

STEP 1: Subtitles

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- * POWERLESS OVER OUR ADDICTIONS
- * UNMANAGEABLE LIVES
- * ADMITTED A PROBLEM EXISTS OVER OUR USE OR MIS- USE OF DRUGS
- * DEFEAT OVER OLD WAYS OF DOING THINGS
- * MENTAL OBSESSION PLUS PHYSICAL ADDICTION
- * ACCEPTANCE TO POSSIBILITY OF RECOVERY

Powerless to me indicates an absolute incapacity to control events in my life --- to prevent or predict their outcome. People have a tremendous impact over my willingness to accept a particular action or occurrence - doing it all my way or no way at all. My desire to be right constantly, often making others accountable for my own personal character flaws.

Because I abused drugs, often I felt others caused me to experience more hurt and upset and I chose to blame them rather than look within. I realize today, that I alone was responsible for my misery. I often wondered where my friends were when I awoke in jail cells, or sick on the floor in the mornings. My ability to recall events the day or evening before was clouded by my intoxication.

Learning that there was help available and that I could once again manage my life with some semblance of sanity was of great news to me. I was tired of using not only drugs to excess, but all my friends, relatives and employers who all suffered in the process. I no longer "had to" do things that made me miserable. No high could fix me. I could, if willing, receive help from a program that shows me a new way to live - free of drugs and alcohol.

FIRST STEP INPUT

It was easier to quit than to run out of drugs.

I have become as simple as a snake. All my spirituality and abstinence produces in me an animal awareness. It took drugs to blast me out of my old ways of thought and being. I used to be totally cerebral, locked in to ideas in my head. I was my ideas. Drugs made me aware of the world. Not the idea of the world but the concrete particularity of the world. But only while stoned could I feel this concreteness -- and only at the beginning of being stoned. After the first few times -- was it days, weeks, months? -- I was searching for that first unfamiliar feeling which I knew reflected what I really was or could be. But drugs stopped working the way I wanted them to work and took me on their trip.

Now I meditate on a regular basis and that is the awareness I have acquired from spirituality: I have become as simple as a snake. I have no history -- or rather I am my history. All I have been is right here with me right now. And what I cast off I slough like a snake's skin. I leave it behind. But I leave it behind because I am growing and my slough is too small for me now. It's a model that does not work and I have to move into a model that works better. In time, I may have to cast this model off too, but for now I'll work with it.

Being powerless over my addiction meant I had to endure my drinking dreams. These dreams really disturbed me. I dreamt I was drinking and when I woke up I thought I had had a slip. I even went so far as to dream that I had a drinking dream. Then in my dream I woke up

and had a drink. Then I awoke from my dream. I was used to waking up and sorting it out whether I had had a drink or a dream about drinking. But this was new. It took me a few minutes to sort it out: I dreamt I had a drink. But that was only a dream. I woke up and then I had a drink. Oh, no. I have to go in to a meeting and raise my hand as a new-comer again. Etc. Eventually I sorted it out.

These dreams continued until I had the following dream: In French they say, "Wine is food." Someone was trying to get me to drink wine mixed with milk -- food mixed with food. But the wine and milk would not mix. They kept separating. So I poured the mixture down the drain. I have not had another drinking dream so far.

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Being powerless over my addiction was the easy part of the first step. I did not understand that my life was unmanageable. I used to sit in meetings and watch people who were clean, well dressed, well groomed say that their lives were unmanageable. Even their eyes were clean and shiny. I could not understand what they meant. My life, I thought, was unmanageable when I could not get out of bed. Even at that I had trouble bathing and changing my clothes. Here were these people doing what I could not -- bathe and groom themselves. What were they talking about?

As I continued not taking anything one day at a time, the days piled up. My eyes cleared up and I started bathing more often and dressing better. But my life was still a mess. I had tried to run the delusion that I was a really fine, nice, together person who had been ruined by drugs. It worked for a while. But eventually I came down to reality and realized that my life had never worked. That was why I had taken to drugs like a duck to water. I had never

learned to live like other people -- set goals, accept frustration, or wait for anything. So I told everyone off. I knew nothing of saying "I like you" to someone I liked. My only means of showing affection was to give drugs away, which I did indiscriminately.

