

How It Works: 12 Steps

Step Eleven

*"We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with
God,
as we understood Him,
praying only for knowledge of His will for us, and the power to carry that out."*

In a program with a first Step involving surrender, it is not out of order to underscore the quiet surrender of meditation. Just taking time out to quiet our restless minds, still our bodies for a while and take a good time out. The longer we are clean, the more we can see how people act to produce the problems in their lives. Just by leaving off unnecessary decision making, practicing total abstinence and going to meetings suspends much of this 'problem making process' from the beginning. Taking time with others and working the Twelve Steps distracts us more from making new problems. Meditation is the only thing a person can do that takes nothing but quiet and the time to sit and gives such tremendous pay offs.

Most people have some moments of quiet reflection. A lady pauses over washing dishes to think about a child's schooling, how her husband is doing and other main things in her life. Just a taking a moment's pause, now and then, helps us stay on track with our dreams and inner reality. Another person works on their car and listens to the radio. Another man working on an assembly line in Detroit practices meditation while performing a repetitive task for his whole shift. As he works, he drifts off into meditation. Some people turn off the radio on the drive to work or going home and meditate then without calling it meditation. Scholars take hours of reflection after all their classes are done. It can take years for them to solve out how best to present the results of their decades of intense learning and training. So much has to be taken into account. When we say meditation is the most practical science in the world today, it is the individual broadening and deepening of this experience. We addicts know how important change is to all the rest of our lives. Changing ourselves changes the rest of the world. A little meditation for most people is enough to power the rest of their lives. What if by taking out a little more time for meditation would increase and cleanse the rest of our lives. Our dreams, our potentials to achieve and accept expand as we grow spiritually. When the student is ready, the master will appear. Are you ready? Did you take time today to meditate?

When we sit, relax physically, breathe and focus, we unleash the powers that live inside us. We gradually explore our own hidden reality, the things that power and drive us. Issues can be resolved and conflicts within our being resolved like patiently uncoiling a rope that has become twisted. Is it possible that this is part of what happens when we sleep? Is that why we feel rested and ready for another day? If we give ourselves the gift of repose has anyone told us what that restful awakens will bring us? We base our lives on decisions made with insufficient information. We think we know people. People have unknown oceans and star systems inside them. Things are going to happen we cannot foresee. This is why we need conscious contact with a higher power.

Spiritual adepts are sometimes called 'seers' because of their ability to 'see' meaning into past present and future events. Any of us can improve our ability to 'see.' We admit our limits as well as our willingness to grow in this area. In other words, we must literally 'seek' the ability to clearly 'see' the spiritual reality. We ask for God's help in every area of life while we are learning to use greater powers to better ourselves and make us more nearly fit instruments of a loving God. We learn to assume the attitude of someone who is sincere and believes that prayer will produce results. A myriad of different groups practice meditation outside of Narcotics Anonymous. Nearly all these groups practice a particular religion or philosophy. An endorsement of any of these methods would be a violation of our Traditions. It would also clearly place a restriction on the individual's right to have a God of his/her understanding. Many of us stick to the definition that meditation is simply getting still, quiet and listening for our Higher Power's guidance. This definition allows us to develop spiritually in our own way. Meditation allows us to reconsider some of the things that didn't work for us in the past because they might work today. We can also envision possible futures in time to make changes for the better. We can catch errors of judgment brought on by the new choices life offers us and our inexperience at dealing with life in favorable situations. Some visions go way beyond what can be put into words. We study and learn 'heart math' to follow the vision before us. Before engaging the 12th Step process, defects tripped us up at every turn. Meditation replaces medication. Meditation helps us clean up our body chemistry so that the flow of endorphins, serotonin and other body chemicals play a healthy role and we don't go off into internal chemistry binges! A drug is a drug and that includes body drugs.

BEE KEEPERS SECRET

Meditation has always been a subject that has not produced much written experience within NA. While including some generalities about meditation in the Basic Text, much can be shared that is not commonly known. There is a major example of the 'power' of meditation in the case of people who can collect honey from a bee hive without being stung. It so happens that people who exhibit an unusual calm can do this. Others would be stung badly. One man in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee was able to collect honey in this manner only when not drinking. The insects pick up on the 'spiritual condition' of the person collecting the honey and do not sting those who are in a meditative trance, mood or state of mind. This is intriguing in a world that demands quantitative evidence.

