

The Traditions As They Apply to Singleness of Purpose

A talk given at the Northern New Jersey Intergroup and NNJGS Area 44

Joint Day of Sharing

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Tradition One: Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.

A.A. is a “we”, not an “I”, program. When “we” place the good of A.A. ahead of our own personal agendas and desires, A.A. can be better unified. We’re unified and bonded by our common problem of alcoholism with a common solution as outlined in our basic text affectionately called “The Big Book”. So what happens when our unity is compromised or broken? How does this kind of thing happen?

As individuals, we are each responsible for placing the common welfare of A.A. first. The good of A.A.

must always be a first priority even if it means “I” can’t get what “I” want.

What can we do to place the welfare of A.A. ahead of our own? - We need to identify ourselves simply as alcoholics...leaving our “other” problems/addictions at the door. This even means not identifying ourselves as drug addicts even if we have that respective addiction. We are not N.A. We’re A.A. The only identification that belongs here is that of being an alcoholic.

- Our sharing should be based on offering our experience, strength and hope to the still-suffering alcoholic. In *How it Works*, we’re told to disclose what we used to be like, what happened (in terms of getting sober with the steps 1-9) and what we are like now (living in steps 10-12). We’re to offer hope that there is a way out of the alcoholic nightmare.

An A.A. meeting should not be used as a dumping ground for all our personal problems and “issues”.

These things belong with our sponsors, our network and with appropriate professionals. We’re here to offer hope and a solution to the still-suffering alcoholic. When we dive into sharing whatever we want, we’re no longer bonded by a common problem. We are divided by our differences. So where does this leave the alcoholic who is dying a miserable alcoholic death? And, who is responsible when that alkie doesn’t come back to A.A.? A lot of us say they just didn’t want it enough. But what’s our part? When we don’t take responsibility for our common welfare to keep A.A. – A.A., everyone suffers. Alcoholics die. And, Alcoholics Anonymous gets a little more watered down.

Tradition Two: 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.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship that is supposed to be directed through a loving God...not by individuals who want to run the show *their* own way. The more we allow God to direct our actions through a group conscience, the more we’re moved out of “self” and our own wants and desires. When God is given the opportunity to direct our actions, our singleness of purpose has a greater chance of being carried out through loving, God-inspired actions. With our own plans and designs set aside, God can better move our fellowship in the direction of helping the still-suffering alcoholic... God moves us to carry out our singleness of purpose.

Tradition Three: The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Notice it doesn’t state that we must identify ourselves as alcoholics; it simply states we **must** have a desire to stop drinking. Also, notice it doesn’t state that the requirement for A.A. membership is to not drink. It states, “to stop drinking”. I’ve attended meetings where someone introduces him/herself as having a desire not to drink. Well anyone, an alcoholic or NOT, can have a desire not to drink. This does not mean they’ve met our requirement for membership.

I’ve known addicts who introduce themselves with “a desire not to drink” as a way to qualify to attend a closed meeting. If an addict has been actively drinking and has a desire to stop, they are more than welcome at a closed meeting and indeed meet our requirement for membership. But if they haven’t been actively drinking, then as such, they can’t have a desire to stop the drinking that they’re not doing. These individuals do not meet our requirement for membership and are only welcome at our open meetings, to sit and listen.

When an individual does not live in the spirit of tradition 3, it becomes about the individual placing his/her own wants & desires ahead of the common welfare of A.A. When a non-alcoholic uses an introduction like, *I have a desire not to drink or simply identify as an alcoholic because they think it’s all the same*, this is a problem and it’s wrong. They don’t share in our common problem. These individuals cannot honestly offer a solution to the still-suffering alcoholic.

ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ADDICTION ARE NOT THE SAME. When this kind of thing happens, our unity is seriously weakened. We no longer share in the same common problem.

In Chapter 7, *Working With Others*, it states, “*Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics...[c]arry this message to other alcoholics! You can help when no one else can.*”

A non-alcoholic who uses A.A. to stay “clean”, not “sober”, cannot carry *the message* to an alcoholic. They do not share a common problem with the alkie nor do they share in a common experience. Our singleness of purpose is completely lost. And, because of such selfish acts, our precious fellowship withers away a little more.

