

A Day at a time

STEP THREE
FAITH

Little River 79th Street
12 Step Workshop
AA Principles of
The 12 Steps



STEP THREE

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Step Three identifies the spiritual illness of alcoholism and suggests a simple, effective remedy. Success with this or other Steps is not a matter of chance but of right thought and motive practiced daily.

Knowledge and treatment of our physical and mental health are vitally important to alcoholics, but lasting, contented sobriety is maintained only by surrender of our lives and will to God as we understand Him.

The first three Steps are a composite A.A. package. Conceived of meditation and experience, they are a basic recovery prescription. Taken with proper timing and in correct proportion they immediately arrest our alcoholic illness. These Steps complement each other, but they fail to work if any of them are omitted.

Steps One and Two are the premise upon which we decide to surrender our alcoholic lives to God. Step Three calls for this decision. Honesty, faith, and prayer spark our success.

A complete knowledge of the physical, mental, and spiritual injury we have suffered at the hands of "John Barleycorn" is indispensable to the honest, far-reaching

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decision we wish to make. Deliberation born of necessity and a desperate need for help will inspire us to seek our understanding of God.

Our great need is loss of self-centeredness and alcoholic obsession. A.A. pioneers discovered their answers to these problems as they developed spiritual understanding and relied upon God's help for recovery. Each of us has the same possibilities if we are honest, humble, and willing enough to work them out.

Step Three offers no compromise for reservation or delay. It calls for a decision, here and now. How we surrender our alcoholic personality defects to God is of no immediate concern. The important point is our willingness to try. Faith in practice of the Twelve Steps opens the way to understanding of God and provides ways of giving our lives to Him.

When we have made this crucial decision, our attitude changes rapidly from negative to wholesome, constructive thinking. We lose our uncertainty and fear. Strife and rebellion disappear. Somehow, we seem to gain a vague understanding of God's will for us. This understanding may be small, but it is all we need to start with. It comes slowly at first.

Members who have accepted and practiced Step Three know the value of turning

the defects of their alcoholic lives over to the care of God as they understand Him. Faith in His help and willingness to try A.A. spiritual practices will convert our weaknesses to great spiritual strength and understanding. Contented sobriety, the central purpose in our lives, is not earned without self-sacrifice and God's help.

If fear of public opinion, spiritual bias, or hypocritical ideas stand in our way, we learn to overcome them. We have no other choice. It is a small price to pay for life and sanity, particularly when we learn our prejudice is but preconceived judgment inspired by ill health, ignorance, and false pride.

Public opinion is for, not against, us. Spiritual bias is but self-will that does not yield to reason. Trying to understand God's will for us is not hypocritical. It is a basic recovery principle for alcoholics. It never fails those who sincerely use it.

A.A. is an anonymous fellowship that will shield us from publicity, "a place where we escape the doom of alcoholic death by life on a spiritual basis."* The public's only knowledge of our lives is that we no longer drink. They did not approve of our drinking, but they honor and receive us when we

*Read pages 44-45 of *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

stop. This is plain, unmistakable evidence of spiritual progress.

After making our decision to live on a moral, spiritual basis, many perplexities arise. How are we to understand God? How are we to submit our will and our lives to Him?

We are advised the A.A. program is simple, and we should keep it as simple as possible. Yet in Step Three we are confronted with the age-old mystery of humankind's relativity to God. Our natural inclination is to duck the issue entirely. Surely there must be some easier way out. There is. Given a chance, our alcoholic minds will find it. It leads back to drinking.

We know what should be done about this matter, but we are not being honest with ourselves when we refuse to seek an understanding of God or to draw upon His help and power. We still reason through alcoholic thinking. It is hard to surrender the rationalization and alibis of our alcoholic personalities. Also while seeking a tangible God we miss the service that leads to Him.

After groping around in the murky fog of rebellion, stinking thinking, and despair, we will come up with our answers. Honest and sincere as we try to make them, they are usually most confusing. When we overlook the fact that we are ill, it is easy to see only moral offense in our conduct and

decide religion is the answer to our problems. But those of us who have tried to exclude A.A. generally end up drunk.

We should not confuse organized religion with A.A. We can keep our religion separate and not substitute it for A.A. philosophy. Honest clergy members expedite spiritual attainment but usually lack understanding of the physical and mental illness of alcoholism. If your priest, minister, or rabbi is interested in A.A., he or she can undoubtedly help you. Regardless of such support, join an A.A. group.

Obviously, religious creeds must be dealt with outside of A.A. Our concept of God as we understand Him and our belief in a Higher Power that can restore spiritual health are all our Program requires. We find it most adequate.

