

CleanTimes

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Serving the West Tennessee Area of Narcotics Anonymous

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CLEAN AND SOBER

A slip of the tongue or a violation of Traditions

CLEAN: Free from contamination or disease, free from moral corruption, observing the rules, Free from drug addiction.(source: Dictionary)

SOBER: Not addicted to intoxicating drink, not drunk.(source: Dictionary)

In 1973, speaking at the 20th anniversary dinner celebrating the beginning of our fellowship Jimmy K. said that as they worked to form NA it all came down to some very simple ideas:

They believed that the program of 12 Steps would work for addicts as well as alcoholics.

That the Traditions must be followed if we were to grow as a fellowship, that could stand on its own two feet aside and away from AA.

The first documented meeting of NA as we know it today was October 1953. By December of 1959 all the original committee members had resigned and there had been no NA meetings for 4 months. Three of the original members restarted NA vowing to follow the Traditions more closely. The issue of "I'm clean and sober" or "an alcoholic and addict" can cause plenty of controversy in the fellowship at times and almost goes unnoticed at other times. It's almost as if maybe it depends on how well my daily maintenance is done. When it comes to the "clean and sober" issue, the first thing I need to do is to look at Step One. It says "that we are powerless over our disease". It doesn't say drugs, it says our addiction. If it said drugs, that would imply many different substances and using anyone of them is just a symptom of our disease. If a group of addicts focused on drugs, each one would probably focus on his/her own drug of choice then we would be focusing on our differences, not our similarities. The First Step takes my focus off drugs no matter which one I like best and puts it on my problem, the disease of addiction. AA has one single perspective and that is one of the oldest known drugs, alcohol. NA displays a clear desire to shift focus away from specific drugs and to focus on two things that we all have in common, the disease of addiction and the desire to recover from it. As a result these two fellowships really don't mix well. When NA members identify themselves as "addicts and alcoholics" or about being "clean and sober" or about how much "sobriety" they have, the clarity of the NA message is blurred. Sometimes this seems like such a small issue, too minor to even worry about but the experience of those before us shows that this minor issue can dilute the full impact of the NA message and the one addict that can suffer the most from this is the most important person in the room, the newcomer. Tradition One says "our personal recovery depends on NA unity", our surrender to the powerlessness over the disease of addiction is one way we identify our unity. Our admission that our disease gets progressively worse when we use any drugs, not just our drug of choice, is another way to identify our unity.

Our recovery grows stronger as we work the NA Steps. The NA Steps are worded so simply as to carry the message clearly. The rest of our language needs to be consistent with our Steps. We cannot mix the principles of our Steps and Traditions with those of another fellowship without crippling our own message. Tradition Six says "an NA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the NA name". There is a stated policy of cooperation, but not an affiliation with outside organizations. Tradition Six is the basis of our non-affiliation policy. The first thing Tradition Six says is "we should never endorse any outside enterprise". That means we should never sanction, approve, or recommend any other fellowship. This includes implied endorsements. Using quotes from their Steps, Traditions or literature is an endorsement. To allow another fellowship to associate itself with the NA name in this manner would be a violation of Tradition Six. Tradition Six says "that these problems often become obsessions and shut us off from our spiritual aim". These arguments should never be used to develop an anti AA attitude. NA is a spiritual fellowship. We must have love, tolerance, and patience if we are going to live our principles. *Continued on page 4. **Clean and Sober***

Get Involved In Your Recovery!

Do Service Work

The only requirement

"This program offers hope. All you have to bring with you is the desire to stop using and the willingness to try this new way of life."

IP No.16, "For the Newcomer"

ECLIPSED

The old timers were hardcore when I first came. "We must abstain from all drugs in order to recover" was one of their battle cries. Anytime the topic of illnesses other than addiction came up they roared the battle cry with coffee and tobacco tainted breath. I didn't recognize their behavior as inappropriate because I was so new but there was some vague suspicion in my mind. Today I know we don't give medical advice and have only one promise: Freedom from active addiction. We can't promise freedom from diabetes, arthritis, clinical depression, bipolar disorders, schizophrenia, high blood pressure, HIV III, hepatitis C, epilepsy, or any of a host of other illnesses to which humans fall prey. For some diabetics complete abstinence from all drugs is a death sentence. I sometimes hear addicts say we aren't fully recovered until they throw dirt on us. Maybe we can help them get there faster?

