

“Spiritual Growth”

Text Taken from the
Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guide



Step One

“We admitted we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.”

Spiritual principles

In the First Step, we will focus on honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, humility, and acceptance. The practice of the principle of honesty from the First Step starts with admitting the truth about our addiction, and continues with the practice of honesty on a daily basis. When we say “I’m an addict” in a meeting, it may be the first truly honest thing we’ve said in a long time. We begin to be able to be honest with ourselves and, consequently, with other people. If I’ve been thinking about using or acting out on my addiction in some other way, have I shared it with my sponsor or told anyone else?

Practicing the principle of open-mindedness found in Step One mostly involves being ready to believe that there might be another way to live and being willing to try that way. It doesn’t matter that we can’t see every detail of what that way might be, or that it may be totally unlike anything we’ve heard about before; what matters is that we don’t limit ourselves or our thinking. Sometimes we may hear NA members saying things that sound totally crazy to us, things like “surrender to win” or suggestions to pray for someone we resent. We demonstrate open-mindedness when

we don’t reject these things without having tried them.

The principle of willingness contained in the First Step can be practiced in a variety of ways. When we first begin to think about recovery, many of us either don’t really believe it’s possible for us or just don’t understand how it will work, but we go ahead with the First Step anyway-and that’s our first experience with willingness. Taking any action that will help our recovery shows willingness: going to meetings early and staying late, helping set up meetings, getting other NA members’ phone numbers and calling them.

The principle of humility, so central to the First Step, is expressed most purely in our surrender. Humility is most easily identified as an acceptance of who we truly are - neither worse nor better than we believed we were when we were using, just human.

To practice the principle of acceptance, we must do more than merely admit that we’re addicts. When we accept our addiction, we feel a profound inner change that is underscored by a rising sense of hope. We also begin to feel a sense of peace. We come to terms with our addiction, with our recovery, and with the meaning those two realities will come to have in our lives. We don’t dread a future of meeting attendance, sponsor contact, and step work; instead, we begin to see recovery as a precious gift, and the work connected with it as no more trouble than other routines of life.

Step Two

“We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”

Spiritual principles

In the Second Step, we will focus on open-mindedness, willingness, faith, trust, and humility. The principle of open-mindedness that we find in the Second Step arises from the understanding that we can't recover alone, that we need some kind of help. It continues with opening our minds to believing that help is possible for us. It doesn't matter whether we have any idea of how this Power greater than ourselves is going to help, just that we believe it's possible.

Practicing the principle of willingness in the Second Step may begin simply. At first we may just go to meetings and listen to other recovering addicts share about their experiences with this step. Then we may begin applying what we hear to our own recovery. Of course, we ask our sponsor to guide us.

We can't just sit back and wait to feel a sense of faith when working Step Two. We have to work at it. One of the suggestions that has worked for many of us is to “act as if” we had faith. This doesn't mean that we should be dishonest with ourselves. We don't need to lie to our sponsor or anyone else about where we are with this step. We're not doing this to sound good or look good. “Acting as if” simply means living as though we believe that what we hope for will happen. In the Second Step, this would mean living as though we expect to be restored to sanity. There are a variety of ways this may work in our individual lives. Many members suggest that we can begin “acting as if” by going to meetings regularly and taking direction from our sponsor.

Practicing the principle of trust may require overcoming a sense of fear about the process of being restored to sanity. Even if we've been clean only a short time, we've probably already experienced some emotional pain as we've grown in recovery. We may be afraid that there will be more pain. In one sense, we're right about this: There will be more pain. None of it, however, will be more than we can bear, and none of it has to be borne alone. If we can develop our sense of trust in the process of recovery and in a Power greater than ourselves, we can walk through the painful times in our recovery. We'll know that what's

waiting on the other side will be more than just superficial happiness, but a fundamental transformation that will make our lives more satisfying on a deeper level.

The principle of humility springs from our acknowledgment that there is a Power greater than ourselves. It's a tremendous struggle for most of us to stop relying on our own thinking and begin to ask for help, but when we do, we have begun to practice the principle of humility found in the Second Step.