A great barrier in finding God is impatience. We soon learn spiritual attainment must be earned. Understanding of God constantly enlarges so we never reach perfection.

Since this is no overnight process, we suggest thought and prayer in the matter. At the start we make separate approaches to surrendering our willful lives and reaching our concept of God. By first deciding what isolates us from Him we reach a spiritual awakening as we eliminate these isolating factors or character defects.

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We deal with God in the abstract; thus our contacts must be on a mental plane. We believe acts of drunkenness, dishonesty, envy, self-pity, spite, hatred, resentment, malice, and injustice injure us; they are the acts of depraved people in the eyes of society and are opposed to all spiritual virtues known to A.A. members who are spiritually awakened.

If this is true and we can accept it, as a majority of our membership have, then the matter of what we turn over to God's care is no longer a problem. We find all of these traits in our unmanageable alcoholic lives. If these are spiritual debits, most of us have drunk ourselves into spiritual bankruptcy.

Step Three should not confuse us. It calls for a decision to correct our character defects under spiritual supervision. The common cause of failure is time and effort spent in visualizing God or vaguely trying to reach Him before we make a decision to surrender and change our insane, unmanageable lives.

We demand maturity without the pains of experience and growth. This is both unreasonable and impossible. By such method we would have a program of three Steps, rather than twelve. It is the practice of Steps Four through Twelve that teaches us our understanding of God. This understanding starts with blind faith; through conviction

it steadily grows into conscious contact with God — personal contact. *Spiritual growth is our goal.* We are wise to avoid all concepts of God opposed to that goal.

Lack of faith arrests our progress. Procrastination and skepticism are enemies of spiritual attainment. Skepticism demands evidence of God's help. Procrastination prevents it. Faith, willingness, and prayer overcome all obstacles and provide ample evidence of His help in our happy, sober lives.

We usually experience our best understanding of God when we humbly admit our alcoholic illness and sincerely lose ourselves in the A.A. way of life. Friendly acts of service, forgiveness, and amends help our understanding.

God speaks to us in as many ways as we find to contact Him. His answers, abstract as they may be, are detected in mind, emotion, and in the new conscience we have developed. We are inspired in accordance with our thought and conduct, either with feelings of faith, accomplishment, and serenity, or with confusion, self-pity, and fear.

Few alcoholics need introduction to the idea of a Divine Being. Most of us were taught this in our youth. We have all seen evidence of a Power greater than ourselves in our well-regulated world of seasons, day

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and night, heat and moisture, human reproduction, and love and tolerance.

Most of us have appreciated the perfection of the universe, the animation of living things, the action of the human mind, and the power of love. These things all seem to denote a dynamic life force that surges through everything around us. This force appears to direct all things harmoniously but irresistibly toward a natural, definite, useful conclusion.

Is it hard to recognize in this life force a Power greater than ourselves? Do we not sense Its creative energy, intelligence, and power? Are human beings not weak and unimportant apart from God's power?

Our founders discovered, by trial and error, that spiritual contact with God as they understood Him was the alcoholic's only assurance of a normal, sober life.

Self-preservation urges that we find this companionship and try to understand God's help.

Understanding comes slowly from practice of the Twelve Steps. From simple acts, such as

1. Humbly admitting our alcoholism. Desiring to stop drinking and treat our illness.
2. Honest effort to lose alcoholic skepticism. Faith in God and the A.A. program.

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3. Making a decision to live as free as possible of mental binges.
4. Identifying character defects that isolate us from contented sobriety.
5. Submitting these defects in prayer to God for removal.
6. Honestly living each Step to establish a conscious contact with Him.
7. Prayer without resentment in our hearts.
8. Studying the Big Book for understanding to improve our conscience. Forgiving others.
9. Dealing in right motives, fair treatment.
10. Acting with kindness and sanity in our business and home life.
11. Being honest and appreciative, helping others, showing tolerance.
12. Belief in our spiritual potential. Willingness to find God in developing it.

The important element is our willingness to *try*. Every alcoholic has spiritual possibilities. We must learn to bring them out, to form convictions, and to let them grow.

When it is possible, we should take our spouses or close relatives into our confidence as we attempt to carry out this Step. We have found great strength, and help comes to members who have the confidence and cooperation of those close to them. If family members are not cooperative, we

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must work it out alone.

We should avoid the common mistake of confusing our minds with anxious thoughts regarding the time and manner God will manifest Himself to us. Our understanding will come gradually as we earn and develop it.

