

Understanding the 12 Traditions **of Narcotics Anonymous**

A Journey into Understanding the Traditions *Through a Series of Questions, Answers, and Viewpoints*

Sometimes a question has an answer that we can all agree upon. Sometimes the response to a question will vary depending on the point from which it is viewed. Some questions do not have an answer and can only be a fuel for meditation in search of a higher understanding and new spiritual awakenings.

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1. Introduction

Understanding and applying the principals of the 12 Traditions

We need to be grateful that we can apply many spiritual principals long before we really understand them. Many of us have come to believe in a power greater than ourselves or surrendered some of our shortcomings (like using drugs) long before we went over the Steps with our sponsor. In the same manner, many NA Meetings, Groups, and NA Services have been facilitated by Addicts that were newcomers and had very little knowledge of the 12 Traditions. They relied on the simplest understanding of the Traditions, the collective conscience of the other Addicts, and faith that a Loving God would do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Personal growth in recovery and experience in applying the principals of the Traditions is always a positive objective. While many of our early members have shared that NA Meetings served the primary purpose and provided the perfect atmosphere for Addicts to recover with the 12 Steps long before we had all of the literature and experience that is available today, our mission in personal recovery and as a Fellowship should always be to grow and understand the spiritual principals that guide our recovery. Our complete understanding will only come with an eternity medallion. Until we arrive at that place and time, we should always enjoy the journey of new understandings and new spiritual awakenings.

The simplest method of understanding the principals within the 12 Traditions may be to separate their application into the different environments in which we use them and review each of them individually and collectively according to how the Tradition creates the environment suited for that situation. The simplest classifications for separating the environments may be:

How and Why the Traditions apply in an NA Group

How and Why the Traditions apply in an NA Meeting

How and Why the Traditions apply in the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship

How and Why the Traditions apply in NA Services outside the Group

How and Why the Traditions apply in our Personal Recovery

How and Why the Traditions apply in _____?

Questions

(Literature Development Note: A goal of this project is to provide the definitions for the terms, principals, and applications that are within our traditions and give examples of actual application. The Questions should relate to how we are applying the principals and concepts within the tradition in comparison to the descriptions provided.)

Definitions – The Statement of a Collective Understanding

A goal of this project is to provide a collectively accepted definition for the terms, principals, and applications that are within our traditions.

The definitions of many words or phrases have a different meaning that is determined by the group or organization that uses them. The medical, legal, and science professions have their own dictionaries that have specific definitions for otherwise commonly used words. In Narcotics Anonymous, many of us were exposed for the first time to the definition of God as a ‘God as we understood Him’. Our definitions of Addiction and Addict are not from the medical or legal profession. The definition of Addiction is based on our Fellowship’s collective understanding a disease that is physical, mental, and spiritual. In the same respect, our definitions of ‘Common Welfare’, ‘Group Conscience’, or ‘Primary Purpose’ are exclusive to

our Fellowship and require a definition that is a statement of our collective understanding. Our personal application of the principals may be as unique as each individual Addict, but the definition of the common principals that we use to describe the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions should be based on a common agreement.

Understanding the difference between the 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions

Definitions: *(Literature Development Note: A goal of this project is to provide the definitions for the terms, principals, and applications that are within our traditions and give examples of actual application.)*

- **Internal process:** personal spiritual growth and change
- **External environment:** the surroundings of, and influences on, a particular item
- *Power Greater Than Ourselves:*
- *Spiritual process:*
-

The simple and obvious difference between the Steps and Traditions is that the Steps describe a process of internal personal recovery for the individual Addict and the Traditions describe a set of principals or conditions that define a Group. However, there are some significant differences.

The 12 Steps outline an **internal process** of personal spiritual growth and change. Addicts begin the process of recovery in NA with little or no understanding of the 12 Steps and continue to learn, grow, and apply the principals in a life-long, never ending process.

The process is primarily linear (in a straight line progression), in that we first have to admit our powerlessness over our addiction in Step 1 and then come to believe in a Power Greater Than Ourselves in Step 2. We start applying all of the 12 Steps in our lives as soon as we enter recovery, even if our process is very limited in the beginning. We never complete or fully master any of the steps or perfectly apply any of the principals within them. We grow and learn to apply the principals within the steps in a continual cycle of growth in our recovery.

The 12 Traditions describe the **external environment** (the surroundings of, and influences on, a particular item) that is required for a Narcotics Anonymous Meeting, Group, and Service Structure to exist. The Traditions do not describe a process of recovery. The process of recovery is outlined in the 12 Steps. The 12 Traditions describe the primary purpose, collective need, requirements for membership and service, priorities, and restrictions necessary for the process of the 12 Steps to occur in an NA Meeting, within the NA Group, or any services performed by Service Boards and Committees that are formed by the Groups. While the 12 Traditions are commonly regarded as the rules and regulations of NA, they are actually a set of Spiritual Principals that create the perfect environment for the spiritual process of the 12 Steps to be shared between Addicts, Groups, and the Fellowship as a whole. This same set of Spiritual Principals can also be adapted and used to create a healthy environment within our families, workplace, and in the community.