Step Three

“We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.”

Spiritual principles

In considering the spiritual principles intrinsic to Step Three, we will focus first on surrender and willingness. Then we will look at how hope translates into faith and trust. Finally, we will see how the principle of commitment is fled to the Third Step. Practicing the principle of surrender is easy for us when everything is going along as we'd like—we think. Actually, when things are going smoothly, it's more likely that we are being lulled into a belief that we're in charge, which doesn't require much “surrender.” Keeping the principle of surrender to the care of the God of our understanding alive in our spirits is essential, even when things are going well.

We usually feel most willing immediately following a surrender. Willingness often comes in the wake of despair or a struggle for control. We can practice the principle of willingness, though, before it becomes necessary and possibly save ourselves some pain.

There is a spiritual progression from hope to faith to trust in the Third Step. As we begin Step Three, we carry with us the sense of hope that was born in us as we worked the Second Step. Hope springs from the knowledge that our life is full of possibilities - there are no hard certainties yet, just the first whispers of anticipation that we just may be able to fulfil our heart's deepest desires. Lingering doubts fade as hope becomes faith. Faith propels us forward into action; we actually do the work that those we have faith in are telling us is necessary if we are to achieve what we want. In the Third Step, faith gives us the capacity to actually make a decision and carry that decision into

action. Trust comes into play after faith has been applied. We have probably made significant progress toward fulfilling our goals; now we have evidence that we can influence the course of our lives through taking positive action.

The principle of commitment is the culmination of the spiritual process of Step Three. Making the decision to “turn it over,” over and over again, even when our decision doesn’t seem to be having any positive effect, is what this step is all about. We can practice the spiritual principle of commitment by reaffirming our decision on a regular basis and by continuing to take action that gives our decision substance and meaning—for instance, working the rest of the steps.

Step Four

“We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

Spiritual principles

In the Fourth Step, we will call on all of the spiritual principles we began to practice in the first three steps. First of all, we have to be willing to work a Fourth Step. We’ll need to be meticulously honest with ourselves, thinking about everything we write down and asking ourselves if it’s true or not. We’ll need to be courageous enough to face our fear and walk through it. Last, but not least, our faith and trust will carry us through when we’re facing a difficult moment and feel like giving up.

Step Five

“We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”

Spiritual principles

In the Fifth Step, we will focus on trust, courage, self-honesty, and commitment.

Practicing the spiritual principle of trust is essential if we are to get through the Fifth Step. As mentioned above, we will probably have some experience with our sponsor that allows us to trust him or her enough to go ahead with this step; but what about the more profound issues that arise when we wonder if working this step will really do any good? We have to trust a process as well as another person. The connection between the Fifth Step and our spiritual development

isn’t always clear to us. This doesn’t mean that the connection is any less real, but it may make it harder for us to trust the process.

Courage is one principle we’ll have to practice just to get started on this step. We’ll probably need to continue drawing on our courage periodically throughout our work on this step. When we replace the phone on its hook just as we are about to call our sponsor for an appointment to make our admissions, we’re feeling fear and we need to practice courage. When we’re sharing our inventory and we see a paragraph that we just can’t tell anyone about, we need to face that moment of fear with courage and go ahead with sharing all of our inventory. When we’ve just shared something excruciatingly painful, and our feelings of vulnerability are so overwhelming that we want to shut down before we hear what our sponsor has to say, we’re at a defining moment in our recovery and we need to choose the courageous path. Doing so will influence the future course of our lives. Each time we feel fear, we remind ourselves that giving in to it has rarely had anything but negative consequences in our lives, and doing so this time won’t be any different. Such a reminder should be sufficient to motivate us to gather our courage.

Practicing the principle of self-honesty is essential when we admit to ourselves the exact nature of our wrongs. Just as we mustn’t disassociate ourselves from our emotions simply because we’re afraid of our listener’s response, so we can’t afford to shut down our own reactions. We must allow ourselves to experience the natural and human reaction to the subject under discussion: our lives as addicts. Our lives have been sad. We’ve missed out on a lot because of our addiction. We’ve hurt people we loved because of our addiction. These realizations are painful. However, if we pay close attention, we’ll probably recognize another feeling that’s beginning to form in the wake of the pain: hope.

