

**"THE TWELVE
CONCEPTS"**

**Presented by Eve M.
at the
4th New York State
Convention**

Mid 1960s

THE TWELVE CONCEPTS

AN INTERPRETATION GIVEN AT THE 4th N.Y. STATE CONVENTION

by EVE M.

Greetings to all of you. It is wonderful to be here on this occasion of the 4th State Convention of New York. I had the happy privilege of participating in the first one, which was held in Syracuse four summers ago. And it is wonderful to see this kind of attendance here in New York City. You know, we are very backward in New York City. We don't have the fun of conventions. We have never experienced them. So this is a wonderful opportunity for some of our New York members to become familiar with this marvelous sharing that takes place on these annual get togethers, and I am indeed very happy to be a part of this one. However, I must confess, if I had been allowed to select my topic, I don't think that I would have selected the topic that has been given me. But I will do the best I can, and I hope you will bear with me, because this has been an experience for me, too, to learn something of these Concepts of Service about which most of us know so very little.

To start out in the usual A.A. way, my name is Eve M., and I am a recovering alcoholic. I like to put that in the present tense because it reminds me that my sobriety today depends upon how well I use the tools of A.A., which have been given to me to maintain that sobriety and to recover from the illness of alcoholism. When I came to A.A., a sick and hopeless alcoholic, I had no idea that I was going to find in this wonderful Fellowship everything that I had always been looking for in the bottle. I found all the faith and confidence and hope here in A.A. Those things of which I had nothing, and that was why I drank. But I had no idea that by practicing this program and by using these tools, I would be able to become the kind of person I had always wanted to be; that I would be able to stand still and say "Thy will be done;" that I would be able to hopefully fulfill God's will for me by practicing A.A., one day at a time.

I am very grateful that as I went along the Fellowship, it was explained to me that our illness is a threefold one: That is, mental, physical and spiritual. And at the same time, our recovery program is also a threefold one -- recovery, unity and service. Recovery, of course, through our Twelve Steps; and I soon found that these Steps had to become a meaningful part of my life if I was going to obtain and maintain the kind of sobriety that I saw around me and that I wanted to have for myself.

I learned something about the Traditions while I was working at our Intergroup Office. I learned how important they are, as the Steps are for recovery, for unity, and for living together amongst ourselves in this Fellowship. But it took me a little more time to learn to understand

that these Traditions also have a personal meaning to me, a personal meaning to me as I practice the A.A. program, so that they become a part of my daily living, even as the Steps are.

For example, Tradition One: "Our common welfare should come first." That to me came to mean something very important. For I could no longer be special, rather, I was a part of our vital whole.

Tradition Two: That is that very important one about "the only authority is the group conscience" and that we have Trusted Servants to fulfill our needs. And here, too, I learned that in order to be a part of the group conscience, I must participate.

Tradition Three: How grateful all of us are that the only requirement for membership in this wonderful Fellowship is a simple desire to recover from a devastating illness. If there had been any other requirement than that, I would never have been able to come in.

Traditions Four, Five and Six deal with our purpose and with fulfilling that purpose by assuring that A.A.'s name not be involved with any outside enterprises or any internal disputes.

Tradition Seven involves me personally too. For if my budgeted allotment for attending A.A. meetings all went into a taxi to get to the meetings, and there was only a quarter left for the basket, I had to come to grips with the fact that I was not assuming my share of responsibility for A.A.'s Tradition of self-support.

Tradition Eight is especially meaningful for me for it has been my privilege for so long to work in a service job. First at Intergroup and now at General Service. But I learned that that was not enough; that I must maintain my personal A.A. membership outside of the job by 12th Step work and attendance at regular group meetings.

In the Ninth Tradition the key words are "Directly responsible to those they serve." This responsibility is a two-way street. It is not only the people in the service assignments that have a responsibility in this Tradition, but the membership too. We all must necessarily keep ourselves informed and know the needs of service, otherwise Tradition Nine will become meaningless.