Learning to admit that my life was unmanageable let me ^{work} ~~out~~ on my life. I started going out ~~for~~ coffee after meetings. I eventually started calling people and forming relationships on the program. As time went by I was even able to form relationships outside the program.

I still say that my life is unmanageable. But it doesn't mean for me now what it used to mean. I can get out of bed and work most of the time. But I still have trouble setting goals and I often find myself lying to myself. I still know very little about living. But I have the 12 steps to teach me how to live and I have a place to try out my new ideas about life. I can fake it better than I ever could before. All in all, I'm pretty happy -- but my life is still unmanageable.

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The last time I "quit" drugs, it lasted for two days. Then I was back again using as heavily as ever. When I discovered that I could not quit whenever I wanted I became very depressed. I could not get high and I could not stop using. I used up my stash and then I called a friend and asked what I should do about my addiction. He suggested that I try a meeting of Narcotics Anonymous.

At my first meeting I heard a story of recovery from addiction and I decided I wanted what N.A. had to offer. I took some literature and read it. All I got out of my first meeting was one sentence: Keep coming back. But I surrendered to the program. I wanted ~~what~~ what you people had to offer and I kept coming back. The next thing I

heard was: Come to 90 meetings in 90 days. I'm sure that whoever said it also said, "and don't take anything between meetings." I didn't take anything but I thought there was some kind of magic that would happen and that in 90 days I would be a different person. But I had surrendered to the program and I went to 90 meetings in 90 days. After that, I liked what had happened so much that I just kept surrendering to the program because you people seemed to know what to do to keep free from drugs.

Surrendering to the program eventually meant working all the steps in this suggested program of recovery. I had to learn to surrender to the steps, and to a higher power and to a spiritual program. I even learned to surrender my character defects and to work on myself. (Who? Me? But I don't have any character defects. I don't even have any resentments. That's how alienated from myself I was.) But people made me welcome when I was still a mess and didn't have anywhere else to go.

Now in my recovery I have to go on surrendering day after day. I have to take the first step every day. I have to admit every day that I am powerless over my addiction and that my life is unmanageable. And I have to admit that I am powerless over people, places and things. But the good part of that is that people, places and things are powerless over me. Surrendering drugs meant I did not have to struggle with drugs any more. And surrendering people, places and things means that I do not have to battle with them any more. Surrendering means that I am responsible for myself and that I do not have to struggle with all those people and things out there. I have not yet learned to deal with myself effectively so my life is still

unmanageable. But I at least know for the first time in my life what I am working on.

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Surrendering means that if I am angry at you I have to work on myself. If you are angry at me you have to work on yourself. My anger might drive me into a relaps, but your anger will not. And vice versa.

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If I am angry at you, I suffer and you do not. Similarly, if you are angry at me you suffer and I do not. If I am angry at you, you are my teacher because you have given me the opportunity to learn to surrender my anger. Anger is a great opportunity to practice the program, to practice surrender, to practice acceptance of the situation as it really is.

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When I was active in my addiction I lived in a dream world. Things were never what they were. Everything meant something else. If someone said, "I like you," I thought, "That really means that this person wants something from me." if someone played a record or a piece of music for me, I thought, "This means that this person is trying to be more hip than I. I'll have to find something even newer to spring on them."

In my addiction I forgot how to express myself. Drugs were my only means of expression. If you gave me drugs, you liked me. If you sold me drugs, you did not like me. If I liked you, I gave you drugs. If I did not like you, I sold them to you. I have stated this simply; the reality was more complicated. If I sold you drugs I would give you

you a little on the side or weigh your drugs a little heavy. That was the love part of the exchange. Then I would take you money and that was the hate part of the exchange.

In addiction my reality was limited to my addiction. If you helped me with my addiction, I had room in my life for you. If you did not contribute to my drug use I had to get you out of my life so there was room for someone who would help in my addiction. Radio, TV and print media were only interesting when they mentioned something to do with drugs. Everything else in the media was just a "shuck." Drugs were real for me in my addiction; everything else was fake and unimportant.

That is the kind of dream-world I lived in throughout my addiction. Of course, I did not think that I was really addicted. I could quit whenever I wanted. Drug laws were unjust and clearly, I was above the law.