We’ve finally stopped using over our feelings, running away from our feelings, and shutting down because of our feelings; now, for the first time, we have a chance to walk through our feelings, even the painful ones, with courage. Doing so will, in the long run, make us feel better about ourselves. This is one of the paradoxes that we often find in recovery: what begins in pain ends in joy and serenity.

The principle of commitment is demonstrated by the action we take in this step. Many of us have made so-

called “commitments” in our lives, commitments to which we had no intention of sticking to in tough times; our “commitments” were made solely for the sake of convenience. With each step we’ve taken in the program of NA, we’ve deepened our real, practical commitment to the program. Getting a sponsor, working the steps, finding a home group and going to its meetings - each one of these actions demonstrates that we’re committed to our recovery in a practical, meaningful way.

Step Six

“We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.”

Spiritual principles

In the Sixth Step, we will focus on commitment and perseverance, willingness, faith and trust, and self-acceptance.

At this point in our Sixth Step work, we should be acutely aware of our shortcomings. In fact, we’re probably so aware of them that, in the course of our daily lives, we can see them coming and even stop ourselves from acting on them much of the time. At times, our awareness may fade, and we may no longer be as vigilant in watching our behaviour. It takes an incredible amount of energy to monitor ourselves every second and curb every impulse to act out. We’ll relax into everyday life until, all of a sudden, we’ll be left feeling sick and ashamed and wondering how, after all the work we’ve done, we could have possibly done that again.

However, we do not give up. Instead, we make a commitment to our recovery. We maintain our newly emerging principles despite our setback. We keep taking steps forward even though we’ve taken one or more backward. We’re looking for gradual improvement, not instant faultlessness.

Applying the spiritual principle of willingness means, very simply, that we are willing to act differently. It does not necessarily mean that we will act differently or even that we’re capable of doing so. We can perhaps best illustrate this attitude by an example. Suppose we’ve been dishonest- with our families, with our employers, with our friends - in many ways, ranging from the minor to the severe. While it may seem better to become willing in “layers,” focusing our willingness on the worst or most destructive forms of dishonesty first, this step says that we were entirely

ready to have all our defects removed. That means being willing never to be dishonest again, even in a minor way. This may seem like more than we can expect of ourselves, but we only have to do it for today.

It’s hard to have this kind of willingness, especially when the apparent consequences for mild dishonesty aren’t so severe. We may be aware that we’re not being entirely honest, but we think we’re not hurting anyone and we’re getting away with it, so why be concerned about it? But it’s this kind of thinking that has perhaps the most severe spiritual consequences. It may turn out that no one is obviously harmed by our dishonesty, and that no one ever finds out, but the dishonesty reverberates in our spirits from then on. Even if we’re not consciously aware of it, even if we sleep just fine at night, the result of acting on a defect when we have the ability not to is an impairment of our spiritual growth. If we continue being unwilling, we’ll eventually paralyse our spiritual growth.

The amount of willingness we have to develop in this step requires a corresponding amount of faith and trust. We have to believe that a Higher Power is going to work in our lives to the exact degree that’s necessary. Continuing with the example of dishonesty, we have to trust that our Higher Power isn’t going to remove the defect of dishonesty from our lives to such a degree that we become brutally honest, incapable of remaining silent even when speaking the truth would hurt someone. As long as we get out of the way so that God can work in our lives, we’ll experience the exact degree of spiritual growth we need.

With words like “entirely” and “all” playing such a prominent role in this step, it’s easy to become overly self-critical and perfectionistic. We need to remember that even though our willingness must be complete, we’re not going to become perfect-not today, not ever. When we act out on a defect against our will, we need to practice the principle of self-acceptance. We need to accept that while we’re still capable of acting out, we’re also still willing to change; with that acknowledgment, we renew our commitment to be changed. We’ve grown exactly as much as we were supposed to for today, and if we were perfect, we would have no further need to grow.

