Individuality, Entry 1 of 3

We are mindful of our behavior and our surroundings without giving up our individuality.

—Living Clean, Chapter 6, “Moving Beyond ‘Social Acceptability’”

Rock bottom means different things to different addicts. We come to NA in various states of unwellness, some more visible than others. No matter what kind of shape we appear to be in when we get here, we each find ourselves at the edge of our own learning curve. Although our minds may try to get ahead of us with all kinds of knotty questions, our journeys almost always start with going to meetings and staying clean between them.

It may occur to us that we wouldn’t have used with a lot of these people—unless it was their stuff, of course; no need to be rude. We can’t imagine them using with each other either, but there they go again, hanging out together in the parking lot an hour after the meeting. We find this mildly troubling. As using addicts, we thought we could suss out any situation and be who we needed to be. Here...what? Am I supposed to be myself? That seems to be the idea. Yikes!

In fact, that’s part of our charge: To figure out who we are and be that on purpose. We read about the value of our diversity and the “rough-and-tumble liveliness” found in NA; this rings true. We’re told that there’s no one right way to be an addict in recovery. This seems reassuring or disconcerting, depending on our mood. We aspire to be as comfortable in our uniqueness as some of those eccentric oldtimers. Like them, we grow secure in our own individuality and learn to express it in context-appropriate ways.

Accepting that our value lies in being ourselves frees up all that energy we used to spend shapeshifting. We no longer feel a need to blend in with the wallpaper or shine like the brightest star. We get to be ourselves, each of us uniquely contributing to the lively whole. We don’t need to fit in—because we belong.

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Knowing that my individuality contributes to the liveliness of the NA Fellowship encourages me to be wholly myself, which I’ll do to the best of my ability.
Step Twelve speaks of the spiritual awakening we have as a result of working the Steps. By the time most of us begin our work on Step Twelve, we have typically had any number of awakenings of a spiritual nature. Some awakenings might seem small, like recognizing an asset we've never noticed when we write our Step Four inventory. Other awakenings are more deep and profound, like realizing how a handful of behavior patterns all trace back to a particular character defect that we are just now coming to understand. As long as we keep moving through the Steps, we will continue learning about ourselves.

The Basic Text mentions that we differ in degree of sickness and rate of recovery, so it stands to reason that the types of awakenings each of us needs may be quite different, as well. We all have our own stories, including how we got here and where we are going. Hearing others share about their awakenings can be inspiring and instructive, but having our own experiences—even if they differ from what we hear others share—is what really matters. If we wait to have the same experience we hear others share, we may be disappointed. Worse yet, we may miss what's happening in our own heart and spirit if we look only for what others have described to us, rather than seeing what we see for ourselves.

The prospect of having a spiritual awakening that is truly our own can be both awe-inspiring and intimidating. While our awakenings may not be identical to anyone else's, the better we get to know the truth of our own experiences, the better we will be able to recognize the truth shared with us by fellow addicts. We are each on our own journey, but much of the terrain we cover is the same.

The awakenings we experience in the Steps may be different, but the message we carry is the same. I will honor the truth of my own awakenings as well as those shared by fellow NA members.
Individuality, Entry 3 of 3

Each one of us finds our way to live spiritually, and that allows us freedom to make choices about how we live.

—Living Clean, Chapter 3, “A Spiritual, Not Religious Program”

Throughout our literature, in meetings, from the podium, over a coffee or tea, during late-night phone calls, alone in quiet meditation or prayer, we’re reminded that NA is a spiritual program. Whatever our individual beliefs or practices or methods or paths are or aren’t—whether they be secular, religious, or do not fit within that binary—we can’t deny that spirituality is central to a life of recovery in NA. Who we are spiritually and how we express that aspect of our individuality is unique to us, though we may use elements from all kinds of traditions, or none at all. Many of us can—and will—easily explain our relationship with our Higher Power. For many others, it’s not intelligible through words. And it’s private, something we’d rather not share about in a specific way.

For NA members, the road to recovery is paved by the same Twelve Steps, yet the journey we choose is varied. Our path to living spiritually is personal, though there’s some commonality and mutual understanding derived from the principles that appear throughout this book. Application of these principles is based on our individual needs and desires. We respond differently to everyday situations; we see through our own lenses and react to events in our own ways. And how we connect to the program—and its principles and spiritual nature—most often doesn’t look the same when we’re new as when we’ve become more comfortable in our own skins, or as we undergo life’s upswings and tragedies. As we continue our recovery journey, we find that the Steps prepare each of us to meet our individual circumstances.

Reciprocity is important here, too, as described by a member: “You have your own spiritual expression and your beliefs, and I have mine. That I can be my own person in NA reminds me that as you let me be me, I must let you be you.”

My aim is to be open to the rich mosaic of spiritual expression I find in NA. I’ll explore and nurture my own beliefs as I apply the principles in our Steps.