

The Traditions
of
Alcoholics Anonymous
As They Apply To
Personal Relationships

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Some Characteristics of AA:

1. We are an inclusive organization - not exclusive. . All alcoholics are welcome as members - everybody else is welcome at open meetings. And it is not just OK with us that you are here - we want you here. You are even welcome if you come drinking (as many of us did).
2. We demand nothing - our Steps of recovery are suggested - never demanded. And you are free to totally ignore all our suggestions without forfeiting your membership.
3. AA is essentially free. We have no money or property. The general service board decides what our prudent reserve should be and all our bills are net 30. We have no debt, we own no property. AA is very clear on clubs and the relationships between clubs, groups, and members.
4. In addition to routine alcoholics, we have neurotics, psychotics, Bleeding Deacons and Traditions Lawyer who are all convinced they represent the true spirit of AA and are willing to die for their way
5. Many of us have an astonishing willingness to practice medicine, law, psychotherapy, and other professions - despite our complete lack of education and credentials in any of these areas.
6. Bill Wilson's Family Reunion – International Conventions (mixed cultures, races, ethnic origins, nationalities, etc. laughing, smiling, doing the wave, hugging, tolerating, being courteous and friendly. That was not an accident.

What makes all this possible? How do we achieve a International Convention? How do we tolerate misguided members? Was it always this way?

Three Questions

Let me ask you three questions:

1. Do you think the idea that alcoholism is a disease originated with AA?
2. Do you think AA is the first to have effectively dealt with alcoholism?
3. Why has AA been able to last (so far)?

A Very Incomplete History of Alcoholism:

Benjamin Rush

In 1796, a doctor Benjamin Rush wrote a paper describing alcohol abuse as a disease. The name alcoholism was not yet invented but the disease concept of alcoholism did not originate with Alcoholics Anonymous. Dr. Rush explored the subject in some depth in his paper; however, few of us have ever heard of him or his paper. Dr. Rush was the first professor of chemistry in the colonies, at the College of Philadelphia. He signed the Declaration of Independence and was a member of the Continental Congress. He established in Philadelphia the first free dispensary in the U.S. and became professor of medicine at the Univ. of Pennsylvania. He was a pioneer in psychiatry and a prolific writer so he was not exactly a remote bumpkin but was rather a very learned man for his time.

Washingtonians

Later, around 1812 a guy named Lyman Beecher organized the Temperance Society, promoting not abstinence from alcohol but abstinence from hard booze. Wine was still acceptable. He adopted and promoted the ideas of Dr. Rush regarding alcohol: keeping non-alcoholics from becoming alcoholics. He believed that drunkards could not be helped. The temperance movement initially felt an indifference to alcoholics because they were beyond help. In fact, Justin Edwards, in 1822, said, "Keep the temperate people temperate; the drunkards will soon die and the land be free.

The temperance movement thrived for a time but by 1836 it began to decline; mostly because it was more or less overpowered by more fanatical forces who believed in total abstinence. By 1840, Mr. Beecher's organization was looking for ways to revitalize itself.

Meanwhile, there was to be found in Baltimore, a half-dozen drunks who drank together daily in a place called Chases Tavern on Liberty Street in Baltimore. One Thursday evening, April 2, 1840, they were discussing the temperance movement and it was decided that they should check it out. With true alcoholic wisdom, they decided that only four of them needed to go and they could then report their findings back to the group. By Sunday, April 5,

the movement was born, a pledge had been written, a meeting place had been decided on (Chases Tavern), and the Washingtonians began.

Within six months, there were several hundred members and within a few years, there were thousands. Abraham Lincoln spoke at one of their gatherings so they were highly successful and entirely accepted in society without any kind of stigma. Remember, AA was formed in 1935 and by 1940, when the Big Book was written; there were only about 100 members.

The Washingtonians were very much like AA meetings are today. They had speaker meetings where members shared their experience, strength, and hope and some of their more prominent members (John Hawkins) were widely reported upon and quoted in the media. All were free to come to their meetings and they were invited to places like New York and Boston to carry their message.

Emmanuel Movement

Around the turn of the century, another movement got started called the Emmanuel movement. This was a religion-based movement founded by a man named Elwood Worcester in New England and was successful for a time in helping people to get sober.

The Oxford Group

The Oxford Group that most of you have heard of was founded at Oxford University by a German-American evangelist named Frank Nathan Daniel Buchman. Buchman worked to "change" lives through his First Century Christian Fellowship, and he organized groups all over the world.

The Oxford Group believed in the principles of first century Christianity, that is, one Christian sharing with another. No grand edifices, no liturgy, no costumes - just simple Christianity as they understood it. If you recall, the Oxford movement was quite successful. Rowland Hazard and Ebby Thatcher were members and it was essentially the Oxford Group credo that both of these men credited for their sobriety. When Ebby visited Bill Wilson in Townes Hospital, it was the message of the Oxford Group that he carried. To give you an indication of their size and power, the Oxford Group had a meeting in the Hollywood Bowl in 1937. There were 27,000 people in the bowl and another 10,000 outside who couldn't get in.