Over the years, we may have heard it stated many times that meditation would allow us to 'see' the path to follow. We amazingly seemed left in the dark as to how to choose the paths to follow and how to go about this. Most assuredly, there is as wide of a range of meditative techniques as there are people. In NA, we do not promote just one method of meditation above the others nor urge all of our members to follow one particular method, just meditate! This doesn't mean that we cannot outline any variety of practices that we know. We have that freedom and responsibility. 'Meditations' open the inner self in order to obtain a higher spiritual nature. To create unity between the two is, broadly speaking, the purpose of meditation. In the following material you will find

concentration exercises that will help train your mind in order to start the meditation process...

Concentration exercises

1. Meditation using a quality or ideal. We take, for example, 'the strength of tenderness' as the focal point of quiet thought. We reflect upon its deeper meaning and after a while we might mentally picture those people that we know who embody 'tenderness'. We try to get an empathetic feeling for the way they look at life. Next, we may move on in our thoughts to the saints or sages in the history of humanity. We may think of the great people that we have known in our life and see the similarities of character. We ask, "How is this quality visible in their lives?" We may then imagine ourselves in the presence of a great spiritual teacher. We pause and feel the strength of their tenderness in us. We pause again, take a few deep breaths and retain these feelings when we exit our meditation and go to do other things. We should repeat this exercise regularly in order for it to enrich our link with the 'qualities or ideals' that we want in our lives.

2. Meditation by listening to a piece of music that you find uplifting because of its gentleness or power. Get comfortable; allow the music to enter through every pore in your body through its vibratory nature. Let it wash through you, cleansing and invigorating you. Remember, when your mind wanders off the music to a worry, duty, future event or memory you bring it gently back to the music.

3. Concentrate our meditation by choosing two or three verses from 'inspirational literature' that are powerful and beautiful to you. Reflect upon them meditatively and repeat them with the intention of using the principles involved in your daily life. Do this in spare moments throughout the day until they become part of you. Such verses evoke and encourage all that is best in you and gain power to motivate you through the years. Whenever you are facing a difficult situation or making an important decision, reflect upon how this verse relates to what you are about to do.

4. Concentrate further by observing your 'thought processes' as you sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Don't suppress your thoughts; simply take note of each one as it occurs. Some examples are, "Concern about an upcoming activity, recalling an experience, distractions in your immediate environment, a mental conversation with someone, or the awareness of physical discomfort." You should take notes of general categories of thought and let go of specific thoughts. You are like an empty cup. Your life fills the cup. You can change what is in the cup.

5. Concentrate by using 'Invocations', as an invitation to your Higher Power to enter your life. Each morning, noon and evening set aside two minutes to center yourself and to repeat an invocation such as one of the following. Try to have your will focused fully and feel the energy of the invocation's meaning stream into you, through you, and out of you. Invocations such as these, when used over time, can become powerful tools for our new way of life. We offer these two invocations in the hope that they may be of some assistance to members who wish to practice this method of concentration.

"May the blessing of _____ flow to _____."

May she/he be comforted, strengthened and guided."

_ or _

"May I be an instrument for your will to be done."

May your strength and guidance pour through me to _____."

Please share any experiences that you may have with meditation to those asking for help in this area. Sharing an experience, giving it away, is how things become real for you and extends our own progress. Usually, there is a calm certainty that accompanies the constant, supportive feedback that we associate with having knowledge of God's will. Frequent obstacles, unusual delays and supportive criticism should cause us to pause and consider whether what we're doing is spiritual or self-willed. This is not to imply that 'doing God's will' is always easy. Sometimes all we can do to go on and the dream or vision of what God wants us to do remains visible. We want a practical and tangible way to implement these visions just like with many of our attitudes regarding spirituality. If what we're attempting to do seems to be too troublesome, frustrating, or awkward, maybe we should look at alternatives and ask others for suggestions. If after we question what we are contemplating, and continue to feel uncertain inside, we may need to pray for additional strength to carry out God's will for us. As addicts, we have a problem with taking on too much, often more than we can handle.

