

Traditions Study Guide

Week 1 - Traditions History

Before I start, it's important to say that no member speaks for AA. No one has been elected or appointed to do so. So all I'm going to do tonight is share my experience, strength and hope with the Traditions. Most of that has been given to me from the generosity of other AA members and from AA literature.

I'll refer often to AA literature and cite it. That's not for your benefit – it's for mine to keep me honest and focused. I do have a love for AA history and that will be part of the discussions as well. Tonight I'm going to focus on the origin of the Traditions. What caused them to happen and what is their purpose? How did they evolve? I'll cover their history up to 1988.

The story of the Traditions is a fascinating one. There is more written about the Traditions in AA literature than there is about the Steps. However, one of the challenges of our history literature is that it is not organized in a timeline or chronological order that shows how the Traditions, and many other things, originated and evolved over time. So for tonight I'd like to discuss that type of timeline of how the Traditions originated and evolved.

In the book *AA Comes of Age*, Bill W described the Traditions with 3 short but solid paragraphs:

1. Implicit throughout AA's Traditions is the confession that our fellowship has its sins. We confess that we have character defects as a society and that these defects threaten us continually. Our Traditions are a guide to better ways of working and living, and they are also an antidote for our various maladies. The 12 Traditions are to group survival and harmony what AA's 12 Steps are to each member's sobriety and peace of mind.
2. But the 12 Traditions also point straight at many of our individual defects. By implication they ask each of us to lay aside pride and resentment. They ask for personal as well as group sacrifice. They ask us never to use the AA name in any quest for personal power or distinction or money. The Traditions guarantee the equality of all members and the independence of all groups. They show how we may best relate ourselves to each other and to the world outside. They indicate how we can best function in harmony as a great whole.
3. For the sake of the welfare of our entire society, the Traditions ask that every individual and every group and every area in AA shall lay aside all desires, ambitions, and untoward actions that could bring serious division among us or lose for us the confidence of the world at large. The 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous symbolize the sacrificial character of our life together and they are the greatest force for unity that we know.

As part of AA's 3 Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service, the Traditions are the spiritual principles whose objective is the promotion of unity within our Fellowship. It's important to emphasize the fact that the Traditions are not some legal code to use to point fingers at other members and accuse them of "violating this" or "violating that." It is not the intent of the Traditions to seek lock-step conformity - the intent of the Traditions is to seek spiritual unity.

There is an old truism that suggests that groups are not destroyed from the outside - they are

destroyed from the inside. Sadly this all too true on issues that cause divisiveness within a group. The Traditions teach us how to be unifiers - not dividers.

Hindsight is 20/20 and history is hindsight, particularly in searching for causes and effects. In terms of cause and effect, the formal documentation of AA Traditions actually began in April 1939 with the publication of the Big Book. They weren't called the Traditions then but the foreword to the 1st edition of the Big Book contains many, but certainly not all, of the spiritual principles in our 12 Traditions. I'm going to get into the Foreword in more detail later on. First though I'd like to offer an example of why the Traditions are so important.

There was a fellowship, actually a temperance society that came into existence almost a century before AA started. It was originally very much like AA in its purpose and membership. Unfortunately, after an initial period of meteoric growth, it failed and faded away for lack of the equivalent of AA's Traditions. This fellowship began in April 1840, when 6 drinking friends in Baltimore, MD formed the "Washington Temperance Society." They later became known as the "Washingtonians."

They required a pledge of abstinence and attendance at weekly meetings where members would tell their stories of drunkenness and recovery. As a body, they recognized no religion and were politically neutral. Each member was supposed to seek out and help other alcoholics who were still drinking. Does that sound familiar?

However, over a relatively short period of time, Washingtonian membership changed radically to consist mainly of non-alcoholic temperance advocates and a large number of adolescents under age 15. The total Washingtonian membership rose to several hundred thousand but the number of alcoholics in the mix was likely well under 150,000.

The only requirement for Washingtonian membership was to sign a pledge card to abstain from alcohol. As their membership grew to consist mainly of non-alcoholics, sentiments shifted away from helping alcoholics to pursuing a legal means of prohibiting alcohol. The temperance movement in the country was changing into the prohibition movement.

The rapid growth of Washingtonians was extraordinary. However, their downfall came about 7 years after they started. Early Washingtonian practices came to be viewed as outmoded and interest in them declined. There was no sudden or massive collapse, they just faded away over time. Almost none of the Washingtonian societies were active beyond 1847.

Some claim that involvement in religion, politics and abolition of slavery led to the Washingtonian's downfall. While there were cases of this, there is no compelling evidence to conclude that these issues really played a major role in the downfall of the Washingtonians. Prohibition was certainly a very divisive issue among the Washingtonians. However, the major causes of their downfall appear to be a direct result of their departing from their original membership makeup (which started out as all alcoholics) and departing from their original primary purpose (which started out as one alcoholic helping another alcoholic). It's a powerful, powerful lesson on the importance of AA's Traditions and Legacy of Unity.

Almost a century after the Washingtonians began and then faded away, AA started in Akron, OH with our 2 co-founders, Bill W and Dr Bob, in June 1935. The 4th of July is important in our nation's history - it's Independence Day. The 4th of July is also important in AA history. AA's 1st group, Akron #1, marks its beginning as July 4, 1935 when Bill D, who was AA #3, was discharged from Akron City Hospital and joined with Bill and Dr Bob to help other alcoholics.

In the autumn of 1935 there were only 2 groups – 1 in Akron and 1 in NY. By the end of 1936 there were a total of 15 members. By the end of 1937 that rose to a total of 40 members. In 1938 that rose to 65 members. When the Big Book was published in April 1939 there were still only 2 groups and the membership was around 100. By comparison, my home group today has 200 names on our group phone list. That's twice the size of the entire AA membership that existed when the Big Book was published in the spring of 1939.

Principle of Group Conscience - December 1936

In AA Comes of Age the earliest personal experience that involved Bill W, and influenced the Traditions, occurred when Bill was 2 years sober. In December 1936, Charles B Towns offered Bill W a lucrative job at his hospital as a lay alcoholism therapist. After years of a hand to mouth existence Bill wanted the job very much. The question was put to the NY group meeting in Bill's home. They rejected it and Bill complied with their decision. He wrote in "AA Comes of Age" (pg 102) "3 blows, well and truly struck, had fallen on the anvil of experience ... The common welfare must come first ... AA cannot have a class of professional therapists ... and God, speaking in the group conscience, is to be our final authority. Clearly implied in these 3 embryo principles of tradition was a 4th: Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."

1937: The next early experience that influenced the Traditions is recorded in the 12&12 essay on Tradition 3. It also happens to be the source of one of the most enduring myths in AA. I don't know what else to call the myth other than the Akron drug addict who didn't exist and NY drug addict who disappeared

In the "12&12" Tradition 3 essay (pgs 141-142) it states that on the AA calendar it was "year two" of the Fellowship - that would be 1937. A prospective member asked to be admitted who frankly described himself to the "oldest" member as "the victim of another addiction even worse stigmatized than alcoholism." In an April 1968 open meeting at the General Service Conference, Bill W revealed that the prospective member's so-called "addiction" was "sex deviate" and that guidance came from Dr Bob (the oldest member in Akron, OH) asking, "What would the Master do?" Many people think Bill W said that but he didn't.

The member with the so-called "addiction" was admitted and plunged into 12th Step work. This incident is also discussed in Dr Bob and the Good Old-timers (pgs 240-241) and the pamphlet The Co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous (pg 30). Parts of the story (particularly the part about the "addiction" and plunging into "12th Step work") are often erroneously intermingled with another incident that occurred 8 years later in 1945 at the 41st St clubhouse in NYC.

The 1945 incident is described in the book "Pass It On" (pgs 317-318). Bill W was called from the clubhouse in NYC by Barry L (he was the member who later wrote the book "Living Sober"). Bill persuaded the group to take in a black man who was an ex-convict with bleach-blond hair, wearing women's clothing and makeup. The man also admitted to being a "dope

fiend.” When asked what to do about it, Bill posed the question, “did you say he was a drunk?” When answered “yes” Bill replied “well I think that’s all we can ask.”

Word of mouth accounts often erroneously, and sometimes very, very solemnly, say that this individual went on to “become one of the best 12th Steppers in NY.” The problem is that it’s just not true. In actual fact, the book Pass It On (pg 318) states that “although he soon disappeared (repeat “soon disappeared”) his presence created a precedent for the 3rd Tradition.”

NY Separates from the Oxford Group - October 1937

Other early Traditions experiences concerned the matter of affiliation and the emergence of the principle of “cooperation but not affiliation.” The NY AAs separated from the Oxford Group in August 1937. This was the beginning of AA separating itself from outside affiliation and it set the groundwork for Tradition 6. The Akron group separated from the OG in October 1939. This ended all outside affiliation between the Fellowship and anyone else.

Hospitals, Paid Missionaries, a Book of Experience - October 1937

A little over 2 years after their 1st historic meeting, Bill W and Dr Bob met again in Akron in October 1937. There were 2 groups then and 40 members. Bill had grandiose ideas for a chain of AA hospitals, paid missionaries and a book of experience to carry the message to distant places. Dr Bob liked the book idea but not the hospitals and paid missionaries. In a meeting of the Akron group, Bill’s ideas narrowly passed by 1 vote. The NY group was more enthusiastic.

John D Rockefeller Jr. - March 1938

The book project required financing. Many non-alcoholic friends of AA helped with early financial support. These funds were viewed as loans and later paid back. Most of this financial help came from John D Rockefeller Jr. and Charles B towns of Towns Hospital where Bill W was treated by Dr Silkworth.

The Alcoholic Foundation - August 1938

To provide safekeeping of the funds, the Alcoholic Foundation was formed as a charitable trust on August 5, 1938 with a board of 5 trustees appointed for life. 3 trustees were non-alcoholic and 2 were alcoholics. The terms Class A and Class B trustees were used to distinguish between the non-alcoholic and alcoholic board members.

The Alcoholic Foundation had a small 1-room office and a staff of 1 non-alcoholic Secretary by the name of Ruth Hock. The Foundation and the office would eventually come to be known as the General Service Board and the General Service Office. And Ruth Hock would later become AA’s first national secretary.

Works Publishing Co - September 1938

In September 1938 the Alcoholic Foundation Board urged Bill W to accept an offer from Harper Brothers Publishers on the rights to the book. But Bill wanted ownership of the book to stay

within the Fellowship. NY member Hank P persuaded Bill to form Works Publishing Co and sell stock to raise funds for the book project. Works Publishing Co would eventually come to be known as AA World Services. 600 shares of stock were issued: Hank and Bill received 200 shares each and 200 shares were sold to others. To keep things calm with the board, it was decided that the author's royalty (which would ordinarily be Bill's) could go to the Alcoholic Foundation.

First Edition Big Book - April 4, 1939

On April 4, 1939, 4,730 copies of the 1st edition of "Alcoholics Anonymous" were published at \$3.50 a copy (\$46 today - a rather expensive book at the time). The printer, Edward Blackwell of Cornwall Press, was told to use the thickest paper in his shop. The large, bulky volume became known as the "Big Book" and the name has stuck ever since. The idea behind the thick, large paper was to convince the alcoholic he was getting his money's worth.

The book had 8 Roman and 400 Arabic numbered pages. "The Doctor's Opinion" started as page 1 and the basic text ended at page 174 not 164. 29 stories were included: 10 from the east coast, 18 from the mid-west and 1 from the west coast (which was ghost-written by Ruth Hock and removed in the 2nd printing).

I mentioned earlier that the Foreword to the 1st edition Big Book provided many of the key principles that later shaped the Traditions. To quote from the foreword:

It is important that we remain anonymous ... We would like it understood that our alcoholic work is an avocation. ... When writing or speaking publicly about alcoholism, we urge each of our Fellowship to omit his personal name, designating himself instead as 'a member of Alcoholics Anonymous' ... Very earnestly we ask the press also, to observe this request, for otherwise we shall be greatly handicapped.

