Simplicity, Entry #1

The simple, priceless gift we give each other is the recognition of our humanity (Guiding Principles, Tradition Eight).

When we’re new in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, it seems that everyone is speaking a language we don’t quite understand. All seem to know the order of things, the readings, the prayer at the end. Newly clean (or trying to be), we’re already immensely uncomfortable when we’re encouraged by someone to talk about what’s going on with us—to a roomful of strangers? We don’t know what to say, but we try anyway. People in the room vigorously nod at us, like they understand us. “Thanks for what you said,” someone tells us during the break. “You really helped me today. So glad you’re here.” This is different.

“I don’t even know what the hell I just said!” we reply. “I have no idea what I’m doing.” More vigorous nodding. What is wrong with these people?

NA’s practice of remaining “forever nonprofessional,” as per our Eighth Tradition, suggests that we are perfectly capable of delivering a message of recovery—even before we’re aware that’s what we’re doing. We don’t need professional training or coaching to share in a meeting. We don’t have to know all the NA jargon or have memorized passages in our literature. We don’t need to wait until we’ve completed a full round of Steps to give what has been so freely given to us, as a sponsor or as just one addict helping another. We are already experts. All of us, from the oldest oldtimer to the newest newcomer.

There is beauty and simplicity in the therapeutic value of one addict helping another. A desire to stop using gets us in the door, and our humanity gives us the capacity to listen and empathize, to share what’s in our hearts and on our minds, to be generous, and, crucially, to accept the generosity of others. Each of us finds our expertise as recovering addicts when we accept our condition as addicts and start to tap into our assets.

This principle of simplicity is aligned with NA’s commitment to anonymity: no matter who we are, we are deserving of each other’s recognition that we are human and worthy of love and acknowledgment. As NA members, we give each other the simple gift of being a part of something greater than each of us. Priceless. Simple. Free.

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Today I’m going to do my best to acknowledge my fellow members’ humanity and share my own. That’s all I have to know how to do.
When we allow spirituality to be simple, we allow it to be universal (Living Clean, Chapter 3, “Spirituality Is Practical”).

Addicts have a knack for complicating things. Finding a spirituality that works for us is no exception. Spirituality is central to Narcotics Anonymous, and what that looks like is up to each of us. We engage in a personal journey of discovery. The Steps help us to define and develop spiritual connections, and we free ourselves to live according to our convictions.

Many of us were relieved that “figuring out the whole God thing could be a life-long project,” as one addict put it. “I was able to hear the message and receive the gift of recovery without subscribing to any specific set of beliefs. What a relief!”

Some of us have to try out many belief systems, conventional and otherwise. We may find a good fit, or maybe we eliminate a few potential paths. A buffet approach—a little of this and a little of that—suits many of this.

“I realized that my effort to define a Higher Power was boxing it in, limiting how my Higher Power-operated,” one member shared. “When I stopped imposing limitations, I started to see my HP everywhere. It is everyone and everything—it just is.”

The bond we share with other recovering addicts is both simple and sacred. The Steps help us understand ourselves, and that makes it easier to connect with others. “Caring about my fellow members helps me,” one member shared, “I notice when the light comes back into a newcomer’s eyes, and it is one of the most beautiful gifts of recovery for me.” Many of us approach spirituality as a practical matter. We know that when we show up at a meeting, we feel less alone. When we are of service, we think less of ourselves. When we share a hug with another member, we feel loved. These simple, spiritual actions are at the heart of our program of recovery.

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I will connect with other members today and appreciate the simple spirituality in those connections.
**Simplicity, Entry #3**

Clarity and simplicity are keys to our message...Narcotics Anonymous, all by itself, is enough. We promise freedom from active addiction *(Guiding Principles, Tradition Ten).*

Tradition Ten is pretty simple: addicts have opinions, but NA does not. Topics like politics and religion create unnecessary controversy and conflict. While civic involvement and participation in our faith communities may certainly help us as individuals to get and stay clean, NA is mute on these topics. To maintain an atmosphere of recovery for everyone, we do our best to leave potential distractions at the door.

Relatedly, here’s a good one that we’ve heard often: “Narcotics Anonymous is a simple program for complicated people.” And then there’s this gem: “Opinions are like a-holes. Everybody’s got one.” While that statement may ring true, it’s not an NA “opinion,” so let’s move straightaway to the NA message...

Our NA message is clear and simple. Any of us can stop using and stay stopped. Our obsession to use can dissipate. And we find a new way to live our lives. Freedom from active addiction is our only promise.

The program of NA has enough to keep us busy—no need to overcomplicate it. We’ve got Steps, Traditions, and Concepts—twelve of each. We have spiritual principles. We have service, literature, and our Higher Power. We have a vision of making NA accessible to addicts around the world. And we have each other. We need each other to stay clean and to find freedom from active addiction and the complicated mess that goes along with it. Keep it simple.

One disease, one program, one promise.

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**NA is enough to keep me clean and free. I’m grateful for all my human complexities, for the outside support I may have, and for the activities and worlds I engage with. But I need to keep my recovery simple. I can commit to that for my own healing—as well as for everyone else who’s seeking freedom in the room with me today.**