We learn to work with surrender, faith and the ability to act without going against our true spiritual nature. We discover that when we don't go against our own nature, we don't go find ourselves in useless conflicts with others as often. Our sense of what is right and wrong shifts from the confusion of addiction to something more sensible. While the past may remain confusing for a while, our present becomes clearer to us. Many of us discover, perhaps for the first time in our lives, that 'moral' is a way to experience 'more.' Moral is not just a judgement against us. Spirituality gives us new ways through which we can experience reality. We can get more done in our lives as we discover that spiritual principles are tools for shaping our lives just as we can get more done at work with the proper tools and supplies. Along with meditation, we may find other words useful. Contemplation and reflection describe two internal processes that have the power to release or direct our spiritual energy. Contemplation is, in a simple form, when we just sit and stare while wide awake. Many of us use this technique to still our mind while keeping our eyes open. When we 'tune out' enough of the external chatter and shove our basic desires out of the way, we may discover thoughts and feelings we had forgotten. We know that these will only go away when we give them the time and attention they deserve.

We can test our ideas, thinking patterns and feelings by meditative reflection. This reflection involves no great mystery, trick or single technique by which we can do this.

Just by sitting quietly, we can eventually reach a level where we can discover our mistakes, gain enthusiasm or change our mind without the pain and embarrassment of 'failure.' Many of us became accustomed to feeling jerked along by life that we couldn't pause and settle down within ourselves before feeling forced to action. A principle of living clean is that by taking care of what we can do, we gain momentum to make other improvements. Reflection might be another word that some substitute for meditation but it may better describe the process of sending out thoughts or trying on feelings without the necessity to act on them. The basic difference between these terms seems to be indirect visions or reflections as compared to the direct insight of meditation. Directly dealing with things is most the most desirable method. We should do this wherever possible. Recovery allows us to step out of the bleak, desolate landscape of addiction into a changing landscape where unfamiliar abilities, responsibilities and demands continuously appear. Being able to explore these things privately without the risk of 'being wrong' brings us an advantage in reality. Reflection is a clear headed and simple way in which we can envision something and think it through before we commit ourselves to action.

One simple way to begin reflective contemplation is to focus our attention completely on any bright point of light that is convenient to where we're sitting. As our attention becomes riveted on this point of light, we find ourselves awake and feeling intensified in a manner that most of us call 'regaining our senses'. Many have asked, "Is self-reliance a safe practice for an addict?" Some may answer, "No." How does this relate to Tradition Seven, "being fully self-supporting"? What about simply trusting our feelings? Can we rely on our feelings to guide us? Why would we have them if we couldn't? Did God create these feelings just to confuse us? Of course not! The disease of addiction would have us believe that God is our primary source of confusion, maybe even our only one. God is the source of our clarity; He gives us the ability to see things as they really are. We can begin to sort out our feelings and our thoughts as we attempt be more God-centered. We learn how to trust these God-inspired thoughts and feelings. We know that when our feelings or thinking gets confused, it's the disease attacking us. When our thoughts and feelings are clear and we are at peace with them, it's God. Telling ourselves this is the way we learn to trust ourselves. We begin to see that God is working in our lives. We need to act out on these inspirations and affirmations by sharing our feelings and thoughts.

We have found our faith and courage by the grace of the God of our understanding. When we do God's will, our self-will pales in comparison. God shows His love, patience and tolerance by carrying us when we cannot carry ourselves. Each of us has received a different gift with which to carry the message and with God's guidance; we have many tools available to us. God may have given some of us the natural ability of carpentry. We are all given gifts. When we are humble enough to 'see' God's will and courageous enough to follow His guidance, we come to believe that all things are possible, even for us. We have found that hope without faith is vanity in its most destructive form. Praying daily and accepting life on life's terms brings profound changes in our spirit. Sometimes it seems that even the pain that we have experienced was God's will because of the lessons we have learned. While spiritual answers differ between individuals, we do share some common ground. Some of these common truths are that "God's will for us is to

practice love, honesty, surrender, faith, acceptance, and acknowledging His presence in our lives." "God's will for us is to use the talents that He gave us to help others." "God's will for us is to carry a message of hope, love, understanding, and life." We receive the inspiration and the strength that we need to carry out each task that the God of our understanding gives us. Our knowledge of God's will like all of our concepts change over time. As we become more capable, we must make a greater effort. Through prayer, asking God for direction, and meditation, listening for His response, we have learned to identify the difference between our will and God's will.

