

# Sierra Foothills Area of Narcotics Anonymous Newsletter - December 2016



This month's SFANA Newsletter's theme is Twelve. The Twelfth Step and the Twelfth Tradition. Also, we have an article entitled "The Science of Addiction and Recovery" by Michael B. In addition, a new section has been added to the newsletter – Events around the Area. Enjoy.

## **Events Around the Area**

There are two – so far – events of note happening in December in the SFANA. The first one is a surprise and very exciting!

### **Christmas Party!**

You are invited to the first annual Aisle 19 Group Christmas Party. It will be a "Don't Miss It" event. 6pm to 7pm – Fellowship and food. 7pm to 8pm – Speaker Meeting. 8pm to 10pm – Live music dance.

Door prize and raffle. There are 2 door prizes. No ticket required – just come and join us. Raffle tickets will also be available.

### **New Year's Eve Party**

New Year's Eve speaker meeting and dance featuring Costanzo's spaghetti dinner 6PM, speaker meeting 8PM, dancing 10PM to 1AM. Tickets \$15 each or 2 for \$25. This will be a packed event because word is that the American River Area of Narcotics

Anonymous is not having a party this year. Grab your tickets now.

## **Step 12**

Submitted by Jeannie C.

*"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."*

"The steps lead to an awakening of a spiritual nature. This awakening is evidenced by changes in our lives. These changes make us better able to live by spiritual principles and to carry our message of recovery and hope to the addict who still suffers. The message, however is meaningless unless we LIVE IT. As we live it, our lives and actions give it more meaning than our words and literature ever could." Basic text, page 49.

Our literature tells us that there are as many forms of spiritual awakenings as there are personalities in our rooms. Throughout the years, spiritual awakenings came to me as my awareness of how the dis-ease of addiction was effecting my life, my thoughts, and my actions at the time. I think the first one was when I realized that I was not alone on this planet. I was so self-centered in addiction that my ability to even be aware of other people was very limited. I lived in my head, my thoughts running rampant from one

problem to the next. I would try and manipulate one problem only to have another one pop up. I lived in constant crisis. Even if I had wanted to acknowledge others, I was incapable of seeing outside my bubble of delusion.

The spiritual awakenings continued to happen as I grew. Eventually, I could not only see other people, but I began to care deeply for them. In recent years, my spiritual awareness has expanded in ways I could have never dreamed of in the beginning. I had no idea I had been living separated from my spirit. I had no idea that once reconnected to my spirit that life would take on new meaning; that I would care enough about people to ask about them instead of making everything about me all the time. I had lost all remembrance of the connection I feel to nature, to animals, to others and to my Higher Power. Once I began living these principles in all my affairs, the connection to myself, my spirit, to others, to nature and my HP deepened. It continues to deepen, only getting more beautiful all the time. I wish I had words to articulate the depth of the spiritual connection I feel most of the time now. It is wonderful. It frees me from the bondage of self and from the prison of active addictions. It removes my fear and helps me to take healthy risks. "So long as I follow this way, I have nothing to fear." My HP has my back. Period.

Spiritual principles behind each step

- Step 1: Honesty
- Step 2: Hope
- Step 3: Faith
- Step 4: Courage
- Step 5: Integrity
- Step 6: Willingness
- Step 7: Humility

- Step 8: Brotherly Love
- Step 9: Justice
- Step 10: Perseverance
- Step 11: Spiritual Awareness
- Step 12: Service

We Tried To carry This Message.

"Helping others is perhaps the highest aspiration of the human heart and something we have been entrusted with as a result of a higher Power working in our lives. We would do well to ask the God of our understanding to continue working through us in our efforts to carry the message. Diligently practicing the principles of recovery will ensure that the connection between ourselves and Higher Power remains open and that our service to others is firmly rooted in spirituality." It Works, How and Why, page 121.

Gratitude opens doors to places in my heart that had long been shut. When I walk in gratitude, the God of my understanding provides various ways for me to carry the message of recovery. Sponsorship is a wonderful gift from HP to help keep me clean and comfortable in my own skin. When I pray, and meditate on how best to serve a sponsee, the answers come and I find myself saying things I did not know they needed to hear. A lot of the time, I need to hear it myself! I love how that works. What a wonderful gift, this giving and receiving becomes!

