

PREPARING FOR THE THIRD TRADITION

(Read pp. 139-145 of the “12 & 12”)

TRADITION THREE:

“The only requirement for A.A. membership is the desire to stop drinking”

In preparing for the study of the third tradition, I suggest that we think about the requirements we now have of life. Do I have demands for a romantic relationship or financial success before I feel I can be happy? Do I have any other demands of life? Let us list them in order of importance.

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

TRADITION THREE:
“The only requirement for A.A. membership is the desire to stop drinking”

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

Read pp. 139-145 of the “12 & 12”

Simplicity and perspective are the words that describe the third tradition: “The only requirement for A.A. membership is the desire to stop drinking.”

For last week’s homework, we suggested making a list of expectations or requirements we have in life beyond sobriety. My list reads like this:

1. Financial and musical success
2. Happy family
3. Tennis success

I am going to tear up the list.

The only requirement I am supposed to have in life is a desire to stay sober. All else will be added to me as long as I keep this as my only goal.

You might say that the homework assignment was a way of exposing to myself how complicated and self-seeking I make my life when I get away from keeping it simple by only pursuing sobriety. I need have no fear of loneliness, financial or other problems if my goal in life is only to pursue sobriety. I can express the essence of the meaning of my life today to myself in just five words: I grow or I drink.

I grow in A.A. by working the principles of the steps, traditions and concepts of service in my life a day at a time.

I work the third tradition in a personal way by eliminating all my desires in life other than pursuing sobriety.

There is nothing wrong in wanting emotional and financial security. However, I make obsessions of these goals rather than seeing them as the by-products of giving service in working a program whose goal is to pursue sobriety.

Whenever I complicate my life by having any goal other than pursuing sobriety, I notice that I become ungrateful and take it for granted.

Thus, the beauty of the third tradition is that it restores perspective through an attitude of gratefulness for the miracle of my sobriety.

I keep perspective when I remember that a financial problem is only a financial problem. It is not the serious problem I have. It is not a drinking problem. If I keep sobriety first and not relationships or the lack of them in my life, I can live to love someday.

I like the perspective of Allen McGinnis on the third tradition when he says that sobriety is an end in itself. We don't stay sober in order to be rewarded with relationships or financial success.

If we stay sober for rewards, we might drink when we get them because we have no more reason to stay sober. Or we might drink if we don't get them, when we say, "What's the use?" We don't stay sober to be virtuous. We stay sober to survive. We place sobriety first because we must in order to live! This is the theme of the third tradition.

The relationship of the third tradition to the third step is a profound one. The third step poses the question: What do I need to do in order to turn my will and my life over to the loving care of God as we understand him?

The tradition answers the problem posed in the third step. The only requirement I need to fulfill in order to turn my will and my life over to God's loving care is a desire to stop drinking. It is unbelievable that all the power of the universe is available to care for me if I only have one desire: to stay sober.

How can I maintain a good relationship with God and other people? If I have no demands on God except a desire to be sober, I can turn my will and my life over to his care. If I insist on financial success or a soul mate first, then I can't turn this area over to God because I am running the show by placing these demands on him.

God is a loving God and he will not keep mine from me as long as I place sobriety first. As I grow in sobriety, all else will be added to me.

My relationships with others are a reflection of my relationship with God. If I have poor relationships in life, it means that I need to straighten out my relationship with God by only seeking sobriety.

A desire for emotional and financial security is not the requirement that makes God's projecting power available to an alcoholic. Therefore I need to rid myself of these demands or any other that I have placed on my relationship with God. I need to make amends to God for trying to manipulate him to suit my desires and to tell him I only desire to stay sober and am grateful for my sobriety.

The desire for sobriety is the basis of my relationship with God. He gives me the power of sobriety and the freedom to grow and do his will as I understand it.

When I first got sober, God looked at my desire for sobriety and rescued me.

I need to be the same to other alcoholics in carrying the message. If a person expresses a desire for sobriety, I need to be willing to go to any length to help him or her just as God helps me. I am not put off by other desires a sick and suffering alcoholic might have as long as the desire for sobriety is present.