In Traditions Ten and Eleven we all have a responsibility, a personal responsibility. For these are the Traditions that involve the good name of our Fellowship. For example, that beautiful talk by the doctor that just preceded us; she asked each of us to get in touch with our doctors; to let them know. They try to help and we are grateful. That is a way we can involve the name of our A.A. Fellowship, by the active participation of doing such a thing.

And finally we come to learn that the Twelfth Tradition is of immense spiritual significance, placing principles before personalities. It used to be kind of tough for me, but when it got too tough, I was very glad when someone explained very simply, just not to confuse A.A. with the people in it.

Now the Third Leg of our Triangle, our Triangle of recovery, unity and service, is service. The broad scopes of the Concepts of service and the relationships in our service entities are outlined in the Twelve Concepts.

Now I will tell you a little secret. I thought I would go to the source for some help on this talk and I said to Bill, "You know I have to talk on the Twelve Concepts." He said, "Do you honey, I'm glad it's you and not me." Well it meant that I had to do a pretty intensive review and you may wonder why I spent so much time on the Traditions. But actually, when I reviewed the Concepts it seems that they are really an extension of some of our Traditions, especially Tradition Two.

Let's look at Concept #1, which gives the final responsibility and ultimate authority for the whole Fellowship for A.A. World Services to A.A.'s collective conscience, the Conference. Isn't this truly an extension of our Second Tradition. For, is this any different from the familiar application of the group conscience in the conduct of our own business affairs? Of course, when the Conference, which has become the conscience for all A.A. was first thought of, there were the familiar fears at the start -- fears that politics, confusion, expense and strife would be the results. But Tradition Two, like all A.A.'s Traditions, is the voice of experience, and the main principles of Tradition Two are crystal clear -- that the A.A. groups are to be the final authority. And, it was soon apparent that the same principles applied to selecting any Trusted Servant, whether it be a secretary or a Delegate. The entire world today is witnessing the breakdown of "group conscience." It has always been the hope of Democratic nations that their citizens would be enlightened enough, moral enough and responsible enough to manage their own affairs, through their chosen representatives. But in many cases we now see the inroads of ignorance, apathy and power-seeking upon democratic systems. The spiritual resources of right purpose and collective intelligence are waning. But for us in A.A. there seems little prospect of such a calamity, for the life of each individual in each group is built around the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions, and the compelling love that we have for our fellow members and for the principles upon which our lives are founded now. This insures that our democracy of world service can rely on our group conscience and can rely on our trusted servants.

If that were all, it would be easy, but that is just Concept One.

But it says in Concept Two, our group conscience cannot be heard unless a properly chosen Conference were fully trusted to speak for it, respecting most matters of A.A. World Service. Here again, our personal experience

with Tradition Two comes into action. I used to be a little mad and resentful when I first came to A.A. that the group I belonged to wasn't doing the things that I thought it should -- you know, they just weren't running it my way. But I wasn't letting myself be a part of the group conscience. I didn't want to be on the wrong side of the team. I didn't want to be rejected for my points of views, with the result that I didn't express my views; I didn't communicate. So, there must be a mechanics established to provide communication, so that the voices of A.A.'s trusted servants can be heard. And, Concept Two very simply states "when the A.A. groups conferred a permanent charter for the General Service Conference, they thereby delegated to the Conference complete authority of the active maintenance of our world services and thereby made the Conference the actual voice and the effective group conscience for our whole society."

Now Concept Three might be called the "Right of Decision." I remember going to business meetings with my group, with my mind made up that I had decided who would be best for secretary for this election, and I was going to vote for Suzy Q. When I got to the meeting and discovered that Suzy just had a slip, or perhaps if it wasn't a slip, she was having problems with her husband, she couldn't get to the meetings regularly, and so on and so forth. Now to refuse to change my vote in the light of newly known facts, would have been pretty silly.