Surrender to the program of Narcotics Anonymous and to a power greater than myself changed all of that dramatically. First, I surrendered drugs. It took me about a month to gain any clarity of thought. All this meant that I had to be willing to go to meetings and listen to what other people said. I also had to be willing to admit that I did not know what was going on or how to live. I started having temper tantrums -- including stomping my foot. I wanted to declare war on drug addicts and drug dealers. I wanted everyone to join Narcotics Anonymous. Little by little, I had to surrender all these ideas and just go to meetings and try to work the steps.

Second, I surrendered my view of the world. I ~~have~~^{had} been the whole universe in my addiction. There was no reality apart from my addiction.

Your addiction was a problem; my addiction was reality, the only reality I knew. I had to surrender the idea that I knew what was going on. Of course, this was no easy surrender. I used to listen to people talking about their feelings at meetings and wonder where they had learned to talk like that. I did not know that these were real feelings that they were talking about. Eventually I learned to talk about what I felt on a current basis. This took a long time. First I talked about what I had felt last week, then about yesterday. Next I was able to say, "I'm having a problem today." But I was not able to name the problem. Eventually I was able to talk about what I was feeling that day. All this came about from surrendering the idea that I knew what was happening. I had to admit that what I thought about the world and the way I dealt with the world just did not work.

Today I have to surrender everything. From my own experience I now know that the only way my life works is to surrender everything. Of course, I do not always do this. But when my life works it's because I have surrendered. The main form this surrender takes is looking at things realistically. In other words, I have to surrender all my old dreams -- that I'm in charge here, that I know what is going on, that I know what I want, what I need, what I'll get; that I am powerful, that I am powerful over you, that I'm powerful over drugs. I have had to surrender to reality.

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My drug use was all about dreaming. Up to the time I started using drugs, I had always worked. I ~~thought~~^{thought} that I had to work, no matter how much I hated it. I had to pay my bills, I had to conform. I was very rebellious, but this rebelliousness had no real outlet. Before I started using drugs, I drank every day. I got drunk every day. I was so angry that I had to get drunk every day. The tension

was so great in me that I had to get "really drunk" every Friday and Saturday night. The disparity between what I thought and what the world was like was so great that I had to get drunk every day to ~~cross~~^{bridge} this gaping chasm. I had to walk around with a pocket full of money to indulge my every wish. The next record I bought was really going to fix me, or the next book, or the next piece of clothes, etc.

Drugs came as a great relief in the cycle of tension. Drugs worked for me better than alcohol had worked. At least at first they did. They enabled me to get into my head and really fantasize. Alcohol had been a problem because it kept making me throw up or pass out. My first drug was pot and we used to sit around dark rooms listening and to loud music, eating munchies. No one wanted to talk much beyond saying such profundities as, "Even my teeth are stoned."

Next I started doing acid and I could take a whole day or night for my fantasies. Acid made me feel that my fantasies were the only reality there was.

That was the beginning and it wasn't bad. But pretty soon I found that I had to ~~trip~~^{trip} every other day in order to live. I could not stand not to trip. And I had to smoke pot all the time. But of course I had to try every drug that I came across. The drugs I did regularly were "good" but there was always the possibility of finding something "better."

Eventually it was too much trouble to work and then too much trouble even to collect unemployment. By this time I had taken so much acid so frequently that I ~~didn't ever come~~^{Never came} all the way down. I was totally into fantasy now. I did not know what was real. This all made me very happy because I had always hated everything. Now

with nothing "real" in my world I did not hate anything. That's how I became a hippy. I had learned to love everybody. I had managed to get totally into my fantasy world. I was a real flower child.

After jails and institutions (in my case, mental hospitals) I eventually found N.A. and surrendered my drugs. I accepted my addiction and took the treatment for it -- total abstinence from all mind altering substances. This started the gradual process of awakening.

I had always thought that I would change all at once if I ever changed. But that was just another dream. The reality was that I changed a little bit each day. If you change something every day, at the end of a month, it seems like everything is changed. Perhaps this is not so but it seems to be so. I just kept changing things a little at a time. This took a lot of faith because I could not be sure where it would end. Even today I keep changing things. I am still finding areas of myself that I have not shared with others. This mainly applies to my past life. I tried to show only what made me look like a tough guy. Now I am learning to share more gentle parts of myself. I am learning to let go of the image of myself that I could control. I mean that you could only see that part of myself that I showed. If I only showed the tough parts you could never relate to me as a gentle, caring person. Now I am learning to share my fears, my vulnerability. I had a dream that I could be all tough and not care about other people. I had to surrender that dream too.

