

PREPARING FOR THE FOURTH TRADITION

(Read pp.146-149 of the “12 & 12.”)

TRADITION FOUR: “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.”

1. Let us start to think about our autonomy with God. Am I only looking for His approval? Do I rely on others for approval in A.A., relationships, and work, before I will follow God’s direction? When was the last time I made a disastrous decision based on my sick alcoholic need for approval? How searching and fearless am I in following God’s direction when others don’t approve?
2. Let us look at a possible misuse of our autonomy. Do we fail to consult others when making decisions that affect them?
3. Let us center in on our shortcomings on living the fourth tradition in our lives and talk about “What God would have me do instead” at the next meeting.

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

TRADITION FOUR: “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.”

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

Read pp. 146-149 of the “12 & 12”.

How do I make “decisions” in sobriety that are in accord with God’s will for me and do not alienate you. A most perplexing problem when I was drinking.

The one word that characterizes the fourth tradition is the word “decisions”. This tradition teaches me how to make decisions and maintain good relationships with God and you at the same time.

The fourth tradition has two sections.

The first section concerns my defect of approval seeking or people pleasing. It says that each group should be autonomous. I need to seek God’s approval, not society’s.

It says to me that I should be listening for the sound of the inner voice and be one with my Maker.

For a long time, I was sober on meetings and the sobriety of others. The first half of the fourth tradition is saying that I need to take spiritual responsibility for myself.

The relationship of the fourth (and tenth) step to the fourth tradition shows me how to overcome people pleasing, by being dependent on God and not on the approval of others.

I learn to speak God’s language by taking inventory. I permit God to govern me more and more by living the fourth tradition in my life as I become more spiritually responsible. I seek to be one with my Maker.

My second favorite sentence¹ in all of the traditions is in this tradition where Bill Wilson says that some alcoholics thought that their personality defects could be cured with a loan. When I came to A.A. that is exactly what I thought. There wasn’t anything too wrong with me that a little money couldn’t cure, and once the financial areas were straightened out, everything else would straighten out.

¹ My favorite quotation is found in the third tradition, “What would the Master do?”

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I no longer think that my personality defects and those of others could be cured by a loan. I see the need for taking responsibility for my life.

My relationship with my sponsor changes when I reach this tradition. I don't consult a sponsor for decisions in my life. I consult a sponsor to reaffirm principles in the decisions I will make in autonomous prayer with my Maker. I begin to hear God's voice in my life and act on it. I hear that inner voice and validate it by consulting the group conscience when doubtful.

As inventory helps me stand on my own spiritual feet, I become less dependent on the personality of others in my life, and more trustworthy with principles.

I become spiritually more mature as I become autonomous in my relationship with God. I no longer need approval or love at any price. I turn to God to seek His approval as I turn away from seeking status in the world.

It's not people, places, things, or relationships, status, or money that's going to satisfy me anymore. It is only seeking to be one with my Maker in all my decisions that will satisfy me now.

One of the issues that ruled me with fear when I was drinking was a business decision to sue or not concerning some copyright infringers that were ruining my business. The infringers were also our best customers, Catholic churches throughout the United States. Our estimates showed that over 10,000 Catholic churches, (and probably some Protestant churches as well), were using illegal copies of my company's copyrights. I knew that if I sued I would be running the risk of ruining my business because of the potential backlash. It was one of my favorite excuses to drink behind. (I once had a psychologist who told me that I had a thousand reasons for drinking and that all of them were true - but none of them mattered. He was right because I have a disease: alcoholism)

When I got sober, I found that I had to face my fears without alcohol in order to stay sober. I had to walk through them to maintain my self respect.

Inventory revealed to me that I was afraid to surrender financial control of my destiny to my Maker. I thought that by not bringing suit, I would not have to face possible bankruptcy.

But when I asked myself the question, "What would the Master do?" there was only one answer. Jesus would seek justice despite any personal risk. He would not approve of worshipping with stolen music. I knew that when I died, I would have to answer the question, "What did I do to protect the copyrights of poor authors and composers that had been entrusted to my care when I had the opportunity to take action?" The authors and composers couldn't sue. Only I could, since as publisher I owned the rights.

I became more attuned to the fourth tradition in my life. It was God's fight, and I was just the one He was acting through.

I became more concerned about getting God's approval and keeping it than I did the world's approval. So I filed suit against the Archbishop of Chicago in 1976.

At this writing (1982), God has protected me financially from extremely high attorney fees and other threatening financial outcomes of this decision. One important achievement that happened, though, as soon as I filed suit, was that most all infringements by churches ceased. It was as if there was a national bonfire of illegal copies. Overnight justice was restored, and all I had to do was take one unpopular stand.

I would not have it any other way. Constant risking to do God's will is the source of today's happiness for me. To lose my fear, I need to act fearlessly.