Practicing these principles in all our affairs can be the most powerful way to carry the message of recovery. When people see displays of our honesty, our integrity, our willingness, our brotherly love, our courage, it carries the message that we do recover. We do learn a new way to live. When we display our faith, hope and perseverance during hard times we carry the message that we are

no longer hopeless and lost. When we are of service, or we display justice through the amends process we show that we are moving from self-centered living to caring about others. When we humbly accept our right place in society, we show that we are growing in spiritual awareness and that we have accepted that we are no better and no worse than anyone. And, when others get a chance to witness our brotherly love, we carry the message through attraction.

It's quite miraculous to be and to witness a person who used to be involved in active addiction, move from such a lonely, desperate, self-centered place to one of vibrant, involved living. It brings me goose bumps to consider how beautiful this process is.

"The first way we carry the message speaks for itself. People see us on the street and remember us as devious, frightened, loners. They notice the fear leaving our faces. They see us gradually come alive."

"Once we find the NA way, boredom and complacency have no place in our new life. By staying clean, we begin to practice spiritual principles such as hope, surrender, acceptance, honesty, open-mindedness, willingness, faith, tolerance, patience, humility, unconditional love, sharing and caring. Our recovery progresses, spiritual principles touch every area of our lives, because we simply try to live this program in the here and now." Basic Text, page 51 and 52.

"Even in silence, the voice of our gratitude does not go unheard. It speaks most clearly as we walk the path of recovery, selflessly giving to those we meet along the way. We venture forth on our spiritual journey, our lives enriched, our spirits awakened, and our horizons ever-expanding. The quintessential

spirit that lies inside each one of us, the spark of life that was almost extinguished by our disease, has been renewed through working the steps of Narcotics Anonymous. It is in the path paved with these steps that our future journey begins." *It Works, How and Why*, page 122.

## ***The Science of Addiction and Recovery***

Submitted by Michael B.

We sometimes say in our meetings that we were addicts before we "put in." According to this view, putting a drug, whether alcohol or any other addictive substance, into our bodies in order to change our state of mind is the result of prior psychological, familial and social experience and, further, that such experiences then support and reinforce addictive behavior. It turns out that there is abundant scientific evidence to support this point of view, evidence presented in Johann Hari's brilliant book, *Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs*.

According to the research that Hari reviews, two precursors to addiction are emotional trauma and psychological and social isolation. Addicts in recovery won't find these findings to be a news flash. Addicts repeatedly report that they felt "apart from" at an early age, and just as frequently report growing up in families riddled with addictions, parented by flawed mothers and fathers who, at their *best*, had little idea of what their children were feeling or what they needed. Hari cites huge longitudinal studies of children—studies, for example, in which kids and their

families were observed, tested, and followed from early childhood until 18 years of age—designed to figure out how much the quality of their parenting affected their later drug use. The correlations were so high that, by observing certain relevant parent/child interactions at an early age, scientists found that they could predict with dramatic accuracy which children would later struggle with drug addiction. Dysfunctional interactions in childhood predicted higher rates of substance abuse in later life, primarily because such interactions left behind a toxic sediment of self-hatred that was so painful that drugs were sought to diminish it. These researchers concluded that childhood trauma and abuse is as likely to cause drug addiction as obesity is to cause heart disease.

The reason this is important is that it contradicts the conventional view of drug addiction as being “substance dependent”—namely, that the substance that’s being abused is so powerfully addictive that it inherently has the power to rob someone of his or her will. Hari’s review of research, however, shows us that this isn’t true. He quotes one researcher who said “nothing is addictive in itself. It’s always a combination of a potentially addictive substance or behavior and a susceptible individual.” It will not surprise any addict in recovery that emotional deprivation and trauma are powerful contributors to that susceptibility.

Isolation and loneliness are others. Many of us remember seeing chilling videos in the 1980s of a rat in a cage who had the choice of drinking from two water bottles—one containing plain water and the other with water laced with cocaine or heroin. Over time, the

rats gravitated almost exclusively to the drug-infused water and drank it with such single-minded ferocity that they would forgo everything else and sometimes die in the service of their addiction. This study seemed to support the notion that it was the intrinsic power of the drug that fueled the addictive behavior. However, this study was decisively refuted by Dr. Bruce Alexander, a researcher from Simon Fraser University in Vancouver who replicated the experiment but, instead of a single rat alone in a cage, Alexander constructed a new cage that was much larger, had other rats, and contained games, learning tasks, opportunities for exploration and exercise, etc. He called his cage “Rat Park” and *the resident rats turned out to have little or no interest in the drugged water*. He concluded that the *context* was crucial to the development of addiction and that, specifically, the opportunity to interact around meaningful activities in a community powerfully counteracted addictive tendencies. Addiction, he argued, was predicated on loneliness and isolation every bit as much -- if not more so -- as the powerful pleasures promised by the drug itself.