So, too, with an elected Delegate. If he is instructed on how to vote, he has no right of decision. He too may learn more on the subject on which he is voting and wish to change his vote in the light of this greater knowledge, but if he is instructed instead of TRUSTED -- he can't.

This Concept applies also to the Trustees. For example, the Trustees do own the service entities -- A.A. World Service and the A.A. Grapevine. They can hire and fire, their authority is final, but if the Trustees were constantly to exert this full and absolute authority, if they were to attempt to manage these operating entities in detail, the staff members would quickly become demoralized. There would be only the choice of either to rebel and resign or to submit and rot. That's a direct quote from Concept Three. They, too, have a right of decision. So a trusted servant is the solution. Our entire A.A. program rests squarely upon the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust A.A. and we trust each other. Therefore, we cannot do less than trust our leaders in service. The right of decision that we offer them is not only the practical means by which they may act and meet effectively, but it is also the symbol of our implicit confidence.

Concept Four is the right of participation. This is a word we all understand. It is one of the first things we learn to do when we come to A.A. -- we learn to participate in group activities. We become a part of our individual group's affairs and of the group conscience and in this way we become a part of a whole. This principle has been carefully

built into our Conference structure, for the charter provides that the Trustees, the Directors of our service corporations, together with their respective staffs, shall always be voting members of the Conference.

It took many years before we saw that we could never put all authority in one group, and virtually all responsibility on another, and expect either efficiency of operation or harmony. There is another good reason for participation, and this one has to do with our spiritual need. All of us deeply desire to belong. We want an A.A. relationship of brotherly partnership. It is our shining ideal that the spiritual corporation of A.A. should never include any members who are regarded as "second class." The right of participation assures us that we are truly the trusted servants described in A.A.'s Tradition Two.

Concept Five deals with the rights of appeal and petition. A central problem of all free governments in democratic societies is how to protect and make possible the best use of minority feeling and opinion.

In A.A., individual freedom is of enormous importance. As a matter of fact, Tradition Three insures us of this -- for any alcoholic is a member the moment he says so -- we can't take away his right to belong, neither can we force members to believe anything or pay anything. Our's is indeed a large charter of minority privileges and liberties. Indeed our Third Legacy procedures of putting two top candidates in the hat, insures that minority candidates have an equal chance with the majority's choice. At our last Board meeting, we had a brand new Trustee from the Southeast Region and he made a wonderful statement. He said, "I came out of a bottle into A.A., and out of the hat on to the Board of Trustees." And that is about the way it goes.

Strictly speaking, a democracy operates on the will of the majority no matter how slim that majority may be. So with this system of ours, of making it possible to accept the often demonstrated wisdom of minorities, we occasionally may deny the democracy's cherished principle of final decision by a majority vote. But, we have actually found that our Third Legacy method of electing Delegates has much strengthened the spirit of democracy among us. Unity has been cemented. Cooperation has been increased, and when the Delegate is finally chosen, no discontented minority can trail in his wake. To increase the actual spirit of democracy by special deference to minority opinion, is, we think, better than to follow blindly the rule which always insists on an unqualified dominance by a slight majority vote. Throughout his political speculation, deTocqueville, the French student of democracy, insisted that the greatest danger to democracy would always be the tyranny of apathetic, self-seeking, uninformed or angry majorities. Only a truly dedicated citizen, quite willing to protect and conserve minority rights and opinions could, he thought guarantee the existence of a free and democratic society. Hence, we believe, that we shall never be subjected to the tyranny of either the

majority or the minority, provided we carefully define the relations between them and forthwith tread the paths of service in the spirit of our Twelve Steps, our Twelve Traditions and this Concept, number Five.

Concept Six -- You know, Bill has always said that one of the great good fortunes in his life, and perhaps A.A.'s life, turned out to be the fact that he was a jack of all trades, and a master of none. He had a little bit of knowledge about public relations, a little bit of knowledge about finance, a little bit of knowledge about law and so forth. This meant that all of this accumulated experience of his could be utilized -- as it has been so magnificently in the creation of our whole A.A. structure. But, I must confess that I wish that Bill had had a little less of that experience with "Law" when he was writing these Concepts! Such legal language, and you know how confusing lawyers can be.