Grandiosity is a symptom of the disease of addiction. Occasionally I see someone making a sweeping, universal pronouncement on some topic instead of simply sharing their experience. Hell, I've done it my damn self. I've learned from working the first three steps that I am not God. God would not work these steps. Could you imagine God admitting to powerlessness over addiction or that his life had become unmanageable? Maybe your God but not mine. Mine isn't an addict and mine isn't powerless over anything. Picture God recognizing insanity in his life and coming to believe in a power greater than himself? There is no power greater than my God. My God isn't insane. Maybe yours is different. How could God make a decision to turn his will and life over to the care of God? That wouldn't be turning it over. That would be holding on to it. So I can't operate under the illusion that I am God if I apply these steps in my life everyday. I only know my own experience so I must stick to that. When I apply these steps it interferes with the idea that I can play God with someone else's recovery. If you like you can take guidance from those who won't live these steps. You may end up with a Svengali sponsor. Go ahead, it'll do you good to have a moment of clarity.

Addiction is a primary illness. It isn't an effect caused by some other illness. It is itself the cause. We know that the Twelve steps of Narcotics Anonymous work on addiction. There are over fifty years worth of proof. It works if you work it and if it isn't working you either aren't applying yourself to the program or you may have another illness. There are many other primary illnesses and there is no guarantee that you will not discover another one simply because you already have the disease of addiction.

I discovered I was bipolar in my fifth year clean. I had struggled with the steps and was frustrated. I knew I was giving an honest effort. Something else was eclipsing my recovery. I knew I needed some outside help but I mistrusted the psychiatric profession. My suspicion started with Mom. She started using prescription drugs when I was in grammar school in the mid-sixties. When I was in my twenties she told me she had been shopping doctors but I was so naive I merely thought she was a dissatisfied consumer. She later found one who gave her whatever she wanted. I had to call the ambulance once when she had a seizure. The tests at the hospital eliminated every possible cause except the drugs. They called her doctor but he wouldn't come. Strangely enough, he retired soon after this incident. The other reason for my suspicion were the lines in our Basic text which read, "Many of us sought help through medicine, religion, and psychiatry. None of these methods was sufficient for us." I thought this was a call to reject these disciplines but much of what I know is subject to revision. As it turns out, by themselves, none of these methods was sufficient for us. They weren't meant to be rejected as a knee-jerk reaction. I sometimes have that all or nothing way of looking at things.

When I went to the doctor I told him outright that I was an addict and there are some drugs I simply can't have. He suggested that my addictive behavior may have been caused by my amateurish attempts to medicate the bipolar disorder. This was when I remembered the Basic Text telling me that doctors often don't understand addiction. The true nature of addiction is obsession and compulsion. If I was simply bipolar and not an addict, why did I lose control so often? I told myself I would just spend thirty dollars and instead ran through the entire paycheck. After I got clean I thought about using nearly every five minutes for close to a year. Am I an addict? You betcha!

Sometimes drug use has side effects that mimic other illnesses. If I'm dishonest with the doctor, and he's not alert enough to give me a drug screen, he could easily misdiagnose me. I needed to be clean for a while before I could get a valid diagnosis. I finally overcame my prejudices and asked for help. After all, a lot of doctors told my mother, "no." It's a sign of dishonesty for me to stereotype an entire profession. I can't take some of the drugs available because they are a risk for releasing my addiction all over again. Being sick is no excuse for using and being in recovery is no excuse for neglecting my health. I must walk the narrow path in between. The drug I take is a salt. It doesn't have me out trying to sell my car, or my TV, or pimp my girlfriend. I can't even tell the difference between taking it and not. My friends can though. When I lost my health insurance a few years ago, and stopped taking the meds, they begged me to get back on. My bipolar disorder mimics ADD and I made a conscious decision not to take the medicine for ADD. They're too closely related to drugs I used in active addiction. So I've been getting help from my sponsor on how to meditate. It is a nonmedical solution that is improving my attention span. I also exercise to counter the depression.

I sometimes hear addicts saying in meetings that everything you need is right here. If you read the orange sponsorship pamphlet you will learn some things a sponsor isn't. A sponsor is not a banker, a marriage counselor, a legal advisor, a parent, or a social worker. If you need these things you may have to go outside the fellowship. We do not provide social services; if you need them you must go outside the fellowship. We have no job placement services. If you need that you may have to go outside the fellowship. We don't tell you what God to have. We suggest that you find one but we do not provide it for you. If you want to practice any of the major faiths you may have to go outside the fellowship to attend church, synagogue, mosque, or temple. We are forever non-professional. The letter of this is that we charge no dues or fees but the spirit of it is that if you need professional counseling of some kind (legal, medical, financial, etc.) you probably will have to go outside the fellowship. As a function of humility we don't make outrageous claims about what our program can do.

