

Tradition I

SHORT: 'OUR COMMON WELFARE SHOULD COME FIRST; PERSONAL RECOVERY DEPENDS UPON AA UNITY'

LONG: 'EACH MEMBER OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS IS BUT A SMALL PART OF A GREAT WHOLE. AA MUST CONTINUE TO LIVE OR MOST OF US WILL SURELY DIE. HENCE OUR COMMON WELFARE COMES FIRST. BUT INDIVIDUAL WELFARE FOLLOWS CLOSE AFTERWARD.'

JANUARY 31

OUR COMMON WELFARE COMES FIRST

The unity of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most cherished quality our Society has . . . We stay whole, or A. A. dies

TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS, p. 129

Our Traditions are key elements in the ego deflation process necessary to achieve and maintain sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous. The First Tradition reminds me not to take credit, or authority, for my recovery. Placing our common welfare first reminds me not to become a healer in this program; I am still one of the patients. Self effacing elders built the ward. Without it, I doubt I would be alive. Without the group, few alcoholics would recover.

The active role in renewed surrender of will enables me to step aside from the need to dominate, the desire for recognition, both of which played so great a part in my active alcoholism. Deferring my personal desires for the greater good of group growth contributes toward A.A. unity that is central to all recovery. It helps me to remember that the whole is greater than the sum of all its parts.

Make a list of areas of your life, e.g.

Home

Work

AA

Friends

Other

Ask, with each of these areas (where relevant):

- Do I still value being able to 'go it alone'?
- Do I place common welfare first, placing others' welfare before my own, or do I put myself first?
- Am I more concerned with giving or with getting?
- Do I do my best to avoid argument, attack, defence, and unnecessary criticism, in order to preserve unity?
- Do I dominate as a matter of course or do I look for my true role?
- Do I create divisions in my mind between 'me' / 'us' and 'you' / 'them'?
- Can I identify with others, even people I dislike or worse?
- Do I insist on unity through uniformity or can I allow unity to be based on inclusion, love, and genuine tolerance?
- Do I see others, even people I dislike, as being a common expression of a loving God?

With each question, ask: (1) What is going on? (2) Where am I at fault? (3) What is my corrective measure?

Tradition 1 prayers

'God, please show me what is for the best of all.'

'God, please help me see the similarities, not the differences.'

'God, please have me focus on giving, not getting.'

'God, please have me forgive and see the God in others.'

Tradition 1 quotations

'And Dr Jung wrote and told Bill, in essence, that he had always known that the alcoholic's problem was his search for unity. His search for unity; and he couldn't find it. He even quoted one of my favourite verses: 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.' ... And when he found the bottle, it seemed to be the missing ingredient. ... He had found chemical unity, and it did a pretty good job for him until it became the problem that only a spiritual answer could solve.' (Chuck C.)

'I don't happen to believe in good or bad. I don't happen to believe in right or wrong. I don't happen to believe in two worlds. I believe in one world. I believe that this is an experience, but it's not reality.' (Chuck C.)

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 1:

- What am I willing to sacrifice for our relationship?
- What affect do my actions have on our relationship? On our family?
- Am I a giver or a taker?
- Do I do unifying things? or am I quick to criticize? Slow to praise?
- Do I use silence as a refuge or punishment while expecting my mate to read my mind?
- Do I listen when my mate has something to say?
- Do I admire and approve of my mate? Does he/she **know** that?
- Am I a healing, mending, integrating force in our marriage or am I divisive?
- Am I a peacemaker? Or, because of my own insecurity, is it critical to my ego that I be right?
- Can I be flexible? Flexibility is taught by nature. You will see the trees bend in the wind. You will see that tree branches are flexible. To be rigid is to break. When we have life problems it is good for us to be flexible. Sometimes we need to flow with what is going on. If we resist, it becomes more painful. We need to be on the path of least resistance. Water flows down the mountain through the path of least resistance. Electricity flows through the path of least resistance. Power flows through the path of least resistance.

Flexible strength is better than inflexible. Let the storm flow over you, and then pop back up."