All of these movements enjoyed some success yet they all failed to achieve any longevity. What happened? It is my belief, and that of many others, that they lost their way because they had no guiding principles or traditions. The Washingtonians were so buoyed by their success and power that they took on causes and social problems other than alcoholism. The Oxford Group, through Buckman, decided to alter the course of the world by "converting" the world's leaders. Buckman would say, "If I could convert Hitler, I could change the course of history." His first attempt at conversion was the Duke of Windsor and it failed - just as his movement was finally to do.

Yet AA has thus far succeeded. How? I believe that our survival as a society is no less miraculous than our personal recoveries from a terminal illness. The fact that we are still thriving is due in no small part to the guiding principles revealed in the 12 traditions. Bill wrote about them extensively in the Grapevine back in the mid-40's but they were not well received and AA members resisted their adoption. According to many older members it was not unusual in those times that when Bill was asked to speak, it was on the condition that he not talk about those "damn traditions". Finally, however, in 1950 at the conference in Cleveland, the short form was adopted in principle and they have grown from there. They have served us well.

A Brief Review of the Traditions

1. Our common welfare should come first. Personal recovery depends upon A.A. Unity. **(If we don't hang together we die alone)**
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. No AA member can require that any other member do anything. This gives some of our more controlling members a little difficulty. For example, when a group decides upon something like a seat-saving policy, it can only be a suggestion. We have no enforcement power. We cannot have seat police that enforce such rules.
3. The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.

Allowing OA's, Alanons, other 12-step people or spouses to share in a meeting. Chips, birthdays and what qualifies one for a birthday cake.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. We offer nothing else. No job counseling, marriage counseling, loans, sober living homes, hospitals, education, nothing.
6. An AA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose. AA has found a way to avoid money and property problems and that is to have none of either.
7. Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

The Elks lodge affair in Oxnard - outside contribution supporting an AA group...

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. AA as such ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

Committees develop new literature, publish the grapevine, etc.

Those GSR reports that many of us do not wish to hear is the opportunity to influence those committee decisions. They are responsible to us.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy. AA has broad respect in the world because we are trusted - we have no hidden agenda. We just sober up drunks. That is all we do.

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.

- It is easy, when something as good as AA happens to us, to go from being an AA member to being an AA showoff.
- However, this says at the level of press, radio, and film...not in my meetings.

12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

It is our reminder that each of us is doing the best we can - and that if we knew better, we'd do better. It is what reminds us that love and tolerance is our code. It lets us remember that screaming at an AA brother or sister may not be God's will for us.

Using the Traditions in Personal and Romantic Relationships

The practice of the 12 steps of both the AA and Alanon programs puts our lives in order, but not necessarily our relationships. How to live successfully with others can also be found within our traditions.

On October 27, 1996, my wife, Polly, and I celebrate 16 years of marriage. I believe I have the most wonderful mate in the world and I hope you feel that way about yours (or will when you get one). Polly, however, is not my first wife. There were three others: Jolynn, Charlotte, and Carma.

My first marriage was an excellent example of how not to do it. I drank and used amphetamines every single day of that marriage. I made love to my wife while under the influence of alcohol. I raised my children under the

perpetual influence of alcohol. I taught them about life, bought their clothes and food, selected the house they would live in, chose their Christmas presents, drove them to school, and taught them about life all under the influence of drugs and alcohol. I responded to their laughter and tears while drinking. My moods, actions, attitudes, and assessments were all formed under the influence of alcohol. How could such an approach not fail? Until AA, I never had a clue about this. I blamed my wife and my children for most of the problems. During this entire period, I developed no friendships or lasting relationships - no ties with others. My second marriage was even worse.

All of these marriages, ranging in length from three years to fourteen years, slowly collapsed, and finally ended in dreary failure. And as one of my Al-Anon friends likes to point out, I was the only common thread in all three. The point is that obviously, I did not know how to conduct a relationship with a wife - or anybody else for that matter. What was the problem? The problem was both complex and simple:

- I was an alcoholic. I was selfish and self-centered. Being selfish and self-centered does not mean that I thought well of myself - it means that I thought only of myself.

Because of that, I was able to listen to you and I have learned many things. The actions you told me to take have worked and I now clearly see that everything I know about how to conduct a relationship with another human being I learned in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Relationships

Some of us approach romance or marriage as though it were a game of some sort. Many of us think the trick is to find the right person. Actually, the trick is to be the right person. Why?

Imagine your Mr. or Ms Wonderful. How tall should they be? What color hair? Eyes? What kind of personality? Sense of humor? How should they act? React? Dress? Talk? How should they treat you and others? Go into great imaginative detail. Now: if Mr. or Ms Wonderful were sitting next to you right this moment, would they want to have a relationship with you. Are you the right person?

