

Sierra Foothills Area of Narcotics Anonymous

Newsletter - March 2017



This month's SFANA Newsletter's theme is Three. The Third Step and the Third Tradition. In addition, a new section has been added to the newsletter – Events around the Area. Enjoy.

Events Around the Area

The events calendar for the area is blank for this month so far. If there are any group activities, get the information to: newsletter@sfana.org so we can have the website updated.

Step Three:

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

“As addicts, we turned our will and our lives over to a destructive power. Our will and our lives were controlled by drugs. We were trapped by our need for instant gratification that drugs gave us. During that time, our total being-body, mind and spirit-was dominated by drugs. For a time, it was pleasurable, then euphoria began to wear off and we saw the ugly side of addiction. We found, that the higher the drugs took us, the lower they brought us. We faced two choices: either suffer the

pain of withdrawal or we took more drugs.” Basic Text, page 25.

When I first tried the various drugs, the instant gratification brought me relief from the confusion of not knowing who I was. I didn't have to think about my lost and confused state of mind if I was loaded. In active addiction, I remember feeling lost and hopeless as despair became my constant companion. I remember feeling completely alone. The high didn't work any longer to relieve me of the rantings of my diseased thinking. I had forgotten why I had started using in the first place. All that existed in my isolated world was a shell of the authentic me; a me I had sadly abandoned the moment I first used drugs. There was no way I could ever remember or recover who I was, as long as I was in an altered state of awareness. I had lost all desire to connect with a Higher Power.

Now, Step three is probably my favorite step. I love the opportunity to allow my higher power to work in my life, to mold and shape me and my life so I can accept the blessings and direction that will bring my highest happiness. Surrendering my will and my life in a conscious decision, daily, brings me freedom and joy. I am free now, from fear. I enjoy watching the will of my Higher Power unfold in all its magic. I no

longer feel the need to worry. Once I made that decision to turn my will and my life over, my life changed. It changed because I made a contract with my HP. Many times, I have tried to renege on that contract. I didn't want to live up to my responsibility to let go. But my HP is a power that does not go back on its word. My HP continued to nudge me, support me, encourage me, and uplift me toward my higher purpose even though I did not want to acknowledge it, let alone surrender to it many days. My attempt at Step Three was lip service for a long time. I am stubborn and giving up the illusion of control came slowly for me. I can only imagine how patient and loving my Higher Power was as I continued to run on self-will and bump my head against a self-made wall of denial. My HP is smart and allowed me to experience a tremendous amount of self-inflicted pain. As I experienced the agony of my stubborn self-will, I slowly became tired of being in pain. My HP knew me well and knew I would not completely surrender until I had exhausted every available, and many unavailable, paths. I learn the hard-headed way. And finally, as the darkness and desperation engulfed my spirit and I went through some of the most agonizing times of my life, I surrendered. I surrendered, suicidal and exhausted in a pool of tears. My being was trashed from the body to the intellect to the spirit. I had lost all contact with my higher self, my fellows, my Higher Power. I needed to do something different. I needed to surrender to the best of my ability at the time.

“Essential to working Step Three is our willingness to allow the God of our understanding to work in our lives. We develop this over time. The willingness we experience in our early recovery is valuable even though we may be willing only to a certain degree. Although this may feel like unconditional willingness many of us have discovered that our

willingness grew as we learned to trust a power greater than ourselves.” It Works, How and Why, page 26.

The first Third Step I did was to best of my ability, but having never experienced the miracles of recovery, I had no idea how much deeper and meaningful that surrender would become. As I grew and changed and life changed, I found that the joy and freedom I experienced with each surrender deepened. I had done my best to make a decision. I had taken action. With each decision that was made under the direction of my HP, my willingness increased and my faith grew as my fear dissipated.

“When we trust that there is growth in taking action, despite our fear or uncertainty, we are able to work Step Three. Even though we do not know how our lives will change as we work this step, we can learn to trust that our Higher Power will care for us better than we could. The Third Step is our commitment to our own emotional, physical and spiritual well being.” It Works, How and Why, page 27.

“We found that all we needed to do was try. When we gave our best effort, the program worked for us as it has worked for countless others. The Third Step does not say, “We turned our will and our lives over to the care of God.” It says, we made a *decision* to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.” We made a decision. It was not made for us by the drugs, our families, a probation

officer, judge, therapist, or doctor. We made it! For the first time since that first high, we have made a decision for ourselves.”

“The word decision implies action. This decision is based on faith. We only have to believe that the miracle we see working in the lives of clean addicts can happen to any addict with the desire to change. We simply realize there is a force for spiritual growth that can help us become more tolerant, patient and useful in helping others. Many of us have said, “Take my will and my life, guide me in my recovery and show me how to live.” The relief of letting go and letting God, helps us develop a life that is worth living.” Basic Text, page 26.

