

TRADITIONS 1 -3

Three of A.A.'s 36 principals



PRINCIPLES OF AA

AA. gives us thirty-six Principles which, when practiced in all our affairs as a way of life, will enrich our lives far beyond our fondest dreams. These thirty-six Principles are grouped into three sets of twelve each. The Twelve Steps of Recovery awaken us to a Higher Power, a higher self with the ability to both give and receive love. The Twelve Concepts of Service are guidelines and tools for our passing on this love through Service. The Twelve Traditions teach us how to relate lovingly to others, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

TRADITION 1

**OUR COMMON WELFARE
SHOULD COME FIRST;
PERSONAL RECOVERY
DEPENDS UPON AA
UNITY.**

The willingness to forgive is the key to all healing of relationships! "So at the outset, how to live and work together as groups became the prime question." We were created in such a way that we must share our individual lives. We may choose to share selfishly, in the illusion of separateness or choose to be closer to our true nature. God is love and so are we. Our fulfillment in this life depends on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

This Tradition goes to the root of the human problem - selfishness/self-centeredness. Unity/love is the solution of the human problem. In a long-term relationship we may find it useful to view this relationship as a third party - that is we may have to do something for the common welfare of our relationship when we are unwilling to do the same for the individuals in this relationship(s). This act will insure continuance when all else fails. There can be little or no recovery without unity.

The First Tradition

Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.



Our teacher the *unity drink* affords the simplest illustration of this Tradition. If he insists on disrupting the meeting, we "invite" him to leave, and we bring him back when he's in better shape to hear the message. We are putting the "common welfare" first. But it is in his welfare, too, if he's ever going to get sober, the group must go on functioning, ready for him.

Yet he is only one raw aspect of the problem. When we do get sober in A.A., we shed a few small bits of the Big Ego. We admit, "I can't handle alcohol, and I can't stay away from it on my own." Fine so far! Then we find there is plenty of that Ego still with us. It may lead us to take other members' inventories and to gossip about their supposed shortcomings. It may lure us into hogging the floor at every discussion meeting.

Oh well, it's a selfish program, isn't it? After all the miseries of active alcoholism, why shouldn't we indulge ourselves a little? We all know one good reason why we shouldn't: Self-indulgence of this kind is an immediate personal danger; it threatens the individual's own sobriety. More than that, it threatens the very basis of our sobriety—the unity of the A.A. group. For a self-righteous group can damage the mutual trust that is vital to every group. And a compulsive talker can ruin the effectiveness of a discussion meeting—I've stopped going to that group. Nobody but Joe can get a word in edgewise.

When A.A. was very young, the first members clearly saw the preservation of its unity as a life-or-death matter for themselves and for the alcoholics still unrecovered. The First Tradition states this aim, and it is the common aim of all Twelve Traditions. When A.A. reached the age of 25, the aim was restated in the theme of the 1975 International Convention:

This we owe to A.A.'s future:

*To place our common welfare first,
To keep our Fellowship united,
For our A.A. unity depend our lives,
And the lives of those to come.*

Each of the other eleven Traditions explains one specific way to protect the unity of the Fellowship and the A.A. group. These early members quickly recognized power-drivers as potential group wreckers. And they're still around—the members who are always sure that they're always right—the members who are happily ready to assume all the burdens of leadership and grudgingly willing to share them, let alone give them up. But a group does need officers. How can we cope with this dilemma? Tradition Two provides the answer. . . .



Our individual sobriety depends on the group. The group depends on us. We soon learn that unless we curb our individual desires and ambitions, we can damage the group. . . .

SACRIFICE FOR TRADITION ONE

**“Am I willing to sacrifice
my personal interests
for the unity of A.A.”**

-Chet P.