So let's begin...

To start, we need to take a look at some common negative or undesirable feelings and try to figure out how to change our actions so that our feelings will change. To make a fundamental shift in perspective, we must first take some kind of action. Unless we do something, nothing will change. Thinking something is appealing but it is totally ineffective. As you have probably heard many times, we cannot think our way into good living. We must live our way into good thinking. This means that we must do something - not think something.

If we want self-esteem, we must do estimable things...not think estimable thoughts. If we want respect, we must be respectable. We must act in a respectable manner, not think respectable thoughts. If we want to be loved we must, alas, be lovable. Socrates said, "You are what you repeatedly do. Excellence then is not an act - but a habit." We are judged by our deeds - not our intentions.

We also need to take a look at the baggage we bring into our relationships. I have a friend who says that all emotional baggage must fit under the seat. We all have it. What baggage do I bring into my relationships? Consider the following list:

- Dysfunctional behavior from my family of origin.
- Functional behavior from my family of origin.
 - taste or preference in food or the way it is prepared
 - ways to do things - make beds, fold socks
 - attitudes toward institutions, education, religion, gender, equality
 - political leanings
- Sexual abuse, both physical and emotional, from family or previous relationships
- Emotional and mental abuse
 - Telling our mate they are lazy or stupid or incompetent
 - Perpetual, unrelenting nagging
- Bad habits/good habits - smoking, eating, exercise
- Ideas about personal hygiene, dress, behavior.
- Fundamental attitudes, usually in the form of sweeping generalizations, about members of the opposite sex (men always... or women always...

In addition, many of us are either alcoholic or have been exposed to alcoholism and there are behavioral symptoms to examine there as well. For example, we alcoholics are typically afraid and ashamed to be seen as we really are - or rather think we really are. And I understand why. We are afraid that you will find us laughable or in some way unacceptable. We are afraid that you will ridicule us - humiliate us - reject us. We frequently view ourselves as victims. This is load to carry into a relationship. Such attitudes are not only crippling, in the sense that they exert a powerful negative force on our lives and affairs but they are distasteful to our mates as well. Our spouse doesn't want to have a mate who is emotionally disabled.

1. Our common welfare should come first. A healthy relationship depends upon unity.

To begin this first tradition, ask yourself: Do I *like* and *respect* my partner? If the answer is no, perhaps you should reevaluate what you want in a relationship.

Unity requires harmonious cooperation. Unity demands a willingness to listen to the ideas, feelings, and opinions of each other with an open mind. Unity means sharing views and ideas and not insisting on promoting our own way as the only way.

Polly is my rock and that is a very unifying characteristic. I admire her. I like her. I think she is beautiful and even sensual when she wants to be. She is fun to be with. She doesn't give me a lot of attitude. I learn a lot from her. It amazes me how easily she handles some things that are so difficult for me. She openly trusts people. She always looks for the good in others and truly expects to find it. She is never cynical and her sense of humor is bright. She does not prefer satire or jokes at the expense of others. She has a lot of enthusiasm and for AA and for life. She's bright and has a nimble mind, even though she frequently doesn't think so. Here's one of the benefits of unity: if we are unified, these traits, many of which were completely missing in me, slowly infiltrate my psyche and my behavior. I begin to do them naturally.

This tradition then is about us and our shared assets and resources. It's about our house, our bank account, our dogs, our cars, our kids, our marriage. This attitude that is particularly hard for people like us who are selfish and self-centered. Relationships too can go on benders. But if we ask God for His help and strive for honesty, humility, open-mindedness, unselfishness and, above all, vigilance, we can find unity.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 1:

- What affect do my actions have on our relationship? On our family?
- 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 them to read my mind?
- Do I listen when they has something to say?
- Do I admire and approve of my mate? Do they *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?
- Do I sneak around and do things that I know she won't like or that violate our values.
- Do I share all of me - good and bad? Or do I have secrets? *Have some secrets.* I do not advocate emotional nudity. We all need a well-placed emotional fig leaf at certain times. Never, never will I 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.

2. For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority: a loving God as he may express Himself in our group conscience. Each partner is God's trusted servant - neither governs.

God is the boss He is the one authority and we must learn somehow to subjugate our egos. When one partner speaks for the relationship without consulting the other member, they then become responsible for its growth or lack thereof. Often, one partner is a dominating individual. Sometimes, one partner is very content to allow the other to dominate the relationship. This allows the dominant one to feel indispensable and to assume a managing and controlling attitude. This is especially true when the one being dominated is afraid and unsure of themselves and wants someone else to be responsible for all the decisions. They may feel that this absolves them of any kind of mistake, blame, or failure. In a situation such as this, love doesn't exist. Full participation in the relationship by both members is vital to its growth. No partner is in the position of speaking for the other without first having consulted him or her. Another word for this is *courtesy*. Usually, most of us find courtesy easily practiced with strangers or those outside our relationships yet when we are dealing with the most precious persons in our lives, we sometimes leave simple kindness out of our manner.

