



Another Look

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There are probably as many definitions of addiction as there are ways of thinking, based on both research and personal experience. It is not surprising that there are many areas of honest disagreement in the definitions that we hear. Some seem to fit the observed and known facts for some groups better than for others. If we can accept this as a fact, then perhaps another viewpoint ought to be examined, in the hope that we can discover a way more basic to all addictions and more valid in establishing communication among all of us. If we can find greater agreement on *what addiction is not*, then perhaps *what it is* may appear with greater clarity.

Maybe we can agree on some prime points.

1. Addiction is not freedom.

The very nature of our disease and its observed symptoms point up this fact. We addicts value personal freedom highly, perhaps because we want it so much and experience it so seldom in the progression of our illness. Even in periods of abstinence, freedom is curtailed. We are never quite sure if any action is based in a conscious desire for continued recovery or an unconscious wish to return to using. We seek to manipulate people and conditions and control all our actions; thus we destroy spontaneity, an integral mark of freedom. We fail to realize that the need for control springs from a fear of losing control. This fear, based in part on past failures and disappointments in solving life's difficulties, prevents us from making meaningful choices; choices which, if acted upon, would remove the very fear which blocks us.

2. Addiction is not personal growth.

The monotonous, imitative, ritualistic, compulsive, and obsessive routines of active addiction render us incapable of responsive or meaningful thought and action. Personal growth is creative effort and purposeful behavior; it presupposes choice, change, and the capacity to face life on its own terms.

3. Addiction is not goodwill.

Addiction insulates us from people, places, and things outside of our own world of getting, using, and finding ways and means to continue the process. Hostile, resentful, self-centered, and self-concerned, we cut off all outside interests as our illness progresses. We live in fear and suspicion of the very people we have to depend on for our needs. This touches every area of our lives and anything not completely familiar becomes alien and dangerous. Our world shrinks and isolation is its goal. This might well be the true nature of our disorder.

All that has been said above could be summed up in...

4. Addiction is not a way of life.

The sick, self-seeking, self-centered, and self-enclosed world of the addict hardly qualifies as a way of life; at best, perhaps it is a way to survive for a while. Even in this limited existence it is a way of despair, destruction, and death.

Any lifestyle seeking spiritual fulfillment seems to demand the very things missing in addiction: *freedom, goodwill, creative action, and personal growth.*

With freedom, life is a meaningful, changing, and advancing process. It looks forward with a reasonable expectancy to a better and richer realization of our desires and a greater fulfillment of our personal selves. These are, of course, some of the manifestations of the spiritual progress that results from the daily practice of the Twelve Steps of NA.

Goodwill is an action that includes others besides ourselves—a way that considers others as important in their own lives as we are in ours. It is hard to tell whether goodwill is the key to empathy or vice versa. If we accept empathy as the capacity to see ourselves in others knowingly, without losing our own identity, then we recognize a sameness in both. If we have accepted ourselves, how can we reject another? Affection comes from seeing similarities. Intolerance results from differences we will not accept.

In personal growth, we use both freedom and goodwill in cooperation with others. We realize we cannot live alone; that personal growth is also interpersonal growth. In order to find better balance, we examine personal, social, and spiritual values as well as material values. Maturity seems to demand this kind of evaluation.

In active addiction, insanity, institutions, and death are the only ends. In recovery, through the help of a Higher Power and the steps of NA, anything is possible.

Creative action is not a mysterious procedure, although it is an inside job in rebuilding or reintegrating our disordered and fractured personalities. Often, it means simply listening to those hunches and intuitive feelings that we think would benefit others or ourselves, and acting on them spontaneously. Here is where many basic principles of action become apparent. We are then able to make decisions based on principles that have real value to ourselves.

The purpose of the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous becomes clear as we find that dependence on a Higher Power, as we each understand it, brings self-respect and self-reliance. We know that we are neither superior nor inferior to anyone; our real value lies in being ourselves. Freedom, with responsibility for ourselves and our actions, appears to be foremost in our lives. We keep and expand freedom through daily practice; this is the creative action that never ends. Goodwill, of course, is the beginning of all spiritual growth. It leads to affection and love in all our actions. These three goals, *freedom, creative action, and goodwill*, when shown in service in the fellowship, without seeking personal rewards, bring about changes whose ends we cannot predict or control. Therefore, service is also a Power greater than we, and has significant meaning for all.

**My gratitude speaks
when I care and
when I share
with others the NA way**