We are not an organization in the conventional sense of the word. There are no fees or dues whatsoever. The only requirement for membership is an honest desire to stop drinking. We are not allied with any particular faith, sect or denomination, nor do we oppose anyone. We simply wish to be helpful to those who are afflicted ...

We shall be interested to hear from those who are getting results from this book, particularly from those who have commenced work with other alcoholics. We should like to be helpful to such cases. Inquiry by scientific, medical, and religious societies will be welcomed.

The foreword to the 1st edition Big Book also provided AA with something else that you will hear read at almost every AA meeting. It's called the AA Preamble

Akron Separates from Oxford Group - October 1939

In late October 1939, the Akron members withdrew from the Oxford Group and held meetings at Dr Bob's house. In January 1940, Akron meetings moved from Dr Bob's house to King's School. This ended all outside affiliation between the Fellowship and the OG or anyone else.

Rockefeller Dinner - February 8, 1940

On February 8, 1940, John D Rockefeller Jr. held a dinner for AA. Nelson Rockefeller hosted in the absence of his ill father. The dinner produced much favorable national publicity for AA and raised \$2,200 (\$29,000 today) from the attendees (almost 1/2 came from Rockefeller). Rockefeller and the dinner guests continued to provide about \$3,000 a year (\$34,000 today) up to 1945 when they were asked to stop contributing.

Works Publishing Inc - May 1940

In May 1940, Works Publishing Co was legally incorporated as a publishing arm of the Alcoholic Foundation. This action ensured that the ownership of the Big Book would be held in trust for all members of the AA Fellowship. Bill W and Hank P gave up their stock with a stipulation that Dr Bob and Anne would receive 10% royalties on the Big Book for life.

Saturday Evening Post - March 1, 1941

A very important part of the Traditions has to do with AA's public relations policy.

In October 1940, Bill W went to Philadelphia to speak to Curtis Bok, one of the owners of the Saturday Evening Post magazine. In December, Jack Alexander was assigned to do a story on AA which was published March 1, 1941. It was AA's most notable public relations blessings.

With a readership of over 3 million, the article helped AA membership jump from 2,000 to 8,000 during 1941. Over 6,000 appeals for help were mailed to the NY Office. The office asked the groups to donate \$1 (\$12 today) per member, per year, for support. This began the practice of financing what is today called the "General Service Office" (GSO) from group and member donations. In those early days, the office was called the "NY Headquarters."

The office in NY had the extremely important job of responding to letters from groups and members. Translators were also brought in to handle correspondence from abroad. By 1942 the correspondence from groups gave early signals of a need to develop guidelines to help with group problems that occurred repeatedly. Basic ideas for the 12 Traditions came from this correspondence and the principles defined in the Foreword to the 1st Ed. Big Book.

Compensation for Special Services - October 1942

In October 1942, Clarence S (Snyder) the founder of AA in Cleveland, OH, stirred up a controversy in Cleveland after discovering that Dr Bob and Bill W were receiving royalties from Big Book sales. Bill and Dr Bob re-examined the problem of their financial status and concluded that royalties from the Big Book seemed to be the only answer to the problem.

Both Bill and Dr Bob dedicated themselves full time, and then some, to AA and had no opportunity to earn a living from their professions. Like everyone else they needed shelter, clothing and food plus Dr Bob had 2 children to raise. Bill W sought counsel from a wonderful early friend of AA, Father Ed Dowling, who suggested that Bill and Bob could certainly not

accept money for 12th Step work, but should accept royalties as compensation for special services. This later formed the basis for Tradition 8.

In 1943: the NY office asked groups to send in lists of their membership rules and requirements. It provided quite a jolt. If all the rules were applied everywhere it would be impossible for any alcoholic to join AA.

The AA Grapevine - June 1944

In June 1944, 1200 copies of the 1st issue of the "Grapevine" were published. 6 volunteers started it as an 8-page newsletter for members in the NYC area and for GIs serving overseas in World War II. The GIs received it free. It soon expanded to become the AA Fellowship's official magazine. As we'll see in a little bit, the Grapevine played an absolutely critical and central role in the development of the Traditions.

Earl T - April 1945

By the mid-1940s, shared group experience in the correspondence sent to the NY office led to very reliable conclusions on what group practices worked well and those that didn't.

In April 1945 Earl T (founder of AA in Chicago) suggested to Bill W that all the experience sent in from group correspondence might be codified into a set of principles which could offer tested solutions to our problems of living and working together and relating our Fellowship to the outside world on issues such as: Group autonomy, singleness of purpose, not endorsing other enterprises, professionalism, public controversy, public relations and (what was to become most important of all) anonymity. Earl T had a major role in the development of the Traditions (both long and short forms).

The August 1945 Grapevine carried Bill W's 1st Traditions article (titled *Modesty One Plank for Good Public Relations*) setting the ground work for his 5-year campaign for the Traditions. The July Grapevine had an article by member CHK of Lansing, MI about the Washingtonians. Bill used this article to begin his essay commentaries.

Fully Self Supporting, Declining Outside Contributions - 1945

In 1945 the board wrote to John D Rockefeller Jr. and the 1940 dinner guests that AA no longer needed their financial help. Big Book royalties could look after Dr Bob and Bill and group contributions could pay the office expenses. If these were insufficient the reserve accumulated out of literature sales could meet the deficit.

The donations were viewed as loans by AA and were paid back out of Big Book income. This led to the principle of being fully self supporting; declining all further outside contributions and later formed the basis of Tradition 7.

From 1945 - 1950 Bill W stated (in *AA Comes of Age*) the 3 big issues were money, anonymity and what was to become of AA when its old timers and founders were gone. This period saw Bill's most intensive and exhaustive work - establishing a service structure for AA and

campaigning for the Traditions.

Twelve Suggest Points for AA Tradition - April 1946 Grapevine

The Grapevine was incorporated in April 1946 as the 2nd publishing arm of the Alcoholic Foundation. 9 months after his 1st Traditions essay, the April 1946 Grapevine carried Bill W's essay titled "12 Suggested Points for AA Tradition." They later came to be called the long form of the Traditions. Bill W wrote Grapevine essays on the Traditions up to late 1949. The essays are preserved in the book "The Language of the Heart" and were used in writing the 12&12 and "AA Comes of Age."

During 1946 Bill W started to feel out the Alcoholic Foundation Board and the Fellowship on the idea of various geographical areas coming together as an elected service conference. The board and Dr Bob were not very enthusiastic about the idea.

AA Preamble - June 1947 Grapevine

In June 1947, the "AA Preamble" first appeared in the Grapevine. It was written by Tom Y, Grapevine's first editor, and was based on the foreword to the 1st edition Big Book. Today, the Preamble is a common reading at the beginning of AA meetings. The December 1947 Grapevine reported that a new 48-page pamphlet titled "AA Tradition" was sent to each group and that enough copies were available for each member to have one free of charge. That was AA's 1st piece literature dedicated totally to the Traditions.

Short Form of the Traditions - November 1949 Grapevine

As plans for the 1st International Convention were under way, Earl T suggested to Bill W that the "Twelve Suggested Points for AA Tradition" would benefit from revision and shortening. Bill, with Earl's help, developed the short form of the 12 Traditions which was printed in the November 1949 Grapevine.

The entire November issue was dedicated to the Traditions for the coming Cleveland Convention in 1950. The issue also posed the question if the week of the Thanksgiving Holliday should be a week dedicated to discussion of the Traditions. The members were overwhelmingly in favor of the idea and later the entire month of November became Traditions month.

Two wording changes were eventually made for the final version of the short form of the Traditions. The original term "primary spiritual aim" was changed to "primary purpose" in Tradition 6. The original term "principles above personalities" was changed to "principles before personalities" in Tradition 12.

First International Convention - Cleveland, OH - July 28-30, 1950

AA's 15th anniversary and 1st International Convention was held at Cleveland, OH from July 28-30, 1950. Bill W chronicled the proceedings in a September 1950 Grapevine article titled "We Come of Age" (LOH 117-124). In part Bill W wrote:

"Several thousand of us crowded into the Cleveland Music Hall for the Tradition meeting, which was thought by most AAs to be the high point of our Conference. Six old-time stalwarts, coming from places far flung as Boston and San Diego, beautifully reviewed the years of AA experience which had led to the writing of our Tradition."

After the 6 members finished speaking, Bill W was asked to sum up the Traditions. He did not recite either the short or long form. He recited a version which is a mixture of both forms (it's also one of the longest sentences in AA literature):

"That, touching all matters affecting AA unity, our common welfare should come first; that AA has no human authority - only God as he may speak in our Group Conscience; that our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern; that any alcoholic may become an AA member if he says so - we exclude no one; that every AA Group may manage its own affairs as it likes, provided surrounding groups are not harmed thereby; that we AAs have but a single aim, the carrying of our message to the alcoholic who still suffers; that in consequence we cannot finance, endorse or otherwise lend the name 'Alcoholics Anonymous' to any other enterprise, however worthy; that AA, as such, ought to remain poor, lest problems of property, management and money divert us from our sole aim; that we ought to be self-supporting, gladly paying our small expenses ourselves; that AA should remain forever non-professional, ordinary 12th Step work never to be paid for; that, as a Fellowship, we should never be organized but may nevertheless create responsible Service Boards or Committees to insure us better propagation and sponsorship and that these agencies may engage fulltime workers for special tasks; that our public relations ought to proceed upon the principle of attraction rather than promotion, it being better to let our friends recommend us; that personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and pictures ought to be strictly maintained as our best protection, against the temptations of power or personal ambition; and finally, that anonymity before the general public is the spiritual key to all our Traditions, ever reminding us we are always to place principles before personalities, that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all."

Following his recitation, Bill asked if anyone objected. No one did. Bill then offered them for adoption and the attendees approved them unanimously by standing vote.

On July 30, 1950, a gravely ill Dr Bob made a brief appearance for his last talk. Dr Bob was dying of cancer.

"Prince of the Twelfth Steppers" - November 16, 1950

After the Convention, Bill W visited Dr Bob in Akron, OH for their last visit together. Bill advised Dr Bob that the board would soon support a trial period of the General Service Conference. Dr Bob gave Bill his endorsement as well.

Dr Bob, age 70 and 15 years sober, died on November 16, 1950. In his 15 years of sobriety he helped more than 5,000 alcoholics. He never took any fee for his professional services. In his eulogy, Bill W described Dr Bob as "the prince of the Twelfth Steppers."

Board Agrees to Try the Conference - December 1950

In the fall of 1950 Class A trustees Leonard Harrison and Bernard B Smith resolved a 5-year conflict between Bill W and the Alcoholic Foundation on having a Conference. Smith chaired a trustees committee that unanimously recommended trying the Conference on a 5-year experimental basis.

The Alcoholic Foundation invited 1 Conference delegate from each of the then 48 States and from the Canadian Provinces. 7 states with large AA populations were assigned additional delegates. Texas was assigned 4 delegates. All the delegates were divided into 2 Panels so that ½ would be elected and ½ would rotate in odd and even numbered years.

Conference-approved Literature - April 1952

On April 19, 1951 37 US and Canadian delegates, ½ of the planned number, convened in NYC as the 1st Panel of the General Service Conference. Panel 1 delegates from TX were Olin L (Lancaster) from Dallas and "Icky" S (Sheridan) from Houston. Icky later moved to Dallas and became the 1st Class B trustee from TX in 1955.

On April 23, 1952, Panel 2 (consisting of 38 additional delegates) joined with Panel 1 for the 1st Conference of all delegates attending. TX Panel 2 delegates were Robert S (Simpson) from Lubbock and Roy G (German) from Austin.

A trustee's committee recommended literature that should be retained and future literature that would be needed. Bill W reported on literature projects that he was engaged in. The trustee's recommendations and Bill's projects were approved by the Conference unanimously. By approving literature to be retained, the Conference retroactively approved the Big Book and several existing pamphlets which included the long form of the Traditions.