WHY SERVICE IS IMPORTANT TO ME?

My first attempt at getting clean was in 1985 at a long term treatment facility. We had no choice about what fellowship we went to. Narcotics Anonymous was too new and the members didn't have enough clean time, according to those in charge of making the rules at the facility. One thing we had to do was get a homegroup. Well I got a homegroup, but no one told me what I was supposed to do in this homegroup, so I didn't do anything! I stayed clean about 6 months.

I ended up back in another facility a few months later. But still there were no Narcotics Anonymous meetings available to us. I had gotten a glimpse of a Basic Text in the first facility and I knew that was where I belonged. A couple of days before I was discharged, a nurse in the facility gave me an NA meeting schedule with her phone number on it, and 276-LIVE. Before I was discharged, I called the NA helpline, got a temporary sponsor and a ride to an NA meeting the day I was to be discharged.

Some "slogans" I heard in those early NA meetings made an impact on me:
Willingness to go to any lengths to stay clean.
Can't keep what we have unless we give it away.
Attitude of Gratitude, which was explained as don't just say you're grateful, let your actions show it.
Get a homegroup.
Get involved with service.
And of course the portion of our 12th step which says – we tried to carry this message to addicts.

I prayed daily for my higher power to give me the willingness to go to any lengths. I prayed for the willingness to follow the suggestions... which included the things listed in the above paragraph.

Even in the first few months of my recovery I got involved in service. I went to meetings early and helped set up. I stayed late and helped clean up. I got a homegroup and at about 3 months clean became secretary of that group. I got involved with PI. I remember going to the Crisis Center monthly and helping to clean up inside and outside the facility, which at that time was our area's way of paying for their service to us. I was the most excited and got the most out of H&I. I loved going back to the 2 facilities where I had been in treatment and carrying the Narcotics Anonymous message. In the early days, I didn't have a car, so people helped me get to meetings. One of the suggestions was calling other addicts. I got a phone as soon as I could. I called addicts every day and got rides to meetings. When I got a car, one way I could give back and show my gratitude, was to give other addicts rides to meetings.

I've been involved in NA service one on one through sponsorship, at my homegroup, at the Area level, and on the regional level as convention treasurer. I read and participate in worldwide forums and email lists that concentrate on service related topics.

I do have a tendency to over do it. But I do know that service work has played a very important part in my staying clean. When I make a commitment I follow through. I made a commitment to my homegroup when I joined that group. I arrange my schedule around my homegroup. My homegroup meeting is a priority in my life. If something comes up, and I plan on missing, I let other homegroup members know that. I have never just not showed up. I try to do more than my part, or more than enough to get by. In my using days and first attempt at recovery, that's what I did – just enough to get by. Frequently it wasn't enough. I relapsed the first time around with that attitude. There have been times when my commitments have kept me clean, they were the only thing that kept me coming back. Thank god something kept me coming back during those times.

Service work did wonders for my self esteem and self worth. I know we don't do service for the 'pats on the back' but those pats on the back boosted my self esteem greatly. I felt so worthless when I got here. To know that I was doing something to help another addict, even if it was making a pot of coffee, emptying the ashtrays, chairing a meeting, having the key and opening the door for a meeting, really helped me to feel like I belonged and that I was doing something to give back to other addicts what was freely given to me. I was a shy person and barely knew how to have a conversation about anything but drugs. Getting involved kept me busy so that I didn't have to stand around trying to think of something to say and feeling so uncomfortable. I could be busy setting out the literature and at the end of the meeting putting it away. I gradually learned how to talk about something besides drugs. I could have a conversation about recovery too!

Another important thing I learned from service work was how to be honest. In my early days, I struggled financially. On more than one occasion I used NA money for personal reasons. I always put a little IOU in the envelope, thinking that made it OK. But I knew in my heart it wasn't right, because it wasn't something I was willing to tell anyone about. I eventually got honest with a sponsor and made amends. Today I am not even tempted to take money that isn't mine. I can be trusted with NA's money and I learned this not only by working and living the steps in my life, but by getting involved in service and becoming willing to do the right thing.

I still love doing service in Narcotics Anonymous. My newest way of giving back to the fellowship is going back to my hometown weekly to support a new meeting there. I don't know why it took me 18+ years to do it. It's a blessing and gift to be able to go back there and share and help people today, instead of going to take and being a bad influence and harming others. It is also one way I'm able to make amends for the havoc I played in so many people's lives when I was living there... for those I harmed that I don't even know or don't remember that I harmed.

