

STEP THREE-Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him.

Step Three offers no compromise, reservation or delay. It calls for a decision here and now. With promptness and determination, we give up our control and surrender our lives to only that "Power" which can provide us with the daily strength to stay clean and sober.

To make a decision is to initiate a course of action. Making a decision may take some time but the action that follows takes longer. For instance, we made a decision to go to an NA meeting. Our sobriety follows from that. So making a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God may take some time. We do not take this step easily. But what follows takes the rest of our lives. We are not capable of turning our will and our lives over to the care of God. But we can make a decision to do that and start a course of action that will culminate in our actually surrendering to our Higher Power.

Many of us have had great difficulty making any kind of decisions in our lives. This is a very human trait. Most people hate to make decisions. We know many others who experience colossal anxiety whenever choices confront them, even trivial choices like what to wear when we wake up in the morning. Sticking to the decisions we make for many of us is even harder, but that is what a decision implies: commitment.

The commitment of making a decision inspires fear for many of us. We have feared what will happen if we do something and feared just as much what might happen if we don't. So we do nothing. Paralyzed by our fears, we make no decisions; we take no action; we shy away

from all commitments.

Major decisions often require the faith that no matter which choice we make, everything will be o.k., that the world will not come to an end. We hope what we have to say about our own experience with the Third Step will help you to acquire the willingness you need to make this crucial decision for yourself.

The pain of living with the decisions that many of us have made in our first year when our minds were still fogged and our moods varied from moment to moment has prompted us to pass on this experience so that others might benefit. We often hear at meetings the suggestion to newcomers to not make any major decisions in the first year of recovery.

Most addicts need to make their mistakes and learn their own lessons from these experiences, and so disregard this suggestion entirely.

"Surrender means not having to fight anymore". Surrender is one of the underlying principles of the first three steps. For most people it brings up a whole host of negative images: defeat, loss, failure. Yet we say in Narcotics Anonymous that to surrender is to win. How can this be?

One answer to that question is that our experience has demonstrated that when we give up our former thinking and behavior, we gain a way of living in the world that provides us with much happiness and peace within. For most of us this new way of life is unlike any kind of existence we have ever known. We win when we surrender because what we give up is our attempts to control our addiction, our delusion that we can manage our lives alone and our insanity. We receive the power, strength and guidance that makes it possible for

us to stay away from that first fix, pill, drink or joint and for us to lead responsible and productive lives. When we surrender to the program our recovery begins.

Great variation exists among us regarding how much we have suffered during our using and in our recovery, before we became willing to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. This process of becoming honest enough to admit to ourselves the need to surrender is painful. As individuals, our pride and denial have kept us dishonest and unable to see what others could clearly see. We need to surrender our way of doing things to make room for a better way.

Step Three identifies our spiritual illness and helps us see clearly that any life run on self-will can only suffer. "Running the show" was a favorite pastime. People, places and things were a constant disappointment. "If only", "maybe", and "next time" were common excuses. We couldn't run our own lives, though we attempted to run the lives of others.

As addicts we want to control other people. We know nothing of interaction among equals. Our unhappiness is so colossal that it fills our horizons. We only know that we are hurting and that we know no way to stop that pain. And so we turn to drugs. In time, drugs stop working and we are addicted and in pain. In this way we feel we are justified in doing anything at all to make us feel better. The sight of other people's happiness only makes us bitter.

With this rationalization we feel we are entitled to anything we want. We have no sense of proportion. The smallest thing will cause us to drop a person from our lives. The function of other people is to do exactly as we wish. People exist only to meet our needs. Their job is to satisfy all our needs immediately. We are angry brats. We want it all and we want it now. Denial is part of this. We do not re-

late to the things we did that we wish we hadn't done. We have selective vision that says we were perfectly justified in doing whatever we did. But we really didn't do it anyway.

As addicts we lived a code that said: "It didn't happen". But if it happened, we didn't do it. And anyway "it's not our fault".

When "our way" was no longer working, we often sought solutions outside ourselves, not knowing we alone were the source of our discomforts. We found new connections, changes of scenery, quick cash and other schemes to feed our addiction. We used ~~everyone~~ around us for what they had to offer. Eventually, this self-centeredness left us with an insatiable void that no drug could fill. We were at the crossroads, not knowing which way to go. We had to make a decision...