

four Significant truths

Returning to the Path of the Warrior

by Jed Diamond, L.C.S.W., C.A.S.

In looking back at my own recovery and the recovery of the people I've worked with for over a quarter of a century, there are four truths that stand out for me.

Everyone Is Addicted to Something (or Someone)

Traditionally, it's been assumed that addiction was a problem for a small minority of the population. Heroin addicts and alcoholics, we felt sure, were irredeemable members of society, and most likely found among ethnic minorities. Cocaine addicts and workaholics, we knew, were all rich and famous, or striving to become rich and famous. Addicts were always seen as someone other than us.

Increasingly we have come to recognize that addiction is not a disease of the few, but is symptomatic of our modern world: it affects us all. There are now more than 250 different 12-step recovery programs dealing with addictions, from alcohol to work, sex to violence. For many in the recovery community, it is no longer a question of "Are you addicted?" but rather, "What are your addictions?" We can no longer point the finger at "them," but must look at ourselves. To paraphrase the wisdom of that well-known social philosopher Pogo, "We have met the addict, and he is us."

We Need to Begin Sooner and Work Longer

The first step of all 12-step programs is to acknowledge that we are powerless over our addiction — that our lives have become unmanageable. I believe that, for most, recovery begins much too late. We don't have to wait until a person is in crisis and ready to admit that he's powerless before treating him. We can help people look at the process much earlier, before addictions are entrenched and denial is strong.

Much of our current treatment is organized around what insurance will pay for rather than on what people need. Thus we have treatment limited to 28-day residential programs with a one-year follow-up. Many veterans of the addictions field recognize that recovery is a long-term process. In my approach, I talk about stages of recovery that occur over a period of seven years and longer.

There Are Positive Sides of Addiction

At first, most clients think it is ludicrous when I ask them to tell me all the positive things their addiction does for them. They see their addiction as a cancer — something that is not part of them and needs to be removed quickly and completely. Yet after we talk more, and they begin to see how

tightly they have held onto their habit, treating it like a cherished lover or friend, they begin to see that their addiction means more to them than they originally thought.

Clients almost always express a tremendous sigh of relief when I tell them they don't have to hate their addiction in order to move beyond it. In fact, hating it robs us of the ability to see it clearly and learn what need the addiction served in our lives. Rather than ripping it out, we can respectfully remove it, replacing it with something that will serve us better.

Recovery is, for many, a spiritual journey to wholeness. In a society that has lost its rituals of initiation, recovery is one of the few passages available that men can use to cut away the dead wood of their civilized prison and return to the wild path of the warrior. Just as addiction is the disease of lost selfhood, recovery gives us the opportunity to journey home.

Individual, Relationship and Planetary Recovery Are Interdependent

The recovery movement has evolved through three periods. Between 1935 (the year that Alcoholics Anonymous was founded) and 1985, the focus was primarily on individual recovery. ("How can I heal myself?") The second stage began around 1985 as we focused on family issues and codependency. ("How can I heal my one-to-one relationships?") In the 1990s, we've reached the third stage as we begin to focus on our addictive society. ("How can we heal our fragile planet?")

Individual recovery will never be complete until we heal our interpersonal relationships. Individual and relationship recovery is useless if we continue to destroy our planetary life-support system. All three are necessary for total recovery.

Just as Martin Luther King Jr. realized that freedom for African-Americans required that he focus beyond the plight of the individual men to the political and economic forces that were sending them off to the war in Vietnam, so too recovery requires that we confront the social forces that feed the machine of addiction. ▼

The previous is an excerpt from the "Warrior's Journey Home, Healing Men, Healing the Planet," reprinted with permission of New Harbinger Publications, Oakland, CA 94605. 800/748-6273; www.newharbinger.com

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