand the way it makes us feel.

95 Our lives change because we take action. Some of us say that we're "applying" spiritual
96 principles because it means we're acting in some way. Others of us prefer to say we're
97 "practicing" principles because we know we can always get better at it. However we say it,
98 action is what matters. We do something different. It's always a risk, but we get better at it
99 as we go.

100 Our primary action is surrender, and we come back to it every day. There is always room to
101 let go a little more. There is great freedom in the understanding that we always have the
102 option to surrender. In the beginning we are often confused and think we need to
103 surrender to our disease; in fact, that's what most of us were doing before we got here! In
104 recovery we learn to surrender to the process, to the program, and ultimately to a power
105 greater than ourselves. When we really give up the battle we find ourselves entirely in the
106 care of a power greater than ourselves. It follows naturally that we commit ourselves to the
107 service of that power, however we understand it. We find that surrender means having the
108 open-mindedness to see things in a new way, as well as the willingness to live differently.
109 When we open ourselves to new perspectives we may find more questions where we'd

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

110 hoped to see answers, but we also find that we can let go a little more. More and more we
111 see how much courage surrender requires. Each time we can see possibilities that might
112 never have occurred to us before; we gain a little more freedom. We are free to change our
113 minds, to change our perspective, to change our lives.

114 “As an addict I’m a creature of habit,” said one member. “The third time I’m in a restaurant,
115 I order ‘the usual.’ I am much more comfortable in an old rut than on a new plateau. I
116 usually don’t notice that I’m stuck until I’ve been there for a while, and by then it’s hard to
117 break free. I have to be willing to be a little uncomfortable if I don’t want to stay stuck.
118 Trying something new can be its own surrender.” It can be very difficult to allow ourselves
119 to experience our freedom. Our comfort with habits makes it easy to stay in a routine. Our
120 fear of the disease sometimes makes us afraid to step too far out on a limb lest we find
121 ourselves in danger. Allowing ourselves to try out new perspectives, new beliefs, and new
122 experiences can all be part of living spiritually.

123 **“A Spiritual, Not Religious Program”**

124 Even though it’s so central to our recovery, many of us resist talking about spirituality
125 because it comes so close to a conversation about religion. There are lots of reasons we
126 may be uncomfortable with this. First of all, it’s something many of us were trained not to
127 discuss. We know it’s deeply personal and unlikely to change. Others of us don’t have a way
128 of talking about it without trying to bring other people’s faith into line with our own. We
129 already need to change so much that it’s important for us to know that our system of faith,
130 whatever it is, is not going to be threatened by our program. It may be challenged, though,
131 as we begin to use our spirituality more actively than we had.

132 We say over and over that this is a spiritual, not religious program, but that doesn’t mean
133 the program can’t work for religious people. Some of us come to NA with a foundation in a
134 faith that we are very comfortable with. Others of us find our way to organized religion as a
135 result of the work we do to build a relationship with a Higher Power in the steps. Many of us
136 never make that leap, and find that the spirituality we achieve through the program is
137 enough for us. There is no right or wrong answer on this; there is no progression that brings
138 us naturally toward or away from organized religion. What is important is that we accept
139 that the program is spiritual in nature, that some of what we depend on here is a great
140 mystery, that some of it doesn’t make sense. Many of us say that even after years clean, we
141 still don’t know “how it works;” we just know that it works for us. Allowing the possibility
142 that there will always be something we don’t know means that there’s always room for
143 something greater than ourselves to work on us and through us.

144 Some of us have maintained the religious beliefs we grew up with, but in our addiction we
145 compromised ourselves in ways that ran deeply against those beliefs. Many of us had to
146 work so hard to distance ourselves from what our beliefs had been that the way we

Chapter 3 – Living Spiritually

147 respond to hearing about them almost feels like an allergy. It can be a long time before we
148 know why that language makes us so uncomfortable. One member said, “my behavior
149 changed much faster than my morals: it took a while before I learned to lie to myself about
150 what I was doing. I had to stay really high not to feel that.” When we start hearing people
151 talk about a higher power, it can feel like we’re about to be pushed through all those
152 feelings again, and it’s natural that this makes us nervous.

153 On the other hand, we can be too quick to cut off conversations that some of us need to
154 have in order to reconcile our recovery with our other beliefs. A member confessed, “I’ve
155 had a struggle with my faith since coming to NA. I still practice the faith I grew up with, and
156 have been very active in it since I got clean. But when I came into the rooms and shared
157 about my spiritual awakenings, I felt shut down. I left for a while to follow that path, but I
158 realize I need to be here too – so I find a way to make peace with the gap between them.”
159 Finding the balance in which we are open to one another’s experience without creating the
160 impression that we’re endorsing a particular religion can be a struggle for us, but without
161 that effort we risk alienating people, or limiting our own understanding of the connections
162 between our spiritual development and our experience in recovery.

163 NA needs to be a place where we all feel welcomed. Even when we’re pretty sure everyone
164 in the room shares the same faith, we still need to make sure that the NA message is clear.
165 We don’t limit our application of the Traditions to those times when we can see the reason
166 for them. Keeping our message clear helps us all. “The more I learn to share my spirituality
167 in NA language, the more clearly I see the connections between my faith and NA,” a
168 member explained. When we find ways to share our new insights using our common
169 language of recovery, we find that our ability to carry the NA message strengthens. Our
170 fellowship matures and develops as each of us brings our increasing understanding to the
171 table; we grow from one another’s experience when we’re willing to share and to listen
172 with an open mind.

173 We may have bad experiences with religion, or experiences that made our relationship to
174 religion feel bad. It can be pretty challenging to face that again. Many of us experienced
175 religious efforts to save us from our addiction, and found that faith alone was insufficient to
176 set us free. Or we may have a very well developed religious faith, and fear that NA is going
177 to ask us to give that up. Whatever our experience, it’s critical to our recovery that we find
178 some kind of belief system we can work with. When we’re in the process of figuring that
179 out, other people’s opinions about what that should be can feel really confusing or
180 threatening. We give each other time and space to come to a belief system of our own.

181 Finding a spirituality that works for us can be one of the most important challenges that we
182 face in recovery, and yet we are often afraid to talk about it. We may worry that we will feel
183 out of place or that others will be uncomfortable with what we are sharing. When we’re

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

184 carrying the message, we learn to make the boundary clear between our personal
185 experience and the message of NA. Most importantly, we find people we trust and respect
186 that we feel comfortable sharing with one on one. The work we must do does not all
187 happen in meetings; we share and explore with our sponsor, in step work, or among our
188 trusted friends. We may not ever have to leave NA to find our spirituality, but if our spiritual
189 explorations take place outside of the rooms it's crucial that we understand that NA
190 welcomes us back from every new voyage, knowing that we have new understanding to
191 share and new challenges to work through as a result of our spiritual growth.

192 When we determine that a certain kind of practice or way of being has saved our lives and
193 refuse to deviate from it, there is a risk that we will become rigid in our thinking or
194 attitudes. We want to believe there's only one way for NA to work, and that's the way it has
195 worked for us so far. There are times when that grit and resolve can save our lives, and it
196 can be really useful when we're carrying the message, as well. But with that hard edge
197 comes the risk that we will simply become stubborn and closed-minded, excluding
198 members who don't do it the way we do. Even worse, when the time comes that we need
199 something more, we've convinced ourselves that it won't be through NA. When we think
200 we know exactly what the program has to offer, we don't leave room for it to grow or for us
201 to continue to grow within it. Our willingness to share our ongoing experience in recovery
202 helps our groups to experience the same growth and renewal that we do as individuals. It is
203 our willingness to stay honest and open about our ongoing experience that keeps our
204 fellowship alive and growing.

205 Our certainty keeps us from the humility we so desperately need. Open-mindedness is a
206 cornerstone of our recovery, and that includes being open-minded about our own program.
207 When we stop being teachable we are in trouble. Too often in recovery we create barriers
208 where boundaries are more appropriate. When we build walls instead of sidewalks we
209 don't just keep new possibilities out, we lock ourselves into old ways of seeing and thinking
210 about the world. It makes sense that we get caught in our own trap this way. When we
211 finally find some relief we want to hold onto it with both hands. As that relief grows into joy
212 and gratitude, it becomes even more precious to us. We can be so afraid to lose what we
213 have gained that we hold ourselves back from growth.

214 We have many beginnings throughout our recovery. When NA has given us all we've asked
215 for – that's the beginning of a new story for us, a new chapter. We think we're done when
216 in fact we may just be getting started. The achievement of our goals is a new beginning of
217 our journey, and as the journey continues we will need the tools we have been given. Just
218 because we've used them already doesn't mean it's time to turn them in. Early on we learn
219 that we can start our day over at any time. As we progress, we learn that we can always
220 begin a new journey in recovery, and we can even start over when we need to. We don't
221 need to blow up our lives to get a fresh start.

Chapter 3 – Living Spiritually

222 Spiritual growth can be a struggle sometimes, but that doesn't mean it's going badly. That
223 struggle is often how we get to a spirituality that works for us. We allow our beliefs to grow
224 just as we allow our spirits to awaken. When we actually experience our beliefs, they
225 become more vital as a result. For some of us, that means finding a style of prayer that
226 resonates with us; some of us find other ways to make a conscious contact that suits our
227 beliefs better. But the key to spiritual growth is that it is growth – which means it's going to
228 change, and it's going to change us. "When I had around ten years clean, I realized I wasn't
229 being honest in my relationship with God because I was pretending I wasn't angry. I realized
230 if I wasn't honest in that relationship, how did any of my other relationships stand a
231 chance?" Each time we recognize an opportunity for spiritual growth, we experience a re-
232 awakening of hope.

233 **A Spiritual Journey**

234 Seeking a God of our understanding is a personal experience, but we need to feel we're not
235 alone in our search. There is a part of this that is very private, unspeakable in a wonderful
236 way. There are times when we must walk alone with our Higher Power. As we study the
237 Traditions we learn that nothing which affects our personal recovery is an outside issue, and
238 also that our unity must come first. These spiritual principles are not in conflict but it might
239 take some thought or some prayer to reconcile them. The awareness and empathy we
240 share with others when we are living spiritually, guide us in our recovery and in our sharing.
241 In the Eleventh Step we ask for the power to carry out God's will. In that spirit, we may ask
242 for the words we need to talk about our experience without creating separation or disunity
243 around us.

244 We need to be able to open up about our journey. It doesn't matter so much what names
245 we give the markers along that road. When we learn to share about our feelings and
246 experiences without naming names, we learn the freedom anonymity has to offer us. We
247 may be surprised at how much we have in common with others who seem to be on very
248 different spiritual paths. When we begin to see the things our journeys have in common we
249 find that our differences really can help us along the way, instead of creating barriers
250 between us.

251 We must come to terms with our own resistance in order to make a commitment to the
252 program. We may be scared to make that leap. There is no way of knowing where it will
253 take us. But the unconditional love we learned in the fellowship is one of the most solid
254 things we have experienced. We see a need for it in all our affairs.

255 We each find a way to surrender, but that does not mean that we all come to believe in
256 God. Many of our members have been clean for years as atheists. For some of us, coming to
257 believe that NA can accommodate our atheism has been a leap of faith. We find that we are
258 welcome no matter what we believe. NA has no opinion on how our members define or

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

259 practice spirituality. Our challenge is to find a definition of spirituality that makes sense to
260 us. By listening carefully and with an open mind to a range of members' opinions and
261 experiences, we form our own understanding that we can use in our own recovery. A
262 member shared, "I didn't hear anyone talking about atheism as a legitimate path in
263 recovery, but I accepted that. I did with spirituality what I was learning to do with other
264 aspects of the program: I took what I needed and left the rest behind. Over the years I have
265 accepted that other people's ideas about spirituality, ethics and God are much different
266 from my own. Part of the strength and beauty of NA is that there is room for all of us. What
267 you call spiritual principles, I call ethical principles."

268 Whatever they're called, the principles in the Twelve Steps lead us away from self-
269 centeredness, fear and active addiction. When we help someone who is struggling, we lose
270 our self-centeredness. When we give back, we cannot be greedy. We have found no limit to
271 the possibilities of recovery for any member who practices the principles of NA, whether we
272 call them spiritual or not.

273 For some of us, the spiritual is simply the unseen or the intangible. Each of us has complete
274 autonomy and anonymity in whatever concept we find for ourselves. The phrase, "as we
275 understood Him" can be a sticking point for a lot of us. We don't have to understand our
276 Higher Power in order to live spiritually. No one else gets to judge that for us, or tell us that
277 our beliefs are right or wrong. What is important is that we are willing to accept one
278 another's experience with an open mind, and to share our experience without an effort to
279 persuade one another what's right or what's true. We simply share what works for us.

280 It can be really hard to express our spiritual experience in words. Because we're talking
281 about things unseen, concrete language usually falls short of what we experience, and the
282 language we have to talk about our spiritual experiences is often borrowed from other
283 places. It takes practice to make it our own. When we're struggling to find words for our
284 experience, the last thing we need is to be told we're doing it wrong. We listen to each
285 other with an open mind and an open heart and we share our experience with the
286 understanding that it won't necessarily be everyone else's experience. In the same spirit,
287 we understand that it's hard for other people to share about this, too, and that sometimes
288 we're going to hear things that ask us to be objective and non-judgmental.

289 Being open minded about our own beliefs as well as those of others frees us from the traps
290 we set for ourselves in our own minds. We can see our spirituality making a difference in
291 our lives when we do the right thing for the right reason. We are able to listen to the voice
292 inside instead of all the chatter around us.

293 When we get tangled up in our differences and our reservations, it's easy to forget why we
294 bother with spirituality in NA. The Basic Text reminds us simply, "We ease the pain of living
295 through spiritual principles." Addiction is a painful disease: we feel life so acutely, and it's

Chapter 3 – Living Spiritually

296 often this pain that drives us to use even when we know it won't really make it better. We
297 have been willing to trade even a moment's relief for a lifetime of hardship. Surviving our
298 own lives seems impossible when we get here, but we learn, gradually, to face reality and
299 make friends with the truth. The spiritual principles we practice begin by helping to take the
300 edge off that pain, but the more we practice the more we find that applying those principles
301 are the key to a freedom we hadn't imagined. We can love our lives, find joy in being alive,
302 and face the world with genuine excitement.

303 Newcomers sometimes ask when their spiritual awakening is going to occur. By the time we
304 ask, it's already started to happen. But we can't see it when we're in the middle of it. We
305 may not be able to pinpoint a single moment of spiritual awakening, but we know we're
306 awake now. We know what it feels like to be so deeply asleep that we thought our spirits
307 had died. We awaken to the fact that we already are spiritual. In the process we recover
308 ourselves, and we find that our true nature is spiritual, and always has been.

309 Just as we get fleeting glimpses of God's will for us, we get fleeting glimpses of our own
310 spirituality. Our spiritual condition is always changing. All too often we think we're
311 "unspiritual" because our conscious contact comes and goes, or because we still have
312 unkind thoughts, or because we still act out in ways we wish we didn't. That we fall short
313 doesn't mean we're not spiritual – it means we are human. Giving ourselves permission to
314 be human means that we allow ourselves room to keep growing. Chances are we are living
315 spiritually long before we know that's what we're doing.

316 Spirituality is a relationship with reality. As we develop our spiritual lives we find that reality
317 becomes less frightening and less rigid. We learn to live with our freedom. We come to see
318 that a change in our perspective can totally shift the way we understand our situation, large
319 or small. When our lives are based in spirituality, our perceptions and responses are based
320 in an ever-evolving relationship to something greater than ourselves. Self-obsession gives
321 way to humility. We understand that we are not the main character in every play, but that
322 our supporting efforts can make a real difference in the lives of those around us.

323 It works both ways: as our spirituality develops, we become increasingly grateful for our
324 lives and the people in them, the more good we see in the world around us, the more
325 deeply grateful we become for the power that brings us to that awareness. When our
326 bodies, minds and spirits are in harmony, our lives show the difference. We are able to live
327 in balance.

328 **Spirituality is Practical**

329 We allow the goodness within us to take root and grow. As we take inventory and practice
330 paying attention to our actions and our motives, it sometimes seems like we are defined by
331 our character defects. The most unpleasant things about ourselves are the things that we
332 believe are most true. Even though we have a disease that requires us to be vigilant about

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

333 our thinking, we know that there is a part of us that is better than that. We learn that our
334 spirit is not apart from us, it is a part of us. We gain awareness of the exact nature of what's
335 right about us. As our behavior is more consistently aligned with our beliefs, we find
336 ourselves coming together into a new sense of who we really are. Integrity is the state of
337 being fully integrated: our actions, our thinking, our feelings, our ideals and our values all
338 match up. We neither overreact nor under-react. Our response to events and our sense of
339 our role in them is proportional and appropriate. It takes a long time for a lot of us to get
340 here, and longer still for us to feel like it's real. Our fractured personalities come back
341 together into an integrated whole. More and more we are able to bring our behavior into
342 alignment with our values and beliefs rather than our feelings and reactions.

343 When we allow spirituality to be simple, we allow it to be universal. It may be mystical but
344 it's not really that mysterious. Whatever our Higher Power, even if we don't have one at all,
345 we each have a spirit – the light on the inside that animates us and makes us who we are.
346 “My spirit was the only thing alive in me,” said a member. “It was dragging my body around
347 like a reluctant pet. Those times I thought my spirit was dead, it was fine – we just weren't
348 on speaking terms.” As we clear out the stuff that keeps us from really stepping into the
349 truth of who we are, we find that light shines more and more brightly. It's the beauty we
350 see in the eyes of someone who's really “got it” – a newcomer on that pink cloud, or an
351 oldtimer whose radiance seems to fill a room. We feel it in a meeting, as well. Many of us
352 have walked into a building where several events were happening, and noticed that the
353 room with the NA meeting in it “felt like home.”

354 In the same way, we learn that finding God's will is often just a matter of showing up.
355 When we show up for life with willingness and an open mind, the next right thing tends to
356 present itself. We don't have to look that hard to find it. A sponsor instructed his sponsee,
357 “Introduce your feet to the floor when you wake up in the morning. Show up to the shower
358 to wash. Show up to your appointments and respect your commitments. When you hit a
359 wall, turn left and find an opening.” We learn to listen to our heart when we surrender and
360 show up for life. The opening is often where we least expect it, leading us to a path or an
361 opportunity or a miracle we weren't looking for at all.

362 Another member shared, “I invite my HP into each moment. Asking for help with my daily
363 routines helps me to love them more. I believe God's will for me is to live in gratitude, even
364 for the little stuff.” It begins with showing up for life but it doesn't end there. There is more
365 to creative action than just getting out of the way. Once we start to live, we find that we
366 have infinite choices on where to go with our lives. We learn to listen to those small inside
367 feelings that tell us if we're on the right path or if we need to put more effort into
368 something.

Chapter 3 – Living Spiritually

369 A spiritual awakening can be like the awakening we experience each morning. We come
370 into awareness, but then it's up to us to decide whether we're going to get up and start our
371 lives, or whether we're going to roll over and go back to sleep. Many times in our addiction
372 we experienced a moment of clarity, when we could see the truth about what we had
373 become, but that awareness in itself did not bring change. The ability to accept life on life's
374 terms is an essential part of our spiritual awakening. We can either accept it or stay
375 miserable.

376 Living spiritually is about recognizing that there's room to grow. "It's not a big eureka
377 moment; it's this calm understanding that I'm not doing the negative stuff I used to do. I
378 feel myself in alignment with my world." We begin to experience awareness and empathy
379 with others. Our confidence and strength are restored. We see ourselves as part of
380 something greater, and seek to live in harmony with that. Spiritual principles give us
381 language through which we develop our values and learn to live by them.

382 None of this means that we automatically get what we wish for. Sometimes we get
383 confused and think that to live spiritually means that we are happy and get what we want,
384 and that if we're not happy or don't get our way, something is out of balance. It would be
385 nice if that were true, but recovery is not a fairy tale. When we experience loss or
386 disappointment, when we find ourselves faced with news we don't want to hear or
387 situations we'd give anything not to experience – it doesn't mean our spirituality isn't
388 working. In fact, it's at times like these that we can see it most powerfully. Life gives and
389 takes, and it's not personal. Our relationship to a power of our understanding is too
390 important to think it can only thrive in good weather. For some of us, the recognition of our
391 awakening spirit includes being okay with life unfolding exactly as it does. But many of us
392 have moments when we are not okay with what's happening around us. We are in pain, we
393 are frightened, and often we are angry that the God we have sought so earnestly has
394 brought us to such a place.

395 **Walking the Walk**

396 If our relationship to a power greater than ourselves is to be of any use to us, it must be an
397 honest relationship. Learning to share our fear, our disappointment and even our anger
398 takes courage. Many of us begin to talk to a Higher Power using formal prayers, and these
399 can be incredibly powerful tools. "I've said the same prayers every day throughout my
400 recovery," one member said. "they worked really well in the beginning. But now, twenty
401 years later, they have a richness and a meaning I could not have imagined." In addition, we
402 learn to talk to our Higher Power in less structured ways, sharing our feelings, our hopes,
403 our fears and our ideas. We may learn to share with our Higher Power the way we share in
404 meetings, allowing ourselves the privilege of honesty. Once we can share our anger and
405 disappointment, we start to get through it and find gratitude again.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

406 Empathy isn't a treatment plan; it's a way of life. NA isn't about learning to be compliant;
407 it's about establishing a relationship with something greater than ourselves, and often that
408 relationship can be a little stormy. Many of our long time members recall that they were
409 "impossible" newcomers – questioning, doubting and admitting their reservations. We
410 made mistakes in public and dealt with the consequences. We built our foundation not by
411 pretending or acting as if, but by going through the struggle honestly and courageously, and
412 accepting help along the way. Recovery isn't always a tidy process; we're building intimate
413 relationships with other people and with a power greater than us, and neither of these
414 come naturally to all of us.