QUESTIONS FOR TRADITION ONE

- 1. List examples where your selfishness or self-centeredness got in the way of unity, love, or "our common welfare."**
- 2. List examples where your selflessness brought about unity, love, healing, or harmony.**
- 3. Are you a peacemaker without being an enabler? List examples in each area.**
- 4. Is there a type of personality you find yourself unable to open up around? That you tend to withdraw from or remain silent or you become aggressive toward?**
- 5. What are your strong points and what are your weak points in your communications?**

AFFIRMATION FOR TRADITION ONE

Let me remember that my fulfillment, love, joy and forgiveness come through my sharing and joining with others in our common welfare.

TRADITION 2

**FOR OUR GROUP PURPOSE
THERE IS BUT ONE ULTIMATE
AUTHORITY - A LOVING GOD
AS HE MAY EXPRESS HIMSELF
IN OUR GROUP CONSCIENCE.
OUR LEADERS ARE BUT
TRUSTED SERVANTS; THEY
DO NOT GOVERN.**

The meaning of the phrase "group conscience" is very important to our understanding of these Traditions. One definition of a group is a number of persons gathered or classified. A definition for conscience: a sense of right and wrong. "We are people who normally would not mix...the tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a common solution." This solution, this Program, this Higher Power is how we understand Him. (Alcoholics Anonymous page 17)

Each one of us is drawn to a group (relationship). If we stay in that group (relationship), we must have in common a general agreement of what we think is right and wrong (conscience). How our Higher Power may express Himself to one group may be a good deal different from other groups. In other words, we are no more nor less than part of a Greater Whole; however, we are not the whole, nor were we intended to be.

"As we go through the day we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action. We constantly remind ourselves we are no longer running the show, humbly saying to ourselves many times each day, Thy will be done."

The Second Tradition

*For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority...
a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.
Our leaders are but trusted servants... they do not govern.*

"Now that I've been elected Secretary, I'll show this group some [real] leadership!"



"There's only one way to do it, and I'll tell you what it is..."



"...furthermore, we'll take our money and establish a fund... I'll manage it..."



DOWN, BOY.

"Thank you. Now shall we talk about working the program?"



Members of A.A. may be chosen to serve in many ways...



Group Secretary

Intergroup Representative



General Service Representative



A.A. is both a democracy and, in H.W.'s words, "a high society." A group elects its own officers—who have no power to order anybody to do anything. In most groups, most of the time rotates out of office at the end of six months, and new officers are elected.

If a group wants to be a part of the whole A.A. service structure, it elects a G.S.R. (general service representative, with a two-year term), G.S.R.s elect area committee members and then join them in electing a delegate from their area to the annual General Service Conference. The Conference is about the closest approximation of a government that A.A. has. It produces opinions on important matters of policy; it approves the choice of some trustee members for the General Service Board and directly elects others. But not



Conference Delegate

But they must always remember that they serve for the good of all, without authority over any.



For the Conference nor the board can give orders to any group or member.

Then who's in charge around here? A.A. is a spiritual movement, and so the "ultimate authority" is the spiritual concept of the "group conscience." Its voice is heard when a well-informed group gathers to arrive at a decision. The result rests on more than willpower, a "yes" and "no" count. Minority ideas get thoughtful attention. What about that annoying character who's always sure she's right. If she's wrong, then she will—if she remembers the First Tradition as well as the Second—go along with the decision of the group conscience. Does this notion seem too cloudy? Let's think back to our first meetings. The practices we sometimes felt in those rooms was the same as the group conscience. And it was real—following we it, setting up no barriers of rules...

SACRIFICE FOR TRADITION TWO

**“Am I willing to sacrifice
sacrifice my personal
opinion; "being boss" for
the group conscience ?”**

-Chet P.

QUESTIONS FOR TRADITION TWO

1. What attracted you to this relationship?
2. Who or what is the ultimate authority in this relationship?
3. What is a successful or useful relationship of this type?
4. In what ways do you see/feel your relationship failing?
5. In what areas are you still a selfish user of people, places or things?
6. Do you feel/think you or others must control or govern, otherwise nothing gets done?