So, let's take a look at Concept Six which reads: "On behalf of A.A. as a whole, our General Service Conference has the principal responsibility for the maintenance of our world services, and it traditionally has the final decision respecting large matters of general policy and finance. But the Conference also recognizes that the chief initiative and the active responsibility in most of these matters should be exercised primarily by the Trustee members of the Conference when they act among themselves as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous." Now let's look at a regular group business meeting. Doesn't that business meeting delegate to its officers or to its Steering Committee the weekly or daily operations of the group's affairs? Don't we feel fairly sure that the speakers will be arranged for and that they will show up somehow, that the coffee and cake will be available after each meeting. And as the officers of the group are trusted by the group, so are they observed and guided by the group's wishes. So, too, do the Trustees assume responsibility for the operation of their service corporations -- A.A. World Services and the A.A. Grapevine. The objective is a spiritual one -- but this service aim can only be achieved by means of an effective business operation. Like any other business Board of Directors -- our Trustees must be given the chief initiative and the active responsibility to effectively manage the principal world affairs of our fellowship.

Concept Seven -- I somehow think of Concept Seven as being the "checks and balances Concept." The charter and bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments, while the Conference Charter is not -- relying on the force of the A.A. Traditions and the A.A. purse, as it were, for its final effectiveness. This means that the practical power of the Conference will nearly always be superior to the legal power of the Trustees. This superior power in the Conference flows from the traditional influence of the charter itself, and further from the undoubted ability of the Delegates to cut off the contributions from the groups themselves.

We can see practical applications of this in our day to day lives. The most obvious is the collection plate at the group. If the program chairman

isn't doing a good job, and there aren't good meetings scheduled or the schedule breaks down, attendance falls off and so does the collection. And even though the Steering Committee may have nominated the program chairman, the group conscience can request that he be removed.

Or at Intergroup -- if the groups don't feel their Intergroup is giving them enough Twelve Step calls or providing them with sufficient services, they could reduce or eliminate their monthly pledge. It was out of these considerations that our present Conference charter was developed -- a structure which clearly gives the Conference the final ultimate authority, but which nevertheless, legally preserves the rights of the Trustees to function freely and adequately, just as any business Board of Directors must. This arrangement is in strict conformity with the "trusted servant" provision of Tradition Two, which contemplates that our servants within the scope of their duties, should be trusted to use their own experience and judgement. Up to the present time, our experience shows that this balance of powers between the trustees and the conference is thoroughly workable. We believe this balance can be maintained indefinitely, because the one is protected by Tradition and the other by law.

Concept Eight -- Long experience has now proved that our Board as a whole must devote itself almost exclusively to the larger and more serious questions of policy, finance, public information. Here the Board is expected to plan, manage and execute. But they cannot as a body concern themselves with the daily routine. There the Board's attitude has to be that of custodial oversight; it cannot be the executive. Hence the trustees are the guarantors of the good management of A.A. World Services and the A.A. Grapevine. They discharge their custodial obligations by electing the Directors. Again to give an over simplified example with which we might all be familiar -- it may be the policy of the group to have only cookies after the meeting, never any cake. That policy would be made by the group's Steering Committee, but the Committee wouldn't feel it had to examine each cookie purchased. This responsibility would fall to the secretary who would be trusted to make the selection after getting the money authorized by the Steering Committee from the Group's Treasurer. So, too, would the Board and its service entities, each of which possesses its own charter, its own working capital, its own executive, its own employees, its own offices and equipment. So Concept Eight reads: "The Trustees of the General Service Board act in two primary capacities. With respect to the larger matters of overall policies and finance, they are the principal planners and administrators, but with respect to our separately incorporated and constantly active services, their relationship is mainly that of custodial oversight, which they exercise through their ability to elect all the Directors of these entities."

