

## PREPARING FOR THE SECOND TRADITION

(Read pp. 133-138 of the “12 & 12”)

### **THE SECOND TRADITION:**

**“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.”**

Let us think about and discuss at the next meeting whether or not each of us views the group as a threat or as the expression of a loving God in three areas:

1. God and A.A.:  
Do I trust God by trusting the group? Am I trusted by God and those in A.A.?
2. Relationships:  
Do I see a loving God in my soul – mate or those whom I like? Do I see a loving God in those I do not like?
3. Work and other talents (art, sports, etc.):  
Do I express the spirit of a loving God in the service I give others?

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”  
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

**THE SECOND TRADITION:**

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

Read pp. 133-138 of the “12 and 12.”

There are three points in reading from the “12 & 12” I would like to explore further. The first area has to do with how I viewed authority. All my life I feared authority. I had a very strange idea about it. I didn’t like anybody else’s authority. I only liked my own authority. Maybe it is not so strange if you’re a sick alcoholic like me. But I certainly did not have any respectful attitude for authority. I didn’t have an attitude that said: “Well, yes. This person should be in authority over me because God placed him in authority and I’m here to cooperate with this person.” Now that’s a sane idea about authority, but it’s not one that I had until later in my sobriety. I did not view those in authority as the expression of a loving God.

My first successful experience in not being fearful of authority was in A.A.. I did not fear my sponsor but relied on him. I saw my sponsor as the expression of a loving God.

I also trusted Alcoholics Anonymous. My experience of being loved in A.A. was the very first experience I had in my life where I trusted a group and took their advice rather than my own. I heard the voice of a loving God in A.A..

The more I followed what I heard in A.A. through the group conscience, the better my life became.

Gradually I have extended this trust in the group in A.A. to that of the world. I used to speak of the world as divided into two groups: A.A., and the “normies.”

But now I see that referring to the world as “normies” was part of my insane distrust of a loving God expressing himself in others. I now hear a loving God in the world and see God in each person I meet. This is a far cry from my ideas when I first came to A.A.. It took the successful experience of first trusting the group in A.A. for me to relate to God as loving and not punishing.

Now, the idea that the “sole authority in A.A. is a loving God as he may express Himself in the group conscience” is a source of comfort to me and not a threat. I know that if I get off the track, the group will lovingly place me back on it.

The second idea in the reading that has helped my growth is the realization that I am here to be a servant and not to govern. I have gradually made progress in the second tradition from moving from the idea of governing to serving.

The idea that was uppermost in my mind in my drinking life was being a boss so I could rule and enjoy life without working. Now my ideas have reversed in sobriety. I wish to become more of a servant because of the closeness it brings me to a loving God as I serve you.

Life forces me to become a trusted servant or a bleeding deacon. The group conscience will correct me if I am out of line and I have a choice to complain like a bleeding deacon or lead by humble example.

Bill Wilson has described a trusted servant as a special person chosen to serve for special abilities, but not chosen to govern. I am happy that a loving God has given me special abilities. But now I know that I do not have them for self-edification but only to serve the group. The group needs me for these special abilities. My status as a trusted servant is an exciting and satisfying source of self-worth. I now know that God needs me. He relies on me to carry the message as a trusted servant.

Proper self-esteem and ego are not the same thing. The three words that lift my spirits when I feel a lack of self-esteem are these: God needs me! I have been entrusted with sobriety and God has sent me to share my experience, strength and hope. If he wanted to send someone else he would have. But he sent me. In my own way, I am his mouth, his hands, and his feet in carrying the message. He relies on me. This is the source of my self-esteem today!

The third idea in the reading that speaks to me is contained in the second to the last paragraph of the "12 & 12" on p. 138: "sometimes the good is the enemy of the best."

Just as Bill was going to do something that was good in his life, the group overruled him for a better idea.

As a sober alcoholic I have a high calling. Being good is not a high enough goal. I am called to be a saint. The reading in the fifth chapter of the "Big Book" says that "we are not saints (p. 60)." We make mistakes. The implication is though we are called to be saints. We are called to be the best we can be so that we can lay claim to some spiritual progress. Bill points out in this reading that good might not be good enough to stay sober.

To work a rigorous program, to be willing to go to any lengths to grow spiritually, and to do all to the best of my willingness (not just the best of my ability), is what is demanded of me in order to stay sober. We are called to a life of excellence. If I don't grow spiritually, I won't stay sober as the story of Fred proves in Chapter Three of the Big Book (p. 42). It's not enough just to be good. "We shall need to raise our eyes toward perfection, and be ready to walk in that direction ("12 & 12", p. 68)."