Step Seven

“We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”

Spiritual principles

In the Seventh Step, we will focus on surrender, trust and faith, patience, and humility.

In the Seventh Step, we take our surrender to a deeper level. What began in Step One with an acknowledgment of our addiction now includes an acknowledgment of the shortcomings that go along with our addiction. We also take our Second Step surrender to a deeper level. We come to believe that our Higher Power can do more than help us stay clean. We look to that Power to relieve us of our shortcomings as well. As time goes by, we place more and more of our trust in a Higher Power and in the process of recovery.

The spiritual principles of trust and faith are central to the Seventh Step. We must be sure enough of our Higher Power to trust that Power with our shortcomings. We have to believe our Higher Power is going to do something with them, or how can we ask with any faith that they be removed? We must avoid any tendency to keep score of how we think God's doing in removing our defects. It's not too hard to see where this kind of thinking can lead if we find we still have certain character defects after some arbitrary amount of time has passed. Instead, we focus on the action we must take in this step: humbly asking, practicing spiritual principles, and getting out of God's way. The results of the Seventh Step may not materialize immediately, but they will in time.

Trust and faith alone can never carry us through a lifetime of working this step; we need to practice patience, too. Even if it's been a long time since we started asking for the removal of a shortcoming, we still must be patient. Maybe, in fact, impatience is one of our shortcomings. We can look at the times when we have to wait as gifts - the times when we most need to practice the principle of patience. After all, one of the surest ways we progress is by rising up over the barriers we run into on our spiritual path.

Finally, we need to maintain our awareness of the principle of humility, more than any other, as we work this step.

Step Eight

“We made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.”

Spiritual principles

In the Eighth Step, we will focus on honesty, courage, willingness, and compassion. To practice the principle of honesty in the Eighth Step, we need to draw on our experience in the previous steps. We've admitted the nature of our problem-addiction-and affirmed the solution to that problem. This was an act of honesty. We've taken a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves; doing so exercised our newfound honesty. Extracting the nature of our wrongs from within the fabric of our personalities took our honesty to an even deeper level. So we have some experience separating our part in things from what others may have done. That's the level of honesty we'll need to call on in Step Eight. We have to forget about resentments, blaming others, believing we were innocent victims, and any other justification for the harm we caused. We simply need to put it on the list!

To practice the principle of courage in the Eighth Step, we have to put ourselves in God's care. We can't restrict our list to only those amends that we think will turn out okay. We have to believe that our Higher Power will provide us with the fortitude, the humility, the inner strength, or whatever we need to get through any amends. Whether we need to face someone and we're afraid of how we'll feel, or we need to accept the consequences of a crime for which we are sought, we'll be able to handle it with the help of our Higher Power.

We've already talked a great deal about willingness in this step, especially becoming willing to make amends. But we need a certain amount of willingness to work this step that has nothing to do with making amends. First of all, we need the willingness to make our list. No matter what we're feeling about adding a certain name to the list, we need to become willing to add it. We also need the willingness to practice the other spiritual principles connected to this step.

Developing a compassionate spirit becomes possible at this stage in our recovery. Before we did the work involved in the previous steps, we were too caught up in resentment, blame, and self-pity to think about

others. Along with our ability to think of ourselves as ordinary human beings, we begin to see that others are doing the best they can with their humanness, too. We know we are subject to periodic doubts and insecurities about ourselves, and so are others. We know we are likely to speak before thinking, and so are others. We realize that they regret it as much as we do. We know we are prone to misreading situations and over or underreacting to them. As a result, when we see others act on a character defect today, we feel empathy rather than annoyance or anger, because we know what caused them to act as they did. Our hearts feel full when we think about how we share the same dreams, fears, passions, and faults as everyone else.

