

SINGLENES OF PURPOSE

I shall venture to place in words the suggestions for an Alcoholics Anonymous Tradition of Relations – Twelve Points to Assure our Future. Bill W.

A.A.'s Twelve Traditions were first written, in the long form, in early 1946 as tentative guides to keep the fellowship from destroying itself from within. The short form used today was condensed with the help of Chicago group founder Earl T. in 1949 and unanimously adopted by standing vote at the first International Convention in Cleveland, OH in July of 1950.

Many people, like Bill Wilson, have ventured to place in words the meaning of each of these traditions. Similar to the steps, we are left with our own interpretation. The definitions of the words are easy to find with a dictionary. The interpretation I refer to is the underlying spiritual value that each of these expressions has in our own personal experience. Our personal experience will also influence the groups that we contribute to. I am acutely aware of the responsibility bestowed on each of us for the opportunity to provide example for those who are new, casually passing through or more important are in desperate need of what we have to offer. I am also aware that some of these desperate souls may or may not realize the importance of the possible fatal situation that they may be in. They might also not be aware of the absolute joy and the possibility of a life beyond the spectrum of their current reference that is available to them.

This is merely my personal venture. I am positive that your experience is different than mine. I do not claim to be an expert. I do claim, however, to be consistently active, open-minded to the probability that I am delusional, aware that I am still growing and will always be growing and that this is merely my perception of the spiritual value of these traditions at this point in my journey.

Occasionally my assessment as to what others are doing, or seem to be saying, might come across as condescending or self-righteous. I promise that my passion is strong, my desire to not allow politeness to compromise the truth as I see it, and my love for my brother or sister who is suffering spiritually the way I use to is the only reason why I allow myself to express my feelings in this way. I am very aware that I could just simply be wrong. This is the best I can offer, however. Enjoy or discard. I have love in my heart for you regardless as to whether or not we agree.

Reference The first tradition short form: Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on A.A. unity.

Reference The first tradition long form: 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 afterwards.

As Steve Sees It: Bottom line...without others in my life, I am dead. Even amongst our differences, we have to stay together or we will surely die alone. This is our dilemma.

Reference The second tradition short form: 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.

Reference The second tradition long form: For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority-a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.

As Steve Sees It: This is the solution to our dilemma. We open our hearts and our minds to allow God to guide us and direct us through “informed” group conscience. The remaining traditions show us how to accomplish this. As always, God guides us using pain, joy, the fear of pain and the promise of joy (hope). I will readdress this in the seventh tradition.

In the spirit of the second tradition, I like to place emphasis on the word “informed” as it is explained in the published literature concerning the traditions (in 12 & 12, A.A. Comes of Age and several pamphlets describing A.A.’s Twelve Traditions). Informed group conscience is desired over simple group conscience. I believe that two or more people can be in complete agreement and be sharing the same delusion. Get informed. *“A little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing...drink deep from the fountain of knowledge of don’t drink at all.”*

Reference: The third tradition short form: The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Reference: The third tradition long form: Our membership should include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence, we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought AA membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two of three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.

As Steve Sees It: In order to put this tradition into perspective...we first need to define alcoholism. Is it really a drinking problem? For some, yes. Is it really a spiritual malady, regardless as to whether or not I have ever picked up a drink before? Yes...but only for those who are going to die from a real bad case of sobriety. If these unfortunate people fall into the hands of the problem drinker who calls himself an alcoholic, the spiritual malady alcoholic is going to die...probably from his own hand. If there is one line that I hear often from a podium in AA that I totally disagree with, that line is...if you do what I do, you’ll get what I have. This is true provided one major element...that you’re treating the same problem. If you’re a spiritual malady alcoholic and you do what the problem drinker alcoholic does...you’re not going to get what he has. You’re going to go insane and even worse, now you’re going to think you already tried AA and it doesn’t work. Then where will you go?

So what is the requirement for membership then? It appears that it is totally up to the individual group.

Reference: The fourth tradition short form: Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

Reference: The fourth tradition long form: 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.

As Steve Sees It: Each group can do whatever it wants to do, provided they don't "negatively" affect other groups or AA as a whole. This is a relative statement. What one person thinks may be affecting other groups or AA as a whole negatively might be totally different than what anyone else thinks. This is truly left up to the spiritual consequences for not adhering to the spiritual principles. I'll address this more in the seventh tradition.

Reference The fifth tradition short form: Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Reference The fifth tradition long form: 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.