Of course, God doesn't personally sort out our arguments and disagreements. We have to somehow work those out. There are times when I think Polly is dead wrong about something. I am certain of it. But no matter what I do or say, she is not even going to see her error, much less admit it. Could such circumstances turn into a rip-roaring fight? You bet! We've all been in such predicaments. What does one do? I have learned to just say, "You could be right" and then drop it. This solution is absolutely magic.

Another tool that I can recommend is also about as tasty as a spoon full of castor oil but after a few times it gets a little easier. We call it the 8 miracle words for problem solving. Are you ready? "I'm sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me."

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 2:

- Do I insist on being *the* leader? Do I feel that it is my place to govern?
Do we strive for equity?
- Do I try to speak for my spouse without consulting them?
- Do I criticize them? Or do I trust them?
- Am I absolutely trustworthy? Try this little prayer

God, treat me tomorrow the way I treat Polly today. Help me not to do anything today that I can't tell Polly about tonight.

- Is my ego so strong that I must have credit for more than I do? Am I so insecure that I must always have praise for my actions and ideas?
- Do I do my share? And is that my opinion or my partners?
- Does the thought of God being in charge of our relationship cause me any discomfort or do I like and rely on that idea?

3. The basic requirement for a good relationship is a mutual desire to make it work.

Not only a desire to stop drinking but a mutual desire to be in the relationship - and a willingness to make it work. There are many reasons why people stay in a relationship other than a mutual desire to be in the relationship: feelings of financial security, the need for emotional security by having a mate, feeling trapped due to responsibilities such as having children to raise and the fear of having to do so alone. These are difficult problems to deal with and are the breeding ground for anger and resentments.

Some days, Polly and me are both intolerable and uncompromising and the desire is all there is. When either I or Polly is being a jackass, the other must try to be accepting, kind, tolerant, loving, and understanding - *and silent*. After all, the next time the roles will be reversed and it will be your turn to be a jerk. Believe me; you will want kindness and understanding. The first two years Polly and I were married we were totally obsessed with each other to the exclusion of nearly every other person or thing in our lives. We were absolutely inseparable and our whole existence was moonlight and passion. *[The 10 months we lived in Ramblewood]* It has since become more. She is now also my friend, my helpmate, my confidante. She is patient, tolerant, has regard for my feelings. Do you know what I would do for her? *Anything!*

Enthusiasm for our relationship ebbs and flows. There are days when we become lazy about upholding our part of a relationship. But these attitudes are temporary and they pass because of the fundamental aspect of our relationship: we love each other - no matter what else may go on in the world, Polly and Dave truly, deeply love each other. And when our best is not very good, we always try to remember this: if we could do better, we would.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 3:

- Do my actions say that I have a desire to be in this relationship?
- Do I set myself up as a judge of my partner's intentions or sincerity?
Do I judge my partner in anything?
- Do I approach my marriage unselfishly or do I depend on my mate's language, looks, race, education, age, appearance, job, or other such things for my own self esteem?
- Am I committed to and do I encourage their spiritual, professional, and individual growth and freedom?
- Am I able to share my feelings with my partner? Can I listen to my partners feelings with an open mind?
- Am I reluctant to work on **My part** of the relationship?

4. Each partner should be autonomous except in matters affecting the other partner, the family, or society as a whole.

Each partner should be autonomous except in matters affecting the other partner, other members (e.g. children or parents) or the relationship as a whole. Another way to say this is that we must have the ability to *become* unselfish. **Our thinking must become, how does this affect us rather than how does this affect me.**

This tradition gives our relationships freedom - complete freedom in all essential matters. Each partner is free to choose their own way of functioning, yet this freedom carries the responsibility of preserving the unity of the relationship as a whole.

Autonomy means self-governing. In order to be autonomous, we must first realize we are God's kids - not just someone's child, mother, father, brother, sister, wife, husband, etc. When we ask God what we are to do, one day at a time, and then go about trying to do His will, we do not endanger our relationship. What does this mean in practical terms?

I like backpacking, mountaineering, kayaking, rock climbing, working out at the gym. I am free to do these things or anything else as long as it does not hurt Polly in any way.

Polly is very feminine, to my great joy, and has little interest in such things. She doesn't have to ask me if it's OK for her to go away for the weekend to speak at a convention. She is her own person. It is not my responsibility to decide what is good for her or what she needs to do for herself. It is clearly, in my mind, her job. *[The girls Polly sponsored in Mich. who called every Fri. night from the "Agape" meeting during break]*

Allowing your mate to be free - to be responsible for themselves should not be a stumbling block. Polly and I actively encourage each other to follow our bliss and our heart. We are secure within ourselves and our relationship so we do not feel such an attitude is not threatening. Polly is not an extension of my personality or attitude or being. To paraphrase the immortal Bob Dylan, I ain't looking for her to feel like me, see like me, or be like me.