As a trusted servant dedicated to serving the group, I make choices now I never would have dreamed of making before.

In A.A. what does “good being the enemy of the best” mean for me? It means choosing to be a listening ear in the evening when somebody wants to talk to me rather than using the time for some other worthy endeavor such as work. Doing the work is good, but serving the needs of another alcoholic is better. To me that’s a real comparison about “good being the enemy of the best.”

Another example in my life regards my marriage. I might have an idea about what we ought to do and Joyce might have a different idea. We both might have good ideas, but for me it’s a better thing to surrender to what she wants to do. There’s nothing wrong with that I want to do, but it’s simply better for me to surrender. Whenever I surrender I live at a higher spiritual level of existence. This is another example of the “good being the enemy of the best.”

Another example is in work. It is good for me to be different at work but not to alienate my employees. After alienating all of my employees in one way or another over my shortness and so-called “drive,” I became a loving employee out of necessity. If I didn’t become loving I might have lost all of my employees. It is good to be efficient, but it is better to be loving.

Each tradition answers the question raised by the parallel step. The second step raises the question of how I can come to believe and what is sanity.

I came to believe by trusting the group conscience in A.A., and then I began to trust God and eventually the world. The experience of trusting A.A. to keep me sober is the experience that gave me confidence in God and in you. This is how the second tradition helped me to come to believe.

The second tradition contains three ideas of sanity I need to follow to have good relationships in my life. First, my view of God needs to be a view of God as a “loving” God, not my old insane drinking view of God as a cold, punishing, harsh God who was out to get me.

I had to get rid of my old ideas about a vengeful God before I could even believe in a personal relationship with God. I thought I was agnostic when I first got sober. The reason I thought this was that I had not yet actually experienced a loving personal relationship with God. I gradually came to believe in a nondenominational God – a God beyond the denominationally structured God I once thought existed. I remember my step, tradition and concept sponsor telling me what his sponsor told him: “if God were small enough for my understanding, he wouldn’t be big enough for my needs.”

What began as a distant relationship with a Higher Power has turned into an intense love affair with my Maker. I know that God loves me because I’m sober and I see the presence of his love in my life in every other facet of it. He knows that I love Him because He sees how I spend my time and in what priority.

The second sane view I need to adopt from the second tradition in order to have good relationships with you is to trust you as part of the group conscience.

Trusting the group conscience filled me with more fear than I think any other concept in A.A.. I can remember going to my eight shrinks before I got sober and being sent to group marathons where you would talk about your feelings. I had the greatest difficulty in talking about my feelings at all. I remember asking one of my shrinks when I would ever get comfortable talking about how I feel, and he said: “Well, Dennis, it might take you one hundred or more marathons before you get comfortable.” So when I came to A.A. and attended discussion meetings, particularly at men’s stag meetings, I thought, “Oh my God, this is nothing but a group marathon without alcohol.” And I was very fearful of exposing myself to the group conscience.

I learned to begin to trust the group conscience by trusting a sponsor. I could tell him anything and I only received love in return. He had experienced everything I had so I knew his love meant I could forgive myself.

I had to extend this successful relationship to others. I had to give up my old insane idea of you as someone to be suspicious of until proven otherwise. I had to approach you now with a trusting attitude.

The first tradition taught me that I could not have a good relationship with you as long as I remained a “loner.” I used to think I was more comfortable being alienated. Being “separate from” was my answer to any concept of a group. It protected my ego in case you rejected me. The last thing I wanted to do was be a joiner. The last thing I wanted to do was be a member of anything. I wanted to be by myself, in my corner, doing my own thing, and if you got too close to me, I wanted to withdraw more into my corner and tell you to go away. So this idea of a group conscience was pretty upsetting when I first encountered it

What is more upsetting though is the loneliness that comes from being a “loner.” Loneliness is a threat to my sobriety – so either loneliness or sobriety must go.

The second tradition has a sane answer to this dilemma. I can stay sober and give up being a loner by trusting you as a child of the same loving God.

Now, the idea of the group conscience no longer threatens me, but has advantages. When I have a problem I can ask for your experience and I begin to hear a pattern of response that suggests to me the direction a loving God would have me follow.

When I don’t seek the advice of the group conscience, it sometimes seeks me. When several people independently tell me the same thing and I never ask them what they thought on the subject, I have the reaction that God wants me to listen and follow a different answer than the one I was thinking of. More conscious contact helps me to be more receptive to the group conscience.