The "12&12" - 1953

Board Chairman Bernard B Smith reported to the 1953 Conference that the corporate name of "Works Publishing" was changed to "Alcoholics Anonymous Publishing." The 1st book to be distributed under the new publishing name was the 12&12 which the Conference approved. The book contains the final wording of the short form of the Traditions that we know today.

1954 The General Service Board

The 1954 Conference unanimously approved the corporate renaming of the "Alcoholic Foundation" to the "General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous."

Also in 1954 actress and nightclub singer, Lillian R (Roth) became the first of many celebrities to break their anonymity and announce their membership in AA. Her book (later movie) "I'll Cry Tomorrow" was a national sensation. In 1955, Susan Hayward's performance as Lillian won her an Academy Award nomination. However, AA's anonymity Traditions were reinforced by the sad fact that Lillian went on to drink again and it generated bad national publicity for AA.

AA Comes of Age - July 1-3, 1955

In 1955 the 5th and final trial Conference was held in St Louis, MO from June 26-29 and July 3. It unanimously recommended a permanent Conference Charter subject to approval of the 2nd Int'l Convention to be held in St Louis from July 1-3.

On July 3 Bill W read a resolution to the Convention attendees proposing that the Conference become the guardian of the Traditions and group conscience of the entire Fellowship. It was approved unanimously and AA came of age. The 2nd edition Big Book was also introduced at the 1955 Convention.

The 1957 Conference recommended that: "No change in Article 12 of the [Conference] Charter or in AA Tradition or in the 12 Steps of AA may be made with less than the written consent of 3/4 of the AA groups." This emphasizes how important the Traditions are to the Fellowship. It would later be made even stronger.

AA Preamble Changed - April 1958

In 1958 the Conference approved removing the word "honest" from the term "honest desire to stop drinking" in the AA Preamble. AA legend sometimes erroneously states that the word "honest" was removed from Tradition 3. Neither the long or short form of Tradition 3 ever contained the word "honest." The term "honest desire to stop drinking" is from the Foreword to the 1st Edition Big Book. The 1958 Conference also recommended that the name "General Service HQ" be changed to "General Service Office." In 1959 the corporate name of "Alcoholics Anonymous Publishing" was changed to "Alcoholics Anonymous World Services" or what we call "AAWS" today.

In 1960, the General Service Board adopted a policy that: "The Board believes that AA members generally think it unwise to break the anonymity of a member even after his death, but that in each situation the final decision must rest with the family." Many AA members believe that it is ok to reveal a member's name after they pass away but that's not what is recommended by both the General Service Board and the Conference.

12 Concepts for World Service - April 1962

The 1962 Conference unanimously approved Bill's manuscript for the "12 Concepts for World Service" and recommended that it eventually be an integral part of the Third Legacy Manual.

In April 1968, the Conference recommended that: "The showing of the full face of an AA member at the level of press, TV, and films is considered a violation of the Anonymity Tradition, even though the name is withheld."

The 1968 Conference also recommended: "That the Board adopt the following policy statement to be used in answering inquiries relating to posthumous breaking of anonymity: The board generally believes that AA members think it unwise to break the anonymity of a member even after his death, but that in each situation the final decision must rest with the family."

Declaration of Unity – 1970

In July 1970 AA's 35th anniversary and 5th International Convention took place at Miami Beach, FL. Estimated attendance was 10-13,000. The keynote was the "Declaration of Unity" which read: "This we owe to AA's future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united. For on AA Unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come."

That is essentially a declaration of the importance of the Traditions since they are so crucial to AA's Legacy of Unity.

Bill W's health was steadily weakening and he made his last public appearance at the 1970 International Convention. He was confined to a wheel-chair and required the administration of oxygen.

William Griffith Wilson - January 24, 1971

On January 24, 1971 Bill W at age 75 and 36 years sober, died at Miami Beach, FL. The date was also Bill and Lois' 53rd wedding anniversary. Bill W was the architect and author of AA's 3 Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service, and all the written works that explained them. This was an amazing achievement. He had no training at all as a writer. In 1990, Life Magazine named Bill W as one of the 100 most important figures of the 20th century.

Short Form of the Twelve Concepts - April 1971

3 months after Bill's death the 1971 General Service Conference approved the "short form" of the 12 Concepts for World Service.

3rd Edition Big Book - 1976

The 1976 Conference approved publication of the 3rd edition Big Book. The Conference also expanded a provision of the Conference Charter that any change to the Steps, Traditions and 6 Warranties of Article 12 of the Charter would require written approval of 75% of the AA Groups worldwide. This makes any proposed change to the Steps, Traditions and Warranties a virtual impossibility (even so much as adding or removing a comma).

Bill W's Grapevine Essays Are Preserved - 1988

1988 General Service Conference approved the AA Grapevine publication of "The Language of the Heart." The book contains the essays that Bill W wrote for the Grapevine to explain the Traditions to the membership. The Grapevine is probably one of the most under-appreciated yet one of the richest sources of information on AA history

As I mentioned at the beginning on that milestone in 1988 I'm going to wrap up the history of the Traditions.

Over the next 3 weeks we'll be discussing each individual Tradition. I hope to cover Traditions 1, 2 and 3 next week. Then Traditions 4 thru 9 the week after that and Traditions 10, 11 and 12 in

the final week. In the last week I'll also cover some (but not all) of the 12 Concepts of World Service and how they relate and build upon the 12 Traditions.

Follow-on Notes and Literature:

If anyone is interested in reading further about the 12 Traditions, I'd recommend first reading the book "The Language of the Heart." It contains numerous essays by Bill W from his 1940s Grapevine articles. These essays were vital in explaining to the membership what the Traditions were all about and why they were needed. The essays were also used by Bill in writing both the 12&12 and "AA Comes of Age."

The book AA Comes of Age is extremely rich in detail on the historical circumstances and experiences that led to the writing of the 12 Traditions. It contains a series of talks that Bill W made at the historic 1955 International Convention in St Louis, MO where he explains the Traditions and their origin.

There are also several excellent AA pamphlets that explain the Traditions. The first is the pamphlet "AA Tradition How it Developed" which contains several Grapevine articles that Bill wrote. Another very helpful pamphlet is "The 12 Traditions Illustrated" which offers a nice concise narrative for each of the Traditions. The pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity" is also a very informative source for the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions.

For a very practical guide on how to apply both the 12 Traditions and the 12 Concepts to group affairs I'd strongly recommend reading the pamphlet titled "The AA Group." I think this is one of the most informative pamphlets published by AA. This pamphlet serves the group much the same that the AA Service Manual serves the General Service Structure.

Finally, there is also a video issued by AA where Bill W discusses the Traditions. Our Archives Chair can arrange to have the video shown at the group.

Week 2

Before I start, I have to explain that I do not speak for AA. No single member speaks for AA. No one has been elected or appointed to do so. That's a very important point that has been taught to me by my sponsor. What I'm going to do is share with you my personal experience, strength and hope with the Traditions of AA. Tonight I'm going to focus on Traditions 1, 2 and 3.

If there is an unwritten guideline that runs through all of AA's spiritual principles (and those are the 12 Steps, 12 Traditions and 12 Concepts of World Service) I'd describe that guideline as "don't waste an experience – repeat the good experiences and try to avoid repeating the bad experiences." Put them all to some good and useful purpose.

Tradition 1

And that's the nature of the Traditions. They are not based on things that AA did right and God bless this Fellowship for having both the honesty and humility to put it all in writing. I will refer often to AA literature and cite it. That's not for your benefit – it's for my benefit to keep me honest and focused.

In AA Comes of Age, Bill W wrote: "Implicit throughout AA's Traditions is the confession that our fellowship has its sins. We confess that we have character defects as a society and that these defects threaten us continually. Our Traditions are a guide to better ways of working and living, and they are also an antidote for our various maladies. The 12 Traditions are to group survival and harmony what AA's 12 Steps are to each member's sobriety and peace of mind."

By far and away the Traditions are based on things that occurred in the past that should not be repeated. In writing the Traditions, Bill W assured the Fellowship that the most desirable state of affairs was that individual members (himself included) should always be less important to AA than the spiritual principles of AA itself.

That's expressed in the short form of Tradition 1. It reads: Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on AA unity. The long form of the Traditions provides much more clarity and context for an understanding and interpretation of the Traditions. The long form of Tradition 1 reads: Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. AA must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.

In July 1970 AA celebrated its 35th anniversary and 5th International Convention at Miami Beach, FL. This was the Convention that introduced what is called AA's "Declaration of Unity." It reads "This we owe to AA's future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our Fellowship united. For on AA Unity depend our lives and the lives of those to come." And that's what our Traditions are all about – and the foundation is Tradition 1.

Let me also mention something very important. The Traditions of AA apply to AA members only. No one outside of AA is in any way obligated to be bound by them. AA enjoys much respect and support from the public. 999 times out of 1,000, if a Traditions issue arises in the

public arena it will likely be due to the actions of AA members and not somebody outside of AA.

And worst of all as Bill W noted in “AA Comes of Age”

“They were all the more dangerous because they were invariably powered by self-righteousness, self-justification and the destructive power of anger, usually masquerading as righteous indignation.”

(Bill goes on to say) “Pride and fear and anger – these are the common enemies of our common welfare. True brotherhood, harmony and love, fortified by clear insights and right practices, are the only answers. And the purpose of AA’s traditional principles is to bring these forces to the top and keep them there. Only then can our common welfare be served; only then can AA’s unity become permanent.”

One of the more useful pieces of AA literature that can help groups understand and practice both the 12 Traditions and 12 Concepts of World Service, is a pamphlet titled “The AA Group.” It’s a gold mine of practical information written in a “keep it simple” manner.

I mention the 12 Concepts because the word “traditional” appears over and over in them. Also the Traditions, and unity, benefit enormously if I, as an individual member, practice the 12 Steps in all my affairs. It will not only help to produce Recovery, it will also help to produce a spirit of Unity and Service as well.

Our Steps, Traditions and Concepts are not independent and isolated sets of spiritual principles meant to exist in their own little vacuum. When combined and practiced in combination, they ensure the survival of both the individual and the Fellowship as a whole. The Steps, Traditions and Concepts are not lists of multiple choices where I pick and choose what I like and leave out what I don’t like. They are all designed to work as a package and that’s how they work best – when they are all practiced as a complete package.

“The AA Group” pamphlet can serve the group very much in the same manner that the “AA Service Manual” serves the General Service Structure (and that is our Districts, Areas, Regions and Conferences). As with all other AA literature both the pamphlet and the service manual have been hammered out on the anvil of AA experience to suggest the repetition of the good and the avoidance of the bad.

The Big Book chapter “How It Works” is probably the most popular reading at AA meetings. It is an extremely effective message on what it takes to find a solution to the destructive nature of alcoholism. And that is our message of hope to the alcoholic who is still suffering - that “There is a Solution” (it also happens to be the title of another wonderful chapter of the Big Book).

Our program of Recovery provides a daily reprieve from alcohol contingent on my spiritual condition. In other words, I’ll get out of it what I put into it. If I don’t put anything in to it, then I really shouldn’t expect to get much out of it. If I put negativity and selfishness into it then that’s pretty much what I’ll get out of it. It certainly won’t add up to serenity and sobriety and survival.

Our program of Recovery really doesn't ask all that much of me. AA's old-timers have very simply and effectively summed it up as "clean house, trust God and help others." And likewise, the maintenance of Group unity can also benefit from the very same formula:

To "clean house" at the group, by all means keep a nice tidy meeting room, but in the same manner that the Steps suggest that I continue to take personal inventory and when wrong promptly admit it (as part of the house-cleaning for my spiritual condition) it can also benefit the group to consider (at least once a year) taking a group inventory as part of group house-cleaning for group unity. "The AA Group" pamphlet offers a very simple and effective suggested procedure for this.

It's also vital to "trust God" at the group level. In the same way that the Big Book discussion on Step 3 suggests that I need to clear away the obstacles that I've put in God's way that prevent me from turning my will and my life over to God, then, in the same manner I personally need to clear away any obstacles that I create that prevents a loving God from expressing Himself in our group conscience and in the day-to-day activities of the group.

