

NA History - India

Looking back over the years, to when Narcotics Anonymous first started in Bombay, India, we the members present at that time, are acutely aware that no single individual could ever have been responsible for what NA is today, a living miracle! And so, not so much in a spirit of humility, but rather, as a matter of simple truth, we have decided that our names being of no importance or consequence need not be mentioned in what we proceed to write - the history of NA (Bombay).

For starters, NA is not history. It never was. It's real and alive. The first NA meeting was held on the 8th day of September, 1983, in the premises of St. Michael School, Mahim, Bombay. There exists some confusion as to the exact date of this first ever NA meeting in Bombay. However, the collective memory of the group present at that time came to agree that the 8th of September would be the record date on which NA was born.

The Parish authorities of St. Michael's allowed us a classroom, equipped with broken tiles and chairs that were no steadier than ourselves. The room was alongside a graveyard - a grim alternative to what the NA program promised us. Recovery! We can't help but mention here that we fell in love with this room. It had a peace of it's own and a warmth that is almost impossible to describe. Our hearts belonged there. It was home! Today, this 'home' is no more, as a new structure has been put up on this site. But it will always have a place in our hearts, and in the hearts of many an addict who attended meetings held there. For it was in this room that hope was born, our lives began to change and, yes, miracles - one more fascinating than the other came to happen. We were coming to believe.

Today, we thank our Higher Power, for the miracles He has worked in our lives. In the beginning, though, the word 'God' in itself frightened and even embarrassed us. We were very few in number and were afraid of rejection from our fellow addict friends. After all, 'tough' guys never spoke about God and tough we were not. This, beneath our masks, we knew very definitely but were very afraid to admit. To admit we were not only weak but entirely powerless was frightening. Like death itself. Because, if we were powerless, what then...? Most of us had been using for over ten years and more. Were we to carry on using till death, or, worse still, insanity took over? That seemed just about the only answer.

And then, in late 1984, the wisdom of the NA program dawned. Slowly, we found that in honestly admitting that we were in fact powerless, we experienced strength - strength from each other. We began holding on to each other (for dear life) and for the first time, we as individuals, began to feel that true sense of belonging and togetherness. The miracle of NA, the process of recovery had begun without us even knowing it. We were still afraid. May be the program wouldn't work for us..? God at times seemed so far away. To pray still felt extremely uncomfortable and the ability to become simple - the secret of success of the NA program - almost impossible. As one member put it, "at a meeting we felt most uncomfortable while saying the prayer!". The prayer was almost usually accompanied by a nervous shuffling of feet and twisting of uneasy fingers. Those days! How could we ever forget them. And yet they were an important part in our recovery as we see it today.

The meeting continued, a member would clean up, only to relapse again, and show up a month later. Would NA work? Yes it will! No, it wont! The see-saw struggle continued within us, but we held on real tight, and persisted. We were then holding meetings twice a week, and we needed more. We then had meetings thrice a week. Would it be sufficient? We were struggling, sometimes drowning and sometimes getting that grateful breath of fresh hope.

Today, looking back at those days, we know that we were being looked after by a Power greater than ourselves right from day one. A steady transformation was taking place. We

were getting more comfortable and could share more openly and with less fear. And then the real thing happened. We were getting clean and yes - we couldn't believe it - staying clean too, and serene! Gone were those cruel obsessions that took us back and back again to drugs. The magic of NA was real after all. We now felt charged with a new energy.

The message that NA works began to spread rapidly and enthusiastically, and on our first group anniversary we had - believe it, it's true - a full house. We named our group at Mahim, appropriately - The Foundation Group. We seemed well on our way.

In 1986, disaster struck. Many of us that were clean decided, as only addicts could, that alcohol - THE WORLD'S OLDEST DRUG - was not a drug after all! Suddenly, NA was in the midst of its worst ever crisis. Addicts now came into NA, only to get off drugs and start drinking. Dishonesty and denial came back in their most cunning and deadly form. We shared at meetings that we were clean, even though we were not. Most of us were in deep trouble. The pain of addiction, now worse than before had returned. For about three years NA reeled under the 'Alcohol' controversy. NA had also in the meanwhile grown. There were regular meetings at Bandra, Byculla, Bhatia Hospital and Santacruz. The proverbial dust could no longer be swept under the carpet. What we had now was a monster of our own making in our midst. People outside of NA, i.e. non-members, now knew that the 'good' guys from NA were drunks after all. We began to hurt all over again. New comers came, heard, some stayed and some never came back. We were quite literally on the run and somewhat past the end of the road. There seemed no way out.

Till our Higher Power came to our rescue again. He gave us the wisdom and, more important, the courage to take the vital step that would save us - NA as a whole. A collective decision based on the principle of group conscience that alcohol was after all a drug, was taken. A lot was at stake. We had to get honest all over again, most of us were going to lose our 'clean time' - something we were very attached to and possessive about, and start all over again. To continue to be dishonest seemed to be the easy way out. But the pain we had experienced through addiction had by now taught us in no uncertain terms that there could never be an alternative to honesty. We are proud to say that at a special meeting where members from all the groups were called upon - the collective group conscience of NA voted for and without hesitation that with immediate effect 'clean' dates (of all members) would be valid only from the day the addict had stayed away from all mood changing and mind altering substances. And alcohol was certainly one of them.

Our weakness now became our strength. A great many of us were able to admit our powerlessness and were thus released once again from the pain of addiction. A lot many of us shared about the pain we had suffered while drinking and in the process we were now more clear than ever before that we were not dealing with a moral problem but a deadly disease. It was like NA starting all over again. Stronger and definitely more honest and responsible. We are not one bit ashamed about what is now referred to as 'the Alcohol Story - Bombay edition'. In fact, as mentioned earlier, we emerged stronger with a wisdom based on our own experience that honesty is not negotiable.

Today NA continues to grow, in number and quality. Our experience is our main source of strength. We have faced a lot of ups and a lot of downs, but the basics will always remain the same - honesty at an individual and group level, persistence, responsibility and, above all faith. Faith that the NA program works.

NA (Bombay), today has seventeen meetings a week at eleven groups spread over the city. There is an NA meeting every day wherein any addict seeking recovery can walk in and get help. Every group has responsible secretaries and treasurers. In June 1987, the Area Service Committee (ASC) was formed to co-ordinate the efforts of all the NA groups. In an effort to reach out and spread the message of recovery a Public Information sub-committee was formed, followed by H&I sub-committee, Translation sub-committee, Convention sub-committee and Literature sub-committee.

How did this all come to be? The transformation of one time hopeless addicts, to members carrying out responsible duties with meticulous detail? We are forced to blink in disbelief whenever faced with this question. And not because we don't know the answer. In fact, we are more sure of the answer - each of us- than anything we could ever be sure of. We know from deep within us and without doubt that the miracle of NA was only possible because of a power greater than ourselves - God of our understanding.

We are tremendously grateful to many people, i.e. non-addicts, without whose help our growth may not have been possible. To the authorities where the meetings are held. To the many doctors and psychiatrists, who believed in us and whose encouragement we have found invaluable. Last but not the least to the members of AA, who gave us a lot of strength when we first began, their guidance and wisdom were of great value. At times, they quite literally held our hands and treated us with a love we had never experienced before. We have learned a lot from them, to those members of AA, we will always owe our gratitude.

- Anonymous, NA Samachar Newsletter, Bombay

Nov-Dec 1994