At the same time, we feel like we don't have the right to commit the other without asking first. And certainly when it comes to our children, autonomy is out of place. We must communicate and agree.

As always, such freedom brings responsibility. Because we are mostly autonomous, it is up to us individually to avoid any action that might harm our relationship. We must always remember that we have personal and relational defects and that these defects are forever lurking in the background ready to pounce.

In a way, the Fourth Tradition is like the Fourth Step: It suggests that our relationship should take an honest inventory of itself, asking about each of its independently planned actions, will this in any way compromise or subvert our alliance that we have worked so hard on.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 4:

- Is my mate autonomous? What must they do to accommodate my insecurity? My ego? Can she have male friends? Can he have female friends? Can my partner go wherever they want, with whomever they want to, mostly whenever they want? Can they dress anyway they want? Are they truly free to be the very best they can be?
- Do I feel like there are only certain ways to do things? And are they my ways? And do I insist on things being done in those ways?
- Do I always think about how or if my decisions will affect my partner? And if so, do I communicate with my partner and come to agreement?
- Am I willing to go to any lengths - their lengths, not mine - to protect the integrity of the relationship?
- Do I carefully avoid injuring them emotionally, physically, or spiritually?
- How do I deal with my partner's anger regarding something I've done through my autonomy? Am I defensive? Do I try to subdue them with still greater anger? Do I try to punish them in any way?

5. Each relationship has but one primary purpose - to love each other and to serve as an expression of God's love.

This tradition has to do with our primary purpose and fully understanding what our primary purpose is. Our primary purpose - Polly and me is to express the theme of love, loyalty, family, and unity in all that we do and to share this knowledge freely with others. **Conducting this relationship within AA (or AA/AFG) is a requirement.** What we have is a relationship based on recovery. It always has been and must continue to be or it won't survive. We are self-admittedly alcoholics and our behavior is that of recovered alcoholics. That means that **we are sometimes selfish and self-willed.** That means we can easily deceive ourselves and rationalize our motives. It is only within the framework of AA that we can remember that "whenever I am upset, there is something wrong with me". We each believe that our troubles are of our own making. That we each have a part in everything that goes on. That **whenever there is a disagreement between us, Polly could be the one that is right!**

Tradition five also asks us to give comfort, encouragement, and understanding to our partner. When I do something or say something that is harmful or hurtful, it is often because I am unhappy with something about myself and could possibly need compassion instead of judgment or angry response. Rather than lashing out, we try to ask ourselves: "At a time like this, what should a loving mate do?" And then do that. If you can't come up with an idea of what you think a loving mate would do, try to find someone that you feel displays those qualities and ask them how to respond. You might also ask God to allow you to see the other person through His eyes.

Polly is not a reflection on me nor I on her. She is her own person - so am I. We strive to be uncomplicated. Most of the time, we strive to just be. Each of us tries to play a part in all aspects of our life together; however, we don't insist on fixed, precise equality. Things are seldom equal. Sometimes the biggest share of the load I can carry is about 20% but I am putting out 100% of what I have just to cover that 20%. As we talked about earlier, we all bring our baggage with us into relationships and I had a lot of baggage.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 5:

- Do we have a "primary purpose" and do we know what it is?
- Do I resort to emotional blackmail? Do I ever start sentences with the phrase, "If you loved me you would...?"
- Do I demand precise equality? And if so, do I monitor my share as closely as I monitor my partner's or am I just in search of a verbal bludgeon.
- Do I *really* understand that my troubles are of my own making? Do I really understand that I have a part in everything and that whenever I am upset, there is something wrong with me?
- Do we express God's love in our relationship and do we share it with others?
- How important is liking myself to my relationship. Do I have or need self-esteem, self-respect?
- Am I a patient and uncritical listener?
- Can I see my partner through God's eyes or hear my partner through God's ears?

6. A partner ought not be overly supportive spiritually, emotionally, or physically to the relationship lest problems of ego, dominance, or prestige, divert us from our primary purpose.

It is important to let our partner stand on their own two feet, making their own decisions and deciding for themselves what is best for them. Polly's first sponsor once told her that she and I should be like two oak trees planted some distance apart. Each of us should grow big and strong without leaning on the other or blocking the sun from each other. And if we would do this, one day, someone could stand between us and look up and we would be so intertwined that one could not tell where one tree stopped and the other began.

We ought never single-handedly endorse, finance, or lend our name to any outside enterprise lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our commitment. That means that I can't make loans without her prior knowledge and agreement. I can endorse things for me but not for us. I can't say, "Come on and move into our house for awhile". I have to remember that we are a team and that we must always consider the other. **[The Pat Ig. Episode]**

This is important in protecting the relationship and its unity. It keeps each one of us responsible for themselves. I cannot meet all of Polly's needs nor can she meet all of mine. We are each responsible for taking care of ourselves, but we are enhanced by our association with each other. Our separateness is our mutual strength. It promotes a relationship of healthy equals.