"Well, my NA brothers and sisters, here we are on Step Eleven. It is now time to put your recovery into high gear. So far we have been taking this inventory and that inventory; making this list and that list but now, in Step Eleven, we must make that greatest of all commitments to this our new NA way of life. We must take action to seek and improve our conscious contact with God. Here we are also told the vehicles we must use in order to achieve this lofty goal, prayer and meditation. This conscious contact when achieved will provide us two great boons, knowledge and power. Not just any kind of knowledge and power but those that can only be granted us by god. This is not a game. This is not just another intellectual exercise, it is an experiential reality. Once granted them, they must not be squandered, we must incorporate them into our daily existence to be used in the service of those who still suffer. Great pain and suffering will follow if we don't. I won't get into the specific practices only to say that those of us who have made this commitment to surrender the ego at this level will no doubt find the proper instruction that will help us make these practices bear fruit."

One member's experience with Meditation:

Meditation is the science of God consciousness, God realization. It is the most practical science that exists in the world today. Most people would want to meditate if they understood its value and experienced its beneficial effects. The ultimate object of meditation is to improve one's conscious awareness of God and to improve the connection of the meditators' spirit with the reality of the God of their own understanding.

Here are simple instructions for meditating:

Sit with a straight spine on a chair or cross-legged on a firm surface. With eyes closed, gently focus your gaze and concentrate your attention at the point between your eyebrows. This is the seat of concentration, and of the spiritual "third eye", or divine perception in the human being. With the attention fixed at this center of calmness and concentration, practice the meditation you have chosen. Meditate until you feel that the concept on which you are meditating has become a part of your own consciousness.

This process showers on the person meditating the infinite amount of Peace of Mind, Power and Wisdom that comes from God.

Meditation uses concentration in its highest form. Concentration consists of freeing the mind's attention from all distractions and focusing the power of the mind on any thought on which the individual might be interested in. Meditation is the special, highest form of concentration in which the attention of the mental stream has been liberated from all restlessness and is focused only on the God of our understanding. Therefore one can say that Meditation is concentration utilized to get to know God.

In response to our love for Him, God manifests himself in various forms. Like truth, all the divine qualities that are present in every human being, in the creative power and beauty present in nature, and in the spirit of every human being. Therefore meditation on any of these concepts can bring to the meditator a deep awareness and direct knowledge of the God of their understanding.

Prayer and meditation is sending and receiving communication with your personal higher power. We ask for knowledge of God's will and the ability to know that will. It is how we go beyond the 'little life.' Also, and more importantly, prayer might be a way to get in the mood to meditate, express gratitude or process what we learn after meditation. Meditation might be a state 'in the middle' between us and God. It might be like looking through a porthole into our interior to see the dominant themes and stare at our internal life. Then, we might be able to move our focal point into the midst of what we have otherwise been looking at so that we are inside and can reach out and make changes. It is possible that meditation is similar to a waking equivalent of the REM phenomenon that occurs while we are sleeping. It is a deep form of sleep wherein the eyes move rapidly behind our closed eyelids. REM sleep is the phase of rest that heals and nurtures our bodies. There is no wrong way to meditate. It is hard for some people to accept that just sitting quietly and comfortably for fifteen minutes can produce such amazing effects as decreased susceptibility to illness, longer life span, an absence of stress, and accidental injury. Wouldn't it be wonderful of an all-powerful and all-loving creator to give us a simple way to improve not just the quantity of our lives, but the quality as well. We will live longer and better if we include meditation, sitting quietly and not thinking about anything in particular, just letting our minds come to a point of rest before going on with our day.

One of the most astounding notions to surface in the last few years is going back to explore and re-experience our childhoods or earlier lives and to take the full power, love, courage, and understanding we presently have with us. By vividly experiencing memories of past pain, we may draw different conclusions and effect different outcomes, especially in the life we are yet to live in the future. This may take the sting out of past pain and eliminate the event as an injury from our futures. All this and with God's help, we can pray for extra strength and guidance to make our inward journey and if necessary go back in with friends to deal with problem areas we have trouble resolving by ourselves. This kind of intense reality alteration with the help of an all loving, all powerful creator can take personality change to a new level of importance in our recovery. In order for Step 11 to be fully effective, prayer and meditation must be practiced on a continuous basis.