- What must my mate do to accommodate my insecurity? My ego? Can he/she have both male and female friends? Can he/she go wherever he/she wants with whomever he/she wants, mostly whenever he/she wants?
- Do I try to be understanding when my mate rubs me the wrong way or does something that upsets me or am I abrasive and rageful?
- Do I spout platitudes about love while indulging in and secretly justifying behavior that bristles with hostility? Do I sneak around and do things that I know my mate won't like or that will violate our values.
- Do I share all of me - good and bad? Or do I have secrets? **Have some secrets.** We do not advocate emotional nudity. We all need a well-placed emotional fig leaf at certain times. We never never suggest

that anyone "let it all hang out". You may say that doing so makes you feel better. Well, so does throwing up, but it's hard on the people around you.

Questions on Tradition 1 from the AA Grapevine:

Am I in my group a healing, mending, integrating person, or am I divisive? What about gossip and taking other members inventories?

2. Am I a peacemaker? Or do I, with pious preludes such as "just for the sake of discussion," plunge into arguments.
3. Am I gentle with those who rub me the wrong way, or am I abrasive?
4. Do I make competitive remarks, such a comparing one group with another or contrasting AA in one place with AA in another?
5. Do I put down some AA activities as if I were superior for not participating in this or that aspect of AA?
6. Am I informed about AA as a whole? Do I support, in every way I can AA as a whole or just the parts I understand and approve of?
7. Am I as considerate of AA members as I want them to be of me?
8. Do I spout platitudes about love while indulging in and secretly justifying behavior that bristles with hostility?
9. Do I go to enough AA meetings or read enough AA literature to really keep in touch?
10. Do I share with AA all of me, the bad and the good, accepting as well as giving the help of fellowship?

The AA Traditions

http://bigbookrecovery.com/traditions_one_twelve.html

General introduction

The 12 Traditions are a set of guidelines for the health of an AA group and, where applicable, for AA as a whole. They have been developed from the experiences of the first AA groups. No group is bound to conform to the Traditions, but those that do tend to flourish.

Most alcoholics in AA would say that when alcoholics get together to help each other to recover from alcoholism, there is something special about the power of a group that makes it more than just a collection of individuals. We would say that the 'special ingredient' is there because to the degree that the group conforms to the Traditions, a Higher Power is working through it. So, just as the 12 Steps represent the principles by which the individual can live in order to let a Higher Power into his life that will enable him to recover from alcoholism, so the 12 Traditions are a set of principles that the group can follow to allow the Higher Power to work through a group.

Just as self-will can destroy the individual alcoholic, if AA is to decline in the future the problem will be through self-will of the very people whose lives it saves: the AA members – us!. The Traditions are here to save AA from us! They were first published in 1946, seven years after the publication of the first edition of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The most important source of information on the Traditions is the appendix at the back of the Big Book called *The AA Tradition*. We have also found useful information in *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *AA Comes of Age* and *The 12 Traditions Illustrated*.

Traditions exist in two forms: there is the short summary; and the full wording (the 'long' version) that can be found in the Big Book appendix. Usually we need to consider the 'long' version of the tradition to get a full understanding.

Before considering specific traditions, it may be useful to consider what the Traditions are not. When they were written there was no suggestion that the Steps were in any way lacking as guidelines for our personal conduct. For us, the situation has not changed. We still consider the Steps are perfect in their conception. If we wish to improve our personal lives or happiness, our approach is to focus on better application of the principles of the Steps. We do not need to use the Traditions except in context for which they were specifically intended.

Similarly, there was no intention that the Traditions could be used to benefit institutions other than Alcoholics Anonymous, such as the family, colleges or businesses. Just because something is good for AA, it doesn't mean necessarily that it's good for anything else. And we feel that at times it might even be presumptuous of us think so. Institutions such as the family have existed happily and successfully for many years before AA was formed. Except where these institutions have to deal directly with individual alcoholics, as in *The Family Afterward* and *To Employers*, AA has nothing to say about how these institutions might like to run themselves; it is worth noting that even in these two chapters, AA tradition is not referred to at all.