415 So many of us share that our reservation about a Higher Power is that a powerful God
416 would not allow things to happen as they do in the world; what we have seen as we
417 endured the hell of addiction could not possibly have been the creation of a loving creator.
418 There are a thousand ways out of this corner, and it's not our place to choose one for all of
419 our members. It can be important for us to remember to separate the words of a step from
420 what people say about that step. Our relationship with a Higher Power, as it develops, may
421 not fit a mold set before us by others, and it may be very different from what we once
422 imagined it to be. In this way, it really is like our relationships with human beings. Intimacy
423 isn't predefined or predictable. What we find is not that our Higher Power spares us the
424 hardships of life, but that it gives us the grace to get through them clean. We can find the
425 lesson in difficulty, and we can see the gifts that come sometimes in terrible packages. We
426 may find that the painful situations we once wanted to blame on God are a consequence of
427 our own actions and decisions. Perhaps most importantly, we can take the pain we endure
428 and transform it into a tool to help others. As we recover and carry the message, we find
429 that everything we have experienced can be a resource for us to find empathy, compassion
430 and the words we need to bring someone else up and out of despair. We are powerless
431 over our addiction, but in our surrender we become powerful tools for transformation.

432 That transformation for each of us begins with surrender. Over and over we find that
433 acceptance helps free us from pain and suffering. We begin by accepting that we are
434 addicts. From our first time that we admit that we are powerless over our addiction and our
435 lives have become unmanageable, we begin to feel relief. And that relief is the very
436 beginning of the gratitude that will guide us throughout our recovery.

437 Gratitude isn't just a mood. It is a course of action, a way of setting ourselves in relation to
438 the world. And sometimes it's a discipline: it can take work to hold ourselves in that
439 position, especially when we're used to seeing the world through our filters of entitlement
440 and resentment. Humility and gratitude walk hand in hand. We learn to practice saying
441 what we're grateful for whether or not we feel it. The feeling may not come naturally at
442 first, but when we practice saying thanks and start to recognize how much we have to be
443 thankful for. Many of us start with the fact that we're not in withdrawal today. When we

Chapter 3 – Living Spiritually

444 start to see how fortunate we really are, many of our questions recede. They may not be
445 answered right away, but we start to understand our questions about the nature of God are
446 much less important than the rewards we get from building the relationship even if we
447 don't understand it or fully believe it.

448 Often we act on spiritual principles before we internalize them simply because it's
449 suggested and we want to save our lives. As we integrate spiritual principles into our lives
450 they become values: that is, we come to value some of them enough that they become part
451 of who we are. We learn what we believe by practicing different beliefs and finding which
452 ones suit us. What we are told to do in the beginning we come to associate with spiritual
453 principles. When we're learning, we may be very rigid in our practice. As our practices
454 become more integrated into our lives, we find that we can soften a little. "My
455 understanding of honesty was so rigid," said one member, "that I couldn't even be tactful to
456 spare someone's feelings. One day I was caught in a conflict between two sponsees: one
457 called and confessed that he'd done great harm to another, who happened to be in my
458 home at the time. Brutal honesty with either of them would have made the situation much
459 worse. I learned to balance the principle of honesty with the principle of anonymity. Since
460 then I've learned to balance it with kindness and compassion, as well."

461 We use the tools we associate with spirituality from our very early recovery: we practice
462 prayer and meditation, we go to meetings, we take suggestions, we work steps. Once we
463 can identify what our spirituality feels like to us, we recognize that other things in our lives
464 are spiritual. Making music is an act of prayer for some of us; walking out in nature can be a
465 meditation. "I'm not a religious person at all," said one member. "But I was out in the ocean
466 one day, floating, and I could feel my connection to the water holding me up, and the sky
467 above, and the people on shore, and all of it. That feeling of connection was a powerful
468 thing." We practice our gratitude by sharing with others, and in that, too, we begin to feel
469 our connection to each other and to something bigger.

470 Each time we feel that connection – however we attain it – we understand a little more.
471 We see ourselves as part of something greater and seek to live in harmony with it. When
472 we achieve that harmony, the freedom we feel is unmistakable. We are freed from our
473 feelings of alienation and inadequacy, and from the self-centered fear that once seemed to
474 infect all of our thoughts and actions. That freedom comes and goes, but the first time we
475 feel it we are given a new hope that life might not have to hurt so much. Addiction is a
476 painful disease. Our spirituality doesn't blunt that pain, but it gives us the ability to move
477 through it, past it and out into our lives. We begin to trust that the pain we feel at moments
478 in our lives will not consume us. We can start to trust ourselves to feel without fearing that
479 our emotions will destroy us.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

480 Part of learning is making mistakes. We learn by missing the mark as much as we do by
481 achieving it. Inventory is the process of going back over our experience to discover where
482 we were in harmony with our values and where we missed. If we didn't take personal
483 inventory, pray and meditate, we wouldn't know whether we were practicing principles in
484 all our affairs. We wouldn't be awake to reality. The steps keep us in tune with the
485 principles, but they also keep us in tune with ourselves. As we get better at it, we can
486 identify earlier and earlier the point at which we start to go astray. Often it's the littlest
487 changes that make the biggest difference in our lives. In the same way that a small change
488 in course alters the destination of ships at sea, small changes in the way we respond to life
489 can free us from old, repetitive patterns and open us to new ways of thinking and acting.
490 Our values become our guiding star.

491 **Service Is Spirituality In Action**

492 We practice with spiritual principles; we try them out, we go to extremes, we drop them
493 altogether and then find that they have become important to us. As long as we are willing,
494 we continue to change. Our values become clear to us as we act. The principles we once
495 practiced as an exercise, or because it was suggested, become a part of us. Things that are
496 profoundly difficult in the beginning of our recovery become second nature to us. We may
497 not notice this change until we fall away from our new habits for a moment. For example, it
498 can be very hard to start going to meetings again when we've been away for a while. Once a
499 habit, meeting attendance once again requires discipline. It gets easier with practice, just
500 like it did the first time. As we get better at practicing our recovery, we start to fear
501 ourselves less. We develop new skills, and get used to the idea of practicing principles in
502 new areas of our lives even when we're scared. We come to know that our pain can be a
503 catalyst for growth, and not just a threat to our newfound equilibrium. On the other hand,
504 we learn that pain is not the same as growth, and that it must spur us to action if we want
505 to be free of it. We become more willing to take the action that will set us free. Our
506 tolerance for pain starts to diminish, and we may notice that the necessity for change
507 comes sooner.

508 Understanding and embracing the steps and traditions is important for all of us. But we
509 must use what we learn, or it is of no value. When we engage in selfless service of any kind,
510 we find that all of the principles we have come to love and learn are called upon. It's not
511 easy to get ourselves out of the way, but that's precisely what frees us from our self-made
512 prisons. Sometimes it's clear that we need to change or we're in trouble; at other times, we
513 are free to stay where we are, but it might mean selling ourselves short. There are many
514 actions we can take when we need to change, but the simplest actions are often the most
515 important. When we give to others, we get out of our own way enough to get a different
516 perspective on our lives. Strangely, the most unselfish things we do are often the most
517 rewarding, directly or indirectly. Selfless service is service to our Higher Power, our fellow

Chapter 3 – Living Spiritually

518 human beings, and ourselves. When we are lucky enough to be part of the process, we see
519 a greater power working through us to make a difference in other people’s lives. When we
520 see it happen we have a harder time denying its reality.

521 “I needed to know how to live peacefully without drugs,” one member said. “My recovery
522 had to be about more than survival.” Others have suggested that early recovery is like
523 passing through a funnel: we’re so aware of what we can’t do that our world seems to get
524 very small. Slowly we move through that narrow channel to find that on the other side a
525 new world opens up to us, full of possibility. Because we’ve passed through that channel we
526 finally have a chance to manifest our potential. But there is no way around that process. We
527 start out in survival mode, and come out to live a life beyond our wildest dreams. Even
528 though we’ve heard it said in meetings for years, it can still be a surprise when our world
529 opens. And sometimes that opening can be very frightening. We who have chosen between
530 bad options for years often find that too many choices can make us really uncomfortable.
531 There are moments when life opens up before us with so many options that it seems
532 strangely empty.

533 There is a transition that happens to each of us in the process of recovery, an indefinable
534 moment when we move from desperation to passion. Where we had been motivated by
535 the fear of greater pain, we start to see new opportunities for growth in our struggles, and
536 are willing to move forward out of hope, rather than fear. This may not be our first spiritual
537 awakening, but it is clearly an awakening of the spirit into a new sense of possibility.

538 It might sound odd, but accepting our freedom is a massive act of spiritual courage. When
539 we become willing to accept what it really means to set ourselves free, we realize that
540 we’re in for quite a ride. A member shared, “Early in recovery someone told me I could have
541 a life now. It was like I was hearing it for the first time. Life had been passing me by, mostly
542 because I couldn’t see myself in it. NA gave me the spirit to be courageous about life again,
543 and to just go out and... live!” Our dreams and wishes can be a form of guidance. That
544 “fleeting glimpse” might not be where we are actually going, but may set the course for our
545 journey. When we’re willing to move toward our dreams we end up living well beyond
546 them. “I was afraid that if I got what I wanted, there wouldn’t be anything left for me in
547 recovery,” one member confessed. Meeting our goals isn’t the end of the story. The end of
548 the journey toward a goal is often the beginning of a new phase in our lives. So many of us
549 are used to being driven by crisis or calamity; it can take practice to learn to be motivated
550 by something other than pain. Being willing to step out and act because something feels
551 right to us takes a new kind of trust. “Just as I struggled to list my assets in my first Fourth
552 Step, I struggle to list my goals and the things I enjoy now,” one member said. We transform
553 need into desire, and obsession into determination.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

554 We can be afraid to want things too badly because it seems selfish, or because that means
555 they will be taken from us. Another member shared, “I believed it was unacceptable to fail,
556 and I believed I was a failure. So there really was no out for me. I needed tools to survive my
557 own humanity.” Freedom from our self-centeredness doesn’t come easily, and it doesn’t
558 come all at once. Thank goodness for that. The truth is, if we went all the way through that
559 process at once, we might not survive it. We might not want to. After years of recovery, we
560 can look back at the work we’ve done and be grateful and satisfied – and we can see the
561 terrible gaps in it, as well. There is a moment in our lives when we may recognize how much
562 of the work we’ve done has been in service to the belief that if we do the right things, we
563 will get what we want. When we realize what we’ve been seeking is not conscious contact
564 but constant comfort, we are appalled. Does this mean that my relationship with my Higher
565 Power is false? Is my recovery a lie? Some spiritual awakenings are also rude awakenings.
566 We see clearly, and what we see may be alarming. When we awaken to the darkness within
567 ourselves, it hurts. “The first time I looked inside and saw The Nothing,” said one member,
568 “I thought that was the truth about me. I was terrified. I thought, I’ve been given the
569 opportunity to see all this grace around me, only to be shown it wasn’t for me.”

570 A crisis of faith is a very real crisis. It is a moment of reckoning. A new kind of surrender is
571 necessary if we are to stay clean and keep growing. Spiritual growth can be painful,
572 bewildering, frightening and very lonely. Sadly, we have seen some of our members give up
573 at this crucial point when there is nothing left to blame or change but ourselves. Selfishness
574 and self-centeredness die hard. But we can get through it with others who have survived
575 this passage, and we find great gifts are waiting for us on the other side. What we heard
576 when we were new still stands: keep coming back, no matter what! We need other people
577 to walk us through these hard times, and we need to reach out and help others as we heal.

578 After a difficult loss, a member shared that “having long term recovery gives me the
579 opportunity to know many addicts around the world. The prayers of these addicts helped
580 me through the grieving process. At the height of my grief I could actually feel people
581 praying for me. My instinct with strong feelings like these is to run, and when I do I’m like a
582 hamster on a wheel. But I have not felt alone or had the desire to self destruct.”

583 One of the gifts of reaching out is finding that our most painful moments can help someone
584 else. When we say, “I’ve been through that, and I stayed clean,” we notice with gratitude
585 that we have gotten to the other side of something we thought we couldn’t get through,
586 and there is great satisfaction in being able not just to look back but to reach back and help
587 someone else through their struggle. Another gift is that the experience of getting through
588 such times strengthens our faith. One member suggested, “There are spiritual explorers and
589 spiritual tourists; one plays it very safe, and the other will step right out there and try God
590 out. We get more sure of that relationship as we go.”

Chapter 3 – Living Spiritually

591 That willingness to step out and try a relationship with a Higher Power can be a powerful
592 thing, but we usually don't start out there. We put a toe in the water first. We may
593 experiment with prayer and meditation for a long time before we feel something engage.
594 One member shared that, "I experimented with different practices for seven years before I
595 found the right grace in the right place. Finding the right path for my spirituality was like
596 finding a shoe that fit." Another member shared that she was so resistant to prayer that her
597 sponsor resorted to extremes: "put your Basic Text on one side of the room, sit on the other
598 side and reach out your hand," said the sponsor. "You have just prayed." However we do it,
599 prayer is an act of reaching out for help and connection. It is an act of humility and honesty,
600 and for some of us it is the first honest or humble action we take.

601 We know that indifference or intolerance toward spiritual principles is very dangerous for
602 us, but sometimes that intolerance is not what we came in with. We develop a set of beliefs
603 in recovery and resist anything that seems to threaten them or call them into question. But
604 this is precisely the way that what we know about the truth can be revised. The truth isn't
605 what changes – it's what we know about it, how we understand it. As we get closer to the
606 truth we understand more that it cannot hurt us, even if it's painful in the moment to let go
607 of an old belief.

608 A member shared, "Letting go of old beliefs was hard because I didn't really know what I
609 believed to begin with." The work we do in the steps can help us figure out what we believe
610 and whether our beliefs still work for us. The ability to change our assumptions about the
611 world is one of the most important freedoms we have, because it enables us to see
612 alternatives we couldn't imagine before. We disguised our low self-esteem as lack of
613 interest in the world around us, and saw our lives as a narrow path between bad
614 alternatives. "I saw myself as an obstacle to God's will," said another member. Our
615 relationship to our Higher Power has suffered a lot of damage in our addiction, and it can be
616 one of the hardest to amend. "I used to feel embarrassed, strange and empty when I
617 prayed," another member admitted. "My relationship with my God required that I
618 persevere. I had to keep praying through the times when I didn't feel anything. It took a
619 long time for it to become natural to me." Being willing to keep going, keep trying when it
620 feels hard – or when it doesn't feel like anything at all – is an act of faith. We get through
621 these difficult times by having a daily spiritual practice: the habit carries us through until the
622 feelings return. We have faith in the experience of our fellow members that somehow, this
623 is going to help.

624 As we develop more ways to relate to our Higher Power, we find benefits in all of our
625 relationships. For some of us this never comes to involve a Higher Power that we would call
626 God: "I trust the unity in NA," said a member, "that it will reach out to me and be there
627 when I reach out. NA has carried me when I couldn't walk." Learning to pray is a process.
628 The journey is its own reward. "I learned the Serenity Prayer without the first word,

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

629 because I knew I didn't believe in that. When I was working the Third Step for the first time,
630 I began to pray by saying "thank you." Most of the time now it's not please or thank you or
631 any kind of dialogue, it just is. I take a deep breath and cherish this quiet moment of being
632 connected."

633 In some ways, conscious contact with a Higher Power is no different than any other
634 relationship. Meeting a person every day at the same time and place is a good beginning in
635 getting to know someone, but to improve that relationship we have to be willing to share.
636 Intimacy grows over time. When we are close to someone through a difficult time, we learn
637 whether we can trust them. The relationships that carry us through hardship become more
638 precious to us than gold.

639 Prayer helps us to let go of our fear and distrust and to live in faith. We don't have to
640 understand it for it to work. We open the door to a faith deep within which allows us to
641 meet adversity with serenity. "I strive to practice prayer in every moment," said one
642 member. "Of course I fail every day. But it is changing my perspective. I am very aware of
643 the fragility and preciousness of life." Instead of giving so much thought to why things
644 happen, we come to look for what we can learn. A member shared, "In early recovery my
645 prayers were sporadic acts of desperation and surrender. I learned prayer as a way to
646 practice conscious contact. Now I find if I can remember my HP in the moment, my life
647 becomes a prayer, my wisdom is activated in meditation, and I exist within the will of my
648 Higher Power. I am spiritually free, the farthest from active addiction and the closest to the
649 pure joy of existence in the moment."

650 One way our Higher Power communicates with us is through people who came into our
651 lives. One member explained, "Sharing in meetings is my highest form of prayer, because I
652 know my HP is there – I can feel it – and I don't hold back. Often I need another person in
653 front of me so I can pretend I'm talking to them and talk to God. Sometimes I get answers
654 through them." Active listening is a form of meditation. Some of the most important
655 messages are delivered through pretty unlikely people. When we listen with an open mind,
656 we can hear the message we need. One of the gifts of empathy is being able to hear each
657 others' truth. We learn to settle inside ourselves. A member said, "I was so tired of that
658 committee in my head talking endlessly about how I wasn't good enough and nothing
659 would be alright. So one day in meditation I gave them all musical instruments. You know,
660 they're a pretty good band."

661 Being present and in the moment feeling alive, aware, and connected are feelings we hear
662 about most often when members are sharing about their experiences with prayer and
663 meditation. Most of us don't feel that profound sense of unity in every waking moment, but
664 just knowing that we can feel it sometimes brings a sense of security. "The fleeting feeling I
665 long for is peace within, based on nothing outside myself. I just have to be willing to put the

Chapter 3 – Living Spiritually

666 world down long enough to have a chance at it.” Even if it’s just for a moment that we
667 experience that peace, we can keep it in our hearts as we move through our lives. That
668 spiritual peace becomes the root of our emotional stability, and it gives us the courage to
669 take risks. When we can quiet our minds, we can better hear the answers we need. So often
670 we’re desperate for answers that are right in front of us.

671 When we notice the word “ritual” embedded in the word “spiritual” we realize how
672 important it is that our spirituality have some kind of regular expression. Practicing
673 principles is just like any other form of exercise: the more regularly and consciously we do
674 it, the better we get at it. “When I don’t practice my morning prayer,” said one member, “I
675 feel disconnected and like I am running on my own power.” Of course we do not tell anyone
676 how, when or where to pray. It may never involve prayer in words at all. But some sort of
677 regular pause for reflection is still useful. “I struggle with getting to 100%,” said a member.
678 “I make good progress toward a goal and then I get scared, back off, and berate myself for
679 not making it all the way there.” Regular spiritual practice teaches us the discipline to
680 follow through on other commitments.

681 For many of us, our commitment to Narcotics Anonymous is the first promise we ever keep.
682 “I always sought freedom from restraints or authority. Freedom from attachment was
683 another big choice. The way I convinced myself of my freedom was by becoming a nomad.
684 When you are never anywhere for long, you can pretend that your choices don’t confine
685 you, that you leave no trace on the world. My emotional luggage was always standing by
686 the door. NA has asked me to do what I have never agreed to do before: to stay. That for
687 me is a really big deal.”

688 The ability to complete a goal comes from the practice of diligence. Developing some
689 autonomy from our negative feelings is a gift of meditation. Our practice helps us to focus
690 and see things through. We remember to put our program first, and to respect our own
691 limits. “I struggle every day to keep myself spiritually balanced. Sometimes I am more
692 successful than others. Then I realized - this is balance.” When we act in love and humility,
693 we are amazed at what we can accomplish. An old member used to say that in the Third
694 Step we gave up our will and in the Eleventh Step, it is returned to us, transformed. We stop
695 being so afraid of ourselves and find that we are able to stand up for what we believe.
696 “Before NA, I was a coward and a follower. My spiritual awakening compels me to stand
697 firm in my beliefs.”

698 More and more we find that the principles of the program guide our choices. Being able to
699 choose wisely begins when we are able to be honest with ourselves about our motives and
700 our desires. Sometimes doing nothing is the most spiritual thing we can do. It can keep us
701 from having to make amends later, and it gives us time to seek guidance from our Higher
702 Power. We can have our feelings without being had by them. “I believe that my Higher

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

703 Power has a sense of humor,” said one member. “Laughter and joy are as spiritual for me as
704 prayer and service. True enlightenment begins when I lighten up on myself.”

705 **“Creative Action of the Spirit”**

706 As we gain more confidence in our spirituality we become more willing to improvise, not
707 only in our spiritual practice but in the way we live. We become willing to do the right thing
708 just because it’s right, and to let go of our fear. We go from simply showing up and
709 reporting for duty each day to a willingness to serve the greater good in the best way we
710 can. We start by following suggestions, and progress to doing the right things for the right
711 reasons. We can stop there – but if we’re willing to strive for more, we have the
712 opportunity to exceed our greatest expectations for ourselves. Our experience settles a lot
713 of our ambivalence about spirituality. We can just go ahead and have the relationship with
714 our Higher Power without worrying so much about the things we don’t know or understand.
715 Each time an experience re-awakens us, we are more aware of the great power pushing us
716 to wake up to our lives.

717 Great or small, our awakening shows in our willingness to practice the principles and carry
718 the message. Service has much to teach us about our spirituality. It’s how we show our love
719 and gratitude, but it’s also how we learn it. When we are in action together, we are greater
720 than the sum of our parts, smarter than our decisions, and more powerful than we think we
721 are. The Second Tradition reminds us that a loving God guides our efforts in service, and we
722 can see it clearly when our short term setbacks or disagreements somehow don’t interfere
723 with carrying the message. We see a Higher Power working in NA and come to believe it can
724 work in our lives too. A member shared, “when my home group has put off a decision
725 because some of us aren’t sure what to do we usually make a better decision later. I learned
726 to do this in my personal life: when I take time to pray I make better decisions.”

727 Some see our service to NA as a training ground: it’s where we can learn to practice
728 principles in an atmosphere of acceptance and mutual respect. It’s not always gentle, but
729 we still share a common purpose and a common bond. And because in NA we are all equal
730 and all learning, we are always both the student and the teacher. No matter how long we’ve
731 been around NA, there always seems to be the opportunity to learn a little more about
732 ourselves when we get involved. “Some of my early service was just to fit in. Over time I
733 have developed a true desire to serve NA. Service makes me feel good about me. I am
734 useful, and I hope and pray each day for new members to join and help carry the message.
735 It takes a long time for NA to grow. To stick with it I’ve learned patience, hope, acceptance,
736 love and commitment.”