Alexander proved what addicts in recovery know so well—that the “therapeutic power of one addict helping another is without parallel.” The non-judgmental acceptance, and appreciative welcome of a recovery-based community can and does frequently trump the physical power of a mood-altering substance. Our recovery groups are like “Rat Park,” surrounding the lonely and isolated addict with a healing context. Just as the cause of addiction lies in certain toxic emotional and social environments that produce self-hatred and isolation, so too does its

cure lie in supportive environments based on love and community.

It's great when science confirms what we already know!

## ***Guiding Principles:***

### ***The Spirit of Our Traditions***

In the years since our Basic Text was written, we have grown from a small, primarily English-speaking Fellowship concentrated in North America to a truly worldwide Fellowship, with literature published in 49 languages. Technological advances have made it possible and much more practical for members in countless NA groups around the world to provide input to help shape our literature. In the July 2016 NA Way Magazine, we discussed some of the ways in which the development of *Guiding Principles: The Spirit of Our Traditions* was groundbreaking. We received input from members speaking half a dozen languages from more than 13 countries, made possible in part due to the simplicity of jotting down some thoughts on a page, snapping a photo with a mobile phone, and emailing the information to the World Board. We certainly look forward to more exciting uses of technology and a more inclusive literature-development process in the years to come.

The process and participation for this project were not the only groundbreaking aspects, however. While many other twelve-step fellowships also use the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, and many others have created step-working guides, NA seems to be the very first to create a guide for

studying and working with the Twelve Traditions. Our goal as a Fellowship is not to be unique and different, but being the first organization to take on a particular type of project means we were forced to pave the road we wished to drive on. Some of our members had a very clear idea in 2010 regarding what a Traditions workbook would consist of, but many other members had other views. Together, as a Fellowship, we envisioned something new that took shape in review drafts and was refined by input to become *Guiding Principles*.

Our new book on the Twelve Traditions can be described as a “modular” text, meaning that it has parts and pieces that can be used in a variety of ways. Every chapter starts and ends with a reading that can be used as a personal meditation, as a topic for a recovery meeting, or to discuss in a service setting. The chapters include exercises called “Word by Word” and “Spiritual Principles,” which would work well as personal writing exercises or as a discussion in a group business meeting or service committee meeting. Finally, each chapter includes sections for members, for groups, and for use in service. These sections offer thoughts about what we have learned and experienced as a Fellowship related to each Tradition, as well as questions for writing, discussion, and workshops.

We are very excited to hear about your experiences using our Fellowship's newest book. In the review and input process, we received a great deal of helpful feedback regarding how the exercises and questions worked for personal use, for group inventory, and in workshops. We're hopeful that the book will be helpful as a way to further explore, understand, and practice our Twelve Traditions. One of the Fellowship

Issue Discussion Topics (IDTs) for this Conference cycle is devoted to how to make use of Guiding Principles, so we hope members who want to know more about the book will participate in these workshops. We strongly encourage all who use it to pass along your experiences, along with any suggestions you have for others about ways they can make the most of their work in this book. To share your feedback, please email us at [worldboard@na.org](mailto:worldboard@na.org).

For more information about the Guiding Principles IDT (and the other IDTs), please visit [www.na.org/IDT](http://www.na.org/IDT) where we'll be posting workshop/discussion outlines and other resource materials.

The previous article first appeared in The NA Way Magazine – October 2016 – Volume Thirty-Three \* Number Four.

## ***NEWSLETTER CALL FOR ARTICLES***

The area staff at SFANA are publishing a monthly newsletter and would like two things from you:

1. Sign in by filling out the form on the website so that you receive the SFANA Newsletter in your email the moment it is published.
2. Submit articles and stories to be published in the SFANA Newsletter to inspire others to stay clean and keep coming back.

Some topics that would be useful in the SFANA Newsletter are:

- What is your favorite recovery quote and why?
- What is your favorite spiritual principle and why?
- What is your experience with children at meetings?
- Does being productive and responsible mean being boring?

- How do you develop healthy intimate relationships?
- How does your gratitude speak?
- How do you continue to make amends? Are you ever finished making amends?

If you, or someone you know, has a problem with addiction please call the helpline at: **(530) 645-1635**