The third tradition also takes care of my perfectionism. My desire to be perfect is a reflection of my desire to be God in my own life, the exact nature of my wrongs. I am reminded by the third tradition that the only desire I am to have is to stay sober, not to be perfect.

The opposite of perfectionism is unworthiness. I would frequently bounce around between the two extremes. I would want to be perfect in my work and get upset at myself when I wasn't. Then I would feel I was unworthy of significant achievements in my life and people please to combat my unworthiness.

Perfectionism and people-pleasing, superior and inferior, arrogance and unworthiness, are all sides of the same coin. I try to be God in my own life and when I see that I am failing at it, I people-please in order to try to find some worthiness to assuage my crushed ego at not being God.

The only leveling attitude to these desires is to get back to the simplicity of the only desire I am to have in life – a desire to stay sober as expressed in the third tradition.

This tradition also guides me in my relationship with you. I am not to judge you or have any demands or expectations of you. We share a desire to stay sober and that is our bond. I don't try to manipulate you for any desire, emotional or financial.

The third tradition states the similarity that binds us together despite our various drinking backgrounds: high bottom or low bottom; skid tow or college professor; periodic or daily drinking. We all belong because of our desire to stay sober.

The most startling thought to me in our reading of the third tradition in the "12 & 12" is the one question that puts to rest any problems I have about what I should do. The one question that immediately gives me proper perspective any about any problem is: "What would the Master do?"

Just as this question straightened out the controversy limiting the membership of A.A. to alcoholics only, it straightens out my self-centered perspective when I ask it of myself. When I am not sure what to do, I ask myself. "What would God do?" and all of a sudden I know what to do, I have not yet had a conflict that this question has not resolved correctly. God only looks to my desire; he does not judge me. May I not judge the motives of others, but only be sensitive to their desire to grow in sobriety. I consecrate myself to this end.

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 third tradition suggests to me that that I surrender all of the requirements and expectations I have in life beyond sobriety. Emotional and financial successes are the result of being of service. But when

Tradition 3

these are things that I demand in my relationships with God and others, then I have lost the simplicity and perspective envisioned in the third tradition.

The only requirement I have to turn my will and life over to the care of a loving God is a desire to stop drinking. Other requirements ruin the relationship.

Let us prepare to write inventory by asking ourselves in meditation if we are anxious about anything at all in our lives. Do I have any requirement of God in my life beyond looking to him for sobriety only? In silent prayer let us make amends for these demands and purify our motives by asking only for sobriety. God has only one requirement to take care of me. Am I content to be grateful for sobriety? Let us purify and simplify the basis of our relationship with the Almighty!

(Pause for three minutes of meditation.)

HOMWORK WRITING INVENTORY

1. GOD and A.A.: Do I have financial or soul-mate demands on God before I feel I can be happy?

Inventory Example – (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I feel depressed when I think about my precarious financial situation.
- b) What Did I Do Wrong?: Financial demands make me unhappy in my relationship with God and others.
- c) What Would God Have Me Do Instead The Next Time?: Surrender all of my demands that I might allow gratitude for my sobriety to be the bond between my Maker and myself.

2. RELATIONSHIPS: Do I have demands on my soul-mate before I can be happy with him or her or do I love her or him without reservation?

Inventory Example – (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: Sometimes I think we need to achieve the next goal in our marriage in order to be happy.
- b) What Did I Do Wrong?: I don't accept the marriage as it is right now.
- c) What Would God Have Me Do Instead The Next Time?: Through prayer, become grateful for the joys of today's relationship and stay sober.

3. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc):

Inventory Example – (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I become discouraged when I don't achieve my work or sports goals.
- b) What Did I Do Wrong?: I view life as a competition and myself as the loser.
- c) What Would God Have Me Do Instead The Next Time?: Pray for a grateful attitude that I can participate in life because of the gift of my sobriety and see setbacks and losses, not from the viewpoint of competition, but as learning experience.