Finally to "help others" at the group level I need to do something at the group besides just sitting in a chair collecting dust and drinking coffee and talking way too long when I get called on at discussion meetings. I need to take my turn at the chores to be done at the group day after day. I can also do something really radical like volunteering for a group service position.

And please, please, please do not talk yourself out of group service even if you only have a short period of sobriety. Obviously someone cannot give away what they do not have, but everyone can give away what they do have. A group member might not have enough sobriety and experience to be a GSR or Treasurer but anyone with even 1 day of sobriety can pitch in and help with group clean up chores, or reach their hand out to other new members to make them feel welcome at the group, or if you have a car and someone else doesn't, then offer them a ride to a meeting.

Why is this important? Those simple things are very effective ways of putting the welfare of the group first – but in doing so it also helps me stay sober by getting out of self – that's a win-win combination.

The Step 3 discussion in the Big Book doesn't pull any punches on what I have to face up to (head on) for Recovery. I believe it also describes the core of what I need to face up to (head on) to be a unifying member of my group and AA as a whole. It cautions that "Selfishness-self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles."

(It goes on to state) "So our troubles, we think, are basically of our own making. They arise out of ourselves, and the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though he usually doesn't think so. Above everything, we alcoholics must be rid of this selfishness. We must, or it kills us! God makes that possible. And there often seems no way of entirely getting rid of self without His aid."

That same selfishness and self-centeredness can poison and kill an AA group just as easily as it can kill an individual AA member. The key, I believe, to both the survival of the individual and

the survival of the group can also be found in the Step 3 discussion in the Big Book (immediately before the paragraph that we call the 3rd Step Prayer). It states:

“This is the how and why of it. First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents. He is the Father, and we are His children. Most good ideas are simple, and this concept was the keystone of the new and triumphant arch through which we passed to freedom (and I might interject that's also going to be strongly emphasized in Tradition 2).

(The Big Book goes on to state) When we sincerely took such a position (that is letting God be Director) all sorts of remarkable things followed. We had a new Employer. Being all powerful, He provided what we needed, if we kept close to Him and performed His work well. Established on such a footing we became less and less interested in ourselves, our little plans and designs. More and more we became interested in seeing what we could contribute to life. As we felt new power flow in, as we enjoyed peace of mind, as we discovered we could face life successfully, as we became conscious of His presence, we began to lose our fear of today, tomorrow or the hereafter. We were reborn.”

What I'm trying to get at is that the type of thinking, and type of speaking and type of action that is so important in trying to practice the principles of the 12 Steps in all our affairs, is also just as important in trying to practice the principles of the Traditions in all our affairs.

Tradition 2

Tradition 1 focuses on priorities and the realization that needs of the many should outweigh the needs of the individual. Tradition 2 focuses on authority. The short form of Tradition 2 reads: 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.

This is one of those endearing AA oddities where the short form of the Tradition is longer than the long form of Tradition. The long form of Tradition 2 does not have the last sentence "Our leaders are but trusted servants - they do not govern."

The notion of our leaders serving and not governing is today in the long form of Tradition 9 which ends with: "All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in AA are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness."

The long form of the 2nd Tradition never contained any mention of "Our leaders are but trusted servants - they do not govern." Also the initial, or original, version of the long form of Tradition 9 did not contain the term "they do not govern."

Both the short and long form of the Traditions have undergone changes from their original wording. Pinning down the dates when these changes actually occurred is not simple.

What caused this addition to the short form of Tradition 2 (and later addition to the long form of Tradition 9)? I can only offer an educated guess based on AA history literature, specifically the book "AA Comes of Age."

From 1946 on, after the first publication of the Traditions, there was friction (it grew to be rather intense) between Bill W and the Alcoholic Foundation Board Trustees regarding Bill's ideas for establishment of the General Service Conference. Bill openly admits this in "AA Comes of Age" and apologizes for his behavior toward the board (who by the way Bill considered to be some of his best friends).

It took 5 years for Bill W to convince the Alcoholic Foundation Board to give the Conference a try on an experimental basis. When the short form of the Traditions was published in the November 1949 Grapevine, the sentence "Our leaders are but trusted servants - they do not govern" may well have been a product of that friction between Bill and the Board which reached its greatest intensity in 1949. Again, this is just an educated guess on my part.

Most groups have what is called a "group conscience" or "business meeting" where group matters are discussed and acted upon and where group service positions are elected. It's also a meeting where group members can receive reports from group service positions and where members can express their concerns and receive information from other group members.

The first part of Tradition 2 again states that a group's ultimate authority is a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. The idea sounds great - but it takes the

cooperation of the members involved in the group conscience discussions to ensure that God gets the opportunity to express himself.

“The AA Group” pamphlet adds an important word to the term “group conscience” and suggests that the goal should be to seek an “**informed** group conscience.” It also asks the question “What is an Informed AA Group Conscience?” and answers it by stating:

“The group conscience is the collective conscience of the group membership and thus represents substantial unanimity on an issue before definitive action is taken. This is achieved by the group members through the sharing of full information, individual points of view, and the practice of AA principles. To be fully informed requires a willingness to listen to minority opinions with an open mind.

(The pamphlet goes on to state) On sensitive issues, the group works slowly—discouraging formal motions until a clear sense of its collective view emerges. Placing principles before personalities, the membership is wary of dominant opinions. Its voice is heard when a well-informed group arrives at a decision. The result rests on more than a “yes” or “no” count—precisely because it is the spiritual expression of the group conscience. The term “informed group conscience” implies that pertinent information has been studied and all views have been heard before the group votes.”

This is not a play on words – it’s really an appeal to AA members who are participating in the formation of group conscience to do so in a way that ensures that the final decision is “informed” and reflects unity.

With AA membership comes the right to vote on issues that affect the group. It’s a process that forms the very cornerstone of AA’s service structure. In the 12 Concepts for World Service it’s called “the right of participation” and appears in Concept 4.

In Concept 5, it further states “Throughout our world service structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, thus assuring us that minority opinion will be heard and that petitions for the redress of personal grievances will be carefully considered.

As with all group-conscience matters, each AA member has 1 vote; and this, ideally, is voiced through the home group. It’s as simple as the idea that the residents of the city of Arlington elect the mayor of Arlington and the residents of the city of Grand Prairie or Fort Worth do not elect the mayor of the city of Arlington. They elect their own mayors.

The bottom line is that a group conscience decision should reflect 2 important qualities: 1st, that it is informed, 2nd, that it reflects something called “substantial unanimity.” Some helpful ways to achieve this are:

- Formal motions should not be presented to the group conscience or business meeting until a matter is first fully discussed. You don’t rush into a decision or ramrod it through.
- By the same token filibustering should not be permitted either. Each participant in the

discussions should have a fixed, and reasonably brief, amount of time to speak and then let someone else have the opportunity to speak.

- Discussions should be free of legalistic arguments, debates and personal accusations (everything benefits from restraint of pen and tongue). It also helps to ask the participants in the discussion to not keep saying the same things over and over. It's ok to just say that I agree with what so and so said.
- Minority or dissenting views should receive due respect and courtesy.
- When a formal motion is presented it should, if possible, be worded in a manner that tries to unite or bring together the collective views expressed by the members participating in the group conscience discussions.

Now, admittedly, compromise isn't always easy especially when someone is very passionate about a particular matter. However, a willingness to cooperate in both give and take and a respect for the views of others will always move the discussions in the right direction and move the decisions toward unity and fellowship.

One of the considerations that should be apparent for arriving at an informed group conscience is that the **way** something is discussed can be just as important as **what** is being discussed.

The AA Service Manual contains a recommended procedure for conducting what is called a "sharing session." There are many things in AA that can be conducted as a sharing session, whether it's a committee meeting, or a group inventory and very importantly a group conscience or business meeting.

In a sharing session, everyone has a chance to use their experience, strength and hope to contribute ideas and opinions about the matter being discussed. The format of a sharing session is aimed at drawing out the ideas of even the shyest participant, and keeps anyone from dominating the meeting. Each person offers an opinion, and never needs to defend it. It also helps to avoid debates and arguments.

It's important that the chairperson, or moderator, of a sharing session functions as a timekeeper not as a participant in the discussions. A meeting chair's primary duties are to try to keep the meeting moving along and encouraging the involvement of the meeting participants.

To keep a meeting moving along, each member participating may talk for a specified time (2 minutes is typical - or whatever the group agrees upon). Usually no one is permitted to speak a second time on the same subject until all who wish to have had an opportunity to speak for the first time. When multiple rounds of discussion occur it is often useful to limit those rounds to 1 minute of discussion per member.

To achieve what is called "substantial unanimity" some matters (particularly very important or sensitive matters) should be resolved by more than just a simple majority vote or they can turn out to be very divisive. In many cases a simple majority vote does little more than divide the

group into 2 opposing factions and that is not healthy to group unity.

Typically in Area and District service committees and in the General Service Conference, matters under discussion usually require a 2/3 majority for adoption (and in some rare but extremely important cases a 3/4 majority). This is not done to make things more difficult to do. It is done to ensure that the decision has the backing of most of the participants and reflects substantial unanimity. It also helps individual members to learn how to compromise.

If a loving God expressing Himself in our group conscience is our ultimate authority, it follows that AA leaders are not authorities in the usual sense, but are rather servants and instruments of the group conscience. Their term of office should be brief and they should be replaced by other members volunteering and being elected to serve. Typically, a group service position doesn't serve multiple successive terms and the term of office is not an open or indefinite. This is called "the principle of rotation." It will also be discussed in Tradition 9.

If a group wants to be part of the whole AA service structure it elects a General Service Representative (or GSR). GSRs elect Area Committee members and then join them in electing a delegate from the area to the annual General Service Conference. The Conference is about the closest approximation of a government that AA has. However, the Conference has no authority to tell any group or any member what to do.

Then who is in charge in AA? AA is a spiritual movement and the ultimate authority in AA is the spiritual concept of the informed group conscience. Almost every group and Fellowship problem can be solved through the process of an informed group conscience and a respect for AA principles. For all involved, a good sense of humor, cooling off periods, patience, courtesy, willingness to listen and to wait—plus a sense of fairness and trust in a "Power greater than ourselves"—have been found to be far more effective than legalistic arguments or personal accusations or "frothy emotional appeal."

Tradition 3

Tradition 3 focuses on who is an AA member and what is an AA group? The short form of Tradition 3 reads: The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking. The long form of Tradition 3 reads: Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought AA membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.

Tradition 3 is quite specific on the make-up of our membership by stating that it “ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism” (not anyone who suffers from “anythingism”). As simple as this may be, it can get controversial if not handled in an open and honest manner.

One of the more helpful pieces of AA literature on this matter is a pamphlet titled “Problems Other Than Alcohol.” There is also a smaller version that contains excerpts. I don’t mention this to be controversial but the matter is important and it should be discussed.

The pamphlet derives from a Grapevine article by Bill W and represents principles that have been reaffirmed by 3 General Service Conferences. The pamphlet states:

“The problem of drug addiction in its several forms lies close to us all. It stirs our deepest interest and sympathy. Many AA’s, especially those who have suffered these particular addictions, are now asking, What can we do about drugs—within our Fellowship, and without?” Specifically, here is a list of questions we are often asked:

1. “Can a non-alcoholic (and the key word here is “non-alcoholic”) pill or drug addict become an AA member? The answer given is “No.”
2. “Can such a person be brought, as a visitor, to an open AA meeting for help and inspiration? The answer given is “Yes.”
3. “If so, should these non-alcoholic (again the key word here is “non-alcoholic”) pill or drug users be led to believe that they have become AA members? The answer given is “No.”
4. “Can a pill or drug taker, who also has a genuine alcoholic history, become a member of AA? The answer given is “Yes.”

(The pamphlet goes on to state) “Now there are certain things that AA cannot do for anybody, regardless of what our desires or sympathies may be. Our first duty, as a fellowship, is to insure our own survival. Therefore, we have to avoid distractions and multipurpose activity.