For me to ask anybody else how they handled a similar situation rather than thinking that only I have the answers was major breakthrough in my sobriety.

A.A. is a cocoon or a nursing station. I go there to get sober and grow spiritually. As I recover and begin to live the second tradition in my life I am sent from A.A. into the world carrying a message of love about the miracle of my sobriety. I can now interact with other people in a truthful and loving manner. I have become one with the group known as humanity.

The third sane view I must adopt for myself if I am to have a successful relationship with myself is to see myself as a trusted servant. I give up my insane views of myself as alternately (and sometimes simultaneously) as incompetent or a dictator.

I thought my purpose in life in the work area was to amass as much money as possible in order to live the kind of life I wanted to live. I did not view myself as a trusted servant with the various talents that God has given me. Now I've come to the totally opposite view of what I used to think. In fact, the order of importance of my talents is totally reversed.

My talents as I see them now are on the three levels that we have been talking about writing inventory. The first level is A.A.. The greatest talent I have in my life is my alcoholic talent. There isn't any talent that I have that is greater or more important than this one because I have a unique experience in my alcoholism to share with others and only I have that particular experience, just as only you have your experience. No one in A.A. duplicates your experience exactly.

I believe that God saved each of us from an alcoholic death in order to carry the message of our sobriety to each other and to those who are not yet here. This is our unique talent. There is no greater love than to share your life with a person who is dying. When we share our experience, strength and hope we are literally laying down our life for others.

I also have talents in a second area of my life, the human relationship level: I have talents as a husband; I have talents as a father; and I have talents as a son.

I then have talents in the work area, which to me is the third level. I have talents as a businessman. I have talents as a musician and I have sports talents. So God has given me maybe nine or ten talents to develop, all in different areas. But out of them all, there is only one main talent, and that's my alcoholic talent.

So these three ideas in the second tradition teach me how I can start today to have improved relationships in my life: I see God as a loving God. I trust you as a voice of the group conscience. And I feel self-esteem as a trusted servant.

I define sanity as oneness of purpose with a loving God. I define insanity as living in a state of attempting to satisfy my character defects: pride, greed, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth. There is only one word that describes what I want when I try to satisfy character defects. That is the word "more." My greed and my lust can never be satisfied. No amount of money is enough and every woman is a potential conquest that never satisfies.

As I become saner in sobriety, I seek now to want those things that God wants me to have. As my choices become His choices I advance in sanity until I live in oneness of purpose with my loving Creator.

When I am willing to serve the group as a trusted servant and surrender the desire to be a dictator, I become sane in my relationships. I try to listen now to a loving God as He expresses Himself to me through the group conscience in each area of my life.

Many are called but few are chosen. I feel that my continued sobriety is dependent on my giving continued service. I am one of the fortunate ones who have been given another chance.

I am the trusted servant of my own sobriety!

Working a step, tradition, or concept to me means that I am willing to take written inventory and allow it to surrender something within me. The second tradition suggests to me that I surrender three old ideas:

1. Have I surrendered my old insane view of God as a vengeful God for a view of Him as a loving God?
2. Do I fear the group conscience since its conclusions might be different from mine? Am I still a loner? Am I willing to trust the group conscience? Do I seek advice from others? Do I trust my sponsor as the voice of a loving God speaking to me through the group conscience?
3. Am I willing to give up my self-centeredness in my relationships with others and be a trusted a servant?

Let us examine these ideas in the area of our relationship with God and A.A., soul-mate relationships, and in work relationships.

1. GOD AND A.A.: Do I trust God by trusting the group? Am I trusted by God and those in A.A.?

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

- a) The Story: I get bored at most speaker meetings.
- b) What did I do wrong? I listen to be entertained rather than to be instructed.
- c) What would God have me do instead? Listen to the voice of the group conscience in what this particular speaker has to say to me about his life.

2. RELATIONSHIPS: Do I see a loving God in my soul-mate or those whom I love? Do I see a loving God in those I do not love?

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

- a) The Story: I sometimes have a closed mind when it comes to hearing an opinion from my wife that is contrary to mine.
- b) What did I do wrong? I don't respect her opinion as the expression of a loving God speaking to me through the group conscience.
- c) What would God have me do instead? As I feel myself turn off to her, I need to pray for a listening ear and an understanding heart.

3. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS: Do I express the spirit of a loving God in the service I give to others?

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

- a) The Story: I don't respect the authority God gives to others over me.
- b) What did I do wrong? I rebel and only want to be the one in charge.
- c) What would God have me do instead? Respect the authority of those over me as coming from a loving God and pray for an obedient spirit.