737 Some of us find our calling in NA, and helping others in recovery becomes our life’s work.
738 Others of us are drawn in different directions, and find that our best service comes in
739 another form. But we still carry the NA message. We can do so much in our world. When

Chapter 3 – Living Spiritually

740 we find recovery, our addiction no longer limits us. We are of value in and out of the
741 fellowship. “Today I understand I’m an instrument of my Higher Power’s will. I have a
742 choice whether I will play in tune, create a new song, or just make noise for its own sake.”
743 By adhering to spiritual principles we are able to live, work and accept situations in the real
744 world, inside and outside of NA. When we work the steps in order, we learn to apply them
745 to our daily affairs. If we practice these principles, we never have to use again, and we can
746 improve our ability to serve and to cope with what life brings. We admit our powerlessness,
747 ask for help, admit our errors, work on our defects, make amends and ask for continued
748 guidance. As we apply these principles to our daily thoughts and action, we enhance the
749 quality of our lives.

750 Our disordered personalities are not the end of our story, but the beginning. Sharing
751 ourselves, whether we’re telling our story or reading our inventory, helps us bring order to
752 the chaos. We begin to sort ourselves out with the steps as an ongoing part of our lives. We
753 experience deeper spiritual growth each time we embrace a step. Over and over we
754 surrender, let go and trust the process; each time another door inside us opens. The
755 emptiness we felt inside is filled as we practice prayer, meditation, and service. As our
756 defects release the chokehold they once had on us, we are freed to live fully. The narrow
757 choices that once defined us give way and we begin to dream, imagine, create, solve
758 problems or just seek joy in life itself. Our NA program provides a solid foundation. We can
759 use that foundation to achieve anything, as long as it is centered in spiritual principles. We
760 always have a choice to continue or move on. Either way, we learn to trust that the
761 principles of NA guide us in all our affairs.

762 We put this way of life into practice with our families, people we work with, and all of our
763 other relationships. We do the best we can each day. Sometimes we improve just a little bit
764 at a time; at other times we make big progress in practicing the principles, or we really fall
765 down. Our progress isn’t always the same, but we can see it happening over time. We learn
766 to stand up for what we believe. We begin to say “no” when something isn’t right for us,
767 even if we might lose someone’s approval in the process. We learn to take care of ourselves
768 and our responsibilities, and not to blame others when things don’t go right. We start to see
769 the opportunities for growth that are available to us on our best and worst days.

770 It is important to have conviction about what we do. We aren’t wandering around anymore,
771 changing who we are to match who happens to be around. Because of this conviction in us,
772 there is a clearer path to follow. Resentment, fear and arrogance cut us off from the ability
773 to be spontaneous, creative and free. We open that channel when we begin to take selfless
774 loving action. We learn to respect and love people without seeking approval. We become
775 responsible members of our communities, taking what we learn in the meetings and
776 practicing it in the rest of our lives. Service matters in the world. At different times our
777 paths lead us to be of service to others, directly or indirectly. One of the most wonderful

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

778 feelings we know is that of being a part of humanity. When we practice spiritual principles
779 we experience awareness and empathy with others. After so many years of isolation, a
780 feeling of well being rises within us, assuring us that we are right where we're supposed to
781 be.

782 Hope and freedom from active addiction come to us early and are given freely. This is what
783 some of us call "the pink cloud." We don't have to work for it. But there comes a time
784 when there is no more "just taking." This is a crossroads; many of us stop here and never
785 know what we have missed. We get the real rewards of recovery by giving back and giving
786 forward, out of gratitude for what we have been given, and out of hope for what is to come.
787 Being of loving service is living spiritually. First we take, then we give, then we share. Living
788 fully is a creative expression of love for our Higher Power. To be fully alive, awake and
789 honest about who we are is a gift to us and from us.

790 We arrive at Narcotics Anonymous hoping for survival. What we find is love, courage, a
791 sense of connection and a sense of direction. All our lives we had looked for the peace and
792 safety we experience in recovery. As we seek our Higher Power's will for us, we come to an
793 understanding of what our purpose is. Spiritual awakening is a process. Maybe it is what the
794 whole process is about. We nurture our awakening spirits and know that we are finally free
795 to live in grace, integrity, and dignity.

796 Our spiritual connection leads us forward into a new life of joy, wholeness and endless
797 learning. We discover within ourselves a passion for living. Our experience is transformed
798 into tools for healing and keys to compassion. We find within ourselves a purity and beauty
799 we never suspected. In whatever way we experience conscious contact, a feeling of
800 acceptance and an end of turmoil seems to come for all of us. The principles of Narcotics
801 Anonymous are the tools we need to deal with whatever life brings. Seeking our Higher
802 Power's will for us brings us ever closer to our own heart's desire: to feel loved, useful and
803 part of something greater than ourselves.

804 The spiritual foundation of NA gives us the confidence to live and enjoy life, to help others,
805 and to carry the NA message secure in the knowledge that we are guided to exactly where
806 we need to be. We begin to feel connected to the world around us and that our lives have
807 purpose. We find the courage to follow our heart, to listen to the voice within, to create, to
808 commit, to explore, and to live.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

Chapter 4 – Our Physical Selves

1 We talk a lot about how addiction affects our bodies, but the physical part of recovery has been
2 ignored to a surprising degree. Our physical, emotional and spiritual lives are interwoven: we can
3 think of them separately, but we cannot experience them separately. We free our minds and spirits,
4 turning them over to a higher power, but our bodies can be another story. If we don't deal with the
5 physical part of our recovery, we run the risk of becoming disconnected from our spiritual path.

6 Each of us has different ways of seeing ourselves. We're physical beings, but we're also spiritual.
7 We're spiritual beings, but we're also emotional. As addicts, we're prone to alienation - the feeling
8 of being apart from - and sometimes we even feel apart from ourselves, as if all these pieces of who
9 we are don't add up to one whole being. When we begin to focus on what is real, we can start to
10 accept ourselves with all our contradictions. All these pieces of ourselves come together like a
11 kaleidoscope, always changing, beautiful and colorful. We let go of the idea that the pieces need to
12 line up perfectly for us to be okay. We can create amazing harmony in our lives just by being aware
13 of what's happening inside ourselves – physically, emotionally and spiritually.

14 Many of us struggle with taking good care of our bodies. We go back and forth between indulging
15 ourselves in ways that feel selfish or excessive, and punishing ourselves or piling on restrictions in an
16 effort to control patterns that feel like feel like symptoms of our addiction. After long struggles with
17 ways and means to drive ourselves back into healthy behavior, we find that what we really needed
18 to do was surrender! "It's not that I don't know I have the tools," a member said. "It's just that I
19 forget to remember." Often it's when we help a newer member work the steps that we see how
20 they apply to our lives today. Each time we see it, it feels new.

21 There are lots of people who want to tell us how we should do it, but taking an honest look at how
22 we relate with our bodies in recovery is new and scary. Too often we hold back from the freedom
23 our program has to offer because we are not entirely ready to let go. Even though we may have
24 beliefs about what a relationship with our bodies should look like, most of us feel we are not living
25 up to that standard. We are aware of our imperfection but tend to see it as something we should
26 control, not something we can surrender.

27 Our sense of humor is the tool that allows us to squeeze a positive attitude out of a negative self-
28 image. When we are able to laugh at ourselves, we can lighten up a little. We do the work, but we
29 also learn to play. We see our defects, but we also begin to see what there is to love about us. We
30 find that balance in our lives is like walking on a tightrope - it's dynamic, it only works when we're
31 moving. We are constantly in motion – and so is the way we see ourselves.

32 **It's a Relationship**

33 A relationship with our bodies is just that: a relationship. It can be healthy and rewarding, or abusive
34 and destructive. Mostly, it's somewhere in between. We live and grow, get better and worse, and
35 find that the process is rarely a straight line in one direction. Like any relationship, it requires
36 communication and responsibility: paying attention to our bodies, giving them what they need,
37 caring for them, and seeking help when necessary. For most of us, this does not come naturally.
38 Very few of us come to NA with education or experience in what is good for us. Even if we knew

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

39 better, living through active addiction means we spent long periods of time abusing and neglecting
40 our bodies.

41 Our disease craves instant gratification, but learning how to take care of our bodies takes time, and
42 so does healing. We may want results as soon as we start, but mostly we see them accumulate
43 gradually. Our relationship to our bodies has been troubled: we spent a lot of time trying to escape
44 them, after all. We pushed the limits, not only through combining drugs, overdosing, or substituting
45 in order to get high – but in other ways, as well: staying awake for days and then sleeping almost as
46 long; not eating, or eating in bizarre and unhealthy ways; selling our bodies or engaging in unsafe
47 sex; participating in or exposing ourselves to extreme violence.

48 We may be better at this relationship at some times than at others. Sometimes we care for
49 ourselves and sometimes we don't. Poor self-care can be a sign that we are in trouble, either in
50 terms of our self-esteem or our priorities. When we're not taking care of ourselves physically,
51 chances are we're not taking very good care of ourselves emotionally or spiritually, either. On the
52 other hand, mood changes can be a sign of a physical problem. When we notice a change in how we
53 feel or react, it's usually worth looking a little deeper.

54 Some issues or life changes bring changes in our relationship with our bodies, like quitting smoking,
55 going through pregnancy or menopause, or recovering from an injury. Taking a job that is more
56 demanding than we're used to, or working different hours. Changing to night shift can really affect
57 how we feel and how we take care of ourselves. Emotional changes, too, like beginning or ending a
58 romantic relationship, can change the way we see and relate with our bodies. Whether the changes
59 are ultimately for better or worse is a choice we get to make.

60 Caring for ourselves gives us other kinds of freedom, including energy, freedom of movement, self-
61 esteem, and discipline. We develop the ability to take action in other areas of our lives. If we are
62 resisting a larger change, then we are likely to resist the smaller changes that would make it
63 possible. What we don't do for our recovery can be a powerful indicator that transformation is
64 coming. Breakdown often precedes breakthrough.

65 **Letting Ourselves Go**

66 The Third Step asks us to make a decision to turn our will and our lives over. Most of us find the
67 willingness to do that pretty early in our recovery, but our desire for control expresses itself in many
68 different ways. One member shared that for her, "the real surrender is surrendering to the fact that I
69 will be surrendering for the rest of my life." It's not a decision we make only once, and as we return to
70 it again and again we find that our resistance lessens, our commitment deepens, and our ability to let
71 go increases. Some suggest that we are in a process of progressive surrenders. We take back control
72 and let it go again, each time finding that we can let go a little more, and that some of what we took
73 back last time we can now let go of for good. Next time we look, we still find that we were holding on
74 here and there: "I can turn over this part of my life," we say, "but that other part is my job to handle."
75 Finding the line between personal responsibility and willful control is a challenge. It's different for each
76 of us. In fact, for most of us, the answers to that question change over the course of our recovery.

77 It's remarkable that with so much experience in sharing our struggles with a higher power and
78 learning to allow that power to work in our lives, so many of us hold on to the relationship with our
79 bodies as something we must learn to control through willpower. Whether it's learning to eat well,

Chapter 4 – Our Physical Selves

80 gaining or losing weight, letting go of smoking or other habits, too often we forget that we have a
81 program that teaches us to be free. Instead we mistakenly say that we have to “get ourselves under
82 control.” We may never be free from the disease of addiction, but that doesn’t mean we cannot
83 experience freedom.

84 Feeling at home in our bodies is one of those “beyond our wildest dreams” ideas for many of us. We
85 feel too fat or too thin, too tall or too short, too old or too young. Some of us are pretty sure we
86 were born in the wrong time, place, gender or culture. We may hardly recognize the person we see
87 in the mirror, or in photographs: “that can’t be me!” When something feels wrong inside, we look
88 outside to explain it. The alienation so many of us feel as part of our addiction comes out in all sorts
89 of ways. Often we feel it as simply not being comfortable in our own skin.

90 So it is with some of the more profound symptoms of our disease as we begin to recover. Obsessive
91 and compulsive patterns other than using drugs have a funny way of arising in the first years we are
92 clean. Substitution can be a good tool for keeping us away from that first drug, or for helping us to
93 replace destructive behavior, but it can also create its own problems. Many of us find that our
94 relationship to food is complicated. We may never really have known how to eat properly, and in
95 our addiction, frankly, other things were more important. We ate irregularly, or we ate junk food, or
96 we didn’t eat at all. We got used to being hungry, or to throwing up, or to eating as much as we
97 could when we could.

98 We bring these issues into recovery with us, but it may be a while before we see that they are
99 important. Many of us will share at meetings about having been bone thin when we got clean; what
100 we talk less about is our response when our bodies start to heal and we begin putting on weight.
101 Some of us find that once the weight starts coming on, it doesn’t stop. Sometimes we joke that we
102 “put down the spoon and picked up the fork,” but it’s not always funny. We may feel deep shame or
103 horror at the weight gain. Some of us consider using again to deal with it. Barring that, staying clean,
104 we may find that compulsive behavior – eating to discomfort, throwing up, fasting, abusing
105 laxatives, experimenting with radical diets – brings its own problems, and its own rush. Obsession
106 with our weight can also lead us back to control games with ourselves: we withhold food, exercise
107 compulsively, and punish ourselves in order to drive ourselves “into shape.”

108 Sometimes we relapse into not liking, or even hating ourselves. Our self-esteem and ability to love
109 suffers. We buy into the old lie that we’re not worth it or we are broken. As we let go of the defects
110 of character and other baggage we’ve been carrying, we begin to uncover the truth of our humanity,
111 our spirituality, and our beauty. Within us is perfection; accepting that can be some of the hardest
112 work we will ever do.

113 The *Self-Acceptance* IP cautions us that “sometimes we fall into the melodrama of wishing we could
114 be what we think we should be.” We often act as if that only applies to the parts of us that we can’t
115 see. We understand that freedom from our defects of character comes through acceptance of
116 ourselves as we are, and willingness to allow a Power greater than ourselves to remove them. But
117 when it comes to what we perceive as our physical imperfection, too often we address the problem
118 through control and punishment of ourselves. We invent strict rules and try to live by them. We act
119 as if these obsessions and compulsions were somehow different from those we had already
120 surrendered. It can be difficult to know the difference between behaviors we can change ourselves
121 and those we must surrender. We can tell we are on the wrong track when we hold ourselves to

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

122 unreasonable standards and berate ourselves when we don't meet our own unrealistic
123 expectations. Allowing ourselves to be human doesn't mean that we live without boundaries or
124 restrictions; it does mean that we seek sanity in our lives by taking the actions we can and turning
125 the results over to our higher power. We let go.

126 Fear of change is common among addicts – after all, we are creatures of habit! But for some of us
127 this reaches extremes. We may be paralyzed by our fear. Sometimes what we fear are specific
128 outcomes or consequences. Sometimes we experience a kind of free-floating fear that will attach
129 itself to all sorts of things: we develop phobias, we avoid risk to the degree that it makes our lives
130 very small. Some of us find that we hold ourselves back from pleasure or sensation, either because
131 we are afraid of the future or because we are afraid of the memories that may be unleashed. We
132 fear that letting go might mean unleashing our most destructive impulses. But when we really do let
133 go, we are free to be all that we are, without fear, without guilt, without reservation.

134 When we admit our fear and to look at it honestly, we find that the actions we take to avoid harm
135 are sometimes more destructive than the consequences we fear. Some of us hide out by not
136 appearing to care for ourselves: we may let go of personal grooming or hygiene, gain weight, or
137 simply present ourselves as people we don't care much about, as a means to make ourselves
138 invisible, to hide from attention, or to walk away from an old way of being that we no longer want
139 but don't know how to change. Sometimes we confuse what we look like with who or how we are,
140 and think that making our outsides look good will fix the void we feel inside.

141 We begin to climb out of the hole we have dug for ourselves when we recognize that our behavior
142 isn't working. We practice appreciating small things about ourselves: the unique way we move, the
143 way our eyes glitter when we talk about things that matter to us, the warmth we feel when we know
144 we're connected to our higher power. We celebrate the fact that we are unique and have beauty to
145 offer the world. Our uniqueness is our gift; when we forget that, we let the disease back into our lives.

146 Acceptance of ourselves comes as we develop a healthy relationship with reality. We accept what is,
147 and learn to apply the serenity prayer in our lives, changing what we can and letting go of the rest. We
148 find that we can be really happy in our own skin if we are willing to let go – not in the old sense of
149 abandoning or neglecting ourselves, but really allowing ourselves to experience our freedom. We
150 begin to experience our senses; the *Basic Text* tells us that we find “joy in simple things... like living in
151 harmony with nature” and it's true! The first time we really see the color in the changing leaves, or feel
152 the wind in our face clean, we feel the joy of being alive. Some of us find that we want to make art; we
153 want to communicate what we see and feel in more than words. We find a sweetness in our pleasure
154 that had been gone a long time. We may value being athletic – to be able to run, or swim, or dance.
155 We lose ourselves to the movement and find that, for once, we don't have to think at all. We can just
156 be. When we express the joy we have in living, when we let that come through us in our movement,
157 our work, the shine in our eyes – we have a beauty about us beyond the sum of our features. When
158 we allow that spirit to shine through us, we don't just see beauty, we attract it. We create it.

159 **Sex**

160 Each of us comes to terms with sex and our sexuality in our own way. The steps provide us with the
161 tools to come to terms with it, and to begin to live free of the negative associations some of us have
162 about sex.

Chapter 4 – Our Physical Selves

163 Asking a room full of addicts how they learned about sex would yield some very strange answers.
164 Most of us struggle in some way with our sexuality. Discovering what is right and wrong for us in this
165 area can be challenging. But the tools of recovery can help us find our way to what is right for us.
166 We start by accepting that there is a lot we don't understand. Being willing to take time to
167 understand our own beliefs can help us to see what has created our views on our own sexuality and
168 the sexuality of others.

169 Some of our most deeply held shame derives from the things we did sexually during our childhood
170 or active addiction. Some of those behaviors reflected how desperate we were to get and use more;
171 or they may have been the best we could do to find love and connection. Sexual abuse is also part of
172 many of our stories. This can be so hard to talk about that we may believe we are the only ones. On
173 the contrary, it is remarkably common among addicts. Finding the words – and a safe place to say
174 them – can be the difference between being able to live with ourselves clean and spending our lives
175 on the run from our past. We examined our history in fourth steps and began sorting out who we
176 are from what we did, or what happened to us. Healing takes time, but it does happen. Some say
177 the process is glacial: mountains are moving, but we can't see it happen. We must be patient with
178 ourselves. Gradually, we come to experience freedom from some of our deepest wounds. As we
179 begin to clear up some of the confusion and contradiction in our lives, we can move forward with
180 less of the baggage we brought in with us.

181 We come into recovery lonely, horny and insecure, and we struggle with relationships. Experienced
182 members suggest that we give ourselves a break for the first year, stay out of relationships, and put
183 our recovery first, but few of us heed this wise advice. We run headlong into relationships in early
184 recovery and they're challenging. We're emotionally raw, and our judgment is still pretty impaired.
185 Early recovery is not a time when we tend to make the best decisions for ourselves. We try, and
186 sometimes we make mistakes. Each mistake we make carries in it a gift and a hazard: we can learn
187 from our mistakes and use them, or let our guilt and remorse drive us into a corner or out of the
188 program. The more practice we get at using the steps and other tools of recovery, the more we are
189 able to use our mistakes to propel us forward.

190 Sex is different when we're clean. When we're neither numbed out nor artificially stimulated, we can
191 experience what is really happening in the moment. We can be present to our own experience and to
192 our partner in a very different way. Finding pleasure in our sexuality without thinking of it as a means
193 of exchange or power can be a great freedom; for some of us, this takes longer than for others. We
194 can enjoy ourselves and each other fully, in the moment, and learn what it really is to connect.

195 We find that we can be intimate. We can open up and be real. We can share the experience rather
196 than having an experience at or on each other. Sometimes this can be frightening; sometimes it can
197 be addictively exciting. We open the door for relapse when we get caught in loops of obsession and
198 compulsion. We mistake novelty for love and find ourselves deep in commitment almost before we
199 know one another, or fear commitment so much that we don't give our partners a chance.

200 We define ourselves partly through our sexuality. For some that definition is a major portion of our
201 identity and sometimes we wield it like a weapon to justify our feeling different. In the rooms of NA
202 we are welcomed regardless of our sexuality. We find people who love us and with whom we feel
203 comfortable no matter what our sexuality or our beliefs about sexuality.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

204 Although some of us arrived in the fellowship secure in our sexual identity, others of us struggled
205 with confusion or distortions. We may have engaged in behaviors that conflicted with our beliefs in
206 order to continue using or to gain acceptance from others. Or we chased sex the same way we
207 chased drugs, feeling just as powerless and out of control. Some of us seem to follow those drives
208 into relationship after relationship without ever really feeling fulfilled. Many of us confused sexual
209 connections with intimacy, and became so divorced from our feelings and desire for emotional
210 connection that we would settle for physical interaction. This can follow us well into our recovery
211 and may point to an ongoing struggle with opening up to emotional intimacy. For those of us who
212 used sex as a way to move through the world, it may take quite some time to figure out the
213 difference between being sexual and being intimate. Working through these issues takes time, trust
214 in our sponsors and close friends, willingness to challenge our assumptions, faith in the process, and
215 ultimately self-acceptance.

216 Many of us are a lot more comfortable with sex than with intimacy. We struggle with issues of self-
217 loathing, contempt for others, and abuse. We may notice that we would rather have unsafe sex than
218 risk a difficult conversation. Having honest, open dialogue with our sponsor brings us to a new level
219 of trust. As we experience intimacy in that relationship, our ability to be intimate with our partners
220 and with others increases, as well. The next chapter will address our relationships in more detail.
221 What we will say here is that when we deal with our fear, we don't have to wear safety belts around
222 our hearts anymore.

223 **Thrill-seeking and Adventure**

224 Long after the obsession to use is lifted; many of us still seek a "rush" in other ways. It might be to
225 fill a void or block a feeling, or else it seems like we just get strung out on our own adrenalin.
226 Whether it's gambling, sex or creating drama in our lives, we can ramp up so fast that it's hard to
227 scale back down. It's up to each of us to find a balance between chasing a destructive rush and really
228 living our lives to the fullest.