Occasionally, some of the Traditions can appear to be usefully applied outside the context of AA. But we find such applications rather forced and artificial. They usually seem to stretch the meaning of the Tradition to the point of distortion. What is often described as an application of a Tradition in our personal lives is in fact an application of the underlying spiritual principle. For example: we are told in Tradition 12 that humility is the spiritual foundation of all the traditions. It could be argued that in trying to practice humility, we are applying Tradition 12 in our lives. We say, no. The application of any spiritual principle in our affairs is simply the practice of Step 12 and humility is simply an example of such a principle.

As a specific example: sometimes we hear it said that we should apply Tradition 7 in our lives and aim to be self-supporting (usually meaning that we shouldn't accept state handouts when we are able to work). But, if we really did apply Tradition 7 to ourselves exactly as we apply it to an AA group and decline all outside contributions, most of us would starve to death because whether working or claiming unemployment benefit we are still accepting outside contributions. Certainly we should aim to work rather than scrounge of the state, but we don't need Tradition Seven to tell us this: anyone who is practising Step 12 and so trying to be honest is not going to claim unemployment benefit when they could work. There is nothing wrong in principle with any individual accepting gifts from others. And if someone has an independent income, provided that there is no dishonesty involved, then let them live off it. It is not going to compromise their sobriety.

Similarly, it would not be helpful to apply Tradition 7 to organizations other than AA. All businesses and nearly all charities must accept outside contributions just to exist. In fact, if the purpose of an organization is profit or fundraising, then this is the converse of Tradition 7. They want to solicit as many outside contributions as they can. And AA does not say there is anything wrong with that, in fact there is even a Tradition that says that it has no opinions on outside issues. Tradition 7 says that an AA group should be fully self-supporting and decline outside contributions. It does not say or even imply that anything else should too.

There is another reason why we are unwilling to get into such discussions. We feel that using the traditions outside the context of the AA distracts us from the ever-urgent consideration of the role that they uniquely and perfectly fulfill – that of keeping AA whole and functioning well. We consider that just as the Steps are the perfect set of principles to use for guidance in our personal lives, the Traditions are the perfect set of principles to use for guidance in our AA group and in the AA service structure.

For the most part we forget about the Traditions and only have to consider how the Traditions are important in AA when we see them broken. Once we observe the consequences of this, we start to understand how well they were working before. This is a reflection of the fact that, for the most part, groups are following the Traditions. The writer of these brief accounts of the Traditions has gained most, though not all of his experience in service in

Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain. This is why many of the illustrative examples of contraventions of the Traditions refer to the Fellowship in Great Britain.

Traditions 1 & 12

We are considering these two Traditions because they are the 'bookends' that support all the others. One tells us why we have the Traditions, and the second tells us how they work. Consider now the full version of Tradition One from the back of the Big Book: Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. AA must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterwards.

Tradition One tells us why we have Traditions at all – because we want to protect AA. Its summary on the scroll defines it as the goal of all the Traditions: AA unity. Without AA most of us will die. The most important thing in AA, therefore, is not the newcomer; it is the group. The newcomer is important, but not as important as the group. We will ensure the existence of the AA group by putting aside our personal desires and putting the group first in some key areas. It is the other Traditions that define for us what those key areas are and how that unity is to be achieved. It is worth noting that they do so based upon the assumption that AA members are full of greed, pride, arrogance, self-centeredness and all the rest of the defects of character. The Traditions are intended to contain those tendencies. If they required us first to become uniformly good, pleasant, selfless individuals in order to be effective they would be doomed to failure. (Although we hope that some of us will gradually become better people through practice of the Steps).

As mentioned, most of the examples of where the primacy of the group is enforced occur through the practice of the other Traditions. But here is an example related to Tradition One alone: it can be the case that when a group exceeds the stated capacity of the hall that it rents, it is breaking the insurance stipulations (and so the law). Therefore, in the past, groups have had to shut their doors when they reach the limit, and stop anyone else coming in, including newcomers. If they did not, the group would be breaking the law and ultimately, could be closed down. Groups faced with this dilemma usually have either to split into two (through a number of people leaving and setting up a new one), or move to a bigger hall.