Questions:

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2. Understanding How And Why

What is Narcotics Anonymous

Our Basic Text states that NA is a non-profit Fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs have become a major problem. In Narcotics Anonymous we refer to the NA Fellowship, the NA Program, the NA Group, Meetings, and NA Service Boards and Committees as all a part of NA either collectively or individually. It may be easier to understand what Narcotics Anonymous is if we first try to understand each of these components.

Definitions: *(Literature Development Note: A goal of this project is to provide the definitions for the terms, principals, and applications that are within our traditions and give examples of actual application.)*

- **Entity:** An **Entity** is something that has a distinct, separate existence. All physical or material things are entities. Each Addict is an entity. An entity can also be an organization or Fellowship. The Fellowship of NA is an entity. A Group is an entity. The committees and boards of an ASC, RSC, and the WSC are entities.
- **Event:** An **Event** only exists while it is occurring. The NA Group is an entity that exists within the fellowship of its members. However, the NA Meeting is an event that only exists from the opening prayer until the closing prayer for each meeting. The World Service Conference meeting is an event, not an entity. It only exists from the opening until the closing of the meeting.
- **Process:** A process is a naturally occurring or designed sequence of changes of properties or attributes of an object or system. (lat. processus - movement)
- **Spiritual Entity:** Something that has a distinct, separate existence that only exists as a Spiritual Bond
- **NA Fellowship:** The entity of Narcotics Anonymous is each of us as individual Addicts that join together as a community or collective Spiritual Entity. The Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship is a Spiritual Entity (something that has a distinct, separate existence) that exists as the collective Spiritual Bond between the Addict Members that participate in it.
- **NA Program:** The total process of recovery that includes going to meetings, working and living the 12 Steps, sponsorship, and service.
- **NA Group:** The NA Group is the Primary Physical Entity in Narcotics Anonymous. As Addicts we are all members and a part of the Group. All of our Service Boards and Committees are extensions of the Group as defined in our 9th Tradition (and several others). Narcotics Anonymous does not exist without the NA Group.
- **NA Meeting:** 2 or more Addicts sharing the process of the NA Program within the boundaries of the 12 Traditions.
- **NA Message:** *That no Addict seeking recovery need die from the horrors of addiction. Our message is hope and the promise of freedom.*

What is the NA Fellowship

The word “fellowship” is used 140 times in the Basic Text (Chapters 1 to 10). Examples of the use are: Fellowship approved literature, our Fellowship, the Fellowship, the Fellowship grew, the individual and the Fellowship, a worldwide Fellowship, collective group conscience of the Fellowship, shared experience of the Fellowship, a non profit Fellowship, secure in the love of the Fellowship, serve the Fellowship, the needs of the Fellowship, the love and security of the Fellowship.

Our Basic Text states that NA is a non-profit Fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs have become a major problem. A fellowship can be defined as a community of interest, activity, feeling, or experience.

With this definition we can determine that Narcotics Anonymous includes the members in a collective partnership. The body of Narcotics Anonymous is each of us as individual Addicts that join together as a community. The Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship is a Spiritual Entity (something that has a distinct, separate existence) that exists as the collective Spiritual Bond between the Addict Members that participate in it. If we separate ourselves from the Fellowship, we separate ourselves from NA.

None of us can recover by ourselves. Narcotics Anonymous more than just the Group, the literature or the service structure. The 12 Steps may be the process of personal recovery, and the 12 Traditions may define the existence of a Group, but many Addicts have relapsed because they tried to live and work the NA Program without becoming a part of collective group conscience and experiencing the collective love and security of our Fellowship.

Questions:

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What is the NA Program

The word “program” is used 298 times in the Basic text (Chapters 1 to 10). Examples of the use are: ‘a Program of complete abstinence, the Program works miracles, our Program is a way of life, Living the Program, a universal and total Program, call it the Group, the Program, or we can call it God, we live our Program, we are examples of the Program working, to adapt our life to the program, is a God-given Program, surrender ourselves to the NA Program, we work the Program, live the Program, our 12 Step Program, the HOW of our Program, a Program of recovery’

The many references to our ‘Program’ seem to encompass the total process of recovery. A process is defined as a sequence of changes. This would include working and living the 12 Steps, making meetings, sponsorship and service, and being a part of the Fellowship.

The chapter in the Basic Text that is titled ‘What is the NA Program’, refers to the ‘Program’ in some uses as the NA Group and the NA Meeting , but most of the descriptions of the ‘Program’ refer to the actual process of recovery.

