

## PREPARING FOR THE TWELFTH TRADITION

(Read pp. 184-187 of the “12 & 12.”)

### **THE TWELFTH TRADITION:**

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

1. Let us recall the last time we sacrificed a personal desire for the common good in our relationship with God, A.A., a spouse or friend, and at work.
2. Let us recall an example where we were swayed by the personality of others or our own desires rather than acting on principle. How could we have acted differently?
3. The next time I hear a speaker in A.A. whose personality is exciting from the platform; can I hear the principles behind his words? To which step, tradition, or concept can I relate his pitch? Also, if I am bored with a speaker, can I tune in to which step, tradition, or concept he or she is coming from?
4. There is an element of sacrifice in practicing the twelve traditions. How could I place principles before my personal wishes in practicing the first tradition: “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on A.A. unity.”

How would you apply principles before personalities in practicing the rest of the traditions? Think about this the next time you hear the traditions read at a meeting. Just pick one tradition.

UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”  
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

**THE TWELFTH TRADITION:**

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

Read pp. 184-187 of the “12 & 12”.

The first two sentences of the “12 & 12” (p.184) on this tradition state it best: “The spiritual substance of anonymity is sacrifice. Because A.A.’s Twelve Traditions repeatedly ask us to give up personal desires for the common good, we realize that the sacrificial spirit well symbolized by anonymity – is the foundation of them all.”

To me this means that any relationship that I have that does not involve sacrifice is a relationship that is not going to endure. Each tradition straightens out a disastrous attitude I had about relationships. The twelfth tradition teaches me that a spirit of sacrifice is vital to good relationships.

My past relationships when I drank certainly were not characterized by a spirit of sacrifice. They were characterized by a spirit of “I want” on my part.

What does sacrifice mean? Bill Wilson defines sacrifice as “giving up personal desires for the common good.” (“12 & 12”, p.184) So, how can I do that?

In A.A., when I’m asked to sponsor, I sponsor. When someone wants to talk to me, I talk to them. I give up my time doing other things in order to be available to whoever calls on me for twelve-step work. That’s one way we learn to sacrifice right away. We sacrifice our time. It means listening to inventories, it means driving long distances to pitch, it means mopping up the floor after a meeting, it means making coffee, it means sacrificing my comfort in order to practice the principles of serving. This is how I view the twelfth tradition as the most important part of my relationships with other people. Am I willing to sacrifice what’s comfortable for me in order to serve you? This is the challenge of practicing anonymity in my sobriety.

I can practice sacrifice in my relationship with God by placing principles first in my prayer life rather than the self-centered interests of my personality. Can I move from a spirituality based on asking for things to one of praise and dialogue with my Maker?

Will I place the principle of writing nightly inventory, taking time for morning prayer and meditation, and being available for twelve-step work ahead of the consideration of personal

convenience? How I spend my time is the proof of what's in my heart. If I love God and am truly grateful for the continual gift of my sobriety, then I will spend time with Him. If I do these things, then I am living a life based on the principles of the program.

Can I practice this tradition in my relationships at home by sacrificing my comfort to help others and not let them know of my sacrifice? The pamphlet, "Just for Today" contains a great suggestion when it says that we can have a good day if we will do something for others without letting them know about it. This is practicing anonymity in both the eleventh and twelfth traditions in my relationships: I don't take credit for the sacrifices I make.

My step sponsor does something unusual when he starts his workday. He tries to do something in the day to help another trucker without letting him know he did it. Sometimes he goes and washes the windshield of a dirty truck. Sometimes he might just go sharpen pencils for somebody in the office. It doesn't matter how small it is, what matters is doing it.

Instead of looking at what I can take from life, I begin to look to what I can give in an anonymous manner. I know that the more that I do this with my mate or with anybody, the closer I get in my loving feelings toward that person. I no longer feel apart from. I don't feel threatened because I am uniting myself with that person by practicing anonymity in my giving.

Can I sacrifice other habits I have held from my drinking days, such as promoting my own causes, manipulating others, and trying to play God? Can I seek to practice principles in my relationships and not manipulation?