Use your home group as a spiritual community. We share in NA an organized system of beliefs to learn about the application of spiritual principles. God will send us guides to help us throughout life, and this Step is where we focus on the kind of growth. Ministers, philosophers, writers, teachers have studied the subjects of this Step and share their knowledge with you through books, recordings and other media. Also, while this Step is about your understanding of God's will for you, getting closer to God also means getting closer to people. A spiritual community, like a church or other spiritual meeting place, is a good place to practice these new social skills that you may have only practiced in NA. Take advantage of what the world has to offer you to further your conscious contact with HP and HP's Will for you. Just remember they may know nothing of the disease of addiction and take pills, smoke pot or take prescribed meds. As a clean addict you can check these things out, being careful to protect your health and recovery all the while.

All NA members are encouraged to practice prayer and meditation according to their beliefs. We reach out spiritually and learn to focus ourselves in meditation in order to receive or listen. Do this daily on a regular basis and meditate for twenty minutes three or four times a week. Keep track of yourself in all of this. Keep in mind the amends you've made to yourself – caring for yourself physically. Eat well and sleep enough. Consider how the questions that follow involve all the aspects of your disease – physical and mental, as well as spiritual. Consider "Just for Today." While you'll be more tempted than ever to dream about possibilities, consciously apply the principles of focus and gratitude in this "new way of life."

PRINCIPLE ELEVEN - UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

"Unconditional love is given where we sense our spirit in another human being."

Unconditional love is a spiritual principle acquired by addicts who are willing to work the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous and apply them in their lives. In order to love another human being without conditions, we must first learn to love ourselves. We must first clear the wreckage of our past in step five by sharing the exact nature of our wrongs with another human being. We must get freedom from the defects that have been robbing us of our dreams in Steps Six and Seven. When our defects are removed, we have more room in our spirit for the assets that help us love ourselves and others. Instead of judging others, we accept them. Instead of taking credit for supposed selfless service, we quietly and humbly serve Narcotics Anonymous and expect nothing in return except continued freedom from active addiction. We demonstrate a greater sense of empathy for addicts who are still sick and suffering when we have let a higher power remove our own pain and suffering. Then, and only then, will we be able to receive the benefits of loving another human being despite their actions and behaviors. This is a spiritual process that requires spiritual work. The spiritual work is done with a loving sponsor who is there to guide us through the twelve steps.

Unconditional love, like empathy, goes beyond simply telling another addict we love them. We must actually demonstrate this love through action. We must take the time to talk to members after the group and share our experience, strength, and hope with the solution so they too can get the freedom we feel. We must answer the telephone even when we would much rather be watching our favorite TV show. We must give rides to

those members who don't have cars and actually listen to their problems with a loving heart. When an addict is sharing off topic and complaining about how horrible their life is, we need to remember that we too were newcomers. We too entered the doors of Narcotics Anonymous bent and broken from a life riddled with fear, anger, guilt, and lost dreams. In Narcotics Anonymous, we rely on our members who have obtained unconditional love through the twelve steps to demonstrate empathy towards these addicts. We must love them if we are to continue to experience the freedom we've obtained.

Our Unconditional love comes from our recognition of addictive pain and the spiritual desire we find in one another. Like many of our terms, unconditional love takes on a special meaning for addicts recovering in NA. This principle lets us explore the hearts of one another. We increase our capacity to live by what we find there; increasing our willingness to help still sick and suffering addicts. Not only do we demonstrate unconditional love for the newcomer, but also to old timers and 'in-betweeners' who are simply going through a spiritual storm in their life. Unconditional love means that we do not place expectations or limitations on our love. When we give unconditional love to an addict we are totally oblivious to age, race, sexual practices, religious backgrounds, clean time and looks. All we need to know is that you are an addict!

