

belief has grown, we are ready for Step Three.

### 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 have turned our will and our lives over many times to a destructive power. Our will and our lives were controlled by drugs. We were trapped by our need for the 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 the euphoria began to wear off, and we saw the ugly side of addiction. We found that the higher our drugs took us, the lower they brought us. We faced two choices. Either we suffered the pain of withdrawal or took more drugs.

For all addicts, the day comes when there is no longer a choice; we had to use. Having given our will and lives to our addiction, in utter desperation we looked for another way. In Narcotics Anonymous, we decide to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him. This is a giant step. We don't have to be religious; anyone can take it. All that is required is willingness. All that is essential is that we open the door to a Power greater than ourselves.

Our concept of God comes not from dogma but from what we believe ourselves, what works for us. Many of us understand God to be simply whatever keeps us clean. The right to a God of your understanding is total and without any catches. Because we have this right, it is necessary to be honest about our belief if we are to grow spiritually.

We found that all we needed to do was to try. When we gave our best effort to the Program, it 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 the 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 have only 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. Show me how to live." The relief of "letting go and letting God" helps us develop a life worth living.

Surrendering to the will of our Higher Power gets easier with daily practice. When we honestly try, it works. Many of us start our day with a simple request for guidance from our Higher Power.

Although we know that "turning it over" works, we may still take our will and life back. We may even get angry because God permits it. At times during our recovery, the decision to ask for God's help is our greatest source of strength and courage. We cannot make this decision often enough. We surrender quietly and let the God of our understanding take care of us.

At first, our heads reeled with the questions: "What will happen when we turn our life over? Will we become perfect?" We may have been more realistic than this. Some of us had to turn to an experienced N.A. member and ask, "What was it like for you?" The answer will vary from member to member. Most of us feel open-mindedness, willingness and surrender are the keys to this Step.

We have surrendered our will and our lives to the care of a Power greater than ourselves. If we are thorough and sincere, we will notice a change for the better. Our fears are lessened and faith begins to grow as we learn the true meaning of surrender. We are no longer fighting fear, anger, guilt, self-pity or depression. We realize that what brought us to this Program is still with us today and will

continue to guide us if we allow it. We are slowly beginning to lose the paralyzing fear of hopelessness. The proof of this Step is in the way we live.

We have come to enjoy clean living and want more of the good things that the N.A. Fellowship holds for us. We know now that we cannot pause in our spiritual program; we want all we can get. We are now ready for our first honest self-appraisal, and we begin with Step Four.

#### STEP FOUR

"We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

The purpose of a searching and fearless moral inventory is to sort through the confusion and the contradiction of our lives so that we can find out who we really are. We are starting a new way of life and need to be rid of the burdens and traps which have controlled us and prevented our growth.

As we approach this Step, most of us are afraid that there is a monster inside us that, if released, will destroy us. This fear can cause us to put off our inventory or may even prevent us from taking this crucial Step at all. We have found that fear is lack of faith, and we have found a loving, personal God to whom we can turn. We no longer need to be afraid.

We have been experts at self-deception and rationalization; by writing our inventory, we can overcome these obstacles. A written inventory will unlock parts of our subconscious which remain hidden when we simply think about or talk about who we are. Once it is all down on paper, it is much easier to see, and much harder to deny our true nature. Honest Self-assessment is one of the keys to our new way of life.

Let's face it; when we were using, we were not honest with ourselves. We are becoming honest with ourselves when we admit that addiction has defeated us and that we need help. It took a long time to admit that we were beaten. We found that we do not recover physically, mentally or spiritually overnight. Step Four will help us toward our recovery more than we imagine. Most of us find that we were neither as terrible, nor as wonderful, as we supposed. We are surprised to find that we have good points in our inventory. Anyone who has some time in the Program and has worked this Step will tell you that the Fourth Step was a turning point in their life.

Some of us make the mistake of approaching the Fourth Step as if it were a confession of how horrible we are--what a bad person we have been. In this new way of life, a binge of emotional sorrow can be dangerous. This is not the purpose of the Fourth Step. We are trying to free ourselves of living in old, useless patterns. We take the Fourth Step to gain the necessary strength and insight which enables us to grow. We may approach the Fourth Step in a number of ways.

It is advisable that before we start, we go over the first three Steps with a sponsor.

These Steps are the preparation necessary to have the faith and courage to write a fearless inventory. We get comfortable with our understanding of these Steps. We allow ourselves the privilege of feeling good about what we are doing. We have been thrashing about for a long time and have gotten nowhere. Now we are going to start this Step, not letting it frighten us. We simply put it on paper, to the best of our present ability.

We must be done with the past, not cling to it. We want to look our past in the face, see it for what it really was and release it so we can live today. The past, for most of us, has been a ghost in the closet. We have been afraid to open that closet for fear of what that ghost may do to us. We do not have to do this alone. Our will and our life are now in the hands of our Higher Power.

Writing a thorough and honest inventory seemed impossible. It was, as long as we were operating under our own power. We take a few quiet moments before writing and ask for the strength to be fearless and thorough.

In Step Four, we begin to get in touch with ourselves. We write about our liabilities such as guilt, shame, remorse, self-pity, resentment, anger, depression, frustration, confusion, loneliness, anxiety,