Can I give more of my love, time and money anonymously? Can I give up seeking rewards for my giving? Do I expect rewards from God for practicing anonymity?

Giving up the expectation of rewards for doing good is difficult for me. It's easy for me to give and then think, "Well, I'll get a reward, even if I don't get public recognition for what I did. I will still get a reward. To remove that reward symbol from the back of my mind for whatever good I do is part of practicing anonymity. If I'm sacrificing something and I secretly know I'm going to get a pat on the head at the end anyway, I'm not practicing the spirit of anonymity. I want to give without expectation of any reward in order to fully get into the spirit of the principle behind this tradition.

I don't need recognition like I did when I drank. The closeness I get to Him, the Eternal Giver, is reward enough whenever I do good!

Will I no longer let attractive personalities sway me, but will I listen for the spiritual principles that lie behind what a person has to say? We have a lot of people who give great pitches in A.A. We have tremendous personalities. It's easy to let a person's personality overwhelm me when they're speaking, and not even listen to the principle of what that person is saying. I used to deal in personalities all of my drinking life. I tried to sway you with my personality, not my principles. If you had a great personality, you could say almost anything

to me. The playwright, Arthur Miller expresses the dangers of personality this way: “It is not what you say, it’s how you say it, because personality always wins the day.”

The next time I hear a speaker in A.A. whose personality is exciting from the platform, can I hear the principles behind his words? To which step, tradition, or concept can I relate his pitch? When I am bored with a speaker, I am listening for an exciting personality and am disappointed if his or her delivery is dull. I will be rewarded if I listen for the principles in a speaker’s message. There are some people who are difficult for me to listen to, especially “whiners”. Can I remember that every now and then I am a “whiner”?

I don’t want to dismiss somebody because they are whining, or they are coming across in a hostile, aggressive manner, or something in their personality is putting me off. I don’t want to be swayed so much that I can’t even hear what they are saying, because their personality is so abrasive. I want to be able to hear the principles behind their personality so that I can be helpful. In such situations, I must pray that my listening ear and understanding heart will be tuned into spiritual principles. This means great growth on my part when I’m not swayed or repulsed by personalities. This is a very good test of whether I’m living by personalities or principles.

Can I stop promoting myself at work? Am I willing to cease manipulating others to get my way? Will I let a selfish program give way to a selfless program?

To the extent that I am willing to be anonymous in practicing the traditions in my life, do I grow in humility?

Let us take a look at the Twelve Traditions to see how I can practice them in my relationships in a self-sacrificing anonymous manner by placing principles before my self-centered desires:

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

Am I willing to merge my identity with the group, even though I prefer to be a loner?

**2. “For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.”**

Am I willing to give up governing and become an anonymous, trusted servant?

**3. “The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.”**

Am I willing to sacrifice my list of wants and the rewards I seek and only have the desire to stay sober?

**4. “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.”**

Am I willing to surrender pursuing the world’s approval and seek only God’s anonymous approval for my decisions?

5. **“Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”**

Am I willing to make all of my ambitions secondary to a new primary purpose – to carry the message to any alcoholic who still suffers?

6. **“An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.”**

Am I willing to spiritually pursue a sober life in A.A. in a spirit of sacrifice and not seek the notoriety of money, property, and prestige?

7. **“Every A..A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.”**

Am I willing to seek a self-supporting program with my Maker and not be the suffering victim or martyr anymore? Will I be spiritually, emotionally, and financially responsible for myself? Will I be responsible for what I think?

8. **“Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.”**

Am I willing to carry the message with nonprofessional zeal and anonymity and be a sacrificing special workers?

9. **“A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they server.”**

Am I willing to accept the anonymity of letting go and letting God organize me into His Divine Order and then be responsible to Him for my service?

10. **“Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.”**

Am I willing to be anonymous on outside issues and not engage in the controversy of criticizing, gossiping, or taking anyone else’s inventory but instead become a peacemaker?

11. **“Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.”**

Am I willing to accept the anonymity of not promoting myself today or taking credit for my sobriety?

