

For the topic “Our Spiritual Principles”, I have chosen the Twelve Traditions quite simply because I truly love them.

Many of us only know the Traditions by the wee bit we read in the short form. While the short form may be informative, without further investigation we can miss out on the full meaning of each Tradition. For this reason, this evening we will look at the long form of the Traditions.

Our A.A. experience has taught us that:□

One—Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.

It’s all about unity.

In this tradition I have learned as an individual to become “right size” within the fellowship that saved my life, that unity gives the fellowship strength to carry the message. I see this not so much as a Tradition but as the umbrella, if you will, for the following eleven principles. It sets the tone for our fellowship.

Two—For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.

Who’s in charge.

How’s that for a very short, long tradition that really packs a punch. Now that we’ve learned how we fit together, we learn who’s in charge and that the answers can be found through an informed group conscience with emphasis on the word “informed”. This tradition keeps us on track and working together.

Three—Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.

Who is a member.

This teaches us who makes up the fellowship. While the qualification of alcoholism is a constant, there is no other requirement. We know we've already paid the price to belong and nothing further is asked of us nor should we exclude any others who suffer from alcoholism.

Four—With respect to its own affairs, each A.A. group should be responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when its plans concern the welfare of neighboring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect A.A. as a whole without conferring with the trustees of the General Service Board. On such issues our common welfare is paramount.

How a group operates.

This Tradition gives the group the right to decide its own fate – but also ensures that wonderful process of **consultation**. Without it, as Bill suggested in his writing on this Tradition, “we wouldn't have a **democracy**, we would have sheer **anarchy**”. It seems to me that housekeeping issues, like deciding to serve cookies at the meeting (so Vicki will come), pertain only to the members while other seemingly simple decisions, like changing the meeting time, could seriously impact other groups and need serious consideration.

We have now defined the home group and if we want our group to be healthy, welcoming and to carry out our primary purpose we must respect other groups. Although it's a weird visual, I see Tradition Four as cooperation and anarchy walking hand in hand ... eating cookies no doubt.

Five—Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity *having but one primary purpose*—that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

What's our job?

At last. We previously defined how we fit together, who can join, how groups function within the whole and now we know what we are to do. And it's simple ... we stick to these spiritual principles and we help the next alcoholic who comes along.

Six—Problems of money, property, and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim. We think, therefore, that any considerable property of genuine use to A.A. should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the material from the spiritual. An A.A. group, as such, should never go into business. Secondary aids to A.A., such as clubs or hospitals which require much property or administration, ought to be incorporated and so set apart that, if necessary, they can be freely discarded by the groups. Hence such facilities ought not to use the A.A. name. Their management should be the sole responsibility of those people who financially support them. For clubs, A.A. managers are usually preferred. But hospitals, as well as other places of recuperation, ought to be well outside A.A.—and medically supervised. While an A.A. group may cooperate with anyone, such cooperation ought never to go so far as affiliation or endorsement, actual or implied. An A.A. group can bind itself to no one.

Cooperation.

I love this tradition primarily because it is so easy to see the trial and error history that created it. Believe me, if you look at my family alone, AA has plenty of work ahead without diversifying. It is a constant challenge for groups to walk the fine line between cooperation and affiliation. By looking back to Tradition Two and the informed group conscience, the path becomes clear.

Seven—The A.A. groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members. We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholics Anonymous is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals, or other outside agencies; that acceptance of large gifts from any source, or of contributions carrying any obligation whatever, is unwise. Then, too, we view with much concern those A.A. treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated A.A. purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.

Who pays the bills.

Money...HA, that's about as far as you can get from a spiritual principle. But really, when we look at the freedom gained by self-support, by having total control of our growth, or lack of it, everytime the basket is passed, the intention of Tradition Seven becomes clear. We all know we are a long, long way from being a self-supported fellowship however the goal remains the same.

Eight—Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non- professional. We define professionalism as the occupation of counselling alcoholics for fees or hire. But we may employ alcoholics where they are going to perform those services for which we might otherwise have to engage non-alcoholics. Such special services may be well recompensed. But our usual A.A. Twelfth Step work is never to be paid for.

Freely given, freely received.

I grew up in a home with a sober parent who was both a member of Alcoholics Anonymous and a professional working in the field of addiction. This gave me the opportunity to see the radically different approaches to helping alcoholics. The helping hand extended from one alcoholic to another when the only motivation is to be of service is an experience not to be missed. Conversely the hard work done by those working in the field is also beyond value and often sets the stage for our non-professional AA work.

Nine—Each A.A. group needs the least possible organization. Rotating leadership is the best. The small group may elect its secretary, the large group its rotating committee, and the groups of a large metropolitan area their central or intergroup committee, which often employs a full-time secretary. The trustees of the General Service Board are, in effect, our A.A. General Service Committee. They are the custodians of our A.A. Tradition and the receivers of voluntary A.A. contributions by which we maintain our A.A. General Service Office at New York. They are authorized by the groups to handle our overall public relations and they guarantee the integrity of our principal newspaper, the A.A. Grapevine. All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in A.A. are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.

The spirit of rotation.

Now we know who runs this thing...well it's us really. From within our fellowship we choose those who act on our behalf and form committees to carry out necessary tasks. All of these within the Spirit of Rotation which is one of my favourite things. We know that the informed group conscience already had the ultimate authority but let's not be so foolish as to think this thing can continue without the hard work of some trusted servants.

Ten—No A.A. group or member should ever, in such a way as to implicate A.A., express any opinion on outside controversial issues—particularly those of politics, alcohol reform, or sectarian religion. The Alcoholics Anonymous groups oppose no one. Concerning such matters they can express no views whatever.

Those pesky outside issues.

Well if money wouldn't get the fight started, our individual opinions certainly would do the trick. With over two million members we will have over two million opinions. So, as a fellowship, we stick to our primary purpose and whenever asked the views of Alcoholics Anonymous on anything beyond that we have no opinion. **No opinion** ... an odd thing for an alcoholic to say but it's one of my favourite phrases.

Eleven—Our relations with the general public should be characterized by personal anonymity. We think A.A. ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed. Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us.

The allure of personal anonymity.

Much as most of us in early sobriety want to promote this thing and shout it from the rooftops, experience has shown the attraction of sobriety is our best advocate. It has been my pleasure to represent Alcoholics Anonymous in public media and I cannot stress the joy of knowing that sharing the principles of this fellowship through the cloak of anonymity might just help someone achieve sobriety. An experience that goes against my nature but fills my heart.

Twelve—And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all.

Principles first.

And here we are at the tradition that often erupts in chanting. This from the pamphlet *The Twelve Traditions Illustrated*: “Anonymity, as we observe it in AA, is at root a simple expression of humility.” And isn’t that what we’ve all be striving toward? It takes us right back to Tradition One where we learned to become one among many. I love it.

More importantly to me, through the study of these traditions I realize true meaning of “principles before personalities” is to put these principles of AA before my personality (not yours) and to carry the message to the next suffering alcoholic.

I want to thank you for being here this evening and allowing me to talk about my favourite topic, the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. These spiritual principles along with the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Concepts have changed my life and for that I am grateful.

Vicki W

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