AFFIRMATION FOR TRADITION TWO

Let me remember that God, as we understand Him, is our only True Source, that we are His children, His agents, His individual expressions, and that we have come together for His purpose. Even now He is guiding and directing us.

TRADITION 3

**THE ONLY
REQUIREMENT FOR
AA MEMBERSHIP IS A
DESIRE TO STOP
DRINKING.**

The principle found in this Tradition is one of the basic laws of all successful relationships with God, with people, places, or things. It is so very simple we often miss it. We must first want the relationship. When we want a relationship enough, we will find every way we can to make it work. When we no longer want the relationship enough, we will find every reason for it not to work. Your motive only matters at the time you have that "want".

As any relationship with God, with people, places, or things progresses our motive may change from day to day, hour to hour, maybe moment to moment. Our Higher Power or Higher Self only needs our willingness to want to open the door. An honest motive is not likely at first; it is useful not to judge the motive. It is enough to want to do whatever it takes. There will always be a great many who need something far more than we do; however they must want to change before the healing can begin.

The Third Tradition

The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

We've thrown away all membership rules and regulations that might keep you out. We want you to have the same chance for sobriety that we have had.

"We aren't a bit afraid you'll harm us, never mind how twisted or violent you may be."

from Serber (1968) and Serber (1970)



Isn't every organization entitled to have rules for membership? Why did A.A. decide to keep this privilege, to be "inclusive...never exclusive"? That's easy. Early members tried it the other way, and it just didn't work. As the Fellowship was nearing its one-year mark, the officers that served as headquarters "asked the groups to let their membership rules and send them in," Bill W. recalled. "If all of these efforts had been in force everywhere at once, it would have been practically impossible for any alcoholic to have ever joined A.A. About two-thirds of our oldest and best members could never have got by." So the rule books went out the window and were replaced by one uncomplicated sentence: Tradition Three.

But, somebody may ask, isn't this Tradition itself a rule? It does state one requirement for membership. Let's read it again, and ask another question. Who determines whether or not newcomers qualify, whether they do want to stop drinking? Obviously, nobody except the newcomers themselves; everybody else simply has to take their word for it. In fact, they don't even have to say it aloud. And that's fortunate for many of us who arrived at A.A. with only a half-hearted desire to stop sober. We are able because the A.A. road stayed open to us.

The problem faced by this Tradition isn't just past A.A. history. It keeps coming up—for instance, when a group debates whether to exclude alcoholics who have problems other than alcohol or how defining identity. The Tradition mentions no such additional requirements, so demand that prospective members must not have a history of drug abuse, a certain identity, or an institutional background. All alcoholics are welcome.

What about the group that seems to impose extra requirements beyond "a desire to stop drinking"? This might be a "special interest" group or collection of groups in which, for example, each member must be a physician—or a young person, a woman, a priest, or a law-enforcement officer. By their own account, these attending special interest groups consider themselves A.A. members first. They attend general membership meetings as well as those that fit their other individual needs, and they remain devoted to A.A.'s primary purpose.

These "special interest" groups offer only one instance of the diverse and inclusive membership within our Fellowship. Our Traditions allow unqualified freedom, not only to every A.A. member, but to every A.A. group.



The TWELVE TRADITIONS *Illustrated*

SACRIFICE FOR TRADITION THREE

**“Am I willing to
sacrifice who I will sit
with in an A.A.
meeting?”**

-Chet P.

QUESTIONS FOR TRADITION THREE

1. When and with whom have you been willing to do “whatever it takes” to make “it” work?
2. When you no longer wanted the relationship enough, did you find every reason for it not to work?
3. Do you tend to get stuck with your or someone else's motive? Give examples.
4. What qualifying information do you seek entering into a relationship such as this?
5. One person cannot make a relationship successful alone and unaided. Both must want the relationship even if it is for different motives. Can you give examples when there was a mutual desire to make it work and when this mutual desire was not present?

AFFIRMATION FOR TRADITION THREE

Let me remember that out of enlightened self-interest I want and I choose to share all I can with whomever He brings.