Now in the quiet, still moments when it is just me and my HP, in those moments when my head is quiet and my heart is open, I can hear my Higher Power say things like, “Nice job Jeannie!” or, “Call that person.” Or, “Surrender your ego Jeannie.” Or, “Breathe, just breathe. You are safe.” Mostly I hear, “We’ve got you. No need to stress. We’ve got you. Just do the footwork and walk through the open doors.” Can you believe that? This old, stubborn, dope fiend can relax at last in the surrender of the Third Step! I remain forever grateful!

“We begin to see positive results from the decision we have made. We begin to notice changes. While the circumstances of our life may not change, the way we deal with those circumstances does.

Because we have made a decision to allow spiritual principles to work in our lives, we may notice a sense of relief. We are being relieved of a burden we’ve carried far too long: the need to control everything and everyone. We begin to react differently to the situations and people around us. As we gain acceptance, we cease to struggle against life on life’s terms. Striving to maintain and build our surrender, we are better able to live and enjoy life in the moment.” It works, How and Why, page 32.

“Recovery is a process of discovery. We learn about ourselves and we learn how to cope with the world around us. When we are sincere in our desire to allow our Higher Power to care for us, we begin to gain a sense of serenity. Our attitudes and ideas become more positive. Our world is no longer distorted by self-pity, denial, and resentment. We are beginning to replace those old attitudes with honesty, faith, and responsibility: as a result, we begin to see our world in a better light. Our lives are guided by our emerging integrity. Even though we make mistakes, we become more willing to take responsibility for our actions. We learn we don’t have to be perfect to live a spiritual life. When we work Step Three with an open mind and heart, we find the results are far beyond our expectations.” It Work How and Why, page 34

Thank you for letting me be of service. I remain forever grateful!

Jeannie C.

TRADITION THREE

“The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using.”

Narcotics Anonymous offers recovery to addicts around the world. We focus on the disease of addiction rather than any particular drug. Our message is broad enough to attract addicts from any social class or nationality. When new members come to meetings, our sole interest is in their desire for freedom from active addiction and how we can be of help.

The Third Tradition helps NA offer recovery to so many addicts by freeing us from having to make judgments about prospective members. It eliminates the need for membership committees or applications. We are not asked to make decisions about anyone's fitness for recovery. Since the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using, we as members have no reason to judge each other.

Desire is not a measurable commodity. It lives in the heart of each individual member. Because we can't judge the sole requirement for membership, we are encouraged to open wide the doors of our meetings to any addict who wishes to join. We are asked to extend to others the care and concern that helped each of us find a sense of belonging. The Third Tradition helps NA grow by encouraging us to welcome others.

Membership is a personal decision reached by each individual. We can do a lot to allow addicts the freedom to make that decision and reaffirm their commitment to recovery. We can help them feel comfortable in our groups by

greeting them at the door, sharing with other addicts before or after the meeting, and exchanging telephone numbers. We try to make sure that any addict who attends our meeting is not turned away. To the extent that it's possible, we choose the most accessible location for our meetings. We may choose a format that reflects an invitational tone. Most of all, we encourage every addict to keep coming back.

The strength of any member's desire is not necessarily connected to any outside circumstance. What makes one addict stay clean while another returns to using? No one of us can judge who will stay to recover and who will return to active addiction. There are no guarantees based on types of drugs used or using history. We cannot predict a higher success rate for addicts of a certain age, or those who used for a certain number of years, or women over men, or any other external factor. Just as we are not capable of measuring another's desire to stay clean, neither are we equipped to decide who should join. We are free to offer welcome instead of judgment.

We look for ways to help instead of judge. Our task is to fan the flame of desire, not dampen it. Any addict who walks into a meeting, even a using addict, displays a level of willingness that cannot be discounted. While maintaining an emphasis on the importance of total abstinence, still-using addicts are welcomed into our meetings with special encouragement to keep coming back. Many recovering addicts do not have access to regular meetings because of incarceration, geography, physical disability, or employment. These addicts are members in every respect as long as they have the desire to stop using, and they

are entitled to the same consideration and support as any other member.

Addicts attend their first meeting for many reasons. Our motives for coming to NA aren't particularly important. The desire to stop using may not be clearly realized; it may be no more than a subtle yearning for relief from pain. But that yearning often drives us to seek solutions we might otherwise never consider. Often the experience of hearing other addicts share about recovery will ignite the desire to stop using. Others come to a meeting, hear the message, and return to active addiction. Those who return to meetings after relapse often say their desire to stop using was born from the pain of relapse. We come to NA for many reasons, but we stay to recover when we find and keep the desire to stop using.