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

Am I willing to be so anonymous that I talk about principles and not myself?

How can I practice principles over my personality in my day-to-day existence? Am I willing to be so anonymous that I talk about principles and not personality in our conversations? In

my day-to-day conversations, can I suppress self-serving sentences, comments, statements that are strictly meant for ego purposes? Can I attempt to have my conversation based on principles rather than on boosting my personality?

The problem of applying the twelfth tradition to my life is to align my personality with the principles of the program. The dictionary defines principle as a basic truth and personality as the quality of being a person.

I would like my personality to reflect principle. If I try to do this in my relationships with others, I become united in love with others through shared principles. To the extent that my personality does not reflect principle but self will run riot, I have disastrous relationships. They improve though, as soon as I return to a practice of anonymity in my relationships.

“Anonymity is real humility at work. It is an all-pervading spiritual quality which today keynotes A.A. life everywhere. Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desire for personal distinction as A.A. members both among fellow alcoholics and before the general public. (“12 & 12”, p.187)

Bill Wilson’s final sentence in the “12 & 12” (p.187) says, “We are sure that humility expressed by anonymity is the greatest safeguard that Alcoholics Anonymous can ever have.” I practicing the twelfth tradition in all my relationships, this sentence might read: “Humility, expressed by anonymity, is the greatest safeguard our sober relationships can ever have.”

The twelfth step poses the question, “What is a spiritual awakening?” I believe that the evidences of a spiritual awakening are found in a person who practices the twelfth tradition in all their affairs. Such a person sacrifices self in order to practice principles. Their motive in practicing all of the traditions is anonymity: they sacrifice to help others.

For me, the twelfth tradition completes the twelfth step in the following way: I become spiritually awake when I carry the message by anonymously practicing sober principles.

As we prepare to go into our three-minute meditation period, I know that I’m going to pray for a spirit of sacrifice in my relationship with God, at home and at work. I’m going to pray that my personality reflect principles and not self-serving demands in my relationships.

I know that I want to thank God for practicing the principle of mercy in dealing with me in giving me sobriety today and not the alcoholic death and suffering that I certainly had coming to me the way I drank. So I want to imitate God’s principle of love in my relationships with others.

Before we start our meditation, I would like to suggest that we focus on the idea that our blessings in sobriety not spoil us and that we dwell in thankful contemplation of our Maker.

## Tradition 12

These thoughts are contained in the long form of the Twelfth Tradition. (See the “Big Book”, pp. 567-8):

“And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has 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.”

(Pause for three minutes of meditation.)

Writing inventory is the A.A. way of becoming surrendered to new awarenesses that lead to new growth. Let us write inventory on any of the twelve questions listed above where we find we haven't practiced anonymity in our relationships with others.

## HOMEWORK: WRITING INVENTORY

1. GOD AND A.A.: Do I place principles first in my prayer life, or do I pray only when convenient or in great need?

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

- a) The Story: I tried to get along doing the minimum in my relationship with God by not taking written nightly inventory and doing daily prayer and meditation.
- b) What did I do wrong? Tried the easier softer way.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? After I discovered the benefits of working a rigorous program, I have no problem writing inventory every night and making time for prayer and meditation each morning.

2. HOME: Will I interrupt pleasures such as watching TV or other activities in order to be helpful and not say a word of complaint? How well do I handle telephone interruptions? Do I think of what I can do to ease my mate's burden, or do I only think of what my mate can do for me?

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

- a) The Story: I dislike receiving telephone calls when I am working.
- b) What did I do wrong? I thought of a call as an interruption to my concentration rather than an opportunity to be helpful.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for a helpful spirit and to remember that it is God who is calling, since He permitted the call to happen.

3. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Can I try to listen to the principles behind the words of a fellow worker especially when they disagree with me? Can I begin to see myself and business actions in terms of principles rather than likes or dislikes?

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

- a) The Story: I get very involved in my assessment of myself in my actions in the business world.
- b) What did I do wrong? I placed my personality before principles.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Ask myself how would God assess my situation and pray to act on those principles.