229 "When I found myself in self-centered fear," said one member, "I would take risks that could
230 ultimately cause me to lose everything. I was living on the edge clean so I could feel something other
231 than the abyss of not using. I filled the void with things like gambling, shopping, anything that makes
232 me feel powerful when I am powerless. Now that I can see myself more clearly, I realize that I have
233 to be more aggressive with treating my disease, taking its deadly nature into account."

234 Surprising numbers of us are fond of extreme sports. A member who spent his weekends scaling
235 glaciers said, "In those moments when I really am on the edge of life and death, when I'm not sure
236 how I'm going to find my next foothold, then I feel present to the moment. I'm not thinking about
237 the bills or the wife or the job, just how good it is to be alive and how I'm going to stay that way."
238 Some of us take on competitive sports or body-building and get really excited about what we're
239 doing. We find a passion and commitment for these activities that seemed lost to our addiction. We
240 have the freedom to push forward, the ability to try new things, take new risks.

241 Many of us are partial to motorcycles, and it is a similar impulse that leads us to ride. We like the
242 power and the risk. Some of us drive our cars very fast, and share that the excitement is not just
243 going fast but knowing we're getting away with something. We may think this doesn't apply to us,
244 until our sponsor suggests that we try obeying all traffic laws for a week – just as an experiment.

Chapter 4 – Our Physical Selves

245 While some of us find acceptable ways to chase the rush throughout our recovery, others find that
246 need settles down after a while – or the wreckage we create just gets to be too much.

247 Sometimes, without an outlet for our energy, we just sit in our own anxiety. It can be surprising to
248 find that’s coming from the same source as our enthusiasm; it can be useful energy, if we channel it,
249 or it can be incredibly destructive. The same power that fuels our destructive impulses can fuel our
250 excitement, creativity and ambition. It can drive us to adventure or chaos. Like so much of what we
251 uncover about ourselves, it can be an asset or a defect, depending how we use it.

252 At moments in recovery it may feel like we are holding on with both hands. There are times when
253 we just bulldoze through an obsession to use or act out in some other way; there are times when
254 fear of our disease leads us to shut down, to resist change, to fear novelty because anything that
255 takes us out of our routine is liable to put us at risk. But recovery doesn’t always have to be about
256 ducking: when we know we’re in the hands of a loving power greater than ourselves, we are able to
257 let go. Some of us express this very literally, going skydiving or bungee jumping as a way to really
258 step out. For most of us, though, letting go is a little less dramatic. We start to experience life as an
259 adventure, and apply that “willingness to try” to other areas of our lives.

260 **Wellness and health**

261 Life is an adventure, and we are able to go farther and experience more than we had dreamed. We
262 are able to live beyond the horizons we set for ourselves when we surrender to the real limits
263 before us and become willing to open up in new directions. Another door opens every time one
264 closes: with self acceptance comes a willingness to creatively explore the possibilities that are open
265 to us as we are. More doors open every time we push. Many of us have regrets about time or
266 abilities lost, but we find when we really start to care for ourselves that we have gifts we may never
267 have dreamed of.

268 For some of us, exercising is something we do – or think we should do – to take care of our health.
269 But for others, it’s deeper than that: “when I’m running”, said one member, “I get a sense of
270 praying. My mind becomes clear.” Finding a spiritual connection in exercise is easier for some of us
271 than meditating while sitting still. And when exercise is part of our spiritual practice, it can be easier
272 to keep up than when it’s simply a matter of doing what we think we’re supposed to. We shift from
273 “I have to...” to “I get to...” and find that caring for ourselves isn’t a chore, it’s a privilege. When we
274 treat ourselves with compassion, we learn to value ourselves for who we are.

275 We have had a difficult relationship with the word “should.” We have spent much of our lives
276 rebelling against the things others expected of us, but when we get clean we find we have long lists
277 of things we think we “should” be doing. We can be so full of “should” that no matter what we’re
278 doing, it feels wrong. Our expectations of ourselves can be so overwhelming that they cripple us.
279 Part of developing new habits we can sustain is finding better reasons to do them than that “we
280 should.” Behavior that brings its own rewards is much likelier to become part of our lives than the
281 things we take on because we imagine it’s what we should do. We may have to persist a while
282 before we find that reward, however. Whether it’s the peace we find in the course of exercising, or
283 the gratification of seeing ourselves improve at a new skill, we are pleased to find out we can keep a
284 commitment to ourselves.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

285 Setting physical goals for ourselves and achieving them can have immense rewards. As we find
286 freedom from our disease through practicing the principles of the program, we learn that discipline
287 is actually a part of that freedom: we have the ability to pursue our dreams, and we get there one
288 goal at a time. We feel refreshed and renewed physically, and realize that we are able to push
289 ourselves beyond what we imagined our limits to be.

290 We may find that we resist meeting goals or getting “too healthy.” We hold ourselves back from all we
291 can be, either because we feel we don’t deserve it or because we are afraid of the change it will bring.
292 Some of us find that praying for willingness can begin the process of change. An act as simple as
293 preparing a proper meal for ourselves can be the first link in a new chain; as we incorporate healthy
294 patterns in our lives we begin to feel refreshed, renewed, and willing to set new goals for ourselves.

295 Some of us see self-care as an ongoing part of the amends process. We start by not engaging in self
296 abuse and gradually learn to treat our body, mind, and spirit with honor and respect. When we care
297 for our own well being as we would an honored friend, we begin to feel differently about who we
298 are and who we can become. Exercising regularly can be a way to act on our new self-respect, and
299 to build a different relationship with our bodies. We can let go of some of the emotional turmoil
300 about what we look like or think we look like, and begin to love ourselves as we are. We are able to
301 walk in dignity and treat others with respect. We start to view ourselves with a sense of unity: we let
302 go of the idea that “my body” is separate from “my spirit” or “myself.”

303 A member shared that it took a long time in recovery to let go of the belief that somehow the
304 ordinary rules of life didn’t apply to him, from the speed limit to the laws of physics. Having courted
305 death for so long, some of us seem to think we are immune to it now. Even though we know better
306 when we think about it, the way we feel about it doesn’t always match up. The powerful sense of
307 entitlement that enabled us to do what was required to maintain a habit doesn’t go away
308 immediately, and many of us struggle with the feeling that being clean is such a triumph for us that
309 the world ought to celebrate – and give us what we want.

310 For some of us, that old sense of entitlement runs so deep that taking care of ourselves does not occur
311 to us as our job: that had been the task of our partners, or of medical professionals, or the warden.
312 Our reading suggests that, “through our inability to accept personal responsibility, we were actually
313 creating our own problems.” It benefits us to sit with our sponsors and consider what our personal
314 responsibility really is: what are we responsible for, and what are we not? When we have a look at it,
315 we may find that we feel more responsible for some others than we do for ourselves. Learning to care
316 for ourselves is part of taking personal responsibility, and it can be surprisingly difficult.

317 One of our oldtimers used to share that “there’s nothing sadder than an addict with a high tolerance
318 for pain,” and the truth is many of us struggle with that. Some of us have endured great physical
319 hardship or abuse; many of us have borne terrible emotional suffering. It makes sense that we take
320 pride in being tough. Strength seems like its own reward, and it’s certainly a survival skill that we’re
321 not too keen on letting go. For a lot of us, that strength is a part of our identity, both in terms of
322 how we see ourselves and how we want to show ourselves to the world. What could be wrong, after
323 all, with being able to tolerate so much?

324 The answer is in the question. Working the steps, looking at our lives honestly, we can see that we
325 tolerate more than we need to, and probably more than is healthy for us, because we can. When we

Chapter 4 – Our Physical Selves

326 see a using addict with a high tolerance for pain going on to the bitter end, we can see how needless
327 that suffering is. But in our own lives we may not notice when we're doing the same thing. One
328 member shared, "I no longer live at the animal level in obvious ways, but when I ignore persistent
329 pain in my body and just wish it would go away, that's still a form of animality." Learning that the
330 rules really do apply to us means that when we recognize something is wrong, we stop and take a
331 look at it.

332 Being a good steward of our bodies means accepting that they need care and maintenance. As we
333 recover, many of us find that we have a new importance in the lives of our families. We develop deep
334 friendships and sponsorship relationships; we become useful in our work and our communities. Where
335 once we may have been a burden to others, we now find that we are important to many people. We
336 matter! Not taking care of ourselves, living self-destructively in recovery, we find the old lie, "I'm only
337 hurting myself," still falls flat. For the people who care about us, failing to care for ourselves is
338 frustrating at best. Too often, it leads to the result that they once again wind up taking care of us.
339 Taking care of ourselves is an act of amends not only to ourselves, but to the people who love us, and
340 to our higher power. It's a way of showing gratitude for being alive.

341 **Illness**

342 Many of us suffer from diseases other than addiction. Some may be a direct consequence of our
343 addiction or things that happened while we were using. Others may have nothing to do with the
344 disease of addiction but certainly impact our recovery. Sometimes it seems like they take over our
345 entire lives. Learning to use the tools we gain in NA to cope with our other challenges is part of living
346 life on life's terms.

347 When we suffer, or see someone else suffering, we want to make sense of it – so we look for an
348 explanation. It's a good impulse that can go sideways: we want an explanation, but we end up placing
349 blame or judgment. Often in the moments when we most need comfort and care, we are angry – at
350 ourselves, at our higher power, at anyone in between. We push away what we need the most.
351 Fantasies about what is or is not "fair" keep us in resentment and self-pity. Sometimes when we're
352 trying to support our friends by helping them find an explanation it can feel like we're just heaping on
353 more blame. We can shift perspective slightly and look for the lesson rather than the explanation. Or it
354 may be that what we really need to do is set all the questions aside and just get through the day.

355 There's a difference between denial and refusal: when we are in denial we don't know it. The
356 evidence may be glaringly obvious but we do not see it. Once we can say, "I'm in denial," it's no
357 longer quite true. At that point we are making a choice to accept what is real, or to turn away from
358 it and pretend. When we refuse to admit the truth we are in danger. Rebellion can be deadly for us.
359 "Acting as if" is a tool we can use for better or worse.

360 When something is going on with our health, we have a choice to accept what is happening and deal
361 with it, or pretend it is not there. A great deal of the time we choose to ignore what we know, either
362 because we are afraid or because we don't want to hassle with it. For some of us, the fear of
363 undergoing medical treatment is understandable, especially if that brings with it the possibility of
364 having to take medication. Weighing the risks and benefits is not an easy thing to do. Finding a
365 doctor we trust makes the process easier. We carefully consider the possibility that leaving a
366 problem untreated may create more problems than before. Turning something over is not the same

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

367 as ignoring it. When we take action and leave the results to a Power greater than ourselves, we are
368 turning it over. When we don't take responsibility for our part, but wait for a magical answer, we are
369 not working the Third Step, we are being irresponsible. Faith is not the same as wishing.

370 The fear that keeps us from moving forward can stem from many causes. We may find that other
371 people's opinions of us are still important enough to risk our lives for: the stigma of disease,
372 whether from society at large, our loved ones, or even our friends in NA, keeps many of us from
373 seeking testing or treatment. Our own judgment and fear can be surprising, as well. In early
374 recovery, we learn about projection: that what really bothers us about someone else is likely true
375 for us, as well. So it is with this fear: what we imagine others to be saying about us is often what we
376 are thinking ourselves. We may need to drive ourselves to take action long before we are done
377 working through our feelings about it.

378 We may be surprised that a dental problem, for example, could returns us to the 6th and 7th steps,
379 but when we recognize that our fear is preventing us from taking care of ourselves, we can see the
380 work we have to do. Sometimes it can help us to look at this action as dealing with the wreckage of
381 our past, as part of the amends process. It may help to see it as part of a Tenth Step, addressing
382 what is wrong in the present moment. Some of us have felt that we created our health problems as
383 a result of our addiction, and that this is simply our lot. The Basic Text tells us that although we are
384 not responsible for our addiction, we are responsible for our recovery; it may help us to consider
385 that this applies to our bodies as well as our spirits.

386 We may also be genuinely afraid of being sick. Whether it's the particular diagnosis we're
387 considering or the idea more broadly of having something "wrong with us," this may be a kind of
388 powerlessness we don't feel at all ready for. We may fear that our health issues will create new
389 uncertainty in our finances, our careers or our families, or that medication will put our recovery in
390 jeopardy. Our fear of something so far out of our control may be surprising in people who have
391 taken so many really insane risks, but feelings don't always make sense. Fear gives us a chance to act
392 with courage. When we stand up, face what's wrong and deal with it to the best of our ability, we
393 may not feel very brave at all. But these are the moments at which we serve as the most powerful
394 testimony to what is possible in NA: we are demonstrating strength of character.

395 When we use the tools available to us – calling on our sponsor and seeking the experience, strength
396 and hope of others, allowing our support group to support us, and turning to In *Times of Illness* and
397 other NA literature – we are able to make decisions we can be comfortable with, and take action to
398 do the next right thing. These can be the moments that define our recovery.

399 We may start trying to make deals with God, promising all sorts of things if this will just please go
400 away. It's not uncommon, but it is dangerous, and frequently un-helpful. When we start trading on
401 promises and expectations in our prayers, we are setting ourselves up for spiritual crisis. When we
402 accept life on life's terms, we come to understand that the terms are not negotiable. Miracles
403 happen to us and around us all the time. The very fact that we're alive and clean to face this
404 challenge is a miracle, and there are always more unfolding, if we look for them. Gratitude may be
405 most needed when it is hardest to find. Looking for the reasons we have to be grateful in a moment
406 of crisis can make all the difference. But daring or demanding miracles doesn't seem to work very
407 well. We take action, and turn the results over.

Chapter 4 – Our Physical Selves

408 Surrender in times of illness can mean a lot of different things. We surrender to the process; we
409 surrender to the fact of mortality and to the possibility of survival. Surrender in this sense does not
410 mean giving up. One member, in the midst of a long illness, said, “It was pretty easy for me to
411 surrender to the possibility of dying. It was a different kind of surrender for me to become willing to
412 fight for my life.”

413 There is no model of the recovering addict, no one right way to do things. Some of us, taking an
414 honest look at ourselves and our lives, really don’t want to live that long. It may sound odd, but it’s
415 true: longevity is not a universal goal or necessarily a universal good. Some of us make choices
416 knowing they will shorten our lives. We may choose to smoke; we may choose to eat in a way we
417 know is harmful; we may make a decision to stop or refuse treatment for an illness. A member
418 whose parents had a difficult old age said, “I’m not going to do that to my daughter. I have a life I
419 love, but that doesn’t mean I want to play the hand to the end.” We may be surprised at some of
420 the decisions we make, or the strength of our feelings about them. These are deeply personal
421 decisions and we make them in accordance with our beliefs. We want to be certain that we are
422 acting on our beliefs, not opening a reservation that could lead us back to using. Each of us finds a
423 balance we can live with between taking perfect care of ourselves, and neglecting ourselves
424 destructively. Whatever choices we make, what matters is that we know we are making them: that
425 we know we have a choice, and we consider it honestly and openly.

426 We are always on a continuum between health and illness, between action and wishing, between
427 living in accordance with our beliefs and betraying ourselves and our values. We come back to the
428 tools of the program again and again to fine-tune that balance, and to find a way to bring ourselves
429 back to a life we are comfortable with. Our process of inventory, amends and surrender is an
430 unending source of improvement for us. We find our values and learn what it means to live by them.
431 Over time we can let go of our expectations for what we thought life was supposed to be, or what
432 we think others expect of us, and live according to the values we find within ourselves. As we learn
433 what is true for us, we find that we are less compelled either to be perfect, or to destroy ourselves.
434 We are free to live lives of our own choosing and design.

435 **Disability**

436 “Just for today,” says our reading, “I will try to get a better perspective on my life.” Even though
437 most of us addicts resist change, we know that it is beneficial for us to change our perception by
438 changing our perspective. Nothing changes our perspective quite like the experience of disability.

439 Chances are, if we live a full life, we will at some point experience disability – perhaps for a relatively
440 short time, or in a way that changes our lives permanently. In either case, the lessons that we learn
441 through the experience can enrich our lives and broaden our understanding, even if some of our
442 choices are narrowed.

443 “Argue for your limitations,” the saying goes, “and they are yours forever.” Many of us find when we
444 are first disabled that we are so painfully aware of our limitations that we can hardly see past them.
445 We are afraid of what our lives will be like. We mourn for the abilities we have lost, and we fear
446 what is to come. Many of us struggle with having to ask for help. Frustration at little things: uneven
447 pavements, the buttons on a shirt – things we might have taken completely for granted – can be

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

448 overwhelming and discouraging. We may be surprised at the amount of time and thought involved
449 in doing the simplest things.

450 To try to talk about gratitude at a time like this seems preposterous and infuriating. We may think,
451 “You just don’t get it; you have no idea what this is like.” Self-pity is not less dangerous when we feel
452 justified in it than when we know we’re out of line; either way, it can kill us. If we’ve been around a
453 while, we know that gratitude is almost always the shortest road to relief. Some of us find gratitude
454 in the knowledge that it could be worse, and find relief in helping out – or simply being aware of –
455 those who are struggling with even greater challenges. For some of us, this is cold comfort, but we
456 find gratitude when we pay attention to the things we do have – starting with people who care
457 about us, and a relationship with a loving higher power. A gratitude list can be a vital tool at times
458 like this. One oldtimer used to growl, “if you can’t find anything to be grateful for, start with the fact
459 that you’re not on fire and work your way up from there!”

460 We may become very conscious of issues of access, even if they only affect us for a short while. We
461 notice whether a meeting list tells us which meetings we can get into with a wheelchair, for
462 example. We start to look more carefully at what makes a meeting feel safe and welcoming. The
463 meeting whose doorway is level but whose bathroom is upstairs is as inaccessible as a meeting on
464 the moon for some of us.

465 Disability doesn’t disqualify us from service: on the contrary, it may make us more aware of the
466 needs of our members and the obstacles to recovery for addicts still suffering. There are ways for
467 everyone to give back in NA, even if we have to be a little creative about how we can best serve. We
468 can be powerful examples of commitment and willingness when we look past our own obstacles to
469 help others. When we bring our experience and our awareness with us into service in our local NA
470 community we help ensure that the message is available to all addicts, regardless of mobility or
471 other access issues; in this way, our challenge may help the fellowship as a whole learn to carry the
472 message more effectively.

473 We find that in times of need, members of the fellowship are almost always here for us. But it may
474 not be the people we expected, or the people we wished for. It is always surprising to see who is
475 ready to walk through a difficult time with us, and who is not. Anonymity inside the fellowship
476 means that we are all equal, that each of us has gifts that are valuable and limitations that are
477 regrettable, and together we can do what we cannot alone. We allow ourselves to be surprised by
478 and open to the people who are ready to walk with us, rather than focusing on our disappointment
479 in those who aren’t there. For all that we might wish people would act according to our
480 expectations, the little miracles of seeing those we never thought had it in them stepping up to the
481 plate and really helping out are gifts we don’t want to be too self-obsessed to miss.

482 The lessons we learn in NA about sharing and caring, asking for help and offering what we have to
483 give are powerful tools we can use outside the Fellowship, as well. We may feel a new bond with
484 other people who struggle with physical challenges and find that our shared experience brings us
485 closer. We may find relief in being with others inside or outside the fellowship who are struggling
486 with the same kinds of issues and learning to adapt to the change.

487 Our pride can be a bigger handicap than the physical challenge we’re confronting. We want to look
488 good, and this puts a serious crimp in our style. Embarrassment, shame, or unwillingness “to be seen

Chapter 4 – Our Physical Selves

489 this way,” can keep us from doing what we can, or really living and enjoying our lives as they are.
490 Our physical disability can become an alibi for isolation, withdrawal, and fear, if we let it.

491 Gradually we find that the disability that has forced a change in our habits also changes the angle
492 from which we see the world. We notice details we missed before; we connect with people we
493 hadn’t seen before. As the rhythm of our life changes, so does the music. We learn to respect,
494 rather than indulge our limitations, and to build out our skills and assets in new areas. We learn time
495 and again that some of our best gifts come in the worst wrapping paper. Being open to the lessons
496 in every experience helps us to get through even the hardest times; knowing that we don’t have to
497 do it alone sure makes it easier.

498 **Mental Illness and Spiritual Crisis**

499 We talk a lot in the rooms and in our literature about the insanity of our addiction, and while it’s
500 quite clear that our thinking is deeply distorted by our disease, this is distinct from other forms of
501 what professionals call mental illness. Our booklet, *In Times of Illness*, is a great resource for those
502 of us struggling with mental illness in recovery.

503 Mental illness is real, and can be very serious. It is vital that we understand it as an outside issue
504 that needs treatment, although our struggles with our mental illnesses and the way that impacts our
505 recovery is very much an “inside issue.” We need to make this distinction to ensure that we don’t
506 fail to take care of illnesses that may cause us great harm either because of stigma in the rooms, or
507 confusion about the relationship between mental illness and recovery. But it is also essential that
508 we understand that we can feel pretty depressed, anxious or out of control without having a mental
509 illness.

510 Sometimes what we experience is a consequence of a physical condition: when we’re detoxing, for
511 example, things can get pretty intense. Most of us in early recovery find that we lack a “volume
512 knob” for our emotions: our moods swing wildly, our lives seem very dramatic, and we can be
513 startlingly impulsive. Many of us find, if we are not a danger to ourselves or others, that we can wait
514 this out – things settle down as we get used to our new lives, and as our bodies get used to being
515 clean. Sometimes we look insane, but we just need more time. “Emotional detox” can take a lot
516 longer than physical detox, and there are days when it’s really hard. The time we sit in meetings may
517 be the only time our racing thoughts slow down at all. Having people around us who have been
518 through what we’re going through and come out the other side is very reassuring: we may not be
519 convinced this will pass, but our sponsor’s confidence gives us hope.

520 Other physical changes put us through emotional challenges, as well: life changes like pregnancy,
521 menopause, illness or injury can set off emotional cascades. Some physical illnesses have emotional
522 or cognitive components, and those of us who struggle with other physical diseases may find our
523 thinking is sometimes profoundly impacted by them. It’s worth considering, when we or our loved
524 ones notice a sudden change in our behavior, that there may be physical forces at work.