It is uncommon for a member to have a drastic spiritual upheaval. Spiritual awakening or experience comes slowly, and often in strange ways. It does come, however, but so naturally we often fail to recognize it.

Our job is to be ready and willing for these experiences, find incentive in the examples of fellow members who are living the A.A. program, be open-minded in our endeavor to understand God and realize that it is not made up of one big accomplishment but gained bit by bit, and remember our inspiration will be influenced by our attitude and action.* The active members who take the program seriously are slowly but surely laying the groundwork for close personal contacts with God — by applying it in their home life, in their business, and in the treatment of new members; by admitting wrongs; and by making amends.

Quiet periods of relaxation and prayer

*Our recovery from alcoholism is dependent on humility, honesty, faith in God, appreciation, and service to other alcoholics.

are necessary to achieve this Step. The alcoholic should also keep in mind the value of relaxation aside from prayer. We should not overlook the fact that all alcoholics are of restless disposition, that restlessness and tension are a part of our trouble, that we once appeased this condition with alcohol, and that we now seek to correct it under God's supervision.

Alcoholics must learn to relax when they become upset, angry, impatient, resentful, bored, or exhausted.

Relaxation helps us maintain physical, mental, and spiritual balance. It aids clear thinking which keeps us out of the "driver's seat." It permits conscious contact with God — our only hope for recovery from alcoholism.

We regard the outcome of this Step in complete confidence, as we know from the example of other members that God's will can be understood and that our understanding of His care will give us new personalities that exclude alcohol — personalities that happily relate us to God, to a conventional world, and to others.

SUMMARIZATION. The confusing ills of alcoholism need no longer frustrate the alcoholic who wants to get well. Steps One and Two clearly reveal alcoholism as a sickness — a fatal, incurable malady.

Chronic alcohol poisoning induced by

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addiction to alcohol accounts for our physical and mental illness. This illness is the premise that we base our decision on — to seek God's help for recovery.

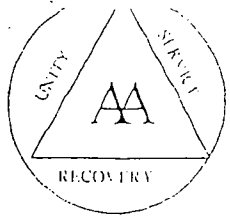
Spiritual illness loses its mystery and vagueness when we concede the anesthetic role alcohol has played in our lives. It explains the mental paralysis and moral deviations associated with compulsive drinking. We come to know that self-pity, fear, intolerance, resentment, belligerency, vindictiveness, and dishonesty have insulated us from God. They have calloused our consciences. They have bred spiritual illness.

Step Three confuses us only when we reverse its suggested application. The Step has three parts: first, a decision; second, we try to determine what constitutes our will and our life; and third, we seek an understanding of God by placing our will and our life in His care.

TREATMENT. We stop playing God. We surrender our self-centeredness to Him. We relax. We avoid confusing A.A. with religion. We do not try to define God. We recognize and attempt to develop our spiritual possibilities. We seek a personal contact with God, practicing thought and action with moral values that help us develop a better conscience. We plan and try to live daily lives that embrace sobriety, faith, honesty, prayer, tolerance, forgiveness, ser-

vice to others, and amends where they should be made.

Spiritual upheavals and overnight personality changes are not for most of us. We come to know God from living the Twelve Steps. If we wish to have God's help in our hour of need, let's get out our pencils and paper now and list the things that Step Four identifies as barriers to His help in our recovery from alcoholism.



Step Three: Beginning My Plan of Action

Here is the Third Step in the AA Twelve Step program: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

