Practicality, Entry #1 of 5

Sometimes it’s enough just to know that other NA members believe [in a Higher Power] and that their belief helps keep them clean (*Just for Today*, April 23).

The struggle to believe in a Higher Power—or *something*—is real for many of us. Sometimes it can trouble us greatly. At other times, the struggle to find our belief system is the most profound and rewarding part of our life in recovery. That’s not to say that all of us take issue with the concept of a Higher Power. Before addiction took over our lives, many of us were unquestionably people of faith. Recovery from addiction in NA has only deepened that faith.

Some of us have no spiritual belief or practice to speak of when we begin our recovery journey. But we adapt easily to the idea of a power greater than ourselves. We’re told that it can be anything as long as it’s loving. The group? Nature? An aspirational “higher self”? No problem! Praying to one or more of these powers makes practical sense considering what our life was like before. Others of us share about our experience staying clean without too much focus on the “god” part of the program—because we want to let others who are struggling know that atheism is an option.

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

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

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

*My belief, whatever it is, is practical for me today—so I’ll practice it. If I’m struggling today, I’ll embrace that. No pressure. Recovery is a process, and it’s working.*
Practicality, Entry #2 of 5

Our part...is to do the very best we can each day, showing up for life and doing what's put in front of us...We promise to do the best we can—not to fake it, not to pretend to be superhuman, but simply to do the footwork of recovery (Just for Today, February 18).

“If it’s not practical, it’s not spiritual.” Many of us have heard this before, but what does this mean exactly?

For starters, we can focus on living just for today as a practical matter. Instead of dwelling on regrets about the past and fears of what’s ahead, we focus on what’s right in front of us. As one member put it, "I concentrate on this day, and it frees me up to participate in my own life and recovery." We may plot our days in a particular direction, but we trust a loving power greater than ourselves with the outcome. Another member shared this strategy: "I ask myself, 'Where are my feet?' And then proceed to move one of them in front of the other."

We do our best. (How's that for practical?!) We follow through on what we can handle in the here and now, and shake off the impulse to achieve perfection. We learn our limits and work within them. Satisfaction comes from putting forth our best effort, even when we fall short of our goals. “I did my best,’ quiets my inner critic,” in one member’s experience. Another added: “When I feel good about what I’m doing, it’s easier to dismiss other people’s opinions of me.”

Staying grounded with some practical, daily footwork improves our lives. “I learned everything I need to know about how to stay clean in my first 30 days around here. You people told me, ‘Go to lots of meetings and don’t take anything in between.’ It sounded simple enough. ‘If you don’t pick up, you can’t get high.’ I thought these people were geniuses. ‘Read the book. Get a sponsor. Work the Steps.’ I followed this advice in the beginning, and it kept me clean. I follow this advice now because it keeps me in the solution.”

I will do my best today. I will do the footwork and accept that it’s enough and that I’m enough.
Practicality, Entry #3 or 5

We feel that our approach to the disease of addiction is completely realistic, for the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel (Basic Text, Chapter 4, “How It Works”).

By the time we get to Narcotics Anonymous, many of us have a long list of what didn’t fix us: family, relationships, doctors, treatment programs, religious institutions. We begged God or Something-Out-There for relief. Because of our involvement in the justice system, some of us have had help imposed on us. All these individuals or entities may indeed have been helpful to our survival, even if only to introduce us to NA. Some may continue supporting us to this day. But we found them to be insufficient to help build the long-lasting changes to our lives that we needed. So what was missing?

One member shared their a-ha moment: “This concept of one addict helping another hit me on the head like a ton of bricks. I thought, ‘Now I get it!’ These were helpful, practical bricks, of course. Bricks that we can use to build our life back up. Recovering addicts who’ve survived what we’ve survived are unquestionably the best source of practical information about recovery. This idea not only makes sense to us, but it also brings us some relief.

In NA, we create an atmosphere of healing for each other—that’s what we mean by “therapeutic.” We help each other to heal through empathy and solidarity. The “we” of NA is a powerful and practical resource that we use to walk through life’s difficulties and hold each other up as we heal. Honest sharing helps to identify others who have survived infidelity, infertility, illness, and the myriad of other hardships. We hook each other up with members who’ve had to navigate similar things and we get to learn from their experience. Our personal tragedies can become a shared source of strength. What could be more practical?

While our disease would have us focus on what makes us different, we know that the ties that bind us together are way stronger than those differences. Those ties are strong, real, and practical. They are the bricks that build us up and keep us from falling. NA is a practical program delivered by addicts to other addicts, with other addicts, for other addicts. That’s how it works.

How am I creating a healing environment for my fellow addicts? What can I do today that’s practical to help another addict?
Practicality, Entry #4 of 5

It’s not what we think about our recovery that matters; it’s what we do (Living Clean, Chapter One).

When we first come into recovery, we may think that everyone in the room is lying. A member recalled thinking, “They can’t possibly be that happy…and really, no one can stay clean for 30 years, let alone 30 days in a row.” We may even tell ourselves that there is no way we can stop using and have a fulfilling life. Despite our internal monologue, we continue showing up to meetings and putting some clean time together. We take suggestions, pick up a commitment, get a sponsor, and begin working steps—all the while thinking, this won’t work for me. We do our best to ignore that devious little voice inside us. After all, what we have been doing up to this point hasn’t really been working either.

As we take these practical actions, the heaviness lifts from our hearts. We experience moments of joy and freedom—clean. We realize that we have been doing all of the things we’d told ourselves were not possible. Now we have six months clean and our lives are so much fuller than we thought they could be. When we share in meetings, we realize that we’ve become those people that we thought were lying to us.

One of the most practical things we do is to show up and tell the truth about our lives. When we no longer need to fabricate stories and justifications, it frees up a lot of mental energy. We share our victories, our process, and our mess as they are happening. While the disease still talks to us, nowadays our recovery also chimes in to remind us that we’re right where we’re supposed to be.

Doing the footwork frees us to live in the present. We have a solid foundation and a network of connections in our recovery community. Our world has become fuller and more fulfilling. We have found a family in Narcotics Anonymous. We want more of these gifts, so we continue to put one foot in front of the other, doing the things that brought us to this point.

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*I will take a practical approach to my recovery today. I’ll thank “the committee” in my head for sharing and take positive actions that enhance my recovery and my life.*
Practicality, Entry #5 of 5

Many of us believe that every day we abstain from using, or take suggestions from our sponsor, we are taking practical action on our decision to turn our will and lives over to the care of our Higher Power (NA Step Working Guides, Step 3, “Turning It Over”).

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

*Just* turn it over. *Just?!* *Heavy sigh*

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

But let’s all just take a moment and consider this: since we didn’t use today (very likely since we are reading these words right now), we are clearly taking a practical action of turning our will over. And listen, even if we did use today, right this very second we are in our Higher Power’s will as we take in this moment, alone or with a group. Right now, as we are reading these words or hearing them read aloud by another member, we are having a spiritual experience. We don’t have to force it, or define it, or wonder about it, or control it. We can just reflect on it.

So simple. So practical.

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