(The pamphlet further states) “Sobriety - freedom from alcohol - through the teaching and practice of the 12 Steps is the sole purpose of an AA group. Groups have repeatedly tried other activities and they have always failed. It has also been learned that there is no possible

way to make non-alcoholics into AA members. We have to confine our membership to alcoholics and we have to confine our AA groups to a single purpose. If we don't stick to these principles we shall almost surely collapse. And if we collapse, we cannot help anyone.

I want to be very, very careful here to qualify the discussion on AA membership. No one appointed or elected me to play God. And no one appointed or elected me to decide which alcoholic lives and which one dies? And it's very easy to forget how fatal alcoholism can be.

The hard experience of the past that emphasized the importance of Tradition 3 is documented in the book "AA Comes of Age." It notes that in the early 1940s the NY office asked the groups to send in a copy of any membership rules that they had created. When all these membership rules were put together into one consolidated list, it wound up that not a single alcoholic on this planet would have been eligible to join AA including its founders and pioneers.

"The AA Group" pamphlet offers very useful information to answer the questions how do you become an AA group member and what is the difference between open and closed meetings?

How Do You Become an AA Group Member? Well to repeat, "The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking" (Tradition 3). Thus, group membership requires no formal application. Just as we are members of AA if we say we are, so are we members of a group if we say we are.

What is the difference between Open and Closed AA Meetings? The purpose of all AA group meetings, as the Preamble states, is for AA members to "share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism." Toward this end, AA groups have both open and closed meetings.

Closed meetings are for AA members only, or for those who think they have a drinking problem and "have a desire to stop drinking." Open meetings are available to anyone interested in Alcoholics Anonymous. Whether open or closed, AA meetings are conducted by AA members who determine the format of their meetings.

As with most of the Traditions, there is quite a contrast between the short and long form of Tradition 3. The long form explains what an AA group is – the short form doesn't.

Now the definition of what is an AA Group should be pretty straightforward. But you'd be surprised by how much of an issue it was in the past for the General Service Conference to come up with a definition of what is an AA Group that could be put into AA literature.

What first gave rise to this is something called the AA Directory. It's basically a phone book that lists all the groups in a certain part of the country. The phone numbers of the group GSR and alternate GSR are in the directory as the contacts for the group. In the 1960s complications arose over what groups to list in the directory because of the emergence of groups that got involved with problems other than alcohol and conducted so-called "alcohol and pill" meetings.

There were also groups that were men only, women only, physicians only, lawyer only, etc., etc. There were also groups that were essentially merging with Al-Anon and conducting so-called “Family” or “Family After” meetings.

For a period of time AA literature (specifically “The AA Group” pamphlet) suggested subdividing AA into the categories of “groups,” “meetings” and “gatherings.” If a group was in line with Tradition 3 then it got called a “group.” If it went off into other areas it was labeled a “meeting.” And if it was really out in left field it was called a “gathering.” Needless to say, many AA members were not very enthusiastic about those types of classifications and wanted more clarity in the definition of what an AA group is. This gave rise to something called the “6-point definition of an AA group.” Those 6 points were:

1. All members of a group are alcoholics, and all alcoholics are eligible for membership.
2. As a group, they are fully self-supporting.
3. A group’s primary purpose is to help alcoholics recover through the Twelve Steps.
4. As a group, they have no outside affiliation.
5. As a group, they have no opinion on outside issues.
6. As a group, their public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion, and they maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV and film.

The 6-point definition was replaced by a 1990 decision of the General Service Conference that defined an AA group with the long form of Tradition 3 which was read earlier and the long form of Tradition 5 which reads “Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose—that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”

Then in 1991 the General Service Conference approved a definition that consists of the long form of Tradition 3 and something called “Warranty 6” which is also a part of Concept 12.

And this is the current definition of an AA group that appears in AA literature. The definition is in “The AA Group” pamphlet and a number of other pamphlets. But the literature I like best is the AA Service Manual in Chapter 2 which is titled “The Group and Its GSR.” The beginning of the chapter recaps the information we previously discussed and I’d like to read it:

For most AAs, membership in a home group is one of the keys to continuing sobriety. In a home group, they accept service responsibilities and learn to sustain friendships. The home group affords individual AAs the privilege of voting on issues that affect the Fellowship as a whole; it is the very basis of the service structure.

While most AA members attend other groups regularly, the home group is where they participate in business meetings and cast their vote as part of the group conscience of the Fellowship as a whole. As with all group conscience matters, each member has one vote.

The Long Form of Tradition 3 and a section of Warranty 6, Concept 12, aptly describe what an AA group is:

(And it says in Tradition 3) “Our membership ought to include all who suffer from

alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought AA membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.”

(And it says in Warranty 6) “much attention has been drawn to the extraordinary liberties which the AA Traditions accord to the individual member and to his group: no penalties to be inflicted for non-conformity to AA principles; no fees or dues to be levied – voluntary contributions only; no member to be expelled from AA – membership always to be the choice of the individual; each AA group to conduct its internal affairs as it wishes – it being merely requested to abstain from acts that might injure AA as a whole; and finally that any group of alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group provided that, as a group, they have no other purpose or affiliation.”

I’m going to stop here and pick up with Tradition 4 next week.

Week 3 - **Tradition 4**

Before I start, it's important to state, like I did last week that no member speaks for AA. No one has been elected, or appointed, to do so. So all I'm going to do tonight is share my experience, strength and hope with the Traditions. Most of that has been given to me from the generosity of other AA members and AA literature.

As I also mentioned last week, I'll refer often to AA literature and cite it. That's not for your benefit – it's for mine to keep me honest and focused. I do have a love for AA history and that will be part of the discussions as well.

The short form of Tradition 4 reads "Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole."

The long form of Tradition 4 reads "With respect to its own affairs, each AA group should be responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when its plans concern the welfare of neighboring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect AA as a whole without conferring with the Trustees of the General Service Board. On such issues our common welfare is paramount."

In a March 1948 Grapevine article Bill W wrote that the long form of Tradition 4 repeats and specifically emphasizes the spiritual principles contained in both Traditions 1 and 2. There is a great deal of repetition in the Traditions. It's not always evident in the short form but is very prominent in the long form of the Traditions.

The 12&12 Tradition 4 essay states that over the years, every conceivable deviation from AA's 12 Steps and Traditions has been tried. That shouldn't be a surprise – we alcoholics are an extreme example of self will run riot. These deviations, however, have also created a body of trial and error experience that can be used to benefit all.

Every group has the right to be wrong and is free to work out its own customs, meeting formats, service structure and many other things. But freedom also requires responsibility otherwise it becomes anarchy. Each group is responsible to avoid any action that might harm others, whether it's our common good, another group or a member. And there have been such actions, or this Tradition would be unnecessary.

AA Comes of Age states that "Implicit throughout AA's Traditions is the confession that our Fellowship has its sins. We admit that we have character defects as a society and these defects threaten us continually."

The experienced group understands that the Traditions are not technicalities. They are proven guides that reinforce the primary purpose of all AA groups and a way to maintain group harmony and unity.

Tradition 3 allows any 2 or 3 alcoholics coming together as an AA group to seek sobriety just about any way they like. They can disagree with any or all AA principles and still call

themselves an AA group. In fact, any member can disagree with any or all AA principles and still call himself or herself an AA member.

That's pretty heady stuff and sounds like risky business. But really it's not. (Bill W also wrote in AA Comes of Age that) this kind of liberty prevents AA from becoming a frozen set of dogmatic (or rigid) principles that couldn't be changed even when obviously wrong. It's our wonderful "democratic anarchy" and it does have checks and balances and ways of sorting itself out.

For example, the 12&12 essay on Tradition 4 has a story about an early group that had grandiose plans that predictably fell flat and went down to failure. But it had a happy ending.

The story is about "Rule # 62" which is "Don't take yourself too damn seriously." A group in the late 1930s decided to involve itself in just about everything and anything. They had extravagant dreams of building a huge alcoholic center that groups everywhere would want to duplicate.

There were plans for a club on the ground floor. On the 2nd floor they planned to have a treatment center and a special bank to hand out money to alcoholics to pay their back debts and get them on their feet again. Then on the 3rd floor they planned to have an alcoholism education center. And that was only the beginning.

Of course, there was a super-promoter and power driver behind it all. He wrote to the NY office to get an official AA charter for the grandiose plans. The NY office advised him that it didn't issue any kind of charters for any purpose and that similar adventures the super-promoter had in mind had come to some very bad ends elsewhere.

Not the least bit fazed, the super-promoter set up 3 corporations and became president of all 3 of them. As an added bonus he also appointed himself manager of the club. All of this would take a lot of money and of course it would be other people's money. In order to keep everyone on the straight and narrow path they adopted 61 rules and regulations.

After a while confusion reigned supreme. The power-driver promoter and members finally reached the point where they wished they had paid attention to AA experience when first advised of it. And, upon admitting defeat in a letter sent to the NY office, out of this was born the famous rule #62 "Don't take yourself too damn seriously."

The 12&12 states that under Tradition 4 an AA group had exercised its right to be wrong. It also did a service to AA by letting others know what it did wrong and being willing to take the hard lessons they had learned and apply them in a humble and good-natured manner. Even the chief architect and super-promoter, standing in the ruins of his dream, could laugh at himself. Bill described that as the very acme (or high point) of humility.

Tradition 5

The short form of Tradition 5 reads: Each group has but one primary purpose - to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

The long form reads: Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity *having but one primary purpose* - that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Every AA member sooner or later learns that staying sober must be the top priority. If we fail at that we're not going to succeed at anything else. The 5th Tradition suggests that a group's primary purpose should be its top priority because if it fails at that it's not going to succeed at anything else either. The rule #62 lessons of Tradition 4 illustrates that probably all the worst of AA's experiences likely started out with the best of intentions.

The pamphlet "The 12 Traditions Illustrated" cites an example of a group that, like the Rule #62 group, wanted to set up an "alcoholism information center" to carry the message to everybody. The temptation is understandable; it was even stronger when the Traditions were first written because the general public at that time was not aware about viewing alcoholism as an illness. However, things have changed a great deal since then.

Today, very capable agencies, both private and government, have assumed the task of educating the general public on alcoholism. That is not AA's purpose. Those private and government agencies are AA's friends and Tradition 6 marks the boundary lines of that friendship and cooperation.

The 12&12 states "Shoemaker, stick to thy last!" ... better do one thing supremely well than many badly. It's the central theme of Tradition 5. It also holds that a group should not be a welfare or lending agency. A member might lend a few dollars to another member for a meal, or may even invite a down-and-out alcoholic to be a temporary houseguest. But the AA group is not a friendly finance company, or a social welfare department, or a housing bureau, or an employment agency, or a taxi service, etc., etc.

Something else that's important, because it is so dangerous, AA members should not award themselves honorary medical degrees. If any member thinks that their recovery in the 12 Steps and length of dry time qualifies them to act like a doctor and suggest what someone should or shouldn't do medically, they are playing with someone else's life and the consequences can be absolutely tragic. I've personally witnessed cases where a member told someone else to stop taking medications that their doctor prescribed and the results were a disaster.

AA publishes a pamphlet titled "The AA Member, Medications and Other Drugs." I'd strongly advise reading it. It's a report from a group of physicians who are also AA members. It addresses both the benefits and the dangers of prescription and over-the-counter medications. And it does it in a very even-handed and experience driven manner.

My experience, strength and hope with AA's Steps, Traditions and Concepts do not qualify me to act like a doctor or theologian or marriage counselor or financial advisor or whatever. They

only qualify me to be a recovered alcoholic carrying the AA message, a unifying member of AA and an AA member who wants to pay back what he has been freely given.

But a strange upside-down mindset can come over AA members in trying to turn personal experiences into qualifications for something they are not - and it can get a bit bizarre.