What happens when we, as members of Alcoholics Anonymous, allow this kind of thing to continue because we’re too scared to stand up for the principle of this tradition out of fear of *hurting someone’s feelings*? We end up placing our own fears ahead of our singleness of purpose. We end up being selfish in a selfless program. And contrary to what many of us have heard at meetings, this is NOT a selfish program! Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety...not to have non-alcoholics, who just attend A.A. because they like our fellowship better than the one they respectively belong in, help alcoholics achieve sobriety. They can’t and it doesn’t work. Simply put...this is not A.A.

Tradition Four: Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

I’ve seen a lot of groups use this tradition to their advantage by leaving off the latter part of “except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.” To me, this is the most important part of this tradition...it reminds me that I have to place the greater whole of A.A. before my or my group’s own wants and desires.

Ideally, Alcoholics Anonymous should be guided by the spirit and love of our Twelve Traditions. Tradition Four allows each group to have its own variations and its own personality, but not when doing so conflicts with our other Twelve Traditions. Tradition Four does not give permission to a group to do whatever it pleases, so it can be a free-for-all. Again, the common welfare of A.A. **must** come first.

I’ve attended some closed meetings where individuals who don’t have a desire to stop drinking are allowed to be present and participate. And, I’ve also heard these very groups use the explanation that they are autonomous and can do what they want. But allowing individuals to attend a closed meeting, who do not meet our requirement for membership, definitely affects other groups and A.A. as a whole. How can it not??? The wrong message is sent of what A.A. is and stands for, what closed meetings actually are and what other groups may allow into their meetings. When we allow this kind of thing, we confuse the individual about our singleness of purpose...or maybe they don’t even understand that we have one.

Tradition Five: Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Again, the group, the “we”, comes before the individual, the “I”. Our purpose is to carry the message as it’s outlined in our basic text. We aren’t supposed to offer up our own “mixed bag message” with our own personal opinions based on our own personal agendas. The group’s message to the still-suffering alcoholic should be clear-cut and taken from our basic text.

Singleness of purpose is also lost when we use A.A. as a social hangout, a gossiping circle, a place to find a date, etc. Our primary purpose is to carry THE message to other alcoholics and help them to achieve sobriety. We cannot successfully do this when we place our own wants and desires ahead of what’s best for A.A.

Also, who is the alcoholic who still suffers? Often times, when trying to identify this person, we think of the newcomer who just walked through the door. But this person can be a face we see often...an old-timer...a personal buddy...or someone with whom I have a personal resentment. It doesn’t matter who the person is. It is our responsibility, it is MY responsibility, to carry THE message to ALL suffering alcoholics and to help them achieve sobriety in the capacity I can. Principles **must** always be placed before personalities.

Tradition Ten: Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

The sharing I’ve heard at A.A. meetings can get quite interesting. Many times, I’ve seen A.A.s share their opinion under the guise of sharing their own experience. How many times have we heard individuals make

comments in meetings on rehabs, the courts, the police, etc...most of the time out of resentment! This kind of sharing has nothing to do with our common problem or common solution...but more likely with our common character defects!

Also, anything shared at a meeting that does not relate to alcoholism is an OUTSIDE ISSUE...this includes drugs! I'd say that in most meetings I've attended, there is almost always someone who ends up sharing on outside issues. Nobody can ever speak for A.A. as a whole, but a newcomer may not understand this. A newcomer may take the personal opinions shared at a meeting as representing A.A. as a whole. And, where does this leave the newcomer or the still-suffering alcoholic? Why do we waste our time and energy sharing opinions when we should be helping the suffering alcoholic? Opinions shared at meetings have nothing whatsoever to do with our singleness of purpose, but more with our own self-will and selfishness! The more we stay away from personal opinions, the more we safeguard ourselves against public controversy. ALL of our energies and efforts need to be extremely focused...Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. Without this, our fellowship will ultimately destroy itself from the inside out. More and more alcoholics will needlessly die and Alcoholics Anonymous will cease to exist.

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