Of course, this new awareness had its corollary: I can only see that part of you that you are willing to share with me. Consequently I try to provide both at meetings and outside of them the kind of environment that is safe for confidences. I am a valuable person

and worthy of fostering care; you are also a valuable person and I will try to provide some of the things that will help you to grow. This is a major task but it becomes much easier when I see things in the light of a power greater than myself.

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I have to accept things as they really are: people, places, things, events, attitudes, situations, combinations of all or some of these things. That has meant for me accepting that I did not know what was going on. I mean that I always thought I knew what was going on. But my internal motor was racing so fast that I could not really hear what was going on outside of myself. Meetings helped me a lot with this because I had to sit and listen. If I spoke for five minutes at a meeting, that was a whole lot. The rest of the time was spent listening to other people talk. I saw that they were changing and I started wanting to change along with them. I saw that they were learning to feel what was going on outside of them and inside of them. They served as my models. I came to this program inert. The things that I heard and saw here got me moving and I'm still moving.

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For me, acceptance is intellectual. I accept the idea that I am an addict. From this comes the idea that I cannot use drugs. Continuing the process of analysis, I can see that I ought to accept the N.A. program of recovery because it offers the best chance I know of to live drug free. If I can see clearly, this cool, intellectual approach will make sense and I will follow it. The problem, of course, is that my addiction involved lots of denial. So no matter how much sense it made to stop, I never saw that I ought to stop. I had to use for years after my addiction was powerful over me before I admitted

that I was powerless over my addiction and that my life was unmanageable. There were many levels of admitting that I was powerless over my addiction. When I first came to the program, for instance, I thought I could go on drinking. I was told to stop and I did stop. But I thought I had been a social drinker. It took more than a month of abstinence for me to realize that I had drunk alcoholically before and during my drug use; that I was, in fact, an addict and an alcoholic.

Surrender, for me, takes place on the emotional level. My emotions do not understand logic. I must train them like an animal. I must repeat the same lesson over and over again, and I must reinforce it every day. That is why I go to a meeting every day. Intellectually I know that I am an addict. But my emotions take over and sneak into my consciousness the idea that I might as well have just one more drug to see if I can handle it. I never could handle drugs. I was out of control with drugs from the start. All I ever wanted was more drugs and more powerful drugs. But somehow I start thinking that if I have a drug today I will be able to handle it. This denial comes from my emotions. I must learn to acknowledge that it is there. This takes away its power. What I am able to bring into my consciousness I can control. What I cannot bring into my consciousness controls me. So I must learn to acknowledge intellectually that my emotions are there and I must learn to name them: this is fear, this is love, this is anger, this is denial. But that is only half the job. I must go on to surrender them: I am powerless over this fear, love, anger or denial. I cannot handle or control these things, so I surrender them to a power greater than myself. I surrender to the program and accept its suggested steps to recovery. These steps, in turn, point me toward

a spiritual program that tells me to surrender to God as I understand him/her/it/them.

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When I was using, I learned to live in my imagination, my fantasy, my day-dream. As a matter of fact, that is what led to my using. I was miserable and it made sense to me to take the risk of using illegal drugs to feel better. No one who was happy would take that risk. But I thought that taking something would work. I thought some external substance would make me happy. I was unhappy and I thought that some substance would make me fit in, would make everything all right. That was the scenario I had written for drugs and that is the scenario that I followed. I told myself that drugs were working for me and made me not only all right but gave me a whole new circle of friends. I thought that sharing drugs meant that we shared the same consciousness. How wrong I was. We did not share the same consciousness; we shared the same games, the same lies, the same evasions. All the things I was taking drugs to get away from were the things that I found in drugs. I had to play the same kind of cover-up I played everywhere else. I was sure that no one would like me for who I was so I had to pretend I was someone else. I called this acceptance. Of course, this pretense could only be maintained so long; I eventually cracked under the strain.

I learned nothing from this experience. That, I think, is the deadly thing about living only in fantasy: I was unable to relate to my experience. I was totally alienated. Reality did not exist for me. I could rationalize my way right out of it. In short I continued to do drugs after my hospitalization. I said that there