A partner should be supportive spiritually, emotionally and physically to the relationship, but a mature partner doesn't do for the other what they can do for themselves. Doing so could promote an inflated ego which would divert the primary purpose of the relationship, which is to express God's love and not one's own self-will. God helps when we need something beyond our own power - this is part of God's love for us. He realizes that to help us when we can help ourselves is to cripple us.

Polly and I encourage one another and are interested in each other's growth, but we have found that we must allow each other the dignity to grow, and

perhaps to fail on their own without assistance, insistence, or advice. We allow each other to have different ideas, concepts, beliefs, and feelings.

Partners compliment one another. They are not crutches for one another. Being totally dependent upon another person isn't living and it is surely not love. This tradition protects each individual's identity in the relationship and thus preserves the unity of the relationship.

Our best relationships are those where dependence is mutual, independence is equal, and obligations are reciprocal."

I'm proud of Polly. I admire her. I learn so much from her. She is the kindest, most non-judgmental person I know. I watch her sponsor many people and work tirelessly on behalf of AA. That is what she does - that is Polly. I can't take credit for her acts. There is some spillover from her actions that I get to enjoy. I get special attention at conferences where she speaks when I go with her but I never lose sight of what that's all about. I know that Polly is also proud of me for what I do and she knows that I don't rely on her actions for my self-worth.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 6:

- Do I encourage and support my partner?
- What is motivating me when I try to be all things to my partner?
- How can I hear God's voice when I am arguing?
- Do I allow my partner the dignity to fail?
- Do I pretend to agree with my partner just to keep things going?
- Do I take responsibility for my own spiritual, emotional, and physical needs?
- Am I in this relationship just to feel needed or loved?

7. Each partner ought to strive to be fully self-supporting spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

O me, this means I must be responsible for myself. I must fully concede that my troubles are of my own making. If I cannot understand and accept that notion, then I am clearly saying that my troubles are caused by other people or places or things. If that is so, then for me to get better, I must get people, places, or things to change. But I've already conceded that I am powerless over people, places, or things. So that line of thinking is a dead end. It is futile to think you will find anything in being a victim other than depression and a grinding, oppressive sense of defeat.

There is also the issue of control here. I must not do anything to limit the options of my partner so that I don't risk being hurt or frightened. Examples: "you must behave so that I don't worry, or become embarrassed. You must do (or not do) something so that I don't become afraid.

Why is it important in a relationship that both members are independent spiritually, emotionally and physically? Let me give an example: It is easy for the member of the relationship that is bringing in all or most of the money to control through the purse strings. This control can become ropes to bind the other partner. Resentments fear, and other problems occur from this type of attitude and action. The non-earning or lesser-earning member the relationship may feel that they are losing their identity. The earning member of the relationship may begin to feel that their only purpose is to be a paycheck in the relationship.

Being self-supporting is impossible if one of the partners becomes the Higher Power for the other. The same is true when one person in the relationship is overly dependent on the other for their emotional well being. Our self-worth comes from within and from God, not from having to have someone in our life in order to feel to feel okay about ourselves.

I believe that if we are not responsible for ourselves, we cannot be an equal in our relationships. We become potential victims for the managers and controllers of the world.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 7:

- Do I try to be boss? Do I attempt to assume control of my partner and our relationship?
- Do I accept responsibility for myself? Can I admit to my innermost self that my problems are of my own making?
- Do I try to manage and control through the purse strings?
- Am I managed and controlled by the purse strings?
- Do I think that because something is good for me personally that it is also good for my mate?
- Do I deceive myself by thinking how unselfish and giving I am when in reality I am giving only when I can do it on my own terms? Can I remember that giving is a position of control and that receiving is a position of powerlessness?
- Do I take responsibility for my own physical needs (health, diet, exercise)?
- Can I point to at least one thing, right now, that determines the degree of healthy independence I have?

8. Our relationship should remain forever an unprofessional, free, and giving relationship - each to the other.

Our individual contributions to the relationship should be free and from the heart. As it says in the 12&12, "Freely ye have received, freely give". I am not a professional carpenter or plumber and Polly is not a professional housekeeper or laundress. And when it comes to chores, we try to share. Most of the time, he who is most interested does. If I am hungry, I cook. I am not the boss and neither is she. Being in charge is not all that important to either one of us. If anything, just the opposite is true. Nobody in our house wants to be in charge.

I must also avoid taking a "professional" or know-it-all attitude. In the final analysis, my opinions are mine - not ours. I am not an expert on alcoholism, the twelve steps, sex, marriage, medicine, child psychology, spirituality, or humility. Neither is Polly and we have to remember that. I do not know when Polly should call her sponsor or go to a meeting. God has never whispered in my ear, "Dave, here is what I want you to get Polly to do..." I believe when he has information for Polly, he gives it directly to her.