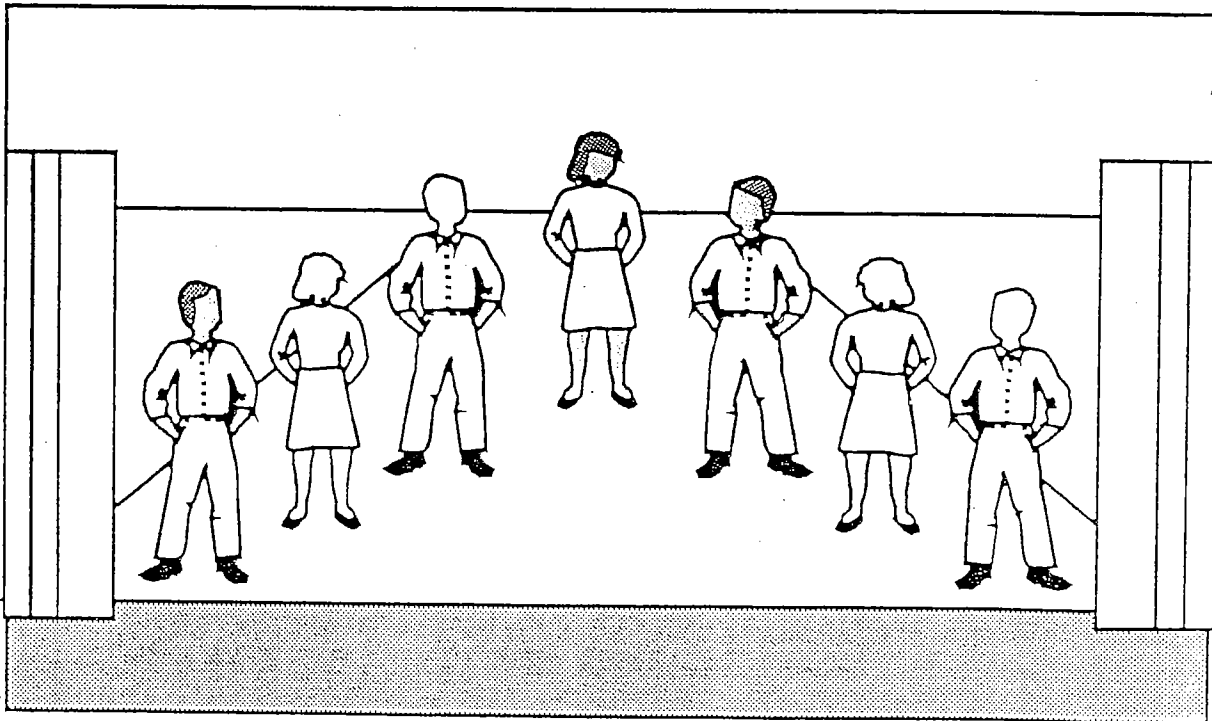
Stop now and read the Big Book from page 60, line 21, through the next-to-the-last paragraph (line 31) on page 63. This section of the Big Book describes Step Three.

Exercise 1

"SELF-WILL RUN RIOT"

Fill in the blank: Near the bottom of page 60 (last paragraph), the Big Book says that until we're convinced that a life run on _____ won't be a success, we're like an actor who wants to run the whole show.

Who are the people whom you have tried to control and who play the other characters in your "show"? Write a name above each figure below. (Add more as needed.)



* Although the Big Book, written in the late 1930s, refers to "God" as "Him," no deliberate gender preference was intended by the author. The words "Her" or simply "God," depending on your preference, can be substituted for "Him."

Now take a separate sheet of paper, and write each person's name across the top of the page. Beneath each person's name, write what you tried to get him or her to do. In other words, how have you tried to run each person's life?



Fill in the blanks: Near the top of page 62 in the Big Book, we are told that _____ is at the root of our problems, and that "driven by a hundreds forms of _____, _____, _____, and _____," we hurt others.

We are also told near the bottom of page 62 (last paragraph) that in order to reduce this self-centeredness, we must quit playing _____, and let _____ be the Director.

In other words, God, as you understand God, is the real Director of your life and your recovery. What gets in the way is *self-will*. Will is nothing more than your mind and your thinking. Your will is the thing up in your head that tells you what to do and, properly used, is aligned with God's will so that God can be your Director.

On the middle of page 62, the Big Book says that an alcoholic _____ "is an extreme example of *self-will run riot*." (Italics added.) This means we're so driven by self-will that even though we have "moral and philosophical convictions galore," we can't live up to them—we continue to hurt ourselves and others.

↳ Exercise 2

WHEN BEHAVIOR CONFLICTS WITH VALUES

Think of an incident directly related to your drinking _____ when your behavior was in conflict with your values, and answer these questions:

What did you do that was in conflict with your values?

Which of your values did you go against?

What was your explanation then?

How do you explain it now?

How might you act differently now if God—your Higher Power—were your guide?

Exercise 3

TURNING IT OVER . . . AND WHAT'S AHEAD?

The idea of turning over your will and life to a Higher Power can be a very frightening one. Think about what areas of your life will be the hardest to turn over to a Higher Power.

In the list that follows, put a "1" by the most difficult thing to turn over, and then number the rest of the items to 10, which will be the least difficult thing to turn over. If there is something (or things) in your life more difficult to turn over than what's listed here, you may add to or substitute for the items below.