The group is not the jury of desire. We cannot measure or arbitrate willingness. Any addict's willingness to come to a meeting ought to be a sufficient indication of desire. It may take a while for an addict to find the desire that will keep her or him in Narcotics Anonymous. No addict should be denied an opportunity to stay long enough to develop that desire. We can nurture that desire with loving acceptance.

The wording of the Third Tradition reflects the broad focus of our First Step. It's written simply enough to include addicts of all countries and cultures, no matter what drugs they used. Before finding recovery in NA, many addicts don't think that alcohol is a problem. Others abuse prescription medication, thinking that "legal" drugs are okay. Because of the wording of this tradition, we are able to attract and welcome addicts who might think they didn't use the "right" drugs to qualify for

membership in NA. Each addict should be allowed to decide if NA is the answer for him or herself. We cannot make the decision for others.

Although the Third Tradition is written simply, we know that when it talks about "a desire to stop using," it means using drugs. We understand that NA is a program of recovery for drug addicts. Although addiction takes on a broader meaning for many of us as we continue in recovery, it's important to remember that we first came to NA because of our drug problems. If new members are to feel that they belong in NA, they need to hear something they can identify with. They find that identification in the fellowship of recovering addicts in Narcotics Anonymous.

Many of us know when we walk into our first meeting that we're addicts. It's not something we have to decide; it's just a fact of life. Membership, however, means more than just being an addict; it means making a decision. If we identify with what we hear in NA and relate with the people we meet, we will want what NA offers. So long as we have a desire to stop using, we are free to make the decision to join Narcotics Anonymous. Then, once we've made that decision, we need to follow it with a commitment to the principles of NA. With that commitment, we set ourselves squarely on the road of recovery.

Applying spiritual principles

The Third Tradition encourages freedom from judgment. It leads us on the path of service toward an attitude of helpfulness, acceptance, and unconditional love. As we've seen in the previous traditions, our path of service arises from the application of principles. Some of the principles that support this

tradition include tolerance, compassion, anonymity, and humility.

Tolerance reminds us that judgment is not our task. The disease of addiction does not exclude anyone. NA, likewise, cannot exclude any addict who desires to stop using. We learn to be tolerant of addicts from different backgrounds than ours, remembering that we are not better than any other addict in a meeting.

Addiction is a deadly disease. We know that addicts who don't find recovery can expect nothing better than jails, institutions, and death. Refusing admission to any addict, even one who comes merely out of curiosity, may be a death sentence for that addict. We learn to practice tolerance of addicts who don't look like us, think like us, or share like us. We teach by example. Pressuring new members to talk or act like we do may send them back to the streets. It certainly denies them the right to recover and learn in their own way.

Compassion lends kindness to all our efforts in service to others. With compassion as the foundation of our actions, we learn to support members through any difficulties they may experience. All too often, we are quick to judge the quality of another's recovery or willingness. Tradition Three asks us to set aside our self-righteousness. Because the only requirement for membership is a quality we cannot measure, the right to judge another's desire is denied us. Our attitude ought to be one of loving acceptance toward all addicts, regardless of any other problems they may experience. Generous application of compassion is more therapeutic to the suffering addict than a free application of judgment.

Humility reminds us that we are not God; we cannot predict another's

readiness to hear the message. We try to remember our own fear and confusion in our first meeting. We need each other's help and encouragement, not criticism or rejection. Our awareness of our own shortcomings, exercised in humility, helps us remember this. The self-acceptance that often accompanies humility makes us reluctant to judge others harshly.

Anonymity is the principle that supports the openness of our groups and our freedom to welcome everyone as equals. NA has no classes of membership and no second-class members. The common denominator in NA is the disease of addiction. We are all equally subject to its devastation. We share an equal right to recovery.

The practice of anonymity ensures the integrity of Tradition Three. In the spirit of anonymity, we remember that no individual member or group is more important than the message we carry. The single requirement for membership helps ensure that no addict need die without having a chance to recover. We celebrate our equality and the freedom we share by welcoming any addict who has the desire to stop using.

Tradition Three spells freedom for the members of NA. It sets the sole requirement for membership in the heart of each individual member. We don't have to decide for anyone else. We don't have to expend time and energy on deciding who should stay or who we should help. Instead, we are free to extend loving assistance to anyone who walks into a meeting desiring freedom from addiction.

The above article is a reprint from *It Works How and Why* pp 106-110.

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. Simply write an article and send it to newsletter@sfana.org.

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