

The Circle & Triangle



"When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and physically." - Big Book page 64 (When it says "physically", please keep in mind that this includes the physical world around us.)

For me, the circle & triangle represents the Alcoholics Anonymous solution to alcoholism. It is a perfect overview of our three-part answer (unity, recovery, & service) to our three-part disease (physical, mental & spiritual).

The foundation of this triangle (which the rest of the solution is built upon) is recovery. The set of 12 spiritual principles associated with recovery are contained in the 12 Steps (which are located in the Big Book, pages i - 164; and then talked about in the 12 & 12, pages 15 - 125). The part of the disease that it treats is the mental.

The left side of this triangle is unity, which can be found in fellowship with other AA's. The set of 12 spiritual principles associated with unity are contained in the 12 Traditions (which are located in the 12 & 12, pages 129 - 192). Meetings and AA fellowship is where we go physically.

And the right side of this triangle is service, which can be found in carrying the message and, with unselfishness & love, contributing inside and outside of AA. The set of 12 spiritual principles associated with service are contained in the 12 Concepts (which are located in the booklet "Twelve Concepts for World Service"). The part of the disease that it treats is the spiritual (remember that the Big Book says on pages 14 - 15 that "we perfect and enlarge our spiritual life through work and self-sacrifice for others", and on pages 14, 76, 88 & 93 it says, "Faith without works is dead").

Also, notice that the sides of the triangle are all equal in size, which means that not only do I need to be living in all three areas but that I need to incorporate all three proportionately. I have seen many people go back out who were using LESS THAN all three parts, but I have NEVER seen ANYONE return to drinking who was living in ALL THREE. I've heard people refer to it as a three-legged stool. If all three legs are there then the structure is solid, but if one or two legs are missing then what is supporting me is shaky and I am sure to fall.

If actions in these three areas are taken, I can be whole in body, mind and spirit; together as one.

There are times when these principles spill into each other because the lines between them are blurred (like, it could be said that all of the Steps lead to our awakening to the awareness of spirit, or service sounds a lot like our Step 12, or there are aspects of the Traditions that can be used in all of our affairs). But if we want to stay on the "Road of Happy Destiny" we need to be familiar with the whole package that leads to freedom, recovery, peace of mind, joy, usefulness and "a way of life that is incredibly more wonderful as time passes".

It doesn't matter how long it's been since our last drink. What matters MORE is how close we are to our next one. How can we tell if we are closer to the next drink than we would like to be? We can get a good indication every few months (as part of taking personal inventory) by asking ourselves, "Am I participating equally in all three branches of the AA solution?" If our answer is, "YES!", we will know as best we can if we are still on the beam in AA's design for living.

At the 20th Anniversary Convention of AA in St. Louis, MO. on July 1 - 3, 1955; Bill Wilson said the following: "Above us we see a banner and that banner shows a circle which is AA circumscribing the world. Within it is a triangle. The base of the triangle is the foundation of recovery on which we stand. The left of the triangle symbolizes our unity, and the right of the triangle our arm of service. Such is the symbol of AA. I first saw it in Norway in 1950, but this symbol is not new with us. We have attributed a particular significance to it but in actuality its significance is very old. Students of ancient days tell that centuries ago it was regarded by priests and witch doctors alike as the symbol by which evil spirits could be kept away, and may that symbol ever stand guard over the society of Alcoholics Anonymous."

This symbol is also an ancient spiritual symbol for wholeness of body, mind and spirit; or "Oneness".

On May 21, 1993, AA World Service released an unsigned document titled: "Follow-up Statement Regarding Use of the Circle/ Triangle Symbol." In it, AAWS stated that "Alcoholics Anonymous will phase out the 'official' use of the circle and triangle symbol in and on its literature, letterheads and other material." That action has generated a considerable amount of discussion because it was taken without a conference action or a "group conscience".

I hope you can see the significance of the Circle and Triangle and please let others know (especially people you work with) about its representation of the 36 spiritual principles in AA's solution to alcoholism that leads to integrity on the personal, group, and service level.

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The Truth Of What Happened To The Triangle In The Circle

Metaphysics and copyrights aside, anyone can still use the circle and triangle logo! It's just not the "official" trade mark for Alcoholics Anonymous anymore...Since 1993, lawyers advised the General Service Board that the copyright on the logo was unenforceable. I remember the reports generating out of the Board and an Ad Hoc Committee meeting in January 1993 (two months before the General Service Conference). The Ad Hoc committee of Delegates and Trustees (chosen from a cross-section of AA Regions) came to the conclusion that recommended a simple phrase replacing it in all the AAWS printing and publications from the Conference forward "This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature." The Conference also agreed with this idea, and by the beginning of May 1993 a notice was sent out by the General Service Board that AAWS, Inc. would discontinue the use of the Circle and

Triangle logo in its then-existing formats (1) blank, 2) with "AA" in the center of the triangle, 3) with "AA" and General Service Conference on the outside of the triangle, and 4) "AA" and Recovery, Unity, Service outside the triangle - those were accepted uses by AA through that 1993 announcement). The logo had been used officially from 1957 to 1993, and that's thirty-six years of uncontested usage - until the General Service Board thought to ask the medallion and coin makers to "cease and desist" using it. For a time in 1991-92 the coin manufacturers complied (to this member, with unsightly results...), but somewhere in 1992 decided to re-negotiate and contest the Board's position. Not that the case ever went to trial as a violation of copyright law; advise to the Board was that the copyright was either not renewed (in 1976, the Big Book copyright was unfortunately not renewed by an oversight error of omission in legal advice to the GSB, too!) or completely unenforceable, perhaps due to the compliance of the coin makers not using it (some who claimed or threatened to claim their own copyright in the coin formats, etc.). To remedy a pretty bad legal situation, the Conference heard the recommendation of simply using the 'conference-approved' phrase on literature. Where much discussion for a few years centered on AA going into the business of minting its own coins (definitely an outside issue), and suing the coin makers (against the 'spirit and letter' of the 12 Concepts for World Service--avoiding lawsuits whenever possible), the "catch-22" choices were evident, and the Conference recommendation was a workable solution. I have a friend and past Delegate who is also a lawyer, and he shared with me, that if anyone can put together a terrible process of lawsuits, it's us...no wonder we are advised against litigation, especially on outside issues. Did you know that upside down, the blank logo is the symbol for an air raid shelter? We had even found the same circle and triangle on manhole covers in Illinois (old ones from the Elgin City Water Dept.). You can imagine the view that any copyright court might take on this if we had followed through with long litigation - it would almost be the question asked "are you joking?" Today we can have a bit of fun discussing our use and its current "unofficial" status. The official logo was a beautiful part of our past, when the 1993 Conference also allowed that many AAs, AA events, etc. would still be using our circle and triangle logo, and there would be no interference in that. Of course, now we don't "own" the logo, but as far as I know, no one does... Perhaps you'll use it in the same spirit used in our past years, but don't worry about infringing on another's copyright. Use your own judgment, seek an informal consensus, but lightly take the above ideas into consideration. The circle and triangle is not "banned by A.A.," just discontinued since 1993 as a trademark.

Rick T., Area 20 Archivist, Illinois.