The 12th step not only talks about giving it away. It talks about practicing these principles in all our affairs. I've learned to practice the principles of this program in all areas of my life – family, home, church, work and even at the grocery store and in my car! I am extremely grateful for all that I have learned in NA through being allowed to serve.

Lucy O.

Birthdays and Anniversaries

October

Bill B. - 10/2 - 15 Years - Primary Purpose
Mike G. - 10/4 - 15 Years - Lunch Bunch
Karl S. - 10/13 - 13 Years - Lunch Bunch
Cheryl L. - 10/14 - 3 Years - Cordova Hope
Dave L. - 10/14 - 2 Years - Lunch Bunch
Tom B. - 10/15 - 2 Years - Lunch Bunch
Kay H. - 10/18 - 1 Year - Lunch Bunch
Mark R. - 10/20 - 8 Years - Primary Purpose
Teejay B. - 10/21 - 3 Years - Clean A.I.R. of Jackson

November

Jackie T. - 11/3 - 1 Year - Desire
Miki F. - 11/4 - 4 Years - Lunch Bunch
Webb N. - 11/4 - 1 Year - Lunch Bunch
Mark Mc - 11/11 - 10 Years - Lunch Bunch
Becky F. - 11/17 - 2 Years - Cordova Hope
Pam R. - 11/28 - 9 Years - Primary Purpose
Diane M. - 11/29 - 1 Year - Cordova Hope
Connie G. - 11/30 - 3 Years - Desire

December

Sheree W. - 12/2 - 2 Years - Cordova Hope
Carol S. - 12/10 - 2 Years - Cordova Hope
Maria C. - 12/11 - 1 Year - Harmony
Diane M. - 12/12 - 1 Year - Lunch Bunch
Debbie B. - 12/21 - 14 Years - Desire
Tony T. - 12/25 - 8 Years - Lunch Bunch
Drew M. - 12/25 - 10 Years - D.H.F.
Phillip W. - 12/30 - 2 Years - Lunch Bunch

Editors Note: I apologize if your birthday has been omitted. Please get with your GSR of your Home Group and have them contact me, Connie G. at kateyesldy40@aol.com for the next issue. Please note these are actual clean dates and birthdays may be celebrated on a different day. Listen for announcements in meetings for exact date of celebration.

Reminder!!!!

VRC XXIII

November 23-27, 2005

Hilton Memphis

If you have a group you would like showcased in the Cleantimes Newsletter, or have an article, cartoon, poetry, or whatever sharing experience, strength and hope, please contact me, Connie G., at kateyesldy40@aol.com.

Clean and Sober....Continued from page 1

Some groups seem to have more members that attend more than one fellowship. Some cases results in a number of members using the terms "sober, sobriety, alcoholic and alcoholism" over and over in the meeting. Tradition Four states "each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole". If NA members attend meetings where this language is accepted, the visiting members do not get the clear NA message from this group that is calling themselves Narcotics Anonymous and the NA message is blurred. When members of a NA meeting that accepts the use of AA terminology attend other meetings, they may feel other meetings are unfriendly or they are not welcome when it is brought to their attention that we do not use that language in a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. The problem could be eliminated by following the Traditions and not using terminology from other fellowships in a NA meeting. Henceforth, the problem caused by using the language of another fellowship does affect other groups and NA as a whole. I have seen people use the terms "sober, alcoholic and so on" just to be defiant. Any addict worth their weight in their own drug of choice should understand this behavior. Chaos and confusion were a couple of my drugs of choice.

Our primary purpose is to carry the message to the addict that still suffers. Tradition Six says "carrying a clear message of recovery in NA reflects integrity". Our message is outlined in our 12 Steps, 12 Traditions and further articulated in NA literature. Because our message is also our identity, we must take care not to confuse it with the beliefs or literature of other organizations. If I see that a member of the fellowship is carrying a mixed message or repeatedly bringing the message of another fellowship into an NA meeting, our literature says that I should speak to that person one on one about the problem in a kind and loving way so that this person doesn't feel that they are not welcome. How many times have you heard sober, alcoholic and addict, or sobriety used in an NA meeting? How many times did you pull that person aside and talk to them in a manner so that they would understand that they are not being told what to do or being run off? We have some NA members that believe it's OK to let people use the terminology of other fellowships. They believe that saying something to these people will only run them off, that they may never get the message. Then we have our so called, "NA Nazis" that take a stringent stance on this issue. Thank God for the both of them. This is what gives us diversity.