525 But there’s not always a physical or organic cause behind our disturbance. We go through intense
526 emotional changes in recovery, and they can be frightening. Too often we mistake spiritual crisis for
527 mental illness. Grief, depression or panic may come over us in a wave; memories come up from the
528 past and seem to swallow our present; and all of this can be part of the process we go through on
529 our way to freedom. What we really want is a cure for our feelings.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

530 We talk about “the process” and are told to trust in it, but we don’t always know what “the process”
531 is. We may be very confused by where it seems to be taking us, but if we focus on putting our faith
532 into action, we find ourselves coming through difficulty with a whole new understanding and
533 awareness. The pain of spiritual growth can feel like depression. A “dark night of the soul” can be
534 frightening and lonely. But what is happening on the inside is often the process that will bring us
535 into the light. Sometimes, there’s just bad weather in our heads and we just need to wait it out.
536 Hanging on, suiting up, and showing up is sometimes all we can do while this passes.

537 This kind of crisis can be frightening in its intensity, and sometimes it seems we can only distinguish
538 it from another kind of crisis in retrospect: intense as it is, it is temporary, and relieved by
539 breakthrough or by an obstinate willfulness to hang on until the crisis passes. “We undergo a vital
540 spiritual experience and are changed,” says the *Basic Text*. We are restored to sanity and find we
541 can live happy and productive lives. It may not be safe or sensible to wait to find out what kind of
542 crisis we’re having before we seek help. Sometimes we find that we need new tools to continue to
543 build our house; it doesn’t mean we’re abandoning the work we’ve done or betraying our
544 commitment if we sometimes go looking for them elsewhere.

545 Some of our more experienced members have shared that moments of deepest insanity occur when
546 our insides don’t match our outsides: when we’re doing things that go against our beliefs, when we
547 are in one way or another living a lie, or when we are in denial of what’s really happening around us.
548 The disconnect between what we want, what we believe and what we are doing is enough to make
549 anyone feel insane – and can be a powerful force for relapse. Coming back to living in integrity
550 begins with sharing honestly with one person. It may be a long road back but the alternative can be
551 so painful that we may not survive it clean. When we tell our sponsor or trusted friend what’s really
552 going on, we begin to feel a little hope again.

553 **Aging**

554 Life passages everyone has to deal with are changed for us because of our disease. They may be
555 magnified by our obsession and self-centeredness, or we may simply be more dramatic than our
556 non-addict friends and neighbors. But we also have physical challenges to deal with that are a
557 consequence of our addiction: the high cost of low living, some used to call it. Many of us have
558 other diseases as a result of what we’ve been through, and we may have to struggle to get through
559 the shame and guilt we feel before we’re willing or able to get treatment. Some of us experienced
560 trauma – violence or abuse that has consequences long after the bruises have healed. “Getting in
561 touch with my body has been a very slow process,” said one member. “Any new information from
562 my body just felt like panic.” We have been in accidents, violent relationships, fights, war, prison –
563 all of these situations had physical and emotional consequences that manifest in different ways over
564 time. For some of us, there is the simple, strange experience of having lost time: when we get clean
565 we feel like we are waking up from a long nap. “I look in the mirror and there’s an old woman
566 looking back at me,” said one member, “and every time it’s a shock. It seems to me that the last
567 time I looked I was just starting out. I still feel like a kid, but I look like someone’s grandmother. ”

568 The likelihood that we would die is less alarming for some of us than the possibility we might get
569 old. Staying clean a long time is one thing; allowing ourselves to age is quite another. And some of
570 us, as we see it happening, grieve. Some of us grieve the time and opportunities lost to our
571 addiction for a long time. We may experience that sense of loss after we’ve been clean for many

Chapter 4 – Our Physical Selves

572 years – when, for example, we become a grandparent and realize how much of our children’s lives
573 we missed. We may not have noticed that time passed at all, until someone points out to us that our
574 friends or the people we date are a generation younger than we are.

575 Normal social pressures to look young or stay pretty are magnified for us by our self-centeredness,
576 but also by the sense of lost time, the feeling that our looks are something we trade on, and that old
577 addict fantasy of dying young and glamorously. When we realize we are too old to die young, and
578 that we might just be around to live a long and full life, some of us have mixed feelings. There is
579 gratitude but also a sense of despair: “I hadn’t prepared for this,” we think. Some of us seek to
580 preserve our youth as best we can, working hard to dress and care for ourselves so we look and feel
581 younger. Some of us realize that we have planning to do, and take action to ensure the future for
582 ourselves or our children. Finding the balance between pride and vanity, between self-loathing and
583 self-acceptance, is a struggle for many of us. When we are able to let go, we find that aging too is a
584 journey, and we can actually enjoy the adventure. We’re not just growing old, we’re growing up!

585 As time has passed and our fellowship has aged, we have started noticing some of our oldtimers
586 getting more and more beautiful. There is something about spirituality that radiates through our
587 outer being, a sort of agelessness that appears as elegance and dignity. Although we may fear
588 growing older, many of us find that we can embrace and love what we have become: aches and
589 pains and all!

590 A member shared, “there really isn’t too much to this aging thing except self-acceptance, and what
591 your body does.” Like so many things in recovery, it sounds so simple from the other side, but
592 getting there can be a long walk. It might be impossible to separate the changes that come with
593 graceful aging from the changes that come from working steps; together, though, the combination is
594 remarkable. “As I have aged and have more trouble getting out of the chair without leaning on the
595 table,” said another, “I am more secure about who I am and find myself more attractive than when I
596 was a hot tomato.”

597 **Death, Dying and Living with Grief**

598 Addicts die. We talk about it in our literature, we remind ourselves at every meeting that the ends of
599 our disease are “jails, institutions and death,” but when one of us dies we generally respond the way
600 anyone else would: with shock, and surprise, and anguish. Sometimes when we lose a member to
601 the disease, we go back through the same reservations we experienced in early recovery that the
602 program doesn’t really work. Many of us experience other reservations at this point, as well – the
603 feeling that it doesn’t pay to care so much about people, the sense that loving addicts only results in
604 loss and hurt – for some of us, staying in the fellowship after a painful loss can be very difficult. It’s
605 not unusual to feel that others are grieving wrong, that people aren’t responding appropriately.
606 When we are hurt and angry it is easy to lash out, harder to feel compassion and connection. But
607 experience has taught us that these are the things that make it easier to get through difficult times
608 clean – even grief.

609 Of course, losing addicts to the disease of addiction isn’t the only way we experience death in
610 recovery. We lose members of our family, we lose friends... Sometimes it seems like the more
611 connected we are, the more opportunities there are to experience loss. And in a sense, it’s true: we
612 love more, we care more, we share more than we ever have, and perhaps more than people who

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

613 are not members of a fellowship like ours. It's one of the great gifts of recovery that our lives are so
614 rich and full of people we care about. But we do lose some of them, and it's hard. Sometimes what
615 we feel is the guilt of having survived: there is no good answer for why some of us survive and some
616 of us don't. This comes up in step work, as it comes up in our lives; for many of us, the answers we
617 find in the steps are the ones that carry us through the very real moments of doubt. But they are
618 very particular, and may be different for each of us. The grief process forces us to find answers to
619 these questions, and in that way it is a gift.

620 When we seek a conscious contact with a power greater than ourselves, we find ways to be of
621 service in the world. Being of service – whether in NA or out of it, in our families, in our
622 neighborhoods or religious communities or elsewhere – helps us to find value in our lives when we
623 can't see our value for ourselves. The *Basic Text* tells us, of course, that our real value is in being
624 ourselves – but we don't always see that, or believe it. Giving generously of ourselves, especially
625 when we are in pain, is a path through some of that guilt and confusion.

626 In moments of great pain, a deep stillness comes over us; in that moment, we can see the depths of
627 the darkness within us but also the enormity of the Power to which we are connected. The terrible
628 grief we feel can bring us a conscious contact that nothing else ever could. The impulse to withdraw,
629 to pull away from noise and crowds and even from the people who support us the most, is often a
630 form of self-protection: we can be so afraid of something shaking loose the feelings again that we
631 barely want to move. But letting the people we trust come and support us reminds us that we are
632 not alone, even at our coldest moments. And allowing people to help us can be a form of service to
633 them, as well: when we let someone love us at a vulnerable time, we and they are rewarded. The
634 caring and sharing we talk about is a two way street, and those of us who are practiced at giving
635 often have a hard time letting others love us back.

636 Some of us find that a death we experience in recovery triggers feelings left over from earlier losses
637 that we never really had the chance to grieve. We have learned through working the steps that
638 emotions we don't feel in the moment often wait, and catch up with us later; the experience of
639 walking through a loss now can bring back long-forgotten losses. We have been surprised by the
640 force of our emotion at the loss of a friend, or even a pet. We may have thought we could get
641 through the feelings relatively easily and find that we are floored by the experience. Others of us
642 find that there is still some distance between ourselves and the world, or that our reactions are not
643 so immediate. Sometimes our feelings aren't as deep as we think they should be; we think we're
644 supposed to be having a particular experience, and we're feeling something very different. Giving
645 ourselves permission to have our feelings and not judge them is a powerful gift we can give
646 ourselves. Whatever our response, it is ours, and we can own it without allowing it to swallow us or
647 define us. We have the freedom to fully experience a range of emotions, and to know at the same
648 time that our emotions are not the limit of ourselves or of our world.

649 Grief is its own experience. Allowing ourselves the time and space to move through it is a
650 commitment to ourselves and to honesty beyond what many of us have experienced before. The
651 feelings move to their own rhythm and on their own time, and it can be very difficult to imagine that
652 we are not "doing it wrong" when we find ourselves surprised by a wave of emotion at an
653 inconvenient time. As with so much of what we experience in recovery, there's no one way, and
654 certainly no right way, to go through it. We take comfort in the knowledge that all things must pass,

Chapter 4 – Our Physical Selves

655 that the feelings will certainly change, and that others around us who have also grieved deeply find
656 a way to survive the emotions, and to thrive once more. We find in recovery that the even the worst
657 things we experience are transformed into a lesson we learn, and then a tool we can use to help
658 others.

659 We often hear members share that “every day I am in recovery is a bonus,” that “I have been given
660 a reprieve.” We have a deadly disease and are lucky to be alive – and even luckier to be glad we are
661 alive. Many of us experienced in addiction a kind of living death, in which each day was a burden to
662 be survived somehow. Many of us have suicide attempts behind us, but whether or not we
663 consciously tried to take our own lives we certainly held them cheap.

664 It can surprise us, then, how shocked we are when we receive bad news from a doctor. Our
665 perfectly human reaction can feel to us like we’re ungrateful or unrealistic. Again, giving ourselves
666 permission to feel whatever we feel is as important as it is difficult. Only by admitting our feelings
667 can we begin to deal with them, after all. One member who’s outlived himself several times over
668 said, “I don’t know if I have a day or a decade left, but I would rather not spend it in fear.” Once we
669 start talking about our feelings, their power is reduced. As we use the tools that are available to us,
670 we find even more solace. The same tools that guide us to live lives we can be happy with can help
671 us to walk the end of our journey with dignity and serenity.

672 Of course, not all of us know it’s coming when our lives end, and some of us have many false alarms
673 or close calls. Sometimes these brushes with death can be a wake-up call, allowing us to consider on
674 a practical and spiritual level what it might mean to get our affairs in order.

675 It is a loving act to let others love us. When we find ourselves in a position of need, as a result of
676 some challenging diagnosis or grief, it can be too easy for us to see this as humiliating or
677 burdensome. But we are given the opportunity to let those who love us express that in very
678 concrete ways. We may be surprised at who comes forward, just as we will be surprised by those
679 who do not or cannot. The vulnerability we experience allows us a different experience of love. It is
680 an act of generosity to let people be close to us, and we try to understand that they, too, are going
681 through feelings about what’s happening. Our training in letting go of self-obsession helps us now:
682 we may find that by helping our loved ones through their fear and sadness, we find the words we
683 need to hear to get through our own. Certainly, as we recognize that we are loved and cared for, we
684 realize that our lives really are different from what they had been: we matter in the world, we have
685 made a contribution to the people around us and to people we can’t see. The love we’ve shared, the
686 families we’ve been part of, the meetings we’ve started and served and shared in – all of these have
687 been a form of amends, a way of making peace with ourselves and our world. We are grateful for
688 what we have and what we have had, and we know better than most people that death is not the
689 worst alternative. We have seen others suffer worse fates, and perhaps we have ourselves. For
690 some of us, in the surrender that comes after very bad news, we find that we are able really to let
691 go and be present to the present moment. Letting go of the fear, the anger, and, gradually, the
692 things that bind us into our lives, we may be surprised to find that we are set free.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

693 **Courage**

694 The serenity to accept the things we cannot change often comes after having had the courage to
695 change the things we could. It takes courage and humility to open new doors and to close old ones.
696 For many of us, courage was not something we came into the rooms with, but we find it here. We
697 might still be afraid, but that no longer stops us from showing up and meeting challenges head-on.
698 When we do the things we fear, that fear turns into faith.

699 Ultimately this chapter is about courage: the courage to accept the things we cannot change and to
700 change the things we can, to look at ourselves as we are and accept ourselves anyway; to talk about
701 things that make us uncomfortable and to take on some of the issues that challenge us most deeply.
702 Working a program in relation to the physical part of our recovery doesn't necessarily mean working
703 a physical program, though for some of us it does. We don't all take on exercise or proper eating or
704 conscious physical healing as part of our daily program, though some of us make this a central part
705 of our recovery. The principles are what we share, even when our practices are very different. We all
706 find that it is necessary, sooner or later, to face the truth about our bodies, whatever that might be;
707 to address the harm that's been done; to treat what we can, and surrender the rest; and to be
708 honest. What we gain is the freedom to live our lives as fully as we are able.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

Chapter 5 – Relationships

1 Recovery doesn't happen in a vacuum. We need each other. We need to be engaged with
2 the world around us in order to recover. Living clean is all about relationships – with
3 ourselves, our loved ones, our fellow members, with society, and ultimately with our Higher
4 Power. The people in our lives are the means by which we experience grace. We see the
5 miracle of change in others, and they reflect our own changes back to us. They are windows
6 through which we see the world, and vehicles by which we achieve spiritual progress.

7 When we look back on our active addiction and see the harm we caused, the relationships
8 we destroyed, the opportunities for intimacy we threw away, we may be awed by the
9 wreckage. But we can also find some gratitude for the fact that we are clean now and we
10 are changing. When we see ourselves creating wreckage clean, we have a harder time
11 making peace with ourselves. Serious work is required. Some of us struggle to have faith
12 that lasting change is possible. Our history with relationships can lead us to think that there
13 is no hope for us in this area, but our experience with the second step proves to us that we
14 can be restored to sanity.

15 When we come into recovery, we don't recognize what is wrong with the ways we relate to
16 people. Our experiences as using addicts shaped our habits and our expectations. A lot of
17 our experience with relationships has been destructive. We do harm when we're using, and
18 the people who are closest to us get the worst of it. We have not been easy people. We can
19 be stubborn and suspicious, angry and afraid, sarcastic, willful and set in our ways. We've
20 been through hell, and we've put others through hell, too. We've experienced loss and
21 failure and often violence. The issues we need to deal with arise in the course of our
22 interactions with others in and out of NA. There is damage that requires a lot of healing.
23 Much of it happens as we go about our lives, just being who we are.

24 As we are healing, difficulties and conflicts occur. When we no longer have the drugs to
25 blame, we begin to understand the part we play in our own struggles. In the fellowship, we
26 are given the chance to see what we're doing. Members who care about us will help us to
27 see the ways we're still creating our own problems, but it's our responsibility to do
28 something about it.

29 The truth is that most of us have not been very good at relationships. Some would say that
30 an inability to form or maintain long-term relationships is one of the symptoms of addiction.
31 The Basic Text tells us that the disease makes us "devious, frightened loners," that we
32 develop strange habits and lose our social graces. Even when we come in with families and
33 careers intact, we need to change how we deal with them. Gaining these skills in recovery
34 can be a long and sometimes painful process. We need help our loved ones cannot give us.
35 The therapeutic value of one addict helping another really is without parallel. Caring and

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

36 sharing the NA way is the ultimate weapon against our alienating, isolating, destructive
37 disease.

38 Relationships are central to everything we do. There is no step or tradition that is not
39 somehow about our relationships, and all of our literature talks about relationships in some
40 way or another. There is no other area in our recovery that causes us more pain or more
41 joy; it's the place where we see our growth and our recovery most clearly.

42 **Fellowship**

43 The simple idea that addicts could recover in society, rather than having to be removed
44 from it for long periods of time, was radical when NA began. For many of us today, what is
45 revolutionary about our experience of recovery is the love and intimacy we experience with
46 other members. We come together in fellowship. As we stay together, we find in each other
47 a deep affection and trust that can override the little hurts and squabbles we have along the
48 way. Because we are bound in fellowship, it's harder to get rid of each other, too. We learn
49 to care for people we may not personally like that much, because we know that they carry
50 the keys to our survival. When we understand that our personal recovery depends on NA
51 unity, we value every member as someone who may someday save our lives.

52 Part of what makes unity so vital to our recovery is that it's so easy to forget how similar we
53 are. The ties that bind us together are also the roots that nourish our growth. After we've
54 been here for a while, it can be easy to see our differences as separating us, rather than
55 bringing us the freedom we need to grow into ourselves. We learn that having concern for
56 each other in spite of our personal feelings can bring us surprising rewards. It's one thing to
57 reach out to a newcomer we're not so sure about, but when we've known each other for
58 years and still don't care much for each other, it may take a little more effort to reach
59 across the divide. We can see that a personality that doesn't appeal to us may still be able
60 to carry the message to someone we couldn't reach ourselves. When we find ourselves
61 caring about someone we don't like or don't know just because we can feel our shared
62 humanity – we recognize a new level of spirituality in ourselves.

63 We call Narcotics Anonymous a fellowship for a reason. "Fellowship" means we are a
64 community of equals. We come together by choice and find a common bond. We have a
65 choice not only about whether or not we are members, but also about what our
66 membership means to us, and how we experience or demonstrate it. As our connection
67 with others develops, we can see ourselves more and more a part of something that makes
68 a deep connection within us. We want to be a member. We enjoy it. We move from being
69 abjectly alone to being deeply connected. Some say that "NA" for them stands for "never
70 alone, never again." Connection changes us, and the fact that we are all bound by a deadly
71 disease means that the stakes are higher. The gratitude we feel on seeing a fellow member
72 stay clean is not abstract. We may be grateful to have had a person as our friend for twenty

Chapter 5 – Relationships

73 years – but the fact that we’ve lost so many along the way means that we are grateful in
74 another sense. Our friendship is also a celebration of our survival. Connected by our
75 common disease and our primary purpose, we share a common bond unlike any other.

76 Because our personal recovery depends on our unity, it is necessary that we learn to live
77 with one another. Even if we don’t like each other, we still need each other to survive.
78 Sometimes simply not escalating a conflict can be a success. It may not be within our power
79 to make peace, but we can certainly keep the conflict from impacting the newcomer or the
80 atmosphere of recovery we all treasure. That puts everything else into perspective.

81 The things we complain about most in the fellowship are often the challenges we learn the
82 most from. As much as we would like to imagine we would learn to practice spiritual
83 principles by reading about them, we learn what they mean and how to apply them by
84 bumping up against each other, sometimes roughly. The conflicts, the drama, the breakups
85 in the rooms help to wear away our rough edges. We learn to deal with each other in spite
86 of all our feelings and all our history.

87 Many times we have seen members who actively dislike each other set aside their
88 differences to help a newcomer. We have also seen those differences set aside at the
89 bedside of a sick friend, or at a moment of distress. When we are in the middle of the worst
90 kind of conflict, someone points out to us that we’re still welcome in meetings, that we still
91 have people we trust and who care for us, and that we are still very much in the middle of
92 the fellowship and of our own recovery process. We learn that when we have a genuine
93 need or concern, almost any member will reach out to help us, even if there’s been some
94 unfortunate history between us. We start to believe that we are safe. Over time, as we care
95 for the people we love and see that they really do support us, we start to feel a little safer.
96 We can feel a little more willing to take a risk, let go of what’s not working and try
97 something different. And each time we make ourselves vulnerable and find someone there
98 for us, we come to a new level of safety and trust. The intensity of fellowship is what brings
99 us from our condition as isolated, alienated and frightened addicts to loving, caring and
100 sharing members of NA.

101 When we say that we will love each other until we learn to love ourselves, what we’re doing
102 is loving one another back to life. That’s true no matter how we express that love. Some of
103 us are warm and affectionate, some of us are gruff and pretty removed, but what we’re
104 doing in the rooms when a meeting is happening is the same. We’re turning our attention
105 outside ourselves, and making a new kind of connection. The Basic Text defines love as, “the
106 flow of life energy from one person to another.” This is essential to what we do. We learn to
107 deal with our family, our workplace, and our community at the same time we learn it in the
108 rooms. Each relationship we have affects every other. They all teach us things that help in

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

109 the rest of our relationships. We connect with others, and through them, to a power greater
110 than ourselves. Opening up to the world around us is a spiritual awakening.

111 The first relationship we have is usually with a home group (whether we call it that or not) –
112 the meeting we connect with and attend regularly. We look at members of the group who
113 seem to have something together – and we want what they have. We get to know others
114 who are new and struggling, and we care about whether they make it back the next week.
115 We find ourselves genuinely excited to see people celebrate their clean time. We're
116 interested in others. We start to hope for them, and we find that we have hope for
117 ourselves, as well. Practicing selflessness gives us relief from self-obsession. Caring about
118 others and realizing that people care about us is another awakening.

119 Our spiritual awakening shows in our actions. We join a group, find a sponsor, take on a
120 service position. We make commitments to show up and take action on a regular basis. We
121 learn new ways to show our gratitude at the same time that we learn to be accountable.
122 When we make a commitment we learn to accept responsibility, to stick and stay through
123 the hard parts, to do the best we can and to ask for help when we need it. We learn our
124 limits through over-commitment, try to figure out the responsible way to let go and find out
125 it's okay to make mistakes. We learn that adversity, even conflict, is not the end of the
126 story. We may do service for ego to begin with, but we learn through difficulty to be
127 selfless, and that's the goal. We become part of something greater than ourselves. Most of
128 our lives we were in the business of tearing down. What a joy it is to be part of something
129 that actually saves people's lives!