We have found that when we are individually living by the principles of the twelve steps and collectively by the principles of the twelve traditions and maintaining a good relationship with God, a sense of serenity and peace with each other helps to diminish our self-centeredness. Being in touch with all of these things allows us to be free. And if our spirits are to fly, they must be free.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 8:

- Do I try to sound like an expert on things? If so, why do I need to do that? Is my security at risk? Is my fear triggered? Does my ego feel threatened?
- Do I believe that one or the other partner should be in charge based on their gender?
- Does my identity and feelings of self worth depend upon my relationship with my mate?
- Can I give for fun and for free - requiring nothing in return?
- Do I charge my mate a fee for being in a relationship with me? If so, what is it?
- How expensive is my love and companionship?
- Do I really understand that I will reap what I sow - that what goes around comes around?

9. A relationship should avoid organization and control mechanisms.

Each alcoholic has been an individual who, because of his alcoholism, could seldom control himself. Almost without exception, the failure to control an alcoholic by force or intimidation has been complete. Yet we alcoholics can be led, we can be inspired, we can and do yield to the will of God. It is not strange therefore that the only real authority to be found in AA is that of spiritual principal. It is never personal authority.

Our defiant individualism was the main reason we all failed in life and resorted to alcohol and drugs. When we couldn't compel others to conform to our plans and desires, we drank. When others tried to pressure us, we also drank. Even though we are now sober, we still resonate with these early traits which caused us to resist authority. Therein probably hangs a clue to our lack of personal government in AA, manifested by no fees, no dues, no rules and regulations, no demand that alcoholics conform, no leaders - just trusted servants.

With all this in mind, it follows that a relationship ought never be organized. It needs to be spontaneous, unpretentious, unrehearsed, and candid. Organization carries with it a certain level of safety. Organization is meant to avoid or pre-empt the unexpected, usually because of fear of the unknown.

This tradition is also an exhortation to have fun, be playful, and lighten up. Don't take yourself too seriously. Our lives have been very difficult at times and there weren't a lot of laughs. Have some laughs. Exercise your sense of humor. Not too long ago, I was without a job for about a year and a half. Throughout that entire time, Polly was steadfast in her love and support and the thing I treasure most was her cheerfulness and attitude and her letting me know that she still loved me and had faith in me.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 9:

- Do I try to be the boss?
- Do I exercise patience and humility in the things I do in my relationship?
- Do I assume responsibility or do I try to take on authority?
- Have I learned how and when to step aside gracefully when I begin to overstep my bounds?
- Who decides who does what in the day-to-day business of a relationship?
- Am I a "peace at any price" person? And doesn't this get to be expensive at times?

10. We each are entitled to our own opinion on outside issues; hence our name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

Within the context of relationships, I believe this means that we are careful about our opinions and rely on "live and let live". We do not drag our relationship into public controversy. In fact, we avoid heated controversy completely. It is usually fired by some form of fear and carries with it power-driven anger, resentment, and emotional damage. Next time you get into a heated argument with your mate, listen very carefully and you will hear his or her mind snap shut. Then ask yourself this question: how likely is it that God's will for me is to scream and yell at another one of his kids?

I don't carry "our" opinion around. I carry mine - Polly carries hers. We don't agree on everything and I have to let Polly be Polly.

We try to always be courteous. The very essence of Alcoholics Anonymous and Alanon Family Groups is treating others - all others - with courtesy and kindness. It adds to our dignity and stature when we are able to avoid saying things we will surely regret.

We also don't speak ill of each other to friends or in public. Being publicly critical gets to be a habit and, in my opinion, is one of the symptoms of alcoholism. We are always railing that it is someone else's fault. Besides, my feelings are temporary unless I state them publicly. Somehow, giving voice to them in public gives them authenticity and longevity. They are remembered. Look at the tabloids.

Love is an action - not a feeling. If you love someone, you treat them like you love them. If you want to know whether or not you are loved, ask your heart. Your heart knows everything. Do you feel loved? Do the words match the actions?

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 10:

- Do I give the impression that "we" have an opinion and I am its keeper?
- Am I careful to keep confidences given to me by my partner?
- Am I publicly critical of my mate? If so, what evidence can I offer to substantiate that I have sound judgment? Am I not a member of a recovery program?
- What would my mate say if asked whether or not I loved them?
- How important is it for me to be right?
- Do I expect or need my partner to see and feel the same as me on issues?
- Can I let my partner disagree with my ideas without feeling rejected and without getting defensive?

11. We individually convey our beliefs and philosophy by attraction rather than promotion. Anonymity is a personal and valuable asset.