For example, if I've been divorced umpteen times that does qualify me to act like a marriage counselor - it means I've been a failure as a husband. If I've been a patient in a treatment center umpteen times that does not qualify me to act like a medical expert on the treatment of alcoholism - it means I've been a failure as a patient. If I've filed for bankruptcy umpteen times that does not qualify me to act like a financial advisor - it means I've been a failure at managing money. Or if I've been sent to jail umpteen times it does qualify me to act like an attorney - it means I've been a failure at obeying the law. I could increase the list ad infinitum.

The 12&12 and Big Book state why it is so important for AA to stay focused on its primary purpose. It's because AA members have shown over and over that they can help problem drinkers as others seldom can. The legacy of Recovery, and shared experience, are easily passed on among alcoholics by one alcoholic talking to another as no one else can. There is also another compelling reason for singleness of purpose. It's the great paradox of AA that we know we can't keep the precious gift of sobriety unless we try to give it away.

In 1955, Bill W wrote that there are those who predict AA may become a new spearhead for a spiritual awakening throughout the world. But such a tribute could well prove to be a heady drink for most of us. If we came to believe this to be the real purpose of AA. Our Society, therefore, will prudently cleave to its single purpose: the carrying of the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Let us resist the proud assumption that since God has enabled us to do well in one area we are destined to be a channel of saving grace for everybody.

Tradition 6

The short form of Tradition 6 reads: 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.

The long form of Tradition 6 (and it is a long one) reads: Problems of money, property, and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim. We think, therefore, that any considerable property of genuine use to AA should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the material from the spiritual. An AA group, as such, should never go into business. Secondary aids to AA, such as clubs or hospitals which require much property or administration, ought to be incorporated and so set apart that, if necessary, they can be freely discarded by the groups. Hence such facilities ought not to use the AA name. Their management should be the sole responsibility of those people who financially support them. For clubs, AA managers are usually preferred. But hospitals, as well as other places of recuperation, ought to be well outside AA-and medically supervised. While an AA group may cooperate with anyone, such cooperation ought never go so far as affiliation or endorsement, actual or implied. An AA group can bind itself to no one.

Very similar to Tradition 5, the Tradition 6 essay in the 12&12 states that the moment AA saw that it had an answer for alcoholism, it was reasonable (or so it seemed at the time) for us to feel that we might have the answer to a lot of other things. (The essay lists) many grandiose ideas and how they all came tumbling down. The result of these experiences implanted a deep-rooted conviction that "in no circumstances could AA endorse any related enterprise, no matter how good. AA could not be all things to all people, nor should we try."

When dealing with outside agencies the AA principle is "cooperation but not affiliation." A group cooperates, for example, by welcoming referrals from treatment centers or the courts or by taking meetings into treatment centers and jails. AA members employed by treatment centers "wear 2 hats" but Tradition 6 cautions against wearing both hats at the same time. On the job, they may be alcoholism counselors; they are not "AA counselors." At meetings, they are just AA members, not alcoholism experts.

Traditions 5 and 6 emphasize that we cooperate with almost everybody but affiliate with nobody. Even the appearance of being linked to any outside organization is supposed to be avoided. A group meeting in a correction or treatment facility or church should not to use the institution's name in the group's name. This makes it clear that the group is not affiliated with the institution but simply rents space there for meetings.

Our AA group conscience, as voiced by the General Service Conference, has recommended that "family" meetings, "double trouble" and "alcohol and pill" meetings not be listed in AA directories. The use of the word "family" might invite confusion with Al-Anon Family Groups, a magnificent fellowship but entirely separate from AA.

An appeal in the long form of Tradition 6 is to "separate the material from the spiritual." To avoid problems of money, property and prestige, most groups have learned to stick to their

primary purpose and leave things like running a club to separate corporations outside AA itself. For that reason, the General Service Office does not accept contributions directly from clubs. But GSO does accept contributions directly from groups that rent meeting space in clubs.

One very compelling reason for avoiding outside affiliation is that there is more than enough to do inside AA. The AA Fellowship functions through more than 60,000 local groups in the US and Canada and over 100,000 groups total worldwide. AA is active in over 150 countries and worldwide membership is estimated to be more than 2 million.

As remarkable as these numbers may seem, studies by AA's friends in medicine, and by the US government institutes of health, estimate that there are over 18 million problem drinkers in just the US alone. Now anyone who thinks drugs are a bigger problem than alcohol you are very much mistaken. Those same agencies in medicine and government estimate the number of drug addicts in the US at around 6 million. The 18 million problem drinkers, and this is just alcohol, not a combination of alcohol and anything else, outnumber drug addicts 3 to 1.

So AA's primary purpose of carrying a message to alcoholics who are still suffering still has an enormous target population that has yet to hear that message in just in the US alone.

Tradition 7

The short form of Tradition 7 reads: Every AA group ought to be fully self supporting declining outside contributions.

The long form of Tradition 7 (which is also rather long) reads: The AA groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members. We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholics Anonymous is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals, or other outside agencies; that acceptance of large gifts from any source, or of contributions carrying any obligation whatever, is unwise. Then too, we view with much concern those AA treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated AA purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.

The 12&12 states that no AA Tradition has had the labor pains that Tradition 7 has had.

When it comes to money we also have to be practical. A group can't hold meetings on a street corner. An empty 7th Tradition collection basket won't fill a coffee pot. There are many expenses involved in keeping a group going on a day-to-day basis.

There are no dues or fees for AA membership, but in keeping with the 7th Tradition a group may "pass the basket" for contributions to cover group expenses and members are encouraged to participate.

It is certainly appropriate for a group to first ensure that it is self-supporting. But what about the Intergroup or Central Office many of us called to ask for help? Phone companies don't give them free service. And the central office is quite literally the 9-1-1 of AA. Also beyond our own immediate local area, the General Service Office in NY assists groups everywhere. AA activity is self-supporting at all levels, and in every case the responsibility comes right back to the individual members for financial support.

It's wise for a group to keep a prudent reserve in case an unforeseen need or emergency arises. The amount of the prudent reserve is determined by informed group conscience. However, AA experience clearly shows that it is not a good idea for a group to accumulate too large an amount of funds in excess of what is needed for rent and other expenses.

Arguments over the use of group funds can be very divisive. But there is a simple solution on the matter of what to do with those excess funds – and that is to donate the excess funds to other AA activities that perform essential AA services. The pamphlet "Self-Support - Where Money and Spirituality Mix" offers suggestions on how groups can support AA essential services provided by the central office, district, area and GSO.

AA members are free to contribute whatever they wish, within certain limits set by AA service entities. The maximum individual contribution to the GSO in NY is \$2,000 annually.

Some members celebrate their AA anniversaries, or birthdays, by sending a gratitude gift to the General Service Office and Intergroup Central Office. With these "Birthday Plans" some members send 1 dollar for each year of sobriety. Others donate \$3 dollars and 65 cents, or a penny a day, for each year of sobriety.

Tradition 8

The short form of Tradition 8 reads: Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

The long form of Tradition 8 reads: Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional. We define professionalism as the occupation of counseling alcoholics for fees or hire. But we may employ alcoholics where they are going to perform those services for which we may otherwise have to engage non-alcoholics. Such special services may be well recompensed. But our usual AA "12th Step" work is never to be paid for.

Most of us have explained to prospects that we don't get paid for carrying the AA message. We do it because it's the best way to stay sober and that's plenty of payment. This does not mean, of course, that the idea of turning professional has never entered any AA member's mind.

In AA's early years Bill W was offered a job as a lay therapist at Towns Hospital with a very generous salary. It was during the great economic depression when enormous numbers of people were out of work and jobs were extremely scarce. Because of his alcoholism, Bill and his wife Lois had been living a hand-to-mouth existence for quite a number of years. Bill wanted the job very much.

As it turned out, the spirit of Tradition 2 emerged and the group members who were meeting at Bill's home formed a group conscience and asked Bill not to take the job and Bill complied. It became clear to those early members that no AA should ever ask or accept payment for "carrying the message to somebody else. Does this apply to AA members today who work as counselors in treatment centers? The answer is no and this was mentioned in Tradition 6. On the job they may be alcoholism counselors not "AA counselors, and at meetings they are AA members not alcoholism experts.

As AA membership grew new questions arose. Intergroups or central offices were at first staffed by volunteers. Today, most of these offices are so busy that full-time employees are needed. Are these employees being paid for doing 12th Step work? The answer again is "No."

A similar change took place at the GSO in NY. It was originally a tiny office for Bill W and a secretary. 70 years later, it has grown into the present GSO, fully staffed, with a big mailroom keeping the lines of communication open throughout AA worldwide. Remarkably though, the number of employees at the GSO is quite small.

In these office jobs the GSO and Grapevine staffs are paid for their business and professional skills. Working on Conference-approved books and pamphlets or on Box 459 or the Grapevine, and La Vina these AA members use their abilities as correspondents, managers, writers, editors, artists, proofreaders, accountants - as well as their understanding of AA from the inside.

Central Offices will also often have an (overworked and underpaid) AA member as a full-time office manager to take care of phone contacts, literature, Group and meeting information and Bridging the Gap contacts (that's where someone who is leaving a treatment center or prison or

jail is matched up with a volunteer AA member who will take them to a group and a meeting when they are discharged). Central offices also maintain lists of speakers and volunteer members willing to accept 12th Step calls at all hours of the day and night.

Tradition 9

The short form of Tradition 9 reads: AA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

The long form of Tradition 9 (which is also quite long) reads: Each AA group needs the least possible organization. Rotating leadership is the best. The small group may elect its Secretary, the large group its Rotating Committee, and the groups of a large Metropolitan area their Central or Intergroup Committee, which often employs a full-time Secretary. The trustees of the General Service Board are, in effect, our AA General Service Committee. They are the custodians of our AA Tradition and the receivers of voluntary AA contributions by which we maintain our AA General Service Office at New York. They are authorized by the groups to handle our over-all public relations and they guarantee the integrity of our principle newspaper, "The AA Grapevine." All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in AA are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.

The words "Let's keep it simple" were the last Bill W heard from Dr Bob shortly before his death in 1950. Aware that "it" in "keep it simple" meant our recovery program, Bill later wrote, "We need to distinguish sharply between spiritual simplicity and functional simplicity. When we get into questions of action by groups, by areas, and by AA as a whole, we find that we must to some extent organize to carry the message or else face chaos. And chaos is not simplicity."

Groups and service committees do need some form of minimum organization. If everybody thinks somebody else is going to purchase the coffee, what's the result? No coffee! To avoid this, one or more group members volunteer to be responsible for it.

All the way from trusted group servants to trustees on the General Service Board, those who take part in AA service work are assuming responsibility - not taking on authority.

Many members don't know that AA is organized into 3 corporations. The General Service Board of AA is a non-profit corporation. It consists of 7 non-alcoholic and 14 alcoholic trustees who are nominated and elected for their business and professional skills.

The General Service Board, in behalf of all AA members, holds in trust literature copyrights and funds from the sale of literature and donations from groups and members. AA World Service, or AAWS, is also a corporation and one of the publishing arms of AA. The General Service Office is part of AAWS. The AA Grapevine is a separate corporation and is the 2nd publishing arm of AA. In many cases, an Intergroup Central Office will also be set up as a non-profit corporation.

Many members don't know that AA has something called a General Service Structure where groups are organized into districts and districts into areas and areas into regions and regions into Conferences with a General Service Board and General Service Office.

All of this organizational structure is described in the AA Service Manual and in "The AA Group" pamphlet. A very important trait of this organization is that it is represented by an upside down pyramid, or triangle, to signify that the top authority is the AA groups, not a board of

directors or a corporation or a committee. The General Service Structure is also organized into service committees to help carry the AA message to a wide variety of people and locations.

This includes Corrections and Treatment Center committees to ensure that AA meetings and literature are reliably and consistently brought in to those institutions. It also includes Public Information and Cooperation with the Professional Community service committees to inform professionals in the legal, medical, educational and business fields on what AA is and just as importantly what AA isn't. Also, the Public Information service committee arranges for AA public service announcements to be aired on local radio and TV stations. Other service committees consist of Special Needs, Grapevine and Archives. The local Intergroup Central Office also provides a variety of services in cooperation with other AA service committees.