130 The desire to serve comes from this sense of care and concern – and it's important to note
131 here that service isn't limited to what we do inside the service system, or even inside NA. In
132 whatever form it takes, service is what we do to act on our concern for others. In meetings,
133 that might mean setting up chairs or helping to clean up afterwards; it could mean taking
134 time to talk with an addict who's struggling or in pain, giving someone a ride to a meeting,
135 or making sure that others feel included. Reaching out is the way we break out of our self-
136 obsession. Service opens us to transformation and to love. The more we practice
137 selflessness, the easier it becomes, and the more rewarding we find it to be.

138 We learn to share, and share intimately. For many of us sponsorship is our first honest,
139 functional relationship – at the very least, the first in a long time. Sponsorship can serve as
140 the model on which we begin to build other relationships in our lives that are healthy,
141 loving and productive. Not all of us come in here alone: many of us come into recovery with
142 partners, children, parents and others we're close to. But many of those relationships we've
143 managed to preserve in some form have been damaged by our disease. As we come to
144 understand that we can't fix it all at once, it can be tempting to walk away and try to start
145 over. But relationships aren't like drugs, even though we may have used them for the same

Chapter 5 – Relationships

146 purposes: we can't walk away and simply abstain. The real work of living clean happens
147 when we're out in the world, relating with others. Our only choice is to learn as we go.

148 In the beginning we trust people based on proximity and affinity. Often the first people we
149 get close to in recovery are people we choose just because they're available, or they go to
150 the same meetings we do. We need to trust before we begin to discern who is trustworthy.
151 Discernment comes from hard experience trusting people we shouldn't, being hurt, and
152 coming back anyway. As our respect for ourselves grows, we find that we choose more
153 carefully who we will confide in. We get to know each other better – but we also get a
154 better idea of ourselves and what we want and deserve in our friendships. We begin to
155 recognize the elements of a healthy relationship.

156 A sense of safety makes the biggest change in our relationships. We start to feel like we can
157 trust people, and we become more trustworthy ourselves. In the fellowship we can
158 experiment with relationships. Our Third Tradition teaches that we're all accepted here,
159 we're not going to be thrown out if we make a mistake. So we get to experience different
160 types of relationships – and different kinds of conflict – safe in the knowledge that we will
161 still be welcome when it's over. The gifts of recovery are available to us all, and they come
162 through us all. We need each other in order to experience the miracle.

163 The steps are very much a part of this process, and the traditions can be, as well. We use
164 the tools that are available to us to help us learn how to practice principles, and to clear
165 away the mess that makes it so hard to see what is real. "There were parts of me that were
166 frozen because of my childhood damage," explained one member. "I made a decision that
167 no one would hurt me again and I would rely only on myself. It was part of my heart's
168 armor. It created a very lonely world: there wasn't room for anyone else, not even my
169 Higher Power. It took some serious step work to examine how my early relationships set the
170 patterns for later ones."

171 Escaping the trap of self-centeredness opens us to others, and we are startled by their gifts
172 and their uniqueness. We find that we are able to help and be helped by the same person.
173 We are stronger in some ways and weaker in others. They need what we have and we need
174 them, as well. We awaken to a world where no one is only what we think they are. Everyone
175 has stories and struggles, gifts and shortcomings. We can learn from anyone and everyone.
176 Escaping from cycles of victimization, blame and shame allows us to see how many other
177 ways we are connected to the people around us – even those we don't yet know.

178 One of the things we notice in recovery is that we have many different kinds of friendships.
179 We get to experiment with that, too, and find the ways in which we are most comfortable
180 connecting. And those also change over time. A member we've sort of known for years will
181 ask us to coffee and we find ourselves becoming fast friends – or we notice that someone

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

182 we used to be close to has grown away from us and we no longer seem to have as much in
183 common.

184 Relationships are fluid, and that's part of what makes them so challenging: they change all
185 the time. Our expectations about what a friend should be (or what a partner or a sponsor or
186 a parent should be) can keep us from addressing the reality and the possibilities of our
187 relationships.

188 We feel one another's joy and sorrow, we see each other's growth, and we genuinely want
189 to help each other, even if there's nothing in it for us. Empathy is the ability to connect with
190 others at the level of the heart and the spirit. Learning to develop empathy requires that we
191 develop a conscience and a consciousness outside of ourselves. We develop care and
192 concern, and in some cases even love for people without wanting anything in return.
193 Empathy means that we meet each other where we are: that we understand each other,
194 but we don't use that understanding as a weapon.

195 The core of our disease is self centeredness. It needs to be dealt with from the very
196 beginning of our recovery and for the rest of our lives. We begin to learn this the first time
197 we walk into a meeting and feel we're in the right place: the identification we feel, the
198 sense that other people know what we've suffered, breaks the grip of that self obsession,
199 and frees us from ourselves.

200 There is a paradox here: we need to develop empathy and concern for others, and to let go
201 of self-obsession without losing sight of ourselves. We can swing from one extreme to the
202 other, from self-obsession to self-neglect and back. When we're caught in this pattern we
203 are often full of resentment and frustration. When we're able to step back and do some
204 inventory, we can see that our willingness to disappear into someone else's needs wasn't
205 selflessness at all, but rather a funny kind of reach for control – being indispensable makes
206 some of us feel important, just as being taken care of does for others. When we let go of
207 selfishness and self-centeredness, we don't lose who we are – we enhance it. There's
208 always more room for empathy and greater capacity for love. We find the faith that just
209 being ourselves really is enough to be loved and cared for by others and by a power greater
210 than ourselves. We all have the opportunity to experience this freedom, but it takes some
211 of us longer than others. We move in and out of self-centeredness as we learn to distinguish
212 between our needs, our desires and our fears.

213 The spiritual principles by which we learn to live guide us as we let go of the things that cut us
214 off from other people and from ourselves. Our fellow members help us, guide us, and share
215 with us. From the moment we come to the door of an NA meeting, our experience is about
216 relationships: the welcome we receive as a newcomer has a way of staying with us. Many of
217 us share about being treated like a normal person for the first time in years when we came to
218 a meeting. "In that first meeting was the first time in a long time that someone treated me

Chapter 5 – Relationships

219 like a person, and not like a problem or a project.” That people greeted us, sat with us, even
220 hugged us without wanting anything in return seemed more surprising than the message we
221 heard in words. “That wordless language of recognition, belief and faith which we call
222 empathy” is exactly what we need, and it happens in the exchange between virtual strangers
223 in our meetings. This is nothing short of a miracle. Over time, we learn that we have a safety
224 net we can trust, and we can rely on the people who care for us to carry us through.

225 We find our kindred spirits in the rooms – people who just plain understand us. We laugh at
226 each other’s jokes and at our experience. Once we get comfortable with the change in our
227 lives, we can see the humor in many of the big issues we face in early recovery. But when
228 we’re still in the process, it’s not funny at all. Our friends in recovery help us to laugh at
229 ourselves. They build us up and tear us down, but ultimately they accept us as we are. The
230 friendships we share in recovery are among the strongest we ever experience.

231 Some of us use the word “family” to describe this closeness, and sometimes it really can
232 feel that way – when we have holidays together, share celebrations and mourning, watch
233 the big game together and so on. One member suggested that her homegroup was like a
234 family not only in its closeness, but because we don’t get to pre-select its members: “some
235 of them are really difficult, she said, but they’re ours, and we love them.” Some of us do
236 have relatives in the rooms or who are involved in our recovery, and our fellow NA
237 members may be part of the lives of our children, our parents, our spouses. A member
238 whose mother was elderly and alone when she got clean brought Mom to all the local NA
239 events, and she quickly became “Mom” to a whole group of people in recovery who were
240 longing for family connections. Some people regard the whole fellowship as a family, and
241 there’s usually one or two in an area who will say, “Hi family,” when they begin to share.

242 But this makes others of us very uncomfortable. Especially if our own families were violent
243 or unsafe, or if we have experience in other kinds of groups that made demands of loyalty
244 from their members, the talk of “family” makes NA seem dangerous in those ways: that
245 demands will be made of us, that we will be asked to compromise ourselves or put
246 ourselves in harm’s way for “the family.” To some of us, it’s not threatening at all – it just
247 sounds a little cheesy. We don’t have language to describe the kinds of connections we
248 have in here, especially when we’ve been around for a while.

249 The safety we feel when we first come into the rooms is transformative. When we are in
250 crisis, it doesn’t matter if we trust someone or not – we reach out and are grateful that
251 anyone is there to grab our hand and pull us back from the edge. But as we stay clean and
252 build longstanding relationships, we experience a kind of safety we could not have imagined
253 before. We know each other as well as anyone knows us. We’ve watched each other grow
254 up and grow old, and we see in the lines on one another’s faces the laughs and struggles
255 we’ve shared with one another over all that time. We may be incredibly close at some times

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

256 and further apart at others, but there's something about just knowing each other is there
257 that makes us feel a little less alone in the world. It's funny, but some of us have friends we
258 see only occasionally, at conventions or other events. We don't see each other that often
259 but the love and connection feels as deep as any we have experienced.

260 We walk with each other through the day to day dramas of our lives: romance and
261 heartbreaks, births and deaths. Our sense of connection deepens into kinship. We may not
262 always have the kind of intensity in our relationships that we do in our first few years, but
263 what grows in its place is also beautiful. When those people who are part of our early
264 recovery continue to be part of our lives, time adds something to those relationships that
265 nothing else can. We have long friendships that have weathered terrible storms, people we
266 see twice a year but pick up with as if no time is lost, people who save our lives and we
267 don't see them again for a year, or a decade, people who are woven completely into our
268 daily lives. These are deep emotional connections that exceed what we think of as
269 friendship but don't quite match what we mean by family, either.

270 We learn to love others – not just our fellow addicts, but our families and those around us –
271 with a force we might never have imagined. Many of us turned away from love in our
272 addiction. Those who loved us just made us feel ashamed. In our self-obsession, there was
273 no such thing as enough, and the ways we were loved just never seemed adequate to our
274 ever-growing needs. When there was sufficient care, concern and support we exploited it.
275 Some of us were raised in addicted households, or in other circumstances where we never
276 really felt love at all – or it would come and go so randomly that we learned not to trust it.
277 That we get clean at all is a miracle. But it doesn't stop there: we grow to be steady,
278 reliable, loving people who can be a force for change in the lives of other addicts and
279 beyond. When we are willing to stay in recovery, to allow ourselves to grow and change, to
280 experience a full range of emotions, that is exactly what happens. The ways that we love in
281 recovery can be intense and beautiful. We don't get long term recovery without having
282 relationships, both in and out of the rooms. It's the meat and potatoes of life – and the
283 dessert! Relationships affect everything we do, and everything we are. The ways we
284 respond to our experiences shape who we become.

285 Relationships are one area where we show our differences most sharply. Some of us stay
286 pretty isolated, while others are surrounded by people; some of us develop large and
287 vibrant social circles within the fellowship, while others of us have just a few friends we're
288 comfortable with. Some of us find that in recovery we calm down in all kinds of ways, while
289 others are still partying 'til dawn- but doing it clean, with clean friends. Some of us stop
290 dating when we get clean and others go a little wild. There's probably no area of recovery
291 where we offer more advice, or take less of it. But the things we all have in common across
292 the fellowship seem to have little to do with any rules or advice: they have to do with the

Chapter 5 – Relationships

293 nature of our disease, and the tools we use to address it. What we share is the disease of
294 addiction, and the tools of recovery that can guide us in all our affairs.

295 There are some things that we know apply to all of us. We have a disease, and the core of
296 that disease is self-centeredness. The most important tool we have in fighting that disease
297 is empathy: the sense that others understand us in a deep way, and the concern we feel for
298 others that allows us to get out of ourselves and connect to something greater. Empathy
299 means we get each other, we see the hidden darkness and love and hurt and we
300 understand. That's different from brutal honesty: taking the truth about someone and using
301 it as a weapon to hurt them. Empathy isn't emotional violence. We might hand one another
302 the truth on a plate, unavoidable, obvious, terrifying and maybe also kind of funny, but we
303 don't use the truth as a means to gain power or to humiliate. We show each other through
304 our insight and example that we have a better self, and that we can rise to it.

305 Relationships are always evolving and we are continually in new territory as our
306 relationships grow and deepen. There will always be mistakes. Being able to recognize
307 them, clean them up and move on is a gift of the tenth step, and it's not just that we're able
308 to keep small problems from getting bigger. Accepting that we make mistakes and that they
309 are not the end of the world or the end of a relationship is part of coming to terms with our
310 own humanity. We struggle with the belief that we're not good enough. Minor problems in
311 a relationship can magnify our sense that we're inadequate, unlovable or unworthy. Even
312 with many years clean, we veer from avoiding responsibility for a problem to believing that
313 it's all our fault. We can deal with our part, surrender, and let the rest work itself out.
314 Surrender frees us from the feeling that we must constantly make up for being so awful.

315 We can share honestly who we are: beyond our addiction, we are human beings, members
316 of society who have gifts and flaws like everyone else. We are capable of loving and being
317 loved, of caring for others and contributing to their well-being, and in the process we build
318 relationships with ourselves, our fellows and our Higher Power. "In the end what is
319 happening is that I feel loved and supported while learning to have honest relationships,
320 without secrets or manipulation. Secure in the love of the fellowship, my heart is
321 unfreezing."

322 **Bridging Two Worlds: Relationships Outside of NA**

323 Earthlings, normies, civilians – we use terms to separate ourselves from people outside the
324 rooms and mistakenly reinforce our own alienation. We can share honestly who we are.
325 Beyond our addiction, we are human beings, members of society and have gifts and flaws
326 like everyone else. We struggle with the fear that if we get too integrated into the outside
327 world, we'll slip away from NA. Certainly we've all seen members get so involved in their
328 careers or their families or even their hobbies that NA seems not to have a place in their

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

329 lives anymore. Each of us seeks to find our own balance that allows us to experience the
330 world without sacrificing our recovery and putting ourselves at risk.

331 We have relationships outside of the rooms: we may have jobs, families or friendships that
332 are completely removed from our recovery. Some of us are a part of other organizations or
333 faith communities that have their own ties that bind. In all of these relationships we learn
334 and grow, practice principles and try new ways to deal with old feelings. But it's in our
335 relationships inside NA that a particular kind of work happens, and it's one of the reasons
336 that it is so important for us to "plug in" to the fellowship.

337 With a base of intimacy and safety in the fellowship, it can be easier to venture out into the
338 world. Our NA relationships might not be like any other relationships we have, but that
339 doesn't mean they're the only relationships in our lives, or even the only important ones.
340 We have family and friends outside the fellowship. Our jobs generally bring us into contact
341 with others; many of us go back to school in recovery, or find other ways to pursue our
342 goals personally and professionally. We develop interests and skills that have nothing to do
343 with recovery, except that without recovery it's likely we wouldn't have those skills or
344 interests. In pursuing our passions, our careers or our hobbies we make connections with
345 the world beyond our doors in all kinds of surprising ways.

346 Learning to live and serve by the traditions gives us particular skills that are very welcome
347 outside the rooms. Willingness, honesty, belief in unity and faith in the process make us
348 valuable wherever we choose to serve. We know how to make ourselves useful, how to be
349 teachable, and how to keep quiet and allow others to speak. Being able to focus on a primary
350 purpose and work creatively toward it is so much a part of our way of life that we may not
351 know how rare and special that is in the world at large. Learning to serve gives us skills to lead.

352 We learn to care and share with others. Even though the boundaries can be very different
353 with people outside, we find that the principles we learn in our recovery can be practiced in
354 all our affairs. Honesty and sincerity are almost always appreciated. We sometimes think
355 that we have the market cornered on pain, but we don't. Other people have their stories
356 too, and when we share with them we find that we have much to learn from one another.

357 For all of our talk about NA as "the last house on the block," or the place we need to be, or
358 the place where we're always welcome no matter what, we sometimes lose track of what a
359 beautiful thing we have. When we allow others to see our recovery and what it means to
360 have a fellowship in our lives, we are sometimes surprised at how attractive it is. It's not
361 unusual for us to hear a non-addict sigh, "I wish I had what you-all have." They can see the
362 beauty of the gift, but they may not understand the stakes on our membership, or what we
363 had to go through to "earn our seat." If they are fortunate, they will never understand that.
364 We can be glad for their good fortune even as we're grateful that we have what we do.

Chapter 5 – Relationships

365 **Family**

366 Our relationships with our families can present some of our biggest challenges. There is
367 never only one set of feelings about them. We have a tendency to do the most harm to the
368 people closest to us, and often we have been harmed by family members, as well. The list of
369 real and imagined hurts on both sides can be hard to get past. Whether or not they are still
370 in our lives, our relationship to our family is a critical matter for most of us.

371 Those of us who have an ongoing relationship with our families don't get to wait until we
372 get to the ninth step to handle all of the difficulties in those relationships. Whether or not
373 we ever make formal amends to our families, we deal with the consequences of our actions
374 – and the consequences of our recovery – every time we see them. Amends means change,
375 and our relationships with our families do change in recovery. Some of us choose to put
376 some new distance in there. One member recalled that he had to move away for a few
377 years: "they were nice people, but I had to find out who I was, and I couldn't do that inside
378 my family." Another member found that amends meant not tolerating abuse anymore, and
379 for the first time she felt she finally had permission to step away from a destructive
380 household.

381 On the other hand, many of us find that as we recover we desire much closer relationships
382 with our families than we'd had before. We enjoy our family, and the ability to be present and
383 participate as a healthy, responsible member of the family is its own reward. What we learn
384 about membership in Narcotics Anonymous can apply to our families as well as our groups.
385 When we show up with an open mind and a willingness to be of service, the rewards can be
386 far greater than our efforts. Sometimes those are the direct rewards of finding loving and
387 productive relationships with the people we care for. At other times the rewards are not so
388 direct, but we can see them over time: amending our behavior is not something we do to get
389 a response from others, but to change our own relationship to ourselves, our Higher Power,
390 and the world around us. As we learn to show up without resentment or fear, we develop an
391 emotional maturity that we might not have seen coming.

392 It is a challenge to let go of old ways of being with our families, especially when those ways
393 operated to our advantage. When people are used to rescuing us or taking responsibility for
394 us, it can seem simplest just to let them continue. Sometimes NA service gives us a window
395 on our patterns at home. We may see ourselves playing the same roles as elsewhere in our
396 lives: we are acting as the victim or rescuer, as the mediator or firebrand. Sometimes it's
397 positive and sometimes it's not. But the ability to see these patterns in one area of our lives
398 allows us to apply the steps and find the tools to change our behavior in all our affairs. As
399 we take our own inventory, we can see the price we pay for not taking responsibility for
400 ourselves in our relationships, our careers, but most of all in our spirits. Slipping the knots
401 on our dependency on others can be done without needless harshness. We are grateful for
402 the people who try to help us, whether or not we accept their help. We try to keep in mind

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

403 the wisdom of the Seventh Tradition: “everything has its price, regardless of intent.” We do
404 our best to accept help when we need it, but to pull our own weight when we can. There is
405 great freedom in taking responsibility for ourselves. We are able to look ourselves in the
406 eye, and to be clearer about our motives.

407 After many years of recovery, a member found herself in the position of caring for her
408 parents, with whom she’d had a hard time as she was growing up. “Recently it’s become
409 clear how human and fragile they are,” she said. “My feelings get hurt when my dad doesn't
410 know who I am anymore, but in the larger picture it doesn't matter, because I remember
411 who he is.” Some of our hardest moments contain the keys to healing deep and painful
412 scars. So often in recovery, the rewards come when we’re not looking for anything but the
413 next right thing to do.

414 We weren’t born with all this damage. But we live with the events of our past, and some of
415 them are traumatic. Many patterns for relationships that have stayed with us through our
416 lives were established early. Abuse takes many forms, and not all of our history is easy to
417 name. No matter which side of the equation we were on, the memories haunt us. Our
418 history leaves us with issues that come up again and again: shame, fear, a sense that we
419 need to justify our existence; a sense of alienation from ourselves, our bodies and other
420 people. In our relationships this shows up as a feeling of failure before we even begin. It
421 seems impossible for us to have a healthy loving relationship, so the first sign of friction or
422 tension seems to prove our worst suspicions. We escalate or walk away before our fears
423 have a chance to come true – or be disproven.

424 Coming to terms with our experience happens over time, in layers: there are issues we must
425 address immediately if we are to face life clean, and issues that we must develop a
426 foundation in recovery in order to be able to face. The baggage that has traveled with us
427 the longest is the stuff most likely to bring feelings of hopelessness. There are times we may
428 be very frustrated to find ourselves facing the same issues that we had dealt with years
429 before, but we find increasing freedom as we continue to chip away at them. When we’re in
430 the grip of a pattern we can’t get free of, we must remember our bottom line: don’t use, no
431 matter what! The process sometimes feels glacial – mountains are moving, but we can’t see
432 it happening. There can be a long time between the work we do on a particular issue and
433 our awareness that change has happened.

434 We may be surprised to learn how many different ways people work through these things.
435 Even if we seek professional help to get through this part of the process, our recovery in NA
436 does not need to go on hold. On the contrary, it’s the basics of our program that support us
437 as we struggle with such powerful feelings and memories. As other members share their
438 love and compassion, we learn once more that we are not as alone as we feel.

Chapter 5 – Relationships

439 For those of us with longstanding patterns of painful relationships, it can be surprising to
440 notice the number of long term, loving relationships we have in the fellowship. Love sneaks
441 up on us. And the very fact of that love, its undeniable presence in our lives, does its own
442 quiet work healing the wounds that nothing else seems to reach.

443 The process of recovery offers us the freedom to choose what we want to bring forward
444 from our past, and what we want to leave behind. It's not always as easy to do as to say, but
445 the ability to make the decision greatly increases the likelihood of being able to carry it out.
446 Our oldtimers sometimes remind us, "If you don't know what you want, you're not likely to
447 get it." When we take an honest look at our lives, we can see good and bad even in the
448 most complicated families. There are times when we only see our childhood through rose-
449 colored glasses, and other times when we forget that there was anything constructive there
450 at all.