Similarly we cannot let one individual bring down the whole group. This is why we must throw the disruptive drunk out of the meeting. The Twelve Traditions Illustrated states in connection with Tradition 1: "Our brother the noisy drunk 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 our 'common welfare' first. But it is his welfare too; if he's ever going to get sober, the group must go on functioning, ready for him." This is referred to also in our discussion of Traditions 3 and 5. Let us now consider the long form of Tradition 12: 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.

This tradition gives us the one spiritual principle that we must practice in the group if we are to achieve our goal of unity. That is humility. It explains that despite that fact that we are a collection of willful, flawed individuals, if we try to conform to all these traditions we will be taking actions that are humble.

Many of us talk about how the group did the job of sponsoring us and keeping us sober in those very early days before we could get a sponsor and make a start in a structured way on the steps. If the groups we attended were conforming to the traditions and if as newcomers we cooperated with the format, we were making a small contribution to the combined acts of humility made by the group. Humility, like love, is expressed in action rather than emotion. Perhaps this is the mechanism that for many of us lets the Higher Power into our lives, even before we acknowledge Him, so that He can give us that first period of sobriety, a period of grace. The principle of anonymity, it tells us, is enshrined in AA Tradition, not just to protect peoples' identities, but as a persistent reminder of this principle of humility. It runs through each Tradition. In Traditions 1-5, it is there to counter most especially the alcoholics' arrogance and intolerance, describing how the disagreements can be resolved and how

we put personal preferences aside in favor of the greater good. In Traditions 6, 7 & 8 it counters our tendency to greed and dishonesty. And in Traditions 9, 10 and 11 it counters our desire for power, attention and publicity.

Let us recall that last phrase: "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." The language used contrasts with the down-to-earth practicality of much of the AA literature. It almost has a mystical quality as it describes the bliss that is offered in AA as a result of practicing the program. We are told categorically that if we do these things, we will remain forever in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us. We can experience joy, without interruption and without end, to the degree that we follow these things. If we commit to a home group that is following the traditions, we are continually reminded that without Him we have nothing, for we are powerless over alcohol. How many of us, when we start to receive the material benefits of sobriety – health, money and attention – forget that it comes through our practice of the steps? If our group, through the repeated reminders of the message its members carry, does not lead us back to the program, the thought might occur that we don't need AA meetings at all. We have seen friends follow this path out of AA and drink; some have died. We can enjoy these benefits indefinitely if we remember that we have been given them as demonstrations to others of the Power and Love of God, as we understand Him.

A.A. Tradition 1: Unity...Our experience has taught us that...

Our A.A. experience has taught us that: (Long Form) 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.

From the 12 and 12

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

Without unity, A.A. dies. Individual liberty and yet great unity. Key to paradox: each A.A.'s life depends on obedience to spiritual principles. The group must survive or the individual will not. Common welfare comes first. How best to live and work together as groups.

Within that 12 & 12, it goes on to say, "No A.A. can compel another to do anything; nobody can be punished or expelled. Our Twelve Steps to recovery are suggestions; the Twelve Traditions which guarantee A.A.'s unity contain not a single 'Don't'."

Why is A.A. NOT anarchy? Because of Tradition 2, more on that later, but also because... "If he deviates too far, the penalty is sure and swift; he sickens and dies."

So although we're not forced to follow these principles, we really need this way of life in order to stay sober and have a chance at life. Or as Paul Martin said, "Once I get what I need, I find that it's what I wanted all along".

It goes on to say that some individuals cannot recover unless there is a group. Tradition 3 defines the A.A. group as "two or more...", so... "By faith and by works we have been able to build upon the lessons of an incredible experience."

I'm seeing how this tradition and all the other 11 work in harmony to give the individuals a place to meet, as a group, and do this program and offer service to those who are yet to come.

In Paul Martin's lead, I heard him speak of an experience while listening to Bill W. give a pitch himself; Bill said, "Imagine if all of you here didn't come to A.A. for another 10 years from when you did..." Then there was silence for a while ... as people in that room contemplated the hell their lives would be if they were to drink for another 10 years. Well... that's the reality for those who have not found A.A. as of yet and we may be the ones who have that opportunity to bring some of them in.

