

PREPARING FOR THE FIRST TRADITION

(Read pp. 129-131 of the “12 & 12”)

THE FIRST TRADITION:

**“Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon
A.A. unity”**

1. A.A.: Am I still being a loner at A.A. meetings? Do I volunteer to help? Do I stick out my hand? Do I try to help others? How long has it been since I gave my phone number to a newcomer who raised his hand at a meeting?
2. RELATIONSHIPS: Am I being a loner in relationships? Do I place the common welfare of the relationship first, or my own needs in a relationship?
3. WORK: Do I place the service my company offers to its customers first or do I place my advancement in the company first? Do I work to give service or to earn as much money as possible? Do I care about fellow workers or just myself? Do I use the money just for myself or to benefit others? Am I being a financial loner?

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRADITIONS

Homework: Writing Inventory on the First Tradition
By Dennis F.

Alcoholics Anonymous has more to offer than recovery!

The Twelve Steps produce recovery and enable us to match calamity with serenity without taking the first drink. Recovery is the restoration of our relationship with God through sobriety.

Our happiness, though, is incomplete unless we expand our loving relationship with God to our relationships with each other.

The Traditions show us how to love each other. The principles of the group apply to the individual. Through working the principles of the traditions we carry out the steps in the world. We live in the solution, not the problem. We are united with each other in love. When we love, we want to serve. The concepts of service then show us how to love each other through being of service to the world. Hence, A.A. has the three-word motto, “Recovery-Unity-Service”, based on the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts of Service. Another way of expressing the total program of A.A. is the phrase we use to identify our meeting, “Unity insures recovery through service.”

Alcoholics Anonymous was born on June 10, 1935 when Dr. Bob had his last drink through Bill’s Twelve Step efforts. A.A. is only forty -six years old at this writing (1981). The emphasis in A.A. these last forty-six years has been primarily on recovery. Over the years, the membership of A.A. has changed to include more young people and more women. “Low Bottom” alcoholic emphasis has changed to “High Bottom” emphasis as A.A. has grown.

I count myself as a “High Bottom” alcoholic because I was spared the last ten to fifteen years of literal hell some alcoholics have to go through.

However, I also realize that I work a rigorous program for me to stay sober. I am full of potential inventory. A person as sick as I am needs to be willing to go to any lengths to work a rigorous program. I either write inventory or I will create it. The road becomes narrower that the rewards become greater.

I was not “burnt out” when I got to A.A. I never drank on skid row or was jailed. Three days after I got drunk, my body recovered sufficiently for me to want to drink again. Alcohol did not surrender me. It softened me up for the program. It is the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts that surrendered me.

Therefore, I have little chance at sobriety unless I work a rigorous program to counteract my potential to drink.

Since the bottom has risen in A.A. there has been a need to go beyond recovery into learning how to get and maintain relationships.

Relationships are often not discussed at A.A. meetings because of our emphasis on recovery and probably because we have so few successful relationships to talk about. Al-Anon speaks more successfully about relationships.

The study of the principles of the Traditions in this book is an attempt to show how they have worked successfully in my life. I feel I owe the credit of a happy marriage to the practice of the principles of the Traditions in our relationship. Sharing this with others is how I work the Ninth Concept of Service (“leadership”) in my life: I exercise my vision of A.A. sobriety by sharing how the dimension of the Traditions and Concepts of Service add to my life in sobriety.

I found I could have as little or as much sobriety as I wanted, depending on to what lengths I am willing to go.

We all know people in A.A. who have settled for white-knuckle sobriety. I was one of those persons at one time when I didn’t know all that A.A. had to offer.

Then we also know those people in A.A. who live the principles of the Traditions in their lives. Their lives overflow with good relationships. Their lives have conformed to the principles of the Traditions as they have met life’s challenges.

The whole vision of sobriety offered by A.A. is not limited to recovery. Recovery is first, but then we can learn to live in a state of love by practicing the Twelve Traditions in our lives through being of service.

I don’t have to wait a lifetime to have a soul-mate enter my life or have good relationships. I can start now and prepare myself by taking inventory on each tradition and see where I need to change. Trying to have good relationships without the spiritual discipline of taking inventory and applying the Traditions to my life is like trying to stay sober without applying the Twelve Steps to my daily life. I end up being dry and frustrated in recovery and might not stay sober.

The same parallel applies to the Traditions. For example, if I do not apply the First Tradition to my life my sobriety is threatened. If I do not place our common welfare first I could easily stay a loner and eventually drink out of loneliness.

I dedicate this section of this book to those of you who work the Twelve Steps on a daily basis but have not yet found peace in the relationships you seek.

**THE FIRST TRADITION:
“Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends
upon A.A. unity”**

Read pp. 129-131 of the “12 & 12”

The twelve traditions are nothing more than a list of twelve areas where alcoholics make mistakes in their relationships. A.A. groups made these mistakes and found they could survive only if they followed the principles that evolved as the Twelve Traditions.