451 **Being a Parent**

452 Perhaps nothing changes our perspective on our own childhood like having children of our
453 own. We have a different perspective on our parents' experience, and we see ourselves
454 through the eyes of our children, as well. We want so badly to get it right – but we don't
455 quite know what that means. Being a good parent might mean really different things to
456 each of us, but whatever we imagine it to be, we want to do it right. We can get so caught
457 up in our theories and expectations of what it means to be a parent that we forget it's a
458 relationship. All the things we learn about relationships in recovery can help us as parents –
459 just as we see all the issues we struggle with in all of our relationships show up some form
460 or another in our relationships with our children.

461 We learn to listen carefully, and to communicate in a way that we can be heard. Just like we
462 do in sponsorship, we learn to meet our kids where they're at. Perhaps most importantly,
463 we learn that when we can get our own self-obsession out of the way, we can experience
464 love and compassion, empathy and intimacy. As we make peace with ourselves we find
465 peace with those around us, including our children. When we practice self-acceptance we
466 can accept our children as the human beings they are. It may be that the best gift we can
467 give our children is acceptance of themselves. And since we cannot give what we do not
468 have, we find that what we want for our children can motivate us in our own journey.

469 Having children is a lifetime commitment, whether we entered into it carefully and
470 thoughtfully or entirely by surprise. One of the things that distinguishes parenting from
471 other relationships in recovery is that it's constant: we never stop being parents, even if
472 we're not around our kids all the time. Whether we are with our children constantly or
473 never see them at all, the fact that we are parents exposes us to a power of love we may
474 not have known before. We are more capable – and more vulnerable – than we had

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

475 imagined. Having children opens us to a deeper connection than any other in our lives, but
476 it's also a lifelong lesson in letting go.

477 Many of us assume that being a parent is something we're supposed to know how to do
478 instinctively, and it can be hard to ask for help. The principle of open-mindedness helps us
479 to remain teachable, and to look for teachers all around us. Some of us find the support we
480 need by bringing our children to meetings, and raising them immersed in the fellowship;
481 others of us are members whose children have no idea we are in recovery at all. Whatever
482 our choices are about how our families and fellowship intersect, we know that the skills we
483 learn in recovery make us better parents, partners and children to our parents at any stage
484 of our lives.

485 There's a really wide range of experience with being a parent in recovery: some of us have
486 our children with us through our addiction and our recovery; some start new families after
487 we're clean; some of us never have children of our own, but become an important part of a
488 child's life anyway. It's hard to talk about the experience without getting distracted by our
489 different theories or beliefs about parenting, or even our different styles of communication.
490 We all have opinions about what's right and wrong. But what recovery in NA gives us is the
491 freedom to figure out what's right for us, and to live it to the best of our ability. Just as
492 there is no model of the recovering addict, there is no model of the recovering parent.

493 Parenthood is one area where our self-centeredness can do real harm. "I was freaked out
494 when I knew we were going to have a baby. I didn't have a clue what to do. My sponsor
495 asked me to write about a few simple questions that were very helpful to me: What is a
496 child? What are the needs of a child? What are a child's responsibilities? What is a parent?
497 What are a parent's responsibilities?" Writing inventory really helps us sort out what we
498 believe so we can better act on it. Working a program of recovery keeps us from getting
499 drawn into our self obsession, and helps us to see when we're recreating old patterns that
500 we don't want to carry on to the next generation. Simply living lives of honesty and integrity
501 sets a pattern for change. Our example teaches our children more than our words ever can.

502 If we've been separated from our kids for a while, we may find that we need to get to know
503 each other again as we learn to deal with one another. "I thought my child was just a little
504 version of me," said one member, "I just figured we'd like the same things and want the
505 same things and think the same way. It took a terrible fight for me to learn that he's his own
506 person, but I'm grateful now that we're getting to know each other. He's not me, but he's
507 someone I really like." There is often a struggle when we reunite with our children; they
508 have their feelings about what has happened, and it can be painful to acknowledge them.
509 Our relationships with our children can be poisoned not only by the damage we do in our
510 addiction, but by the guilt and shame we feel for what happened. Self-loathing is just
511 another form of self-obsession, and blinds us to the needs of the person in front of us.

Chapter 5 – Relationships

512 When we get out of the way, we find that we can be good parents at any stage of our
513 children’s lives: even if we get to know them after they’re already adults, we still have
514 something to offer them. Our experience with selfless service in recovery teaches us that if
515 we show up with willingness, the opportunities for us to help naturally appear.

516 “I let my kids take the lead on love. They showed me warmth and nurturance I hadn’t
517 known before, and I learned to stop controlling and just enjoy,” another parent in recovery
518 said. “My partner’s big, warm family taught my child how to love and hug and call back. I’m
519 learning from him to accept their affection for what it is, even when it feels uncomfortable
520 to me.” Part of the joy and the difficulty of parenting is that we’re constantly
521 experimenting. No two children are the same, and no two parents are, either. We learn to
522 adapt our beliefs to reality, to check our behavior, and to use the tools we learn in NA to
523 help us build a family we’re glad to be part of.

524 But even the best parent has days when they’re not so sure they like their kids. We are
525 human; we are not our child’s Higher Power, and there are times when just not doing the
526 next wrong thing is the best we can manage. “I used to run into the bathroom and close the
527 door,” said one woman. “I’d get on my knees and just pray until the desire to hit my child
528 would pass.” Another said, “I’d go in my room and just pray for bedtime.” Often we see
529 signs of our own disease manifesting in our children, and it’s not always clear whether
530 they’re just going through a phase or they’re addicts like we are. We teeter between denial
531 of what’s happening and labeling any using behavior as a symptom of addiction. Our desire
532 to spare our children our experience can sometimes cause us to assume too quickly that we
533 know what’s best. Making sure that our children have access to recovery might mean not
534 pushing it on them too hard. Even for the people we love the most, this is still a program of
535 attraction. Our frustration and our fear can lead us to respond in ways we think we know
536 better than. We aren’t perfect, but we are getting better. We start by not doing harm, and
537 find that we can do a lot of good, if we’re willing to try.

538 Having children in active addiction is always a hard thing. No one, not even the worst
539 parent, means to bring harm to their children, but in our addiction we do harm them by
540 what we do and what we don’t do. Some of us did our best out there, but still came short: “I
541 thought being a good parent was buying my son fast food and toys with the money I got
542 from stealing,” said another. In many cases, it seemed simpler for all involved if we just
543 weren’t around. We left our children with their other parent, with our relatives, or in foster
544 care while we pursued our addiction, and found when we got clean that our desire to be a
545 good parent was not enough to make parents out of us. Some of us were physically present
546 but emotionally absent or unpredictable. Some of us know that we have done more
547 damage than we can repair: “I was a lousy parent,” one member said. “There’s no denying
548 it, and no way I can undo the harm I did. I will spend a lifetime making amends for it.” We
549 know we harmed our own children, but we forget about the other children that were

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

550 around us in our addiction: we babysat when we were using, or we ignored the neglect and
551 abuse of children in the places where we used. If we cannot undo the harm, at least we
552 know we can stop causing more of it. That in itself can make a world of difference in our
553 own lives and the lives of those we care about. The program helps us stop doing damage,
554 and then gives us opportunities to share our experience with others, through meetings,
555 sponsorship and the power of example. We can break the cycles in our own families, and
556 help others do better with their children as well.

557 On the other hand, some of us want to take responsibility for more than we could possibly
558 control. We see our children struggling, and want to blame ourselves for their difficulties.
559 We project the worst, based on our own experience. It's another kind of self-centeredness
560 to see our child not as who he or she is, but as a reflection of ourselves, our parenting, or
561 our decisions. Trusting that our children have their own path and their own Higher Power
562 can bring us to a new understanding of our own Third Step. When we get out of the way,
563 our children come into focus as the unique human beings they are. We realize that our
564 recovery is a message to them and to us that there are such things as second chances.

565 Many of us have lost our children in one way or another: they were taken from us, or we
566 gave them up to ensure their safety, or something happened to them. For some of us, this is
567 the deepest wound of our addiction, the loss we feel most acutely.

568 If we are fortunate to have our children with us in recovery, we may find that our process
569 and theirs really aren't that different: "We grew up alongside one another," said one addict.
570 "I was as much a child as they were, and I had to be parent to us all. It's pretty embarrassing
571 when your children mature faster than you do." We need help, we need advice, and we
572 need the power of example. Turning to our friends in NA, the people in our communities,
573 and the other adults in our children's lives, we find the tools and information we need. "I
574 was a single parent, but I didn't do it alone," a member explained. When we are free to ask
575 for help, we are able to acquire the tools we need to raise our children the way we believe
576 is right.

577 Whether or not we come into recovery with families, we have a tendency to build them
578 once we get here. Some of them look like the families we're used to – we find a partner and
579 have children, or find a partner and share the children we already have. But we also put
580 together families in other ways: we take in the children of family or friends who aren't able
581 to raise their own; we adopt or foster. We blend families in surprising patterns. "I was
582 heartbroken when I learned that one of the consequences of my addiction was being
583 unable to have children. A sponsee was sharing her step work with me, and she wondered
584 aloud if the childless mother was here to mother the motherless child. It was like a light
585 went on – I looked around me in the rooms and there were these kids fresh off the streets,
586 who had no one, and it seemed like god's will for me was clear." Some of us end up taking

Chapter 5 – Relationships

587 care of elderly or sick friends who have no families of their own. However it happens, many
588 of us find our homes full of love and full of people we love, whether or not we're related.
589 The ties that bind us are not limited to those we first recognize when we come together in
590 unity. Family can be a pretty hard concept for some of us. We make peace with it one way
591 or another, sometimes by reinventing it altogether.

592 **Amends and Reconciliation**

593 As our behavior changes, we no longer leave a path of chaos and damage in our wake. But
594 we recognize there is no way to un-ring a bell: there are instances where the damage we
595 caused may be difficult for others to forgive. Amends are necessary to live free of the guilt,
596 shame and remorse that keep us trapped in self-destruction. But the process of amends
597 neither begins nor ends when we sit down with the person we have harmed to have that
598 talk. With the help of our sponsor, we reconcile ourselves to the truth of what we did, and
599 we begin the process of making peace with the consequences of our actions. An honest
600 relationship with ourselves and real, tangible change in our lives are necessary for amends
601 to have much value. There's a reason we take on this work so late in the steps. The process
602 is one of the most important we ever undertake, and we do not enter it lightly.

603 The amends we make in words are crucial to our recovery, but that's only part of the
604 process. Living those amends means allowing the changes in our personalities and our
605 behavior to become reliable and consistent in the lives of those we care about. We do this
606 whether the people we care for are changing or not, whether they forgive us or not,
607 whether our relationship becomes what we wish for it or not. When we clean up our side of
608 the street, we can feel easier in our hearts and spirits. But that by no means obligates
609 anyone else to clean up their part, nor does it suggest that our families will magically
610 transform into what we always wished they were. More likely, we learn to make peace with
611 the families we have, and to accept the reality of who they are. Just as in sponsorship, we
612 learn to meet them where they're at.

613 There are some people who never forgive us. Often those people are members of our
614 family. As dearly as we may want their forgiveness, the simple truth is that it's not going to
615 come until they're ready. Living with that can be enormously difficult. The desire to fix it can
616 be so powerful that we make it worse by not letting go and letting them heal in their own
617 time. One member shared that twelve years after her initial amends, her daughter finally
618 declared that she was forgiven. "It was grace that I didn't know all those years that she was
619 still struggling with this," she said, "because if I'd known I wouldn't have let go, and I don't
620 know if we could ever have gotten there." Whatever we need to say to the people we have
621 harmed, we know that the deepest amends we make is that we change. And while we can
622 feel the depth of the change, people who struggled with us for years of our addiction may
623 take a long time to believe it. The hard part can be believing and trusting that ourselves. We
624 carry with us that same doubt that the changes we're making will stick, and when others

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

625 don't trust that change we can fall into that trap as well. Having people who believe in us
626 and in our recovery can be essential to walking through this process, especially when it's
627 long. The gift in it can be a deep self acceptance: we forgive ourselves, we forgive others,
628 and we find peace – regardless what others may think or feel or tell us. "I am not who I was,
629 no matter who is not convinced. That lie is dead," a member shared.

630 Reconciliation is an important spiritual principle for us to consider: we come to terms with
631 the reality of our actions, and we also reconcile with people we've had conflict with.
632 Sometimes that reconciliation means that we restore the relationship to its previous state
633 or to a new state based on the current reality, and sometimes it means that we make peace
634 with the fact that the connection with that person is lost. Reconciliation can also mean
635 restoring balance – like when one reconciles accounts. When we take on what is not ours,
636 as when we take responsibility for someone else's feelings or actions, we're out of balance,
637 and the result is often destructive. We do what we can to amend the harm we have done
638 and restore balance in our relationships, and we let go of the results. Facing the responses
639 of some people from our past may give us a much sharper vision of who we had been, and
640 it can take some work to make peace with that. We are very aware of who we are
641 becoming, because awareness is such an important part of our new way of life.

642 If indeed amends is about change, one change we can make is not to subject ourselves to
643 abuse anymore. Finding the balance between hearing someone out and putting ourselves in
644 danger is difficult: we're the only ones who can say where that line is, and we may not find
645 it in the moment. Like so many things we work through and walk through in recovery, it
646 comes in layers. It can be useful to know that dealing with what we can does not necessarily
647 mean we're "done" with an issue, a memory, or an amends. More is continually revealed to
648 us, and sometimes in the course of dealing with what we know we learn more than we had
649 expected.

650 Walking with the knowledge that someone has not forgiven us is hard, but through it we
651 find levels of forgiveness and acceptance that we may not have known were possible. For
652 one thing, it brings us to a clearer understanding of what the Ninth Step is for, and we learn
653 to recognize the difference between hope and expectation. As much as we might want
654 someone to forgive us or to own their part of a situation in which harm was mutual, we
655 have no right and no reason to expect that. Sometimes the path to forgiving ourselves
656 begins with forgiving another for their lack of forgiveness. As we forgive them, we may find
657 that we feel compassion for the pain they experience at carrying that resentment – and for
658 the pain we caused them in the first place. We understand that everyone's sense of harm is
659 different, and that something we might find easy to let go someone else may find
660 unforgivable: that is not our business to decide or to change. When we understand the
661 gravity of the damage we did, we can see that accepting their unforgiveness may in fact be
662 part of our amends. We realize, too, that forgiving us may have other consequences for the

Chapter 5 – Relationships

663 person to whom we're making amends. It may threaten their other relationships, or their
664 sense of themselves. We are the only ones whose recovery we have any control over. We
665 can only amend what is ours. The rest is out of our hands, and we practice letting go.

666 There is no substitute for time. Miracles do happen; we are not the only ones who
667 experience healing. Sometimes reconciliation is possible, but not necessarily on our
668 schedule or our terms. We practice forgiveness, patience, and acceptance. We must give
669 time, time – even if it's a lifetime. One of the great gifts of being a member of NA is that we
670 are surrounded by people who believe in us and care for us – and, if we pay attention, there
671 is always someone who needs our help. We can turn the love we feel toward those who
672 welcome it, building and cherishing the relationships that are present in our lives today.

673 **Romantic Relationships**

674 There's a statement in the Basic Text that if we made a list for ourselves in early recovery of
675 what we wanted, we'd be selling ourselves short. It's not just in the beginning that this is true –
676 over and over, our dreams for ourselves are a glimpse of God's will, not a road map. Many of us
677 have found this in our romances, as well. We take on the project of finding a partner in much
678 the same way we might shop for a new car: we make a list of the features we want or don't
679 want, and begin evaluating available models based on our list. We may be surprised, on finding
680 the one who seems to meet our criteria, that things still don't work out as we'd planned.

681 Our sponsor might suggest turning that list back on ourselves, asking what it would take for
682 us to become the person we imagine as a partner. Others might suggest stepping away
683 from such a list altogether, thinking instead about what would constitute a relationship
684 we'd like to be in. Some of us are masters of projection: by the time we've gone on a first
685 date with someone, we've already imagined the whole relationship, from steamy beginning
686 to bitter divorce! Allowing ourselves to be present means that we can have a relationship
687 with a person, rather than a fantasy. Learning to live in the moment frees us to enjoy
688 ourselves. Applying skills like communication and active listening, practicing principles like
689 unity, compassion and sharing, we can learn what we need to be in a solid relationship long
690 before we're actually there. These behaviors don't just make us more attractive, they also
691 make us happier where we're at.

692 There's so much in the way of our ability to have the kind of relationships we want: fear,
693 selfishness, reservations, the belief that it will just end badly. The more inventory we do,
694 the more we can see the things inside us that stand between us and what we want. We may
695 mistake our impulsiveness for our intuition, and imagine that we've fallen in love as soon as
696 we get excited. Others of us resist feeling at all. Not wanting to risk our hearts means that
697 they never really get full. As we learn to open up we also learn to survive being hurt.
698 Strangely, as it gets easier to withstand that kind of hurt it seems to happen less often. We
699 choose better, come into relationships a little more cautiously, and learn to recognize and

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

700 address signs of difficulty much sooner. Healthy relationships begin to replace the chaos
701 that had consumed our lives. Sometimes we miss the chaos. Living without the drama and
702 clutter of active addiction is strange. We may create drama in recovery just so it feels
703 familiar.

704 “Don’t get into romantic relationships in your first year” might be the most repeated, least
705 listened-to piece of advice in Narcotics Anonymous. We need time to get our feet on the
706 ground, to build support, to work some steps and figure out who we are, but many of us
707 don’t take that time in the beginning. We find that this is like building a house without
708 laying a foundation: sooner or later, that work needs to get done, and it’s a lot easier to do
709 it in the beginning than to try to build a foundation under a standing structure. Many of us
710 who don’t take that time in the beginning find that we need it later. If we survive that first
711 breakup clean, we have a pretty good idea of what that time is for.

712 Not all of us take a full year, and some of us take much more time before we start dating.
713 We may even find that we are happier and more serene when we’re single, and choose to
714 stay that way. Like so many things, once we find there’s nothing to be afraid of and no one
715 right answer, we can answer the big questions for ourselves and know we can always
716 change our mind later, if we choose.

717 It can be hard to admit, but the times when we most desire to be in a relationship are often
718 the moments when we’re least equipped to handle one. So many of us struggle with the
719 fear that we’ll never have a partner, and that not having a life partner means we’ll always
720 be “alone.” This kind of fear leads to panic – and to pain. When we’re lonely, or sad, or
721 trying to distract ourselves we may be willing to do or to settle for things that are not we
722 really want in the long term. When our priority is simply not being alone, we are likely to
723 compromise our values or our priorities, to commit too quickly to a person we really are just
724 getting to know. There’s an old saying, “be careful what you pray for – you might get it.” We
725 mistake intensity or sex for intimacy, and are likely to think something is serious when
726 we’ve really just been seeking distraction and a fix. Or we settle for sex or romance when
727 what we really want is love. Afraid of being alone, we patch the emptiness we feel with a
728 relationship. “He became my higher power and my drug of choice,” said one member of the
729 guy she dated when she was a newcomer. “I was calling all the time, when I was bored or
730 lonely or happy, asking ‘what are you doooooing?’ I was clean, with no tools and a new
731 obsession. Nothing had changed.” (That same member also reported that someone
732 suggested to her, “if it’s after 10 at night and it sounds like a good idea – don’t do it.”)
733 Sometimes it seems as if our latest drug of choice is another person. It can be surprising to
734 discover that having a crush on someone else turns so easily into self-obsession – but when
735 we really have a look at our thinking, we can see how involved we are with whether we’re
736 being noticed or how we’re being perceived.

Chapter 5 – Relationships

737 We want a magic formula that will make relationships okay: a year, three years, a fifth step,
738 a round of steps. The truth is much simpler, but harder to define. Some of us are never
739 “ready” and struggle all our lives. We know members who are scholars of our principles but
740 have many marriages behind them; we also see newcomers stumble into a relationship and
741 somehow make it work. When it works, we believe we were ready. When it doesn’t, we try
742 to understand why. There are always lessons. Experience is what we get when we don’t get
743 what we want, as the old saying goes. But some are lessons so clear that we don’t have to
744 act out to learn them. With practice we develop personal responsibility, accountability, and
745 discernment. Mostly we know when we’re doing something wrong, taking advantage of
746 someone who’s vulnerable, being controlling, deceptive or abusive – and we have a
747 responsibility to ourselves as well as to the other person to stop it.

748 Too often, we let our recovery take a back seat to a new relationship. We find ourselves
749 missing meetings, calling other people less, not working as hard on ourselves. There’s no
750 reason to be surprised if the relationship suffers when we’re not taking care of ourselves,
751 but it can feel like we’re taking needed energy out of the relationship when we take the
752 time and space we need to work our program. We do the work to become the kind of
753 person who is ready for the relationship we want – but we have to keep doing the work to
754 be that person inside the relationship, as well. “It’s like pouring “Miracle Grow” on your
755 recovery,” one member said. “If you want to get to know yourself, get into a relationship.”
756 “No,” said another: “If you want to get to know your sponsor – get into a relationship!”

757 Some of us get clean and begin a pattern of apparently serious relationships that all seem to
758 end in calamity. The drama of falling in and out of love can be its own reward, and we find
759 that we have the same relationship over and over with different people. The intensity of
760 early love may be so compelling that we seek it again and again. Sometimes it’s our
761 behavior in the relationship that’s in the way, but we can also see trouble even before the
762 relationships begin – we notice that we’re choosing people who just aren’t appropriate for
763 us. We joke sometimes about having a “broken picker,” but the reality can be pretty painful.