FIRST TRADITION

Some ideas about the Traditions based on observation and experience:

They are ideals for a society in which love is the only law. Great suffering and great love binds us together.

They are living principles. I experienced them before I knew about them. I was welcomed and accepted as I was where I was.

Some myths and misconceptions about the Traditions:

Most often, our experience with both Steps and Traditions are based on the short forms that we read before our meetings and put on the walls of our meeting rooms. This has led to widespread misconception and fallacies in today's A.A. There is much more to the Traditions than what we find in the short form. The short form of both the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions will be found in our book. The long form of both the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions will be found in our book.

-It is helpful to know the history of Alcoholics Anonymous when looking at the Traditions. Most were arrived at after trial and error, by making mistakes. Some were born out of fear in our early fellowship. All were born of the necessity to preserve our society for future generations and to protect it from forces, both within and without which could destroy it.

-The Traditions are not rules, but living principles that I live by in a society in which there are no rules.

-Another myth: that the Traditions are only for people who are in service or who are sober a long time. The statement "The Traditions are to the group as the Steps are to the individual", is not true. This leaves a whole set of principles that can be practiced in the home, business, society, etc. They are merely extensions of what is found in the Steps.

The Traditions are about unity and preserving our fellowship for future generations. Without unity, we can't survive as a fellowship. The Twelve Steps are a unifying experience. My recovery depends upon my unity with you and your unity with me. The Steps get rid of what's in the way of me being in unity with you. The Traditions help keep that experience alive. A true fellowship is a gathering of like-minded people. If there is sponsorship and recovery going on within a group, there will be unity, and there will be service. Unity means a lot more than being in a room full of people with the same problem.

-One principle not spoken of often in A.A. is stewardship. It means to take care of what we've been given. The fellowship is about having a place where recovered alcoholics can carry a message to sick alcoholics. If the old-timers have no place to carry their message, they wither and die. If the sick alcoholic has no place to come to see and hear a message, he will wither and die.

The First Tradition, wherein each of us is but a small part of a great whole, is the foundation upon which all else rests. We must hang together or die alone. Like the First Step, it addresses the problem. Like the First Step, all else comes back to it.

The First Tradition addresses the problem-comply or die. Comply not to human rules, but with spiritual principles. Compliance means conditions-the condition is life or death, change or die.

Most alcoholics feel as if they are separate and alone when they get to us. Stay separate, stay alone, die alone. Or recover together. Unity means being a part of the whole, rather than apart from. A spiritual experience is a

unifying experience that joins me to myself, to other people, and to God; A process of becoming whole and complete.

-the First Tradition can work backwards: If my personal recovery depends upon the unity in the group, is it possible that unity in the group can hinge on the recovery of the individual within the group? If the group members are practicing these principals, there will be recovery, and hence there will be unity.

-does my recovery bring about unity around me? Or am I a producer of confusion rather than harmony?

-although my recovery depends not so much on your unity with as on my unity with you, it does depend on unity within the group....

-watch the company you keep. You can stay sick in A.A. and have plenty of company. Or you can get well in A.A. and have plenty of company. You just have to pick the company you want to hang with.

- If one of us is missing, we are not whole.

-the best way to belong to a group is to participate in what that group does.

-a true group is a gathering of like-minded people.

-the whole group participates. If there is not an informed group conscience, the group will die or become something that is not A.A.

-the principle of anonymity applies. I am one of many, a member of A.A.

-a guiding principle for the individual in a group: is it selfish or not?

-a principle common to all truly spiritual communities is that the group comes first. I set aside my need for recognition, prestige, and power and put the needs of the group first. My needs are automatically met if I help to see that needs of the whole are met.

-a principle of good living is sacrifice, the giving of my very best to God and to the group. The word sacrifice comes from sacred-that which is holy, the very best. If it's not worth giving up, it's not a sacrifice.

-Trust as a principle: can I trust my group? Can I trust myself to behave as a member of the group?

-our message should be one of continuity, of common experience, of profound change (BB, p. 17). Brotherly and harmonious action: I set aside my opinions and differences to join in a common effort.

-principle of unity before personalities: One myth-that the "newcomer is the most important person in the room", isn't true. Nobody is more important than anyone else.