

NEW ATTITUDES, The NORVANA Newsletter

June 2010

Monthly Quiz:

1. Which fellowship came first, NA or AA?
2. What is the big difference in the First Step between NA and AA? (Answers on p. 2)

REMINDER: TWC Weekend June 11-13. Wish I could have printed a piece on the history of NORVANA weekends but never got the submission I was promised.

NA, AA and Clarity

Over the years, my home group has had several debates on the "clarity statement". One form of this statement is **"We are presented with a dilemma when NA members identify themselves as addicts and alcoholics or talk about "living clean and sober". The clarity of the NA message is blurred. To speak in this manner suggests that there are two diseases and that one drug is somehow separate from the rest, requiring special recognition. Narcotics Anonymous makes no distinction between drugs. To us, an alcoholic is simply an addict whose drug of choice happened to be alcohol. Our identification as addicts is all-inclusive and allows us to concentrate on our similarities, not our differences."** The dilemma comes when newcomers come into our meeting(s) with a message (usually taught to them in rehabs) that AA and NA are interchangeable. However, many of us (myself included) feel that NA's message, with its emphasis on ADDICTION and its inclusiveness of ALL drugs, INCLUDING ALCOHOL (WHICH IS A DRUG), is much clearer than that of AA, which has no opinion on the use of drugs outside of alcohol. For me, this is not an academic point; in my recovery I've heard multiple stories from people who were "sober" from alcohol but continued to use other drugs for years until they finally figured out that they still had a problem which was wrecking their lives. The NA message, accepted at the beginning of recovery, may prevent such potentially fatal detours.

OK, having said all that, do we need a clarity statement in meetings? This is up to individual groups, and the debate has been going on for a long time (the piece on page 2 was written in 1985, and a search on "NA clarity statement" produces multiple online debates going back pretty much to the beginning of widespread Internet use). Many groups, while wanting to carry a clear NA message, prefer to gently educate people privately rather than read a statement that may be perceived as pushing people out or telling them what to do. Our primary purpose is to carry the message; is that best carried by reading a clarity statement, or by providing a supportive atmosphere where people can share without worrying about using politically correct language? It's a dilemma all right; life on life's terms has a lot of them.

As always please write your opinions on this or other subjects for submission in future newsletters. I'd especially be interested if anyone knows any alternately worded clarity statements.

All the best to my fellows in the fellowship, may we stay unified and clean despite our differences. Jim S.

Recovery Haiku: Ninety degree sweat

Pours out as I mow the lawn

Clean again today

REMINDER: SEND SUBMISSIONS TO norvananewsletter@cprna.org

NEW ATTITUDES, page 2, June 2010

Some thoughts regarding our relationship to Alcoholics Anonymous (abridged from NA World Service Board of Trustees, Bulletin #13) [First published 1985, revised 1996]

The question of just how Narcotics Anonymous relates to all other fellowships and organizations is one which may generate controversy within our fellowship. In spite of the fact that we have a stated policy of "cooperation, not affiliation" with outside organizations confusion remains. One such sensitive issue involves our relationship to the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. Narcotics Anonymous is modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous. Our fellowship itself sprang from the turmoil within AA over what to do with the addicts knocking on its doors. We will look at our roots for some perspective on our current relationship to AA. Bill W, one of AA's co-founders, often said that one of AA's greatest strengths is its single-minded focus on one thing and one thing only. By limiting its primary purpose to carrying the message to alcoholics, and avoiding all other activities, AA is able to do that one thing supremely well. The atmosphere of identification is preserved by that purity of focus, and alcoholics get help. From very early on, AA was confronted by a perplexing problem: "What do we do with drug addicts?" Allow the atmosphere of identification to get blurry so that no one got a clear sense of belonging? Kick these dying people back out into the streets? The problem must have been a tremendous one for them. When they finally studied the problem carefully They pledged their support in a spirit of "cooperation, not affiliation." This farsighted solution to a difficult concern paved the way for the development of the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship. But still, the problem that they wished to avoid would have to be addressed by any group that tried to adapt AA's program of recovery to drug addicts. How do you achieve the atmosphere of identification so necessary for surrender and recovery if you let all different kinds of addicts in? Can someone with a heroin problem relate to someone with an alcohol or marijuana or Valium problem? How will you ever achieve the unity that the First Tradition says is necessary for recovery? Our fellowship inherited a tough dilemma.

The founders of Narcotics Anonymous adapted our steps... Rather than converting the First Step in a natural, logical way ("we admitted that we were powerless over drugs..."), they made a radical change in that step. They wrote, "We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction..." Drugs are a varied group of substances, the use of any of which is but a symptom of our disease. When addicts gather and focus on drugs, they are usually focusing on their differences, because each of us used a different drug or combination of drugs. The one thing that we all share is the disease of addiction. With that single turn of a phrase, the foundation of the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship was laid. The AA perspective, with its alcohol-oriented language, and the NA approach, with its clear need to shift the focus away from specific drugs, don't mix well. When we try to mix them, we find that we have the same problem as AA had with us all along! When our members identify as "addicts and alcoholics" or talk about "sobriety" and living "clean and sober," the clarity of the NA message is blurred. The implication in this language is that there are two diseases, that one drug is separate from another, so a separate set of terms is needed when discussing addiction. At first glance this seems minor, but our experience clearly shows that the full impact of the NA message is crippled by this subtle semantic confusion. It has become clear that our common identification, our unity, and our full surrender as addicts depends on a clear understanding of our most fundamental principles: We are powerless over a disease that gets progressively worse when we use any drug. It does not matter what drug was at the center for us when we arrived. Any drug we use will release our disease all over again. We recover from the disease of addiction by applying our Twelve Steps. Our steps are uniquely worded to carry this message clearly, so the rest of our language of recovery must be consistent with our steps. We cannot mix these fundamental principles with those of our parent fellowship without crippling our own message. As a fellowship, we must continue to strive to move forward by not stubbornly clinging to one radical extreme or the other. Our members who have been unintentionally blurring the NA message by using drug-specific language such as "sobriety," "alcoholic," "clean and sober," "dope fiend," etc., could help by identifying simply and clearly as addicts, and using the words "clean," "clean time," and "recovery," which imply no particular substance. Our members who have used these arguments to rationalize an anti-AA stand, thereby alienating many sorely needed stable members, would do well to re-evaluate and reconsider the effects of that kind of behavior. Narcotics Anonymous is a spiritual fellowship. Love, tolerance, patience, and cooperation are essential if we are to live our principles.

Answers to monthly quiz:

- 1. AA, in the 1930s. We were formed permanently in 1953, with AA's blessing, because they had a dilemma on how to handle all the "junkies" and keep their focus on alcohol.**
- 2. AA's first step ("powerless over alcohol") is tied to a specific substance, and NA's first step ("powerless over our addiction") includes all drugs, indeed it does not even mention drugs.**