764 It’s no secret that addicts have trouble accepting reality. This is no less true for us in our
765 intimate relationships: we get tangled up in a fantasy of what our relationship is supposed to
766 be, and lose track of what it actually is. When we love a fantasy we get angry with reality.
767 Anger with reality is the opposite of acceptance. We can get so involved with the fantasy of
768 who our partner is that we are furious with them for not living up to that image. Sometimes
769 the best we can do is walk away, but often walking away is the easy way out. The journey is
770 learning to accept the person we love in spite of all the ways they don’t match our fantasy of
771 who they should be or could be. It’s possible that unconditional love is something that only a
772 Higher Power is capable of, but as we get closer to achieving this ideal in our own lives we find
773 that our spirits blossom. The more deeply we love, the more we are capable of loving. The
774 more we open ourselves to grow through relationship, the more intimacy we experience.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

775 The conundrum of all this is that relationships are one area where practice alone doesn't
776 make perfect. Some of the most important work we do to improve our relationships isn't
777 done in those relationships at all, but with our sponsors and trusted friends. Even with
778 many years clean, separating what's in our heart from what's in our head doesn't come
779 automatically. We need another set of eyes; we need a caring, attentive listener to help us
780 sort things out. A good sponsor is the key to opening up the possibility for change in the
781 way we relate to others. That relationship can form the basis for all the rest of the
782 relationships we have in recovery. For many of us it's the first honest, open, trusting
783 relationship we've had. Some of us recover for a long time before we find a sponsor we
784 connect with, and find that listener in another trusted friend. Wherever we find the safety
785 to begin, opening up about our experience is critical to change.

786 With many years clean, we may find that we appear very mature, that our lives have begun
787 to look the way we want them to in many ways – but that in our intimate relationships we
788 still struggle. Distinguishing mature from immature love can take as long as it takes to
789 mature: it's a lifetime process. When we admit how much of the damage in our lives has
790 circulated around love and sexuality, we can see how much can be gained by a restoration
791 to sanity in this area. We work the steps to clear away the wreckage of our past: we use a
792 sponsor to help us address the wreckage of our present; we use the traditions to learn new
793 ways to get along with others. We let go of our expectations of others and we begin to
794 expect a little bit more of ourselves.

795 Gradually we come to see where we need to change, and where we need to stand firm in
796 our beliefs even if it means waiting. We start to see where our beliefs keep us safe, and
797 where they drive us into the same patterns over and over. "I don't have a fear of
798 abandonment," said one member. "I expect it." When we expect the worst, we usually get
799 it. Learning from our experience is important, but being willing to believe we can move
800 beyond it is also crucial. Our literature talks a lot about insanity as "doing the same thing
801 and expecting different results," but when we're trying to live a new way of life we
802 sometimes find that we are doing different things, and expecting the same results. We learn
803 to have standards and limits, but also to be open: we can become so rigid in our demands
804 that finding a partner becomes impossible. Giving ourselves and others permission to
805 change also means surrendering to the possibility that we may be in strange territory a lot:
806 when we're not repeating the same relationship, we may feel like we don't know what to
807 do at all. "It has taken many years," one member said, "but in my last Fourth Step it was
808 suddenly clear that I didn't get involved with the same person over and over – I was the
809 same person. It didn't matter who the other person was, I still reacted the same way."
810 Doing something different is a risk – but doing the same thing is a guarantee of failure. An
811 oldtimer said it best: "we used to think we had trust issues, but now we know we have
812 courage issues."

Chapter 5 – Relationships

813 The more we experience freedom from active addiction, the more we can see how our
814 addiction drives us into corners even when we're not using drugs. The ways in which we
815 create damage in our lives, or put ourselves in harm's way have a tendency to repeat. A
816 little clarity may be all it takes to change an old and painful pattern. Sometimes we can see
817 it all too clearly, and do it again anyway. We examine our motives and our willingness, we
818 share about it, we fill notebooks with inventory – but there we still are, in the same
819 relationship with a different partner, or experiencing the same conflict in service that we
820 did in our last job.

821 It can be easy to judge one another when we see this kind of repetition, but the truth is,
822 we're not ready till we're ready. Sometimes the pain just needs to be great enough; but
823 sometimes, looking back, we can see that other kinds of healing had to happen before we
824 were ready to deal with some of that deeply buried stuff. We may be disappointed to
825 discover that our defects are removed, but not in our order of preference. Each time we go
826 through an emotional storm, we are given an opportunity to let go of more of the burden of
827 the past and find more freedom on the other side. We find that our future, and our
828 freedom, is less and less determined by our history.

829 There really isn't a right way or a wrong way to experience love. What matters is that we
830 allow ourselves the privilege. We love who we love. It doesn't always make sense or look
831 good on paper. A happy couple put it like this: "The thing is, whether we love each other or
832 hate each other on any given day, it's really fun. We can be playful, we can fight, we can come
833 together and just enjoy each other's company. It might look a little fishy from the outside, but
834 we're enjoying every minute of it." Sometimes it really is that we found our mate –
835 sometimes; perhaps, there's a lesson it's time for us to learn. When we let go and allow
836 others to be who they are, we find we're able to let go of our own insecurities a little more,
837 and be honest about who we are. That's not always a deadly serious proposition: we can be
838 playful and silly, loving and tender, frightened or sad. We can finally be free of that terrible
839 sense we have that who we are isn't enough, or that if they really knew us, they'd leave.

840 We need to be honest about what we are doing. We may be looking for a meaningful
841 relationship, or for a good time, or we may be looking for trouble. Understanding our
842 motivation makes it a lot easier to understand our consequences. It's not that we always
843 get what we ask for. But when we want one thing and ask for another, the consequences
844 are usually disappointing. We can hardly hope to be honest and open with a partner if we
845 are still practicing self-deception.

846 It's not surprising that some of us get strung out on sex. We want something to make us
847 feel good fast. Sometimes just the flirting is its own little high – we like playing the game.
848 Making the connection is its own rush, even before anything "happens." That's not to say
849 that it's a problem for all of us, or even for all of us whose relationship with sex is casual.

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

850 Like so many things in recovery, it's not a problem until it's a problem for us. We may want
851 to ask ourselves if sex is making our lives unmanageable, if it's contributing to our happiness
852 or unhappiness, if obsession and compulsion are playing a part in our behavior, if we're
853 lying, keeping secrets or sneaking around. We take an honest look at whether our behavior
854 is hurting our loved ones – or if it would hurt them, if they knew about it.

855 What matters is that we are comfortable with our behavior and our decisions. Other people
856 have opinions, but we learn in recovery to identify what we want, what we believe, and
857 how we choose to live. That can look very different from one member to another, or from
858 one point in our lives to another, it is entirely reasonable for our behavior to change as our
859 needs, wants and desires change – the issue is that we're clear about that with ourselves.
860 Behavior that was comfortable in early recovery may be unthinkable later on; or we may
861 find after years clean that we feel a freedom to experiment that we never had in the
862 beginning.

863 Over time, we find increased acceptance of ourselves and our circumstances. We learn to
864 enjoy our own company, and to handle our own needs and responsibilities appropriately. It
865 can be surprising when we notice that we no longer seem to “need” a partner as we once
866 did; what is more surprising is how much easier it is to be comfortable with a partner once
867 we know we want a relationship – but we don't need it. Having support in place means that
868 we have some of the resources we need for a successful one-on-one relationship, but also
869 that we have the support we need if things don't go as we'd hoped.

870 Our relationship with ourselves determines the quality of our relationships with others. It
871 seems so obvious, but in the moment it really can slip away from us. When we're not
872 feeling so good about ourselves, when we're hurting, when we feel lonely and insecure, of
873 course we want someone else to tell us we're okay. But the better we know ourselves, the
874 better we know our needs and what we have to give. “It helps if at least one person in the
875 relationship knows at least one of the people in the relationship,” a member explained, “but
876 I've been a stranger to myself sometimes even when I wasn't new. Seeing into myself
877 honestly and accurately is something that comes and goes. I find now I can name a lot of
878 emotions, but that doesn't mean I know what I'm feeling at any given moment, especially
879 when my feelings are strong. I still default to anger, depression and resistance when what
880 I'm really feeling is loneliness, desperation or fear. It comes out sideways at the people
881 nearest me. I comfort myself with the idea that I recognize it sooner than I used to – after a
882 bad week, rather than a bad month or a breakup. But it still hasn't gone away.” We can
883 really see the rewards of the tenth step when we start being able to recognize our emotions
884 as we're having them. When we can identify our own responses we find that we can choose
885 to respond rather than react.

Chapter 5 – Relationships

886 Practicing principles in our relationship doesn't mean being someone else, or being phony,
887 but sometimes it can feel a little awkward at first. Our sponsors can be a great help to us as
888 we begin to try new ways of responding or reacting. As we try to replace old, defective ways
889 of thinking with new ideas and attitudes, issues arise that we may not have seen before. We
890 are faced with choices and challenges we didn't see coming.

891 Being in a relationship is a different experience when we put unity first. When we set aside
892 our own needs and consider the good of the partnership or the family as a whole, it does
893 not mean that we tolerate our needs going unmet or unacknowledged. We start to
894 recognize that each of us will get what we need if both of us come to the relationship with
895 an attitude of willingness and a belief that when we allow our unity to be a priority we can
896 turn the results over to a power greater than ourselves.

897 We learn that being self supporting doesn't just have to do with money: self support is a
898 spiritual principle, and learning to support our own spirits is a critical part of our
899 development. Of course we don't just "go it alone". We have the group, we have our
900 trusted friends and sponsors, and we have a Higher Power that helps us carry on. We share
901 our triumphs and burdens with a partner, but learn not to make them responsible for our
902 moods or the overall quality of our lives. When we can have a bad day without insisting our
903 partner also be miserable, something's really changing. "The first time I came home angry,
904 and my girlfriend started in, and I didn't say the next wrong thing, I knew a Higher Power
905 was working in my life," said one member.

906 Learning the difference between having a partner and taking a hostage – or being taken
907 hostage – is a big step for a lot of us. "Letting go of expectations" is often a nice name for
908 letting go of control. Allowing our partners and ourselves to experience personal autonomy
909 means we can grow and change at our own pace, and the relationship can benefit from
910 what each of us brings to it. When we're willing to stand still and be present to a
911 relationship even as it changes, or as we change, is another way we come to understand
912 commitment. Just as it's normal in recovery to sometimes think about using, sometimes in
913 the closest relationships we may think about running. Standing still in spite of the impulse
914 to run can be a great spiritual exercise. The tenth step reminds us that when we don't know
915 what to do, we can wait and the answer will become clear. A sane solution is often possible
916 if we're willing to wait for the answers we need. Open mindedness is critical to getting
917 through difficulties in our relationships.

918 Being with someone who is not in recovery presents particular difficulties. One is that we
919 may feel judged or excluded by our friends in the rooms. Too often we think of people
920 coming in two types: in recovery and needing recovery. The very idea of a healthy
921 relationship with someone who isn't "one of us" can seem unlikely. In fact, it's no more or
922 less likely than being happy with someone who is in recovery. We may have to work a little

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

923 harder to balance our priorities between our commitments to our partner and to our
924 recovery. When we're out of balance, it can seem like we're leading a double life. We may
925 find that the language we use to express ourselves or describe our feelings are not the
926 same. Relationships require compromise and learning. In the rooms we find the tools we
927 need to have the relationships we want in our lives. Outside the fellowship, we find ways to
928 apply the principles without necessarily naming what we're doing. The flexibility that
929 relationships require comes more easily to us when we're practicing principles in our lives.
930 We learn to resolve challenges as they arise and to have the courage to say how we feel,
931 even when it's uncomfortable. Willingness to change means that we can allow relationships
932 to grow, or cool off, or to grow into something we hadn't imagined before.

933 We might find, after some consideration, that a relationship really does need to end. But we
934 can do it in a way that we're comfortable with, instead of acting on impulse and leaving a
935 painful mess to clean up later. Ending a relationship doesn't mean someone has to be
936 wrong or bad; in fact, it can be the best thing for all involved. We can feel pressure to stay in
937 a relationship – for social approval, the kids, complacency or fear – when we know it's really
938 time to go. It is an act of courage to do what we think is right because it's right, without
939 having to create damage to justify our actions. We no longer need to have an affair to end
940 a marriage; we may have the clarity not to enter that marriage to begin with, or to exit with
941 dignity and integrity. We let go of our schoolyard mentality and allow ourselves to be
942 present with each other as adults willing and ready to share the experience.

943 When a relationship that's important to us isn't working, it can feel like nothing is working.
944 Conflict with our loved ones can be really traumatic, and a breakup with a lover or a friend
945 can set off a wave of emotions that really can be overwhelming. These things are hard for
946 anyone, but for addicts they hold particular danger: the pain can be so great that using seems
947 like an option again. We can feel so alienated from those who seem to be taking sides that
948 going to meetings feels unsafe. That old triangle of fear, anger and resentment can feel like an
949 iron cage, and the antidote, connection to others, seems like the last thing we want.
950 Sometimes it's the newcomers who serve as the power of example, reminding us to show up
951 and reach out when we're hurting. Any member at any time is liable to save our lives.

952 Sometimes as we are dealing with the loss of a relationship, we are surprised by the force of
953 our feelings. Our reaction seems all out of proportion to the loss we're experiencing – and it
954 may be. That's not a reason to judge ourselves or pretend it's not happening, though we
955 may be tempted. There's no right or wrong about how we feel. Some of us find that the
956 feelings we didn't experience when we were using are still waiting for us when we get
957 clean, and a loss in recovery sets off a cascade of feelings from all those earlier losses we
958 hadn't grieved. Our sponsors can be a lifeline when we go through this kind of experience. If
959 we're willing to hang on, trust and do the work, we can find real healing in the steps at
960 these times. Relapse is a possibility here, but so is making our lives unmanageable through

Chapter 5 – Relationships

961 gambling, shopping, sex or eating – anything to push the feelings away. Some of us repeat
962 this pattern for years in recovery before we are willing or able to push through the pain and
963 take an honest look at what’s been happening.

964 We place unrealistic expectations on ourselves and others. We fantasize and project about
965 how things “should be.” Our ideas about relationships are often based in anything but
966 reality; we want to believe that relationships somehow happen on their own, that we can
967 step into a relationship like a carnival ride and it takes us. In reality, two sick people rarely
968 make a well couple. But once we start taking care of ourselves, all kinds of intimacy is
969 possible. Just as we imagined the right combinations of drugs would get us high, we
970 sometimes imagine that the right combination of attributes would make a soul-mate.
971 Partnership isn’t found, it’s built. We need to show up and participate to build it.

972 **Conclusion**

973 In NA it’s not true that we can’t love others until we love ourselves; in fact, that’s exactly
974 what we do. We experience empathy, and it grows into something greater. Gradually we
975 build a relationship with ourselves as well, and we clean up the things that keep us in self-
976 loathing and self-sabotage. We learn to love others, but our relationships with them are a
977 struggle until we learn to have a relationship with ourselves and our Higher Power. In turn,
978 our relationship with ourselves and our Higher Power are enriched and informed by our
979 relationships with other people.

980 We learn to respect the spirit in one another. When we acknowledge that each of us is in
981 the care of a loving Higher Power, we can accept one another where we are and see that
982 each of us has our own path. We all have our own ways of thinking and feeling. If it is based
983 in spiritual principles, it will serve as a good guide. Learning to step outside our own
984 reactions and accept reality makes us more flexible and able to deal with the challenges
985 that relationships present to us. In NA we are all teachers and students. We start at
986 different places and we learn in different ways, but the road is just as long, and the journey
987 is just as rewarding, for each of us.

988 Because recovery is progressive, we continue to work steps and to reveal more about
989 ourselves. We come to know our intentions. We get better at hearing our own voice, our
990 own conscience, and at listening to our instincts. Addicts who make it to recovery have
991 pretty good instincts, but we’ve taught ourselves over time not to trust them. Learning the
992 difference between the voice of our intuition and the voice of our disease is not something
993 that can be explained; we figure it out when we practice listening to ourselves. We share
994 our experience with our sponsor as it unfolds, and he or she points out to us when our
995 instincts were serving us well. We become increasingly aware of our choices, our motives
996 and our behavior. We come to know what we were thinking when we made a decision, and
997 we recognize the difference between thinking through to a decision, and acting on impulse

Living Clean: The Journey Continues

998 or reaction. Listening to our intuition means that we can be open to others without being
999 naïve or foolhardy. We learn to trust our instincts and honor our feelings.

1000 The conscious contact we speak of in the eleventh step is a relationship with our Higher
1001 Power. Intimacy is conscious contact with another human being. We pay attention to them,
1002 and to ourselves when we're with them. We connect. As we get close to others we see the
1003 divine in them, and we see it in ourselves as well. When we feel real joy at seeing a
1004 struggling member finally get that thirty day keytag, when we find the words we didn't
1005 know we had in us, when we make a genuine connection with another human being and
1006 feel something shift inside of us – we feel love in action, flowing through us, changing us for
1007 the better.

1008 Each of our relationships teaches us how to make our other relationships better, stronger,
1009 more meaningful – if we're willing to stop and listen for the lesson. And all of these
1010 relationships, in turn, bring us back to our relationship with ourselves. We cannot say that
1011 one is more important than another, any more than we could say one side of a pyramid is
1012 more important than the next. In fact, the pyramid that is in our symbol is made up of
1013 relationships: with self, society, service and God. Rooted in a base of goodwill, these are the
1014 relationships that bring us to a point of freedom. Our capacity to love grows in proportion
1015 to the effort we make to show love, and our willingness to accept it. And with that capacity
1016 for love – something so many of us never even wanted – we begin to feel that our lives have
1017 meaning and purpose. The harm we've done, the pain we've suffered, the loss we've
1018 experienced all deepen our compassion for others, and our understanding of their
1019 struggles. Our real value is in being ourselves, not in spite of what we've been through but
1020 because of it.

GOALS OF SESSION

- Raise members' awareness of the project and opportunities for involvement.
- Gather input on the drafts.
- Work through the session profile with others who will do this in their home communities.

On tables are pens, Brainstorming Guidelines, Ground Rules, Facilitator's Guides, and draft material for review and input. Ideally, there should be enough copies of the draft material so that each participant has one for the read-through portion of the session. The times indicated are estimates and may vary depending upon the size of the group.

LEADER WILL PROVIDE A SESSION SETUP**10 MINUTES****Background and Introduction to the Project**

- The project plan for this book-length piece was adopted at WSC 2008, but has been an item on the "literature wish list" since 1983. This project remained on the back burner until other literature priorities were completed.
- This book will allow us to touch on many of the ideas gathered from the fellowship over the years regarding new literature. While this book will not be able to capture all of the ideas submitted, it will include material on practicing principles in our daily lives as we deal with relationships, living with success and failure, our health, and our spirituality as we move forward in our recovery.
- In order to realize the vision for the book, we need input from our members. We are seeking examples of practical application of the tools of recovery, some real "boots-on-the-ground" experience, things we hear that positively affect our recovery, and the results of applying the principles.
- We want this book to sound like us in much the same way that the Basic Text speaks to us—a lofty goal to be sure, but one that is attainable if we all work to contribute to the project.
- As with any literature development process, the beginning of this process is the best time to offer input which may affect the overall scope of the book.

Review and Input

- The project plan calls for staggered periods of review and input. The first set of review and input contained the first two chapters and the detailed outline for the book. That review was conducted between 1 June and 15 September 2009. There will be one more period of review and input covering the remainder of the book slated for later in 2010.

- **The deadline for input on Chapters Three, Four, and Five is 30 June 2010.**
- The APPROVAL FORM of the book will be released in April 2011 for one full year. Approval requires a two-thirds vote of the regional delegates at the World Service Conference in 2012.

REVIEW AND RESPOND TO THE QUESTIONS

60 MINUTES

Icebreaker

5 minutes

Have members of the small groups introduce themselves to one another and offer an interesting detail about themselves that others don't know. Groups of not more than ten people are best.

SMALL GROUP

55 MINUTES

Post the questions where participants can see them, use a PowerPoint presentation to display them, or have the questions printed and placed on each of the tables. If there are enough people present, divide the work between groups by assigning chapters to separate groups.

Review and Input Questions

It is our hope that this book will speak to all NA members. This will necessitate discussing all elements of our lives and may encroach on topics that at first glance appear to be outside issues; yet, as NA members, we navigate those issues on a daily basis.

Please keep in mind that these drafts have not been fully copyedited and, so may contain spelling errors and/or erroneous punctuation. The APPROVAL form of the material will have been fully edited to eliminate such occurrences, so the focus of this review session can remain on the concepts being communicated rather than spelling or punctuation.

These chapters are part of a larger whole and, as such, will not reflect a complete picture of recovery as practiced in NA. The entire book will strive to reflect the common experience of the fellowship with living clean and applying principles in our lives.

These questions will help to focus your review sessions.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Allot 55 minutes for the chapter review. Take each chapter separately. Reading the entire chapter aloud is recommended before responding to the questions. Use the same questions for each chapter. Members may find it helpful to note areas they want to return to after the read-through is completed. Do not stop to discuss specific points during the read-through; make a note and come back to the item later.

1. What are your overall impressions of the chapter? Please rate this chapter on a scale of 1 to 10; with 1 representing "don't like it at all" and 10 representing "loved it." Try to be specific about what you particularly liked or disliked in the chapter.

2. Are any ideas or concepts missing from this chapter? If so, what specifically is missing?
3. Are there concepts or ideas that should be elaborated upon or expanded in some way, including ideas that are inadequately explained? Please be as specific as you can.
4. Is there anything in the drafts that should be removed or modified, including anything that is not consistent with our NA principles? If so, what specifically should be removed or modified, and why?

REPORTS BACK FROM THE SMALL GROUPS

15 MINUTES

Once time has expired, facilitate a brief discussion about the groups' work, addressing one set of questions at a time. Be sure to record feedback from the small groups.

- Allow the small groups to share their overall impressions and views regarding the material they reviewed. This is not a time to get into specific input. Specific input should be recorded and forwarded to the workgroup.

CONCLUSION AND WRAP UP

5 MINUTES

Here are some other avenues to offer personal input for this project:

- The Living Clean Project Discussion Area is an online discussion board for members of the fellowship to offer their thoughts regarding the material to be included in the book. The discussion board is set up by chapter, and members are encouraged to share their experience, strength, and hope regarding the long-term aspects of living the NA program. The link to the discussion board site is:
<http://naws.org/lc/index.php>.
- Input from this session can be sent to: LivingClean@na.org
Or entered on the website at: <http://questionnaire.disc.na.org>
- As always we welcome the submission of material from our members via regular postal mail as well; send that material to:

NA World Services
ATTN: Living Clean Project
PO Box 9999
Van Nuys, CA 91409 USA

The deadline for input on Chapters Three, Four, and Five is 30 June 2010.