Questions:

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What is the NA Group

Most of the Traditions refer to the NA Group. The NA Group is the Primary Physical Entity in Narcotics Anonymous. As Addicts we are all members and a part of the Group. All of our Service Boards and Committees are extensions of the Group as defined in our 9th Tradition (and several others). Narcotics Anonymous does not exist without the NA Group.

“The primary purpose of an NA group is to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. The group provides each member with the opportunity to share and to hear the experience of other addicts who are learning to live a better way of life without the use of drugs. The group is the primary vehicle by which our message is carried. It provides a setting in which a newcomer can identify with recovering addicts and find an atmosphere of recovery.”

FROM THE GUIDE TO LOCAL SERVICE IN NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

“NA groups – not NA meetings – are the foundation of the NA service structure. Together, the NA groups are responsible for making service decisions that directly affect them and what they do in their meetings as well as those that fundamentally affect the identity of Narcotics Anonymous. For instance, new NA literature is approved by regional delegates at the World Service Conference only after they have received direction from the groups they represent. Likewise, “proposals to change NA’s Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, name, nature, or purpose should be approved directly by the groups” before they can become effective, in accordance with our Second Concept.”

FROM THE GUIDE TO LOCAL SERVICE IN NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

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What is the NA Meetings

An NA Meeting is when 2 or more Addicts are sharing the process of the NA Program within the boundaries of the 12 Traditions.

“NA meetings are events at which addicts share with one another their experience in recovery and in the application of the Twelve Steps. While many – if not most – NA meetings are in fact hosted by an NA group, other NA meetings occur at the time: informally among friends, at large area or regional speaker meetings, at conventions, in schools, institutions, and so forth. The NA group is an entity; the NA meeting is an event; and NA meetings may be held without the sponsorship of an NA group.”

FROM THE GUIDE TO LOCAL SERVICE IN NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

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What are NA Service Boards and Committees

The Ninth Tradition suggests that groups organize separate boards and committees to serve their needs. We are not organized but may organize boards and committees to serve us. The development of these services is based squarely on the groups' needs. We create these boards and committees to serve us in fulfilling those needs.

The groups provide regular information about their condition and their activities. This information helps our boards and committees better understand and serve the needs of the groups.

Responsible service boards and committees consult the groups in matters directly affecting them and seek direction from the groups in matters not already covered by existing policy. By maintaining regular two-way communication between NA groups and the boards and committees serving them, we create an atmosphere of responsibility that serve our fellowship and its primary purpose well

NA Service Boards and Committees are formed by the Groups or their representatives and all Service Boards and Committees are directly responsible to the Groups. Therefore it can be determined that the Service Boards and Committees in Narcotics Anonymous are a direct extension of the Group Entity.

Questions:

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What is Narcotics Anonymous ?

To accurately understand how and why the 12 Traditions apply in Narcotics Anonymous, we need to accurately define what Narcotics Anonymous is. If we look at all of the components of Narcotics Anonymous, we find that each component is either an Entity, a Process, or an Event. These components all combine to become Narcotics Anonymous. An accurate description of Narcotics Anonymous could then be: ‘Narcotics Anonymous is an NA Entity creating an NA Event to cause an NA Process to occur.’

Table 1 ‘Narcotics Anonymous is an NA Entity creating an NA Event to cause an NA Process to occur.’

			<i>(Note. These examples are not a complete description of each process)</i>
	<u>NA Entity</u>	<u>NA Event</u>	<u>NA Process - The Program</u>
	The Group	NA Meeting	Carrying the Message- Traditions
	The Addict	NA Meeting	Sharing the 12 Steps -Recovery
	The Coffee maker	NA Meeting	Sharing the 12 Steps -12 th Step
	The Group	Group Business Meeting	Group Conscience - Traditions
	The Addict	Group Business Meeting	Service -12 th Step
	Sponsee	Sharing a 5 th Step	Sharing the 12 Steps -5 th Step
	Sponsor	Sharing a 5 th Step	Sharing the 12 Steps -12 th Step
	Area H&I Committee	Jail H&I Presentation	Committee Service – 9 th Tradition
	The Addict	Jail H&I Presentation	Service -12 th Step
	Area Meeting List Committee	Distribute Meeting Lists	Service -12 th Step
	World Board	Literature Translations	Committee Service – 9 th Tradition
	World Board	NA Way prints a list of new Translations	Committee Service – 9 th Tradition
	The Addict	World Board Meeting	Service -12 th Step
	NA Fellowship	NA Way prints a list of new Translations	Unity

Questions:

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How and Why the Traditions apply in our Personal Recovery

- Definitions
- Questions

Searching For Solutions

(Literature Development Note: A goal of this section is to give examples of actual applications of this Section. This could include common conflicts related to the Traditions or applications and successful solutions)

Definitions: *(Literature Development Note: A goal of this project is to provide the definitions for the terms, principals, and applications that are within our traditions and give examples of actual application.)*

Questions

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How and Why the Traditions apply in our Personal Recovery

- Questions