Concept Nine - The primary world service leadership once exercised by the founders of A.A. must necessarily be assumed by the Trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous. That means that Bill and Dr. Bob stepped down and turned the Fellowship over to you and me.

Good leadership cannot function well in a poorly designed structure. But weak leadership can hardly function at all, even in the best of structures. Good leadership can be here today and gone tomorrow. Furnishing our service structure with able and willing workers has to be a continuous activity.

Here, too, we can see the relationships of our Traditions to the Concepts. For Tradition One says, "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity." The long form of that Tradition as it was originally written says, "Each Member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us would surely die. Hence, our common welfare comes first -- but individual welfare follows close afterwards."

Let's look at that long form of Tradition One in the light of many group elections we've attended. How many times have we heard someone say "Let's make Mary the G.S.R., it will do her good." But Mary's and the group's strength will come from A.A.'s survival and unity, and the group will best be served by a G.S.R. who can serve the group.

And along these lines let's remember that the basis for our complete service structure rests on the dedication and ability of the G.S.R., in the Committee members and the Delegates. These are the indispensable links between the Fellowship as a whole and its world service. These are the primary representatives of A.A.'s group conscience. Without their support and activity we could not operate permanently at all. So in keeping with Tradition One, good leadership comes from selecting those individuals to serve at any level who can most effectively serve the group with responsibility. We should always ask the question "Who are the best qualified people that we can select?"

Somewhere in our literature there is a statement to this effect: "Our leaders do not drive by mandate, they lead by example." In effect we are saying to them "Act for us, but don't boss us." A leader in A.A. service is therefore a man or woman who can personally put principles, plans and policies into such dedicated and effective action that the rest of us want to back him up and help him with his job. And there is the old important attribute of vision. Bill says, "Vision is, I think, the ability to make good estimates, both for the immediate and for the more distant future." Now a lot of us get hung up on the 24 hour program and we may not think that we should look ahead. But let's not forget in 1939 when there were approximately 100 members in our Fellowship Bill wrote: "Someday we hope that every alcoholic who journeys will find the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous at his destination." I don't know whether Bill really believed that the day would come when there would be groups in 90 countries, sharing A.A. in 17 languages in over 14,000 groups all over the world, but he had the vision.

So, when we talk about A.A. leadership, we only mean that we ought to select that leadership on the basis of obtaining the best talent we can find and this is true in 12th Step work too. Every sponsor is a leader.

The stakes are about as big as they could be. A human life and usually the happiness of a whole family hangs in the balance. What the sponsor does and says, how well he estimates the reactions of his prospect, how well he times and makes his presentation, how well he handles criticism, and how well he leads his prospects on by personal spiritual example, these qualities of leadership can make all the difference. Often the difference between life and death.

Concept Ten says, "Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority -- the scope of such authority to be always well defined whether by tradition, resolution, by a specific job description, or by appropriate charters and bylaws."

There's Bill and his legal language again. But actually an outstanding characteristic of every good operational structure, is that it guarantees harmonious and effective function by relating its several parts and people in such a way that none can doubt what their respective responsibilities and corresponding authorities actually are. Unless these attributes are well defined, unless those holding the final authority are able and willing properly to delegate a suitable operational authority; unless those holding such delegated authority feel able and willing to use it freely as trusted servants, and unless there exists some definite means of interpreting and deciding doubtful situations, then personal clashes, confusions and ineffectiveness will be inevitable. The influence of ultimate authority must always be felt, but it is perfectly clear that when delegated authority is operating well, it should be left alone.

Let's go back to those cookies again. It's fine for the secretary to have the responsibility to go and buy the cookies, and with this responsibility, to make whatever selection of cookies she wants to. But, she must also know the limit of her responsibility -- that limit might be that she had to function on a budget, and it would not be her decision as to whether there would be an extra dozen cookies that week.