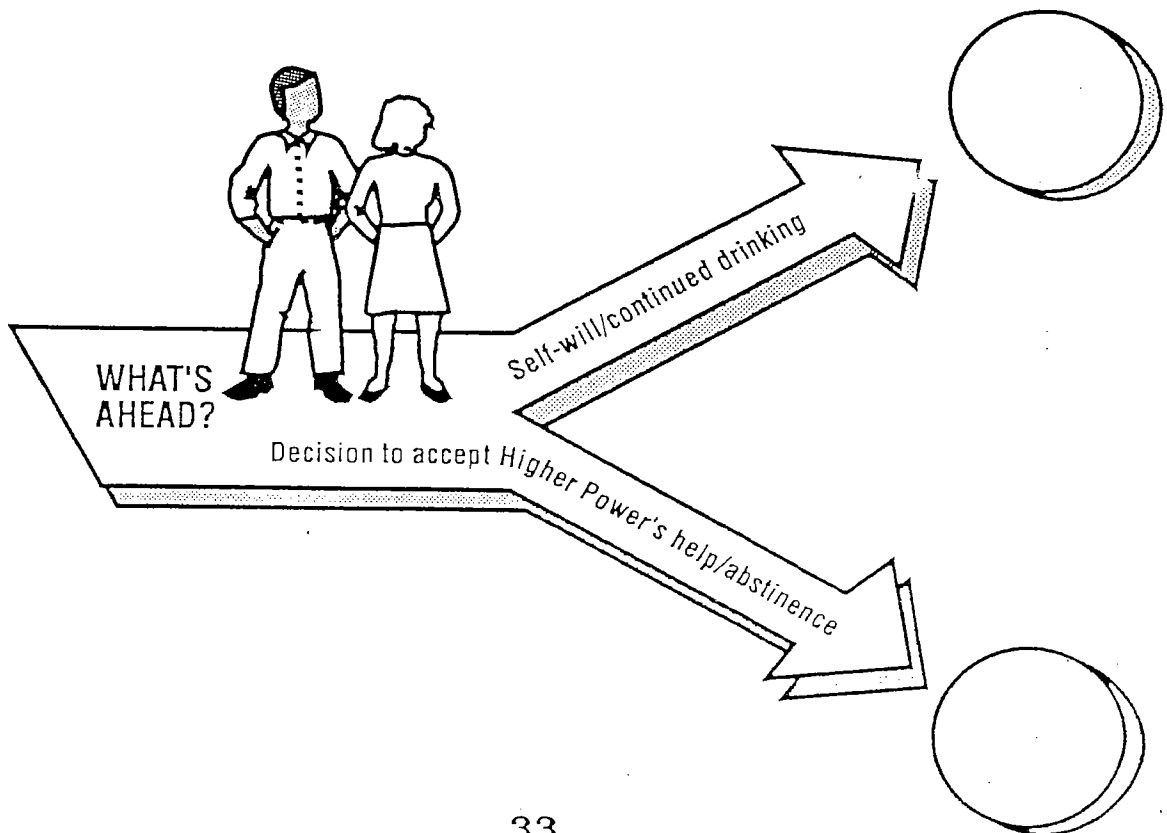
- | | |
|--|--|
| _____ self-serving sexual gratification | _____ idea that I can drink or use drugs normally |
| _____ need to be different (special) | _____ self-pity |
| _____ friends who drink and drive | _____ resentments over past harm |
| _____ need to be nothing but the best | _____ need for control over family members, co-workers, or friends |
| _____ need to have things always go my way | |
| _____ (other) | _____ (other) |

Now starting with the areas of your life (from the preceding list) that you think will be the hardest to turn over to a Higher Power, describe below in a few words what you're afraid will happen if you turn each of these over.

This fear of giving your will and life to a Higher Power is not unusual. Yet as alcoholics we've already given our will and lives to something—alcohol. It often determined where we went, with whom we associated, who we slept with, and how we spent our money. We have a disease of the body and mind that will end in insanity or death unless we make the decision required in Step Three.

Compared to turning our lives over to alcohol, ... deciding to turn our will and life over to a Higher Power should be far less frightening. And Step Three only asks us to *make the decision* to turn our will and life over to our Higher Power. The actual turning over of our will and life occurs naturally in the course of working the next eight Steps.

Turn in the Big Book to page 25, lines 25-32, and read this passage. What are your choices? Write them in the circles on the diagram below.



WHAT'S AHEAD?

Read the prayer on page 63, lines 13-20, in your Big Book.

Write out in your own words what this prayer means to you.

If possible, share what you've written aloud with someone you trust; for example, your sponsor, counselor, or a close friend or relative who understands. Otherwise, say what you've written to yourself and your Higher Power.

In taking the Third Step, as the Big Book says on page 62, lines 32-33, you put in place *"the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which [you will pass] to freedom."* (Italics added.)

You are now ready for your Fourth Step.

The Twelve Steps Of Alcoholics Anonymous*

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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The Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous*

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.
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.
3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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