Similarly, it takes group member participation and organization to ensure that group service work is done. These elected trusted servants are sometimes called "officers" and usually are chosen by the group for limited terms of service. Groups may also choose to have a Steering Committee to tend to the day-to-day operations of the group.

These service positions may have titles. But titles in AA do not bring authority - they describe services and responsibilities. And it has generally been found that giving members service positions solely to help them stay sober does not work. Instead, the group's welfare is of primary concern in choosing officers or trusted servants. It is also important to practice the principle of rotation so that all who wish to serve are provided the opportunity to do so.

For a group to keep carrying a message of recovery all kinds of organized services must be done. It is through the combined efforts and organization of group members that:

- A meeting place is provided and maintained.
- Monthly programs are arranged and speakers are scheduled to speak.
- 7th Tradition contributions are collected, and group bills and expenses are paid.
- AA literature is on hand.
- Lists of local group meetings are available.
- Refreshments, such as coffee, are available as well as supplies.
- Calls for help are answered.
- Group problems are aired and resolved.

Next week I'm going to wrap up with Traditions 10, 11 and 12 and a recap of the Traditions. I'll also try to work in some information on the 12 Concepts to some degree and how they complement and reinforce the 12 Traditions.

Week 4 - Tradition 10

This is wrap-up night. I'm going to discuss Traditions 10, 11 and 12 and in Tradition 12 do a summary of all the Traditions since anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions. And finally I'd like to briefly discuss some, not all, of the 12 Concepts of World Service and how they complement and reinforce the 12 Traditions.

Before I start, it's important to state, like I have each week that no member speaks for AA. No one has been elected, or appointed, to do so. So all I'm going to do tonight is share my experience, strength and hope with the Traditions and Concepts. Most of that has been given to me from the generosity of other AA members and AA literature.

As I also mentioned each week, I'll refer often to AA literature and cite it. That's not for your benefit – it's for mine to keep me honest and focused. I do have a love for AA history and that will be part of the discussions as well.

The short form of Tradition 10 reads: Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

The long form of Tradition 10 reads: No AA group or member should ever, in such a way as to implicate AA, express any opinion on outside controversial issues-particularly those of politics, alcohol reform, or sectarian religion. The Alcoholics Anonymous groups oppose no one. Concerning such matters they can express no views whatever.

I might be giving away my age a bit, but as a past bar drinker, I remember well that just about every bar I drank in had an unwritten code that bar talk should not get into politics or religion. The reasons were both simple and practical: first, what might start out as a discussion, would likely soon evolve into heated debate, and if allowed to continue - especially being fortified by more and more alcohol, would soon erupt into a fight.

There are many topics that human beings have a tough time dealing with in terms of keeping the heat and anger levels down. Tradition 10 recognizes 3 of those hot button topics explicitly: 1st) politics, 2nd) alcohol reform (or what might be called "prohibition") and 3rd) sectarian religion. There are certainly many more topics that would get just as heated and just because they are not mentioned directly in Tradition 10; they are just as dangerous to AA unity.

Our beloved Texas still has political election issues over whether a particular area will be wet or dry and the debate can get very heated. I stay away from the subject altogether. If you dig into the history books, the divisive subject of prohibition (or legally banning alcohol) was one of the prime reasons that the Washingtonians do not exist today. It tore them apart from the inside.

On the matter of sectarian religion something that will pop up now and then concerns the use of the Lord's Prayer at AA meetings and the question "isn't that a Christian prayer."

Also, when members find out that the Serenity Prayer has several verses and the 2nd verse mentions Jesus, then this prayer gets branded as a "Christian" prayer as well - as if this somehow represents affiliation with religion.

Bill W was asked about this around 6 years after the 12&12 was written and responded to it in an April 1959 letter to a member named Russ. The letter is in the AA Archives but not published in AA literature. Bill W wrote:

“Now about the business of adding the Lord's Prayer to each AA meeting, this practice probably came from the Oxford Groups who were influential in the early days of AA. You have probably noted in AA Comes of Age what the connection of these people in AA really was. I think saying the Lord's Prayer was a custom of theirs following the close of each meeting. Therefore it quite easily got shifted into a general custom among us.

Of course there will always be those who seem to be offended by the introduction of any prayer whatever into an ordinary AA gathering. Also, it is sometimes complained that the Lord's Prayer is a Christian document.

Nevertheless this Prayer is of such widespread use and recognition that the arguments of its Christian origin seem to be a little farfetched. It is also true that most AAs believe in some kind of God and that communication and strength is obtainable through His grace. Since this is the general consensus it seems only right that at least the Serenity Prayer and the Lord's Prayer be used in connection with our meetings. It does not seem necessary to defer to the feelings of our agnostic and atheist newcomers to the extent of completely hiding our light under a bushel.

However, around here, the leader of the meeting usually asks those to join him in the Lord's Prayer who feel that they would care to do so. The worst that happens to the objectors is that they have to listen to it. This is doubtless a salutary exercise in tolerance at their stage of progress.”

I wish that letter had found its way into the book “As Bill Sees It.” I think it's a gem.

It's certain that AA will never endorse any religion, political party or the prohibition of alcohol. But what about other matters? Has AA ever had any internal controversies that became public? The answer is yes. And it continues to this day. Some of these matters concerned anonymity which will be discussed in the 11th and 12th Traditions. But there were also other a few other matters that are documented in AA literature.

An early incident documented in AA Comes of Age, Dr Bob and the Good Old-timers and Pass It On, concerned money and what was erroneously perceived as AA professionalism. It occurred at a time when AA had only 3 groups and it had to do with Bill W and Dr Bob receiving royalty payments from sales of the Big Book.

In order for Dr Bob and Bill W to dedicate 100% of their time to AA (and just about all the AA members wanted them both to dedicate 100% of their time to AA) they had to have some means of support if only to just pay the rent and put food on the table. Also Dr Bob had 2 children to raise. For the first few years, loans from friends carried them as well as an allowance from funds donated by John D Rockefeller Jr. However, these loans could not go on indefinitely.

The solution came from a non-alcoholic, Jesuit priest who started AA in St Louis, MO. His name was Father Edward Dowling. What triggered it occurred In October 1942. Clarence S (Snyder)

the founder of AA in Cleveland, OH, stirred up a major controversy in Cleveland after discovering that Dr Bob and Bill W were receiving royalties from Big Book sales.

As stated in *AA Comes of Age*, Bill and Dr Bob re-examined the problem of their financial status and concluded that royalties from the Big Book seemed to be the only answer to the problem. Bill sought counsel from Father Edward Dowling who suggested that Bill and Bob could certainly not accept money for 12th Step work but should accept royalties as compensation for special services. This later formed the basis for Tradition 8.

Controversy from outside AA has also had its impact. In February, 1963, an article titled "Alcoholics Anonymous - Cult or Cure?" appeared in *Harpers* magazine. The author, a psychologist, sharply criticized AA as being "one of America's most fanatical religious cults." In scathing terms he accused AA of being "pompous", "intolerant", "dogmatic" and "anti-science," among other things.

The immediate reaction of many within AA was very predictable and very human (after all the Big Book states that we alcoholics are sensitive people.). The NY office and Board were flooded with letters expressing indignation, anger and a desire for vengeance demanding that Bill W and the Board "do something." Bill recommended they do nothing. He counseled them that the best response to criticism was no response at all. Later, in a *Grapevine* article explaining his position, Bill said "our critics can be our friends" by forcing us to take a look at our faults.

The passage of time has proven the wisdom of this policy. The article had no effect on the continued growth and health of AA. The Fellowship is many times larger today than it was in 1963, while the name of the author of the critical article has long since faded into obscurity.

The 12&12 states: "As by some deep instinct, we AAs have known from the beginning that we must never, no matter what the provocation, publicly take sides in any fight, even a worthy one ..." " ... we do not enter into public controversy, because we know that our Society will perish if it does. We conceive the survival and spread of Alcoholics Anonymous to be something of far greater importance Since recovery from alcoholism is life itself to us, it is imperative that we preserve in full strength our means of survival."

Bill W wrote "I believe there is only one potential enemy to AA and it is called character defects. It will come from within, not from the outside if our fellowship ceases being led by spiritual principles that bring us closer to God's will and succumbs instead to strong personalities, celebrity and human nature." Bill W further noted in "AA Comes of Age" "They were all the more dangerous because they were invariably powered by self-righteousness, self-justification and the destructive power of anger, usually masquerading as righteous indignation."

I'd like to end the discussion on Tradition 10 with something that might sound like that it better belongs in Tradition 2. It has to do with the need, within AA, for mutual respect and mutual cooperation to avoid controversy.

Gerry F, a past Western Canadian Regional Trustee, made a report to the 1995 General Service Conference that is quite perceptive and prophetic. I believe it sums up a genuine challenge in AA

today, and in our society today, that relates to Traditions 1, 2 and 10 and AA unity. I'd like to read an abbreviated and edited section of it:

"... the greatest hurdle we [AA] face today and in the foreseeable future is the spill-over into our Fellowship of the cynicism and distrust that are exhibited in our ... society at large in regard to its public servants.

I have noticed with growing concern that letters from members of the Fellowship are more and more suspicious of the motives of the leaders we have chosen to serve us. There was a time ... in [the AA] Fellowship when arguments abounded about principles and what the best course of action might be. But there was always the underlying premise that ... when the vote was taken, and upwards of 2/3 voted for something ... the minority [would have their] say, but would accept the decision of a Higher Power "as He may express Himself in our group conscience."

I sometimes wonder if we can still do that. More often I hear the minority either questioning the motives of ... the majority; or else, insisting that the body wasn't well informed, and then when the group does have the information, saying that the body is not [being] responsible [or not listening] ... The thing that's missing is the acceptance by the minority of the group conscience decision of the majority[.]

I believe those are very wise words that apply more today than they did a decade ago. Pure and simple it describes how a democracy should function without the tyranny of the majority and equally important, not torn apart by the tyranny of minority.

For the last 2 weeks I've mentioned that the Grapevine, some years ago published a "Traditions Checklist." It's a series of questions about each Tradition that helps me better understand the Traditions and assess how well or how poorly I'm practicing them. I'm going to continue to read those questions at the end of each Tradition.

Tradition 11

The short form of Tradition 11 reads: 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.

The long form of Tradition 11 reads: Our relations with the general public should be characterized by personal anonymity. We think AA ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as AA members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed. Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us.

Too often anonymity gets portrayed as secrecy. AA is not a secret society. Otherwise, how do alcoholics who still suffer find us and we find them? The 11th Tradition is talking about "personal anonymity" not total anonymity? It encourages us as individual members to exercise restraint in terms of personal recognition and ambition.

Our AA Program of Recovery is not driven by theory - it is driven by the accumulation of actual experience over the past 7 decades. That is an enormous body of experience. Alcoholics who have the experience of recovering through our 12 Steps are by far and away the strongest attraction that AA has. They are living, breathing examples that AA works and that there is a solution. In AA membership surveys, when asked what led them to seek AA help, the answer given most often is: "An AA member." Their chances would have been slim or none if we all remained completely in hiding.

Information about AA is offered to the public through all the communications media, in print and over the air. On radio, it's easy to guard members' anonymity. But TV (which was not in wide use when the Traditions were written in 1946 and 1949) is another matter altogether. So is something else that is a modern phenomenon and has the potential to be the largest challenge to AA anonymity - the world-wide internet. If there is a growing breakdown in the practice of AA Traditions by AA members, I'd suggest that it is in the area of personal anonymity especially in books, TV and the internet.

If you walk into a Barnes and Noble book store these days you can find what I call a "retail recovery" section with books galore. Recovery has become an industry. It seems to have reached a point where individual after individual feels compelled to write a book about their recovery and become a celebrity. No matter what noble intentions may be stated, it is a classic case of tossing AA's anonymity Traditions out the window.