The one word that describes the First Tradition that keeps me from unity with others is “loner.”

Am I willing to give up being a loner for me to stay sober?

I always prided myself on being a loner and not a member of any group; I have a life-long problem of being alienated from others. It is an essential ingredient of my alcoholism. My defenses against the first drink were those of a loner – I tried willpower, intelligence, and escape in relationships. The idea of joining a group and admitting that I was a beginner who knew nothing about the answer to my problems was anathema to me.

Now, nowhere in our books does it say one must go to meetings. But here is the connection between the First Step and the First Tradition. I am powerless over alcohol and have an unmanageable life, so I am dependent upon uniting myself with A.A. for my personal recovery.

The Step states the problem and the Tradition states the solution. What do I do about my powerlessness and unmanageability? I join A.A. and place our common welfare first, since my personal recovery depends upon doing this.

So now I know that I have to give up the idea of being a loner if I want to survive sober.

Doing the steps throws me into the pool, doing the traditions teaches me how to swim.

The reading on Tradition One in the “Twelve and Twelve” contains three ideas that strike me:

First: My continued life depends upon my obedience to spiritual principles. Obedience is now the life net of my sobriety. I used to pride myself on being a rebel – now I seek to be obedient. After obedience comes enthusiasm: the desire to do God’s will because of the benefits I receive. The most difficult jobs are effortless when motivated by zeal. When all else fails, I am back to obedience. No matter what, I won’t take that first drink and no matter what, I will work Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve on a daily basis.

The second idea in the reading is the notion that I cannot keep the gift of my sobriety unless I give it away. Frankly, I was getting bored and restless with some problem meetings I was attending. I wanted to live more in the solution at meetings. I need to go

Tradition 1

beyond recovery – into the Traditions and Concepts of Service. So it was necessary for me to start a meeting in my home where my search could be shared with others of like mind.

The third and most important idea of the First Tradition reading is that I cannot recover unless there is a group. I must place our common welfare first for the group to continue.

When I write inventory on the Steps, the Traditions, and Concepts, I apply them to the levels of my life. First God and A.A., since the other areas of my life will not exist unless I am sober. Secondly, my marriage and important relationships, and thirdly, my work and other talents like music and sports.

The inventory questions on the First Tradition might be these:

1. GOD AND A.A.: Am I still being a loner at A.A. meetings? Do I volunteer to help? Do I stick out my hand? Do I try to help others? Or, do I go just for myself, hide in the corner and go home as soon as possible without contributing anything to meetings or other members? I need to do more than just attend meetings; I need to bring enthusiasm for others to it. How long has it been since I gave my phone number to a newcomer who raised his hand at a meeting? Am I placing our common welfare first at meetings?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a). The Story: Sometimes I go to a meeting with a withdrawn attitude.
- b). What Did I Do Wrong? Self-centered fear of new experiences and laziness.
- c). What Would God Have Me Do The Next Time? Take action by going to a discussion meeting, make myself share, stick my hand out to one person I don't know at the meeting, and give my phone number to a newcomer.

2. RELATIONSHIPS: Am I being a loner in relationships? Do I place the common welfare of the relationship first, or my own needs in the relationship? Do I ask myself what I can contribute to the relationship?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a). The Story: I give a polite ear but not an involved heart to some topics that are important to my wife.
- b). What Did I Do Wrong? I'm selfish and only interested in myself.
- c). What Would God Have Me Do The Next Time? Pray for a listening ear and an understanding heart and try to be helpful in any way I can to my wife and her concerns.

3. WORK: Do I place the unique service my company offers to its customers first or do I place my advancement in the company first? Do I work to give service or to earn as much money as possible? Do I care about fellow workers or just myself? Do I use money just for myself or to benefit others? Am I being a financial loner?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: I feel disappointed when my company does not make a lot of money.
- b) What Did I Do Wrong?: I am concerned about my welfare, not the message of service my company is carrying to its customers.
- c) What Would God Have Me Do The Next Time? Pray to be of service to my company and its customers and to be grateful for the opportunity to give service and let God be my financial manager.

To me, working a Step, Tradition or Concept of Service means that I become willing to surrender a part of myself in a Sixth Step. After reading my inventory to my sponsor I get on my knees and work Steps Six and Seven. Am I willing to give up being a loner? Will I humbly ask God to remove this defect and give me a spirit of fellowship with others?

After working Steps Six and Seven, I am given the choice to continue to be a loner or not, just as Step One gave me the choice to drink or not. When loneliness comes now, I have the choice to pray that I might get my mind off of me and contribute something to our common welfare. If I choose not to pray, then I will sink into my old alcoholic idea of loneliness. If I get lonely enough, I might think that alcohol is the only companion I have left. Therefore, I pray for a spirit of oneness with others.

I then become willing to make amends to God in an Eighth and Ninth Step for my spirit of separateness from Him.

I apply the cycle of Steps Five through Nine to each of the awarenesses produced by my inventory on the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service.