Step Nine

“We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”

Spiritual principles

In the Ninth Step, we will focus on humility, love, and forgiveness. The humility we’ve gained in this step has resulted from getting a good look at the damage we did to others and accepting responsibility for it. We acknowledge to ourselves, “Yes, this is what I’ve done. I’m responsible for the harm I caused and for making it right.” We may have been led to this awareness by the experience of having someone tearfully tell us how much we hurt them. We may have found ourselves on the receiving end of some hurt we had inflicted on someone else, and been so jarred by such an experience that we were able to see on a deeper level how we hurt people. Then again, it may have been only the process of the previous steps, coupled with the experience of making amends that led us to experience increased humility.

It becomes much easier to practice the spiritual principle of love in Step Nine, though we’ve probably been working on practicing it throughout our recovery. By this time, we’ve eliminated many of the destructive views and feelings we had, making room for love in our lives. As we become filled with love, we find ourselves compelled to share it by nurturing our relationships and building new ones and by selflessly sharing our recovery, our time, our resources, and above all, ourselves with those in need.

As we experience being forgiven, we begin to see the value in extending that to others. This motivates us to practice the spiritual principle of forgiveness as much as possible. Recognizing our own humanness gives us the capacity to forgive others and not be as judgmental as we have been in the past. It becomes second nature for us to give other people the benefit of the doubt. We no longer suspect vile motives and sneaky conspiracies are at play in every situation over which we don’t have full control. We’re aware that we usually mean well, and so extend that belief to others. When someone does harm us, we’re aware that holding resentments only serves to rob our own peace and serenity, so we tend to forgive sooner rather than later.

Step Ten

“We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”

Spiritual principles

In the Tenth Step, we will focus on self-discipline, honesty and integrity.

Self-discipline is essential to our recovery. When we were using, we were self-seeking and self-absorbed. We always took the easy way out, giving in to our impulses, ignoring any opportunity for personal growth. If there was anything in our lives that required a regular commitment, chances are that we only followed through if it wasn’t too hard, if it didn’t get in the way of our self-indulgence, or if we happened to feel like it.

The self-discipline of recovery calls on us to do certain things regardless of how we feel. We need to go to meetings regularly even if we’re tired, busy at work, having fun, or filled with despair; we need to go regularly even when – especially when – we’re feeling hostile toward the demands that recovery makes on us. We go to meetings, call our sponsor, and work with others because we have decided we want recovery in NA, and those things are the actions that will help assure our continued recovery. Sometimes we’re enthusiastic about these activities. Sometimes it takes every bit of willingness we possess to continue with them. Sometimes they become so woven into our daily existence, we’re hardly aware that we’re doing them.

The principle of honesty originates in Step One, and is brought to fruition in Step Ten. We are usually nothing less than amazed at the range and depth of our honesty by this point in our recovery. Where before we may have had honest hindsight, able to see our true motives long after a situation was over, we are now able to be honest with ourselves, about ourselves, while the situation is still occurring.

The principle of integrity can be quite complex, but it is integrity, more than anything else, that commands our ability to practice other principles. In fact, integrity is knowing which principles we need to practice in a given situation, and in what measure. For instance, we're standing outside a meeting one night, and happen to be part of a group that begins gossiping about someone else in the program. Let's say they're discussing the affair our best friend's spouse is having, and we know it to be true because we heard it from our best friend the previous night. Knowing what to do in this situation will probably take every ounce of integrity we possess. So which spiritual principles do we need in this situation? Honesty? Tolerance? Respect? Restraint? It's probably our first impulse to rush in, condemning the gossip because we know how much it would hurt our friend to have such private matters discussed publicly. But by doing so, we may confirm the gossip's truth and so hurt our friend more, or we may end up self-righteously humiliating the people involved in the gossip. Most of the time, it isn't necessary to prove we have integrity by confronting a situation we don't approve of. There are a couple of things we could do in this situation. We could either change the subject, or we could excuse ourselves and walk away. Either of these choices would send a subtle message about our feelings, and at the same time, allow us to be true to our own principles and spare our friend as much as possible.

Step Eleven

“We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”

Spiritual principles

In the Eleventh Step, we will focus on commitment, humility, courage, and faith.