Not long ago a member of the US congress was cited for driving under the influence. The 24 hour 7 days a week new channels ate it up and absolutely sensationalized it. After coming out of a treatment center the member of congress held a news conference to announce that he was going to attend AA.

If that wasn't bad enough, his attorney gave his own personal name and announced that he was a member of AA and was sober for over 30 years. It too is a classic case of taking AA's anonymity

Traditions and tossing them out the window.

The internet is even more of a case of concern. Anyone and everyone with a personal computer and a connection to the web can have an instant international soapbox. There are sites after sites where people who claim to be AA members publish their photos, their full names, and pour out their souls and their 4th Steps and intermingle AA with just about every other 12 Step and new-age, psycho-babble program imaginable.

But I do want to be careful to avoid interpreting the Traditions in the sense of someone is "violating" this or "breaking" that. That's the negative way of applying the Traditions. More often than not it achieves little more than confrontation.

The Traditions are not by-laws or a rigid set of rules or regulations. They, like the Steps, are spiritual principles to be practiced by each member to achieve unity, not to demand lock-step conformity. The Traditions should be applied in a positive way not in an accusing way.

It's also important to understand that when it comes to personal anonymity an individual member alone decides whatever degree of anonymity they practice and it can rise to any level they want. I don't have any authority or any business to ask any AA member to lower their own personal anonymity standards.

The AA pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity" states: "AA as a whole seeks to ensure that individual members stay as private and protected as they wish, about belonging to the Fellowship ... Experience suggests that AA members respect the right of other members to maintain their own anonymity at whatever levels they wish."

Finally, I'd like to mention one more aspect of anonymity that many AA members seem to be unaware of. It concerns anonymity after an AA member passes away.

Many within (and outside) AA believe that when AA members are deceased, it's ok to use their last name in a public forum. Contrary to this belief, there is a long-standing AA General Service Board policy, and several Conference advisory actions that suggest otherwise and recommend that we respect the anonymity of deceased AA members the same as if they were still alive.

In 1960 the General Service Board approved a policy statement that read: "The Board believes that AA members generally think it unwise to break the anonymity of a member even after his death, but that in each situation the final decision must rest with the family".

In 1968 the General Service Conference reaffirmed the General Service Board's policy. The 1971 and 1988 General Service Conferences again reaffirmed the policy and added that the AA Archives protect the anonymity of deceased AA members as well as other members.

Tradition 12

The short form of Tradition 12 reads: Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

The long form of Tradition 12 reads: And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of Anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all.

When we use the 12 Steps to recover from alcoholism, we try to achieve real humility. The entire 12&12 essay on Step 7 is about humility. In the 11th Step we seek to continually allow God to provide our direction rather than being driven by our own will and ambitions. This also depended on the humility encouraged in the 7th Step to humbly ask God to remove all our shortcomings which had been blocking the way for us to be open to God's direction.

When we use the 12 Traditions to work together in AA, we are also trying to achieve humility both as individual members and as a Fellowship. The 12&12 essay on Tradition 12 states that AA's past experiences "taught us that anonymity is real humility at work." The essay ends with the statement that "we are sure that humility, expressed by anonymity, is the greatest safeguard that AA can ever have."

Since Tradition 12 also reminds us that anonymity, in the form of humility, is the foundation of all our Traditions, this would be a good place to review a simple summary of all the Traditions.

Tradition 1 reminds us to hold back our personal desires and ambitions in order to guard the unity of our group and our Fellowship. By keeping Tradition 1 firmly in mind and becoming familiar with all the Traditions, we can help to ensure a healthy AA group and a healthy AA Fellowship.

Tradition 2 reminds us that we should not fancy ourselves as big shots and bosses in AA, no matter what office we hold. All of us are just alcoholics together. God is to be our ultimate authority, and as God so often does, that authority is usually voiced through others. Our focus should be on how to humbly and respectfully listen to those voices.

Tradition 3 reminds us that we are not entitled or authorized to rule on the qualifications of other alcoholics seeking the very same help that we have been freely given. No one appointed or elected me to play God. And no one appointed or elected me to decide which alcoholic lives and which one dies? And it's very easy to forget how fatal alcoholism can be. Tradition 3 allows any 2 or 3 alcoholics coming together as an AA group to seek sobriety just about any way they like. They can disagree with any or all AA principles and still call themselves an AA group. AA members can disagree with any or all AA principles and still call themselves AA members.

Tradition 4 reminds us that a group needs humility as well. It should certainly make its group name public, but in the spirit of anonymity, a group should see itself as part of a bigger whole and be careful to consider the welfare of other AA groups and members. Tradition 4 also

reminds us that an AA group has the right to be wrong and learn from that experience.

Tradition 5 reminds us that groups and members should remember what the name of our Fellowship is – Alcoholics Anonymous. It does not represent any established code of belief. We are not evangelists or gurus or a social movement out to save humanity. We are anonymous alcoholics trying to help other alcoholics. Each AA group ought to be a spiritual entity *having but one primary purpose* - that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers

Tradition 6 reminds us that we should not let our pride in AA mislead us into linking the AA name with other organizations to seek power, prestige or funds. If we keep Traditions 5 and 6 in mind, we will instead direct all our efforts toward AA's own unique and common purpose. Traditions 5 and 6 also emphasize that we cooperate with almost everybody but affiliate with nobody. Even the appearance of being linked to any outside organization should be avoided.

Tradition 7 reminds us that experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority. It also reminds us to view with concern the continued accumulation of funds beyond a prudent reserve for no stated AA purpose. To the degree that we can, groups and members should also support AA essential services provided by the central office, the district, the area and GSO.

Tradition 8 reminds us that when we go on 12th Step calls, we should not pat ourselves on the back for doing such valuable work without pay. The meaning of 12th Step work cannot be measured in money in the spirit of Tradition 8. We have received something far more valuable and that is our recovery and our lives. Tradition 8 also suggests that AA service centers practice humility by paying its employees decent wages rather than considering AA so virtuous and so special that employment is a favor.

Tradition 9 reminds us that when we are given special positions and responsibilities within AA they are opportunities to serve not titles to show off. In the same spirit as Tradition 2, Tradition 9 reminds us that all such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in AA are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.

Tradition 10 reminds us that the humility of the Fellowship itself is safeguarded by the refusal to set ourselves up as general authorities in the public arena. We are also reminded that there is only one potential enemy to AA and it is called “character defects.” AA does not enter into public controversy, because we know that our Fellowship will perish if it does just as the Washingtonians perished in the 1800s. The Washingtonians also taught us that inside controversy is just as great a threat to our unity and survival as outside controversy.

Tradition 11 reminds us that we shouldn't sell our program of Recovery as some sort of a "surefire remedy" in the extravagant terms of a promotional campaign, nor dramatize it by identifying noted people or celebrities in AA. Tradition 11 is more than a denial of self-seeking. It is a constant and practical reminder that personal ambition has no place in AA.

Tradition 12 reminds us, we have something stronger than our human personalities to rely on.

Our spiritual principles come first - and they are not our own invention. They reflect eternal and universal spiritual values. With Tradition 12, both as individuals and as a fellowship, we humbly acknowledge our dependence on a power greater than ourselves.

The Big Book and the 12&12 describe over and over that the spiritual backbone and foundation of AA's Steps and Traditions is humility. And just what is humility? The simple definition is the absence of pride and all the wreckage that results from that character defect which the 12&12 says leads the list of the 7 deadly sins.

The 12&12 states that the attainment of greater humility is the foundation principle of each of the 12 Steps. And that for the 12 Traditions, humility, expressed by anonymity, is not only the spiritual foundation all our Traditions, it is the greatest safeguard that AA can ever have. It then states that the basic ingredient of all humility is a desire to seek and do God's will.

Before closing, I'd like to discuss a few of AA's 12 Concepts for World Service and their relation to the Traditions. The words "traditional" and "tradition" appear many times in both the short and long form of the 12 Concepts for World Service.

Our 12 Concepts can to some degree also be called AA's bill of rights. I'm going to focus on what the Concepts identify as every AA member's traditional (and I emphasize the word traditional) right of Decision, right of Participation and right of Appeal and Petition.

Concept 3 in its long form reads: as a traditional means of creating and maintaining a clearly defined working relation between the groups, the Conference, the AA General Service Board and its several service corporations, staffs, committees and executives, and of thus insuring their effective leadership, it is here suggested that we endow each of these elements of world service with a traditional "Right of Decision."

In the discussion of the Concepts in the AA Service Manual, it states: Our entire AA program rests squarely upon the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust AA, 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 lead effectively, it is also the symbol of our implicit confidence and trust.

In other words if we give service positions responsibilities then also give them a sufficient amount of authority to carry out those responsibilities. Don't try to micromanage a service position. What Concept 3 boils down to is let's trust our trusted servants.

Concept 4 in its long form reads: throughout our Conference structure, we ought to maintain at all responsible levels a traditional "Right of Participation," taking care that each classification or group of our world servants shall be allowed a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.

In other words, in group and committee activities practice inclusion not exclusion. It encourages that all members of a group or service committee should have both a voice and vote in matters affecting their group or committee. What Concept 4 boils down to is that there are no second

class members of AA.

Concept 5 in its long form reads: throughout our world service structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, thus assuring us that minority opinion will be heard and that petitions for the redress of personal grievances will be carefully considered.

This is the spiritual principle that encourages a right of minority appeal in the formation of an informed group conscience and the right of “Petition” to address grievances. What it boils down to is that if we listen well to the minority, it’s AA’s best protection against an uninformed, misinformed, hasty or angry majority.

The last Concept I’m going to discuss is Concept 12 which is essentially a condensed expression of all the Traditions. The intent of Concept 12 is to ensure that the General Service Conference adheres to, and functions as, the Guardian of AA’s 12 Traditions and group conscience of the entire Fellowship. Concept 12 is formed from a set of principles called the “6 Warranties” which also form the substance of Article 12 of the Conference Charter.

Concept 12 in its long form states:

In all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the AA Tradition, taking great care that the Conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of the Conference Members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; that, though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action.

In Concept 12, if you substitute the words “AA group” or “AA member” wherever it refers to the General Service Conference, it provides a magnificent guideline for each group and each member to both practice the Traditions and be a guardian of the Traditions as well.

In regards to the Conference remaining democratic in thought and action, it might sound a bit like preaching to the choir, but I would challenge anyone to demonstrate a better form of representative democracy than AA and its General Service Structure.

Also, AA invented term limits long before anyone even anyone came up with term “term limits.” We call it the principle of rotation.

But there is a very special case where our representative democracy of Trustees and Conference Delegates is superseded by a pure democracy of AA groups and it has to do with our Steps, Traditions and Warranties.

The 1976 General Service Conference approved the publication of the 3rd edition Big Book. As

significant as that was, the 1976 Conference went on to expand a provision of the Conference Charter that any change to the Steps, Traditions and 6 Warranties of Article 12 of the Charter, would require written approval of 75% of the registered AA Groups worldwide.

This makes any proposed change to the Steps, Traditions and Warranties a virtual impossibility (even so much as adding or removing a comma). Having survived many decades of experience, the Conference ensured that AA's principles are placed above any form of AA personalities by democratically reserving to the AA groups the sole and exclusive authority to change the 12 Steps, 12 Traditions and 6 Warranties.

Everything I've read or have been able to investigate, shows that the elected representatives to AA's representative democracy have, for over half a century, served us well as both the Guardians of AA's Traditions and the group conscience of the AA Fellowship.

Well that wraps it up for the month. It's admittedly not easy, but I've tried to make the discussions on the 12 Traditions this month both informative and entertaining in order to generate interest in them. I especially wanted to share information on the historical origin of the Traditions. Because the more I dig into AA history the more my respect for the AA Fellowship, its pioneers and its co-founders, grows by leaps and bounds.

If you've heard something useful, and it's backed up by AA literature, please use it. And by the same token, you are free to discard anything and everything you've heard. That's the wonder of our 12 Traditions.

Thank you so much for the privilege of speaking here this month.