The spiritual growth we find leads to an elusive empathetic understanding that seems to come just when we need it. We realize that whatever form it takes, our disease continues to focus our attention on externals, misguided attempts to change others, and a lack of effort to take care of our own spiritual condition. We avoid responsibility and stop doing the things that make us feel good. Recovering our shattered selves with spirituality lets us grow anew from within as we start to share and care the NA Way. As our experience and knowledge of applied spirituality increases, we can more often see into the heart of things. We can more easily 'read between the lines' and utilize our intuition to help someone find what is bothering them. We do this by waiting until they ask for help. It is good to bide spend our time with addicts who are seeking help or else we are intruding and they won't forget our interference. Once they ask, we can help. In many cases, we back off, knowing we're powerless until they ask. In many other cases, we are able to act on faith and play the roles of helpers, caring listeners, truth tellers, principled persons, selfless givers and occasionally take stands that are spiritually meaningful.

To do these things, we turn a portion of our attention inward and begin to ask questions about what we believe and why we do things. Along the way, our understanding passes a point where we realize the love, generosity and help we have received - yet were unable to recognize or acknowledge. After this realization, our attitude towards the needs and suffering of others is more generous. When we realize how much we've been helped, we feel embarrassed not to pass on what others gave to us. The idea of pride, arrogance, or expectation of getting things in return for our work becomes ridiculous. where We can see ourselves as the holders of spiritual truths that came directly from the God of our understanding. We cannot personally control or lay claim God's grace.

Awareness of the loving nature of and the reality that surrounds us doesn't blind us to the ignorance, cruelty, and selfishness that still exist in the world. The roles we play can reflect our new viewpoints and general awareness. We become able to see differently.

Our insight enables us to make loving choices within our means and based on extending the kind of love and caring that helped us find the clean life.

The limitations of language obscure the sometimes painful fact that even 'unconditional love' is dependent on certain factors beyond our control. This love may be in our hearts yet unable to find expression. Receipt of this love usually depends on the openness of someone asking for help. One condition is that the person we would enjoy helping is open to our help. We are all too familiar as addicts with the pain of well-intended intrusion. Sometimes we feel like an exhibit at the zoo. To intrude on someone unasked is presumptuous and more likely to trigger retaliation than gratitude. Our love can only be given to those who are willing to receive it.

Another condition is that the time is right for sharing. We need to understand that a person doing things that are bound to have disastrous results are going to happen regardless of our actions. The person that is causing chaos in their lives might not know how serious their actions can be. They may think they're in no need of help. Any effort on our part beyond a gentle comment or two may seem insulting and egotistical. If we wait until they're in pain and desperation, they may pass beyond all help. All we can do is share our experience, strength and hope. By praying to be ready and available, we are sometimes there at the exact moment when a person is open to help and asks for it. There are no coincidences in Narcotics Anonymous.

Perhaps one more condition should be brought into this rare and inspiring form of love. It is that we do share from our own experience and not wander into the role of savior. Our spiritual condition is important: God works the miracles and gets the credit, not us. The trap here is that if we see ourselves as the doers, even if we really help someone, we will sustain an injury to our spirits. The love we give does not make us better than create in those we help. It would be a case of our pushing God away from the controlling role in our lives, canceling out our Third Step of recovery. We will find ourselves seeking greater challenges, isolated and eventually in serious need of help ourselves.

Also, setting ourselves up as saviors makes us ideal targets for our character defects to come roaring back into our lives. Our job is to help, not to find fault. For the disease in others to find fault with us. We cannot expect ourselves to be perfect, but we must consider God's will when helping addicts. Our failure to be perfect can be used by the addictive trait to discredit our recovery! Our only perfection consists of honest and complete surrender. Then, if we are attacked, we can laugh at the strange turn of events and the foolishness that makes it hard to actualize the best of intentions.

The gathering of spiritual knowledge leads eventually to a great and lasting simplicity. We spend less time figuring out when we are powerless. Lack of confusion and wasted effort help our love reflect that simplicity. We may do the right thing just because it seems like the right thing to do!

Love expands our life as hatred restricts it. Through love, we can go more places, meet more people agreeably with an honest smile, and do more things with them that demonstrate unconditional love. Increasingly, hatred cuts us off from others, leads us to avoid certain places, and limits our ability to succeed. If we want to gain the principle of unconditional love and truly feel the heart of another addict in ours, we must do the spiritual work. The spiritual work is the working of the twelve steps with a Narcotics

Anonymous sponsor. The solution to all of our problems in Narcotics Anonymous are the twelve steps so it makes sense that they are also the key to eventually grasping the spiritual principle of unconditional love.