We need to make a commitment to the practice of regular prayer and meditation. Many of us find that our first experiences with prayer and meditation have us feeling kind of silly. We glance around the room to see if anyone is looking, and wonder just what we're supposed to be feeling, anyway. As we continue with our commitment, this feeling will pass, as will the ensuing feelings of frustration when the results aren't what we expect, and the boredom that sets in when the things we're doing become routine. The point is that we need to continue, no matter how we feel about it. The long-term results of peace of mind and a deeper relationship with our Higher Power are worth waiting for.

The often-heard warning to “Be careful what you pray for!” captures the kind of humility we need to practice in this step. We simply need to acknowledge that we don't always know what's best for us - or for anyone else. That's why we ask for knowledge of God's will for us.

There's nothing that requires as much courage as trying to live according to our Higher Power's will when there's frequent pressure not to. Not everyone in our lives will be delighted that we've chosen to live our lives in a spiritual way. We may have family members who are used to us living according to their will and want us to continue. Our growth threatens them.

Or say we're with some friends who are gossiping. Our efforts to live the program have resulted in us becoming uncomfortable with participating in gossip, yet we don't want to be self-righteous and start moralizing with our friends. Merely refraining from participating in something like this requires courage. We may lose some friends as we grow spiritually.

Almost all of us face some situation in life where we are either being asked to participate in something that is morally reprehensible or just keep quiet about it and allow it to happen. It may be that the truly courageous course of action is to protest loudly, and doing so may have severe consequences for us. What we do at such a time is a defining moment, and may very well affect the choices we make for the rest of our lives

The principle of faith will help us to practice the principle of courage and live our lives with integrity. We need not be so afraid of losing friends or having relationships change or even having our lives

profoundly affected because we know that we're being cared for. We have faith that if we have to let go of old friends because what they're doing is unhealthy for our spiritual development, we'll form new relationships with people whose values we share. Basically, we need to have faith that we'll be given the power to carry out our Higher Power's will.

Step Twelve

“Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”

Spiritual principles

Even in the step that asks us to practice spiritual principles, there are specific principles connected to the step itself. We will focus on unconditional love, selflessness, and steadfastness.

Practicing the principle of unconditional love in the Twelfth Step is essential. Nobody needs love without conditions more than a suffering addict. We don't ask anything of the people to whom we are trying to carry the message. We don't ask for money. We don't ask for gratitude. We don't even ask that they stay clean. We simply extend ourselves.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't take reasonable precautions. If we believe it isn't safe to bring a suffering addict to our home, we shouldn't do it. Twelfth Step calls should always be done with another NA member. Nor does practicing the principle of unconditional love require that we allow ourselves to be abused. Sometimes the best way of loving and helping is to stop enabling someone else to use.

Why do we carry the message? Not to serve ourselves, even though we benefit. We carry the message to help others, to help them find freedom from their addiction and grow as individuals. If we have an attitude that the people we sponsor are somehow our possessions, that their lives would fall apart if we were not directing their every move, that most likely they wouldn't even be clean without us, then we've missed the point of the Twelfth Step. We don't expect recognition for the number of sponsees we have or for how well they're doing. We don't expect recognition for being of service. We do these things to accomplish something good.

It's a great paradox that selfless service becomes an expression of our deepest selves. Through our work in the previous steps, we have uncovered a self that cares more about allowing a Higher Power to work through us than it cares about recognition and glory. We have uncovered a self that cares more about principles than the exercise of our individual personalities. Just as our disease is often expressed in self-centeredness, our recovery is expressed beautifully as selfless service.

Practicing the principle of steadfastness means we need to keep on trying to do our best. Even if we've had a setback and fallen short of our own expectations, we need to recommit ourselves to recovery. Steadfastness keeps a bad morning or a bad day from turning into a pattern that can lead to our relapse. This commitment ensures that we will keep practicing the principles of our program despite how we feel. Whether we're happy about it, bored with it, disgusted by it, or completely frustrated over it, we keep on trying to work a program.