To me, this says that we rely on our attraction to each other, and that my anonymity is mine and Polly's is hers. I don't hustle or jive Polly. That was my style in my other marriages and it never worked out. I continuously lied about where I was, what I was doing, or who I was with. I was usually either discovered outright or, when an ex-wife couldn't prove her suspicions, I was simply not believed. You cannot successfully jive your mate for very long. If you are still trying that, give it up.

Polly and I try very hard not to take cheap shots at each other. We know each other well so each of us knows where the others Achilles tendon is. A thoughtless cheap shot can quickly and easily escalate into an angry disaster and the outcome can be devastating. Some remarks, no matter how much you may later regret them, will not - cannot - ever- ever be forgotten.

Another aspect of this tradition that of attraction is that I need to be physically attractive to my partner. I'm talking about personal hygiene. I owe it to her to shave and bathe and wear clean clothes. I also believe I should not embarrass or humiliate her in public with obscenity or vulgar tasteless behavior of any kind - spoken or otherwise.

The spirit of this tradition is that we accept another person as they are, putting both the Golden and Silver Rules into practice within the relationship. The Golden rule is; of course, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The Silver rule is: "Don't do for others what they need to do for themselves".

Finally, anonymity in a relationship is that ability to do something good and not have to advertise it. Anonymity is a positive attitude, not complaining when things are not just as we would have them. Anonymity is keeping silent when our partner makes a mistake. Anonymity is saying encouraging things to our loved ones; showing gratitude for small favors, etc. Anonymity is the ability to do good for goods sake without having to take credit or receive special strokes. Anonymity is being happy doing good without expectations of reward or return. A nice by-product o this practice of anonymity is the spiritual principle, 'what we sow, so shall we reap.' There is no room in healthy relationships for self-glorification and pride but there is

much room for great amounts of gratitude, humility and a willingness to be if service to others.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 11:

- Is my relationship treated with care in public?
- Do I think my relationship is attractive to others? Or does it appear shabby?
- Is my partner ever embarrassed or humiliated by my appearance or actions?
- Do I give relationships a bad name?
- Am I guilty of promotion rather than attraction?
- Can I go about my affairs without giving my partner advice on how he or she should conduct theirs?
- Can I do good things for my relationship anonymously? **DO** I do good things for my relationship anonymously?
- How do I feel when my partner criticizes the way I am trying to live my recovery program?
- Which do I give more of to my partner: Positive strokes or negative zingers?

12. Selflessness is a spiritual foundation of our way of life as partners or mates, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

This tradition says that selflessness is a spiritual foundation of our relationship and reminds us to place principles before personalities. I used to think that meant my "lofty principles" before your contaminated unwholesome personality. I have learned that it means AA principles before MY contaminated unwholesome personality.

One of our greatest gifts or privileges as members of AA is the opportunity we have to be of help to God's kids. There is no room in our primary purpose for ego, pride, arrogance, selfishness, or unwillingness. There is however a lot of room for gratitude, humility, willingness, love, forgiveness, understanding, joy, and freedom.

We have learned that lessons can be learned from everyone. Some will teach us how to be and others will teach us how not to be. We are reminded that our primary purpose is to be of service, to express God's love, to treat others well.

Polly is my wife. How should Dave's wife be treated? Ask yourself these questions:

- What would I like an article in the L. A. Times to say about the way I treat my spouse?
- How should a good spouse act toward their partner?
- How should one talk about their mate or their relationship?
- Is the way I treat my mate likely to improve or enrich our relationship or make it worse?

If you're not pleased with the answers, ask yourself this: What can I do to change? None of us got here knowing how to be a good partner. We have all had to learn, *sometimes slowly and painfully*, how to do better. My answer has been the program of AA. I also recommend the short prayer we presented earlier:

God, treat me tomorrow the way I treat my mate today.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 12:

- Do I place our common welfare first? What would happen to me if my mate disappeared?
- Do I treat my mate in a way that I'm proud of? Do I treat my mate one way in public and another in private? Do I care if others see every aspect of how I treat my mate?
- Do I have an immature need for attention and recognition?
- Do I have personal integrity? Am I true to my own beliefs?
- Is my relationship growing healthier or getting sicker?

Conclusion:

Having a warm loving relationship with another person is one of life's greatest achievements and one of God's premium gifts. It contains all there is in great measure if you let it...love, fun, sex, humor, tears, laughter, and pain. It is worth all of its trouble and tears ten times over.

Our ability to conduct a good relationship usually has to be learned and somehow it must become our way of life - our values - what we do when nobody is watching and there is no chance of getting caught. I have a framed statement at home that says:

You are what you repeatedly do.

Excellence then is not an act but a habit.

- Socrates -

By doing our best to adapt these traditions and their underlying concepts of good attitude, humility, communication, fearlessness, love, tolerance, courtesy, and honesty, we have seen not only our marriage grow and prosper spiritually and physically but all of our other relationships as well.

We hope that these traditions enrich your life as much as they have ours.