As Steve Sees It: I like to place emphasis on the word "its" in the fifth tradition. I believe that each effective group of Alcoholics Anonymous has "its" own message. By defining this message and agreeing that carrying this message is "its" primary purpose, all further dilemmas or motions raised in group conscience need merely to pass one test...Will this enhance the group's primary purpose or distract the group from it?

The group's I like to support have defined "its" message as: Hope is available through God dependence and service to others. This message is carried most effectively by one alcoholic sharing with another, using the Big Book for guidance and inspiration.

What is a group? My belief is that a group "should be" two or more people who have a similar message to carry, or a similar approach to carrying a message...I realize that is not the case in most groups today, but it sure makes life easier when all group members come from the same type of recovery approach.

What is the purpose of having a home group?

- 1) It is where I have a vote in AA as a whole...the service structure, however, I would suggest that your group steer clear of the service structure until your group gets a solid foundation.
- 2) It is a place where someone looking for me, even years down the road, can pretty much assume they can find me there. I try never to miss my home group, if possible.

The sixth tradition guides us to stay away from problems of money, power and prestige because they will divert us from our primary purpose. You need to have your primary purpose identified in order to know whether you are diverted or not.

Reference: The seventh tradition short form: Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

Reference: The seventh tradition long form: 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.

As Steve Sees It: The seventh tradition is our one pure measuring stick as to whether or not we are serving a purpose. If the group is not supported by people's time and energy or if it cannot pay its own bills, then it has either outlived its purpose or it never served a purpose to begin with...except maybe to show people what not to do.

If your interpretation of the traditions is effective, you will attract others. If not, you might want to reconsider your interpretation.

In meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous today...we hear a lot of controversy over the reference to "I'm an alcoholic and an addict" or "I'm an alcoholic and something else".

The battle cry seems to be that if you're not a straight, white male that drank during the war, then you don't qualify for membership in Alcoholics Anonymous. What are we so afraid of? The question I have for these people is what really is our primary purpose? Is it to stop drinking or is it to treat the underlying cause and condition? Do we want to put walls up to keep people out because of our fears? If so, I promise you that those walls will become prison walls to keep you in. If we stay close to our primary purpose, never compromise it, the laws of nature will sort everything else out.

I am suggesting that we, as an organization, might have our singleness of purpose distorted. What if, just maybe, the real singleness of purpose is treating the "spiritual malady" or "real alcoholism"? What if the reason that the organizations before us self-destructed, and the reason why Alcoholics Anonymous' success rate has almost vanished is partly due to the belief that drinking is my problem and not the spiritual malady?

If we don't acknowledge the possibility of this, we are intentionally throwing people to the wolves. People come in and already don't feel like they fit and are looking for reasons to justify why they want to leave. Often we tell them...if they didn't drink alcohol "the way we did", which is ridiculous because we all have different drinking histories, then they don't belong here. We tell them to go to another twelve step program, where, in my experience, they are all but guaranteed to not hear a message of hope based on God Dependence through Working with Others. We can pretty much guarantee that they won't hear that message in 99% of the meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, let alone the other twelve step programs.

On the other hand, if we can agree, *only in the groups that have a similar problem with a similar solution, based on the tradition of autonomy amongst groups*, that our common problem is spiritual in nature, then there should be no reason why I need to identify myself as anything other than simply an “Alcoholic”. This would quiet the people attracted to controversy long enough to maybe get them to open up their minds to another possibility, and it would help the new guy who might be given a reason to leave on a silver platter when we identify ourselves as anything else that he may have no experience with. After all, he/she did come to Alcoholics Anonymous, not Anything Goes Anonymous. The long form of the third tradition states that AA membership should include all who suffer from alcoholism. How do you define alcoholism?

Keep in mind that membership does not mean you get to have our podium and hold us hostage. I do not believe that anyone should be speaking in a meeting of AA that does not have experience with the problem (real alcoholism) and the solution (helping others through God dependence). There are problem drinkers calling themselves alcoholics, speaking from our podiums that, in my opinion, are causing more destruction to Alcoholics Anonymous than people that have spiritual maladies but didn't drink. I guess this is why we have the tradition of autonomy. Each group can do whatever it wants to do. God, through the laws of the universe, will sort out who is truly serving Him...it will be obvious by what is supported and what is not supported.

Just some food for thought... I'd be happy to entertain any constructive dialogue with anyone who would care to engage. But in my opinion, you're a member if you say you are...period. Try throwing someone out. I'd be interested in the results you get.