So let us always be sure there is an abundance of final or ultimate authority to correct or to reorganize, but let us be equally sure that all of our trusted servants have a clearly defined and adequate authority to do their daily work and to discharge their clear responsibilities. All of this is implied in A.A.'s Tradition Two -- Here we see the group conscience as the ultimate authority and the trusted servant as the delegated authority. One cannot function without the other.

Concept Eleven outlines the relationships of the standing committees of the General Service Board, the Corporate Service Directors, the Staff and consultants. The composition of these underlying Committees and Service Boards, the personal qualification of their members, the manner of their induction into service, the systems of their rotation, the way in which they are related to each other, the special rights and duties of our executives, Staff and consultants, together with a proper basis for the financial compensation of these special workers, will always be matters for serious care and concern.

In all of these relationships we find the importance of the previously outlined Concepts -- the delegation of authority to the Directors, the advisory function and capacity of the Board's Committees, the right of decision, participation and appeal on the part of all.

Ultimately, only the sustained willingness to practice spiritual principles in all our affairs can accomplish the harmonious working of the whole. So, here we are right back to our 12th Tradition, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Concept Twelve is a restatement of the general warranties of the Conference. In 1955, the Charter for the General Service Conference was adopted at the 20th anniversary of the Convention of A.A. that was held in St. Louis over the 4th of July weekend of that year. At that time a resolution was passed which said in part "That A.A.'s General Service Conference should now become the permanent successor to the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, inheriting from them all their former duties and special responsibilities, thus avoiding at future times all possible strivings for individual prestige or personal powers; and also providing our society with the means of functioning on a permanent basis."

The resolution further said "Neither the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous nor the warranties of Article 12 of the Conference Charter shall ever be changed or amended by the General Service Conference, except by first asking the consent of the registered A.A. groups throughout the world." The warranties themselves, which are the basis of Concept 12, have a high and permanent importance to A.A.'s general welfare. They are a series of solemn undertakings which guarantee that the Conference itself will conform to A.A.'s Twelve Traditions; that the Conference can never become the seat of great wealth or government; that its financial policies shall ever be prudent; that it will never create any absolute authority; that the principle of substantial unanimity will be observed; that it will never take any punitive action; that it will never incite public controversy; that it can serve A.A. only; and that it shall always remain democratic in spirit.

These warranties are guides for the relationships of the Conference to all of A.A., but aren't they also guides by which we in our own groups can function. Certainly our system of rotation prevents any small group of persons from becoming a kind of "government" within the group. If they don't move over, we kick them over. Prudence is generally the word as far as money matters are concerned. As a matter of fact, we sometimes are a little bit too prudent, finding it difficult to get that extra \$1 out of our pocket. The group does not give absolute authority to its trusted servants -- it just trusts them; the group conscience is the principle of unanimity; in our relationships with others the key is sharing and caring rather than punitive action.

The group bound by Tradition Ten has no opinion on outside issues, hence the A.A. name is not drawn into public controversy. The warranties say

that the Conference can serve A.A. only. This is in keeping with our Fifth Tradition which says that A.A.'s primary purpose, and the primary purpose of every A.A. group, is to carry the message of Alcoholics Anonymous to the alcoholic who still suffers -- and this is an extension of the 12th Step which says, "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of practicing these Steps, we try to carry the A.A. message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

Which brings us back -- full circle -- to recovery -- the base of our triangle. And with our recovery we have been given a freedom from bondage we never dreamt possible. Through the practice of the Steps, we have the continued freedom to grow, to serve and to love. We of A.A. believe that our freedom to serve is truly the freedom by which we live, for the 12th Step call is the first service, and the 12th Step call keeps us sober, and sober we stay free. So let's go back to the beginning, to that book which was written so many years ago and which was the forerunner of all that has been given us over these years of growth, success and service: "Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the fellowship of the spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trod the road of happy destiny."