All of us encounter situations that we have to walk through fearlessly in order to do God's will, even though it will not be popular with others. That's how we grow, and that's what this one phrase means for me in a nutshell, "each group should be autonomous." I become fearless by writing inventory on a distressing situation; I act fearlessly and walk through that situation by seeking God's will and not the world's will through practicing the Fourth Tradition.

Confrontation with faith and a loving spirit is the challenge of sobriety. I confront those things I used to drink at. I am truthful without being hostile. Truth and love maintain a balance in my life. For me life is a series of challenges to my faith that keep my growing. As a result of this spiritual growth, I am able to stay sober.

The other half of the fourth tradition shows me that I should not misuse my autonomous relationship with God.

The second half of the fourth tradition balances the first half. We have talked about the purpose of the steps being to restore us to a relationship with God through sobriety. The traditions show us how to get along with each other. The second half of the fourth tradition teaches me to consult others when I make decisions that affect them. The tradition reads: *"Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other of A.A. groups of A.A. as a whole."*

God wants me to consult others in decisions affecting them. I am not to be a dictator in making decisions that affect other people's lives (or the community) as I did when I was drinking.

I need help from others, especially in matters affecting them. My goal is unanimity.

If I don't seek the advice and help of others in matters affecting them, then I again become God in my own life, the exact nature of my wrongs.

The steps to restore my relationship with God and the traditions show me how to get along with God. I was God in my own life. I was a dictator. With others, I was just the opposite. I sought their approval.

The defect behind autonomy is people pleasing and the defect behind unanimity is being a dictator.

These defects are really two sides of the same coin: I sought to run things when I thought I was God and in charge and then when that failed, I sought the approval of others. I bounced around between being a dictator and people pleasing.

I like the way Allen McGinnis expressed this dilemma. He said that we tried to cope with a neurotic need to dominate or an equally neurotic need for approval.

The fourth tradition solves this dilemma: I seek to be one with God and to be one with others about matters affecting them.

If I have a satisfying, autonomous relationship with a Higher Power, then I'll have a good relationship with you. But if I don't, I won't have a good relationship with you because you are simply a reflection of my relationship with my Higher Power.

If I'm in an unhappy relationship with another person, I am being told that I have an unhappy relationship with God. I am being told, "Straighten out your relationship with God first and then this relationship will straighten out."

There is another reason why it is important for me to consult with others on decisions affecting them. God speaks to me through the voice of others, especially in matters affecting them. If I talk to somebody about a decision I want to make, and they don't agree, I might begin to get a better idea as I listen to them. If I shut myself off from this consultation process, I shut myself off from finding out more about God's will for me, as revealed through other people. That's a big switch in an alcoholic's thinking. The last thing I ever wanted when I drank was consulting other people.

There are certain things that must be done alone with God, such as writing inventory. Writing inventory is an autonomous function. Then that inventory is shared with another human being. The fourth tradition parallels this procedure. I make decisions autonomously but seek God's approval in prayer. If the decision affects you, I consult you and try to seek unanimity with you (see the Twelfth Concept of Service, fourth warranty, concerning seeking unanimity).

I need to work this tradition in all areas of my life – A.A., home, and work. I first ask the question: Would God approve of this course of action? Then I ask in prayer if this course of action will affect others. If so, I consult them.

Let us stop now in our period of meditation to see if we are relying on the approval of others instead of God and in A.A., home or work. Let us also ask ourselves if we are acting like a dictator in any of these areas.

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One of the areas we suggested that we look at in last week's homework preparation for this week was how long it has been since we made a disastrous decision based on our sick alcoholic need for approval. Should I be acting fearlessly in some area where I am not fearless now?

Are we being a dictator and trying to run everybody's life?

Let us approach God for solutions in these areas. Let us also meditate on our oneness of purpose with God. I define sanity as oneness of purpose with my Maker. Let us center on the oneness with our relationship with God that has been brought about through our sobriety. Let us seek the approval of an approval-giving God. Can I see a loving God in every area of my life and your life today? Can I see His love in our sobriety?

Can I dwell in the autonomy of our loving relationship with God? It is a place of beauty that I don't want to leave. Being with anyone we live is nice. Being one with a loving Creator defies description. Let us meditate.

(Pause for three minutes of meditation)

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 fourth tradition suggests to me that I surrender seeking the approval of others, rather than seeking God's approval. Since I have taken a searching and fearless inventory about myself in the fourth step, it is now time for me to take spiritual responsibility for myself and only have God rule my will and my life.

Let us write inventory on relationships in A.A., home, and work where we are dependent on the approval of others, rather than one the approval of God.

HOMWORK: WRITING INVENTORY – PART ONE

1. GOD AND A.A.: Do I take responsibility for my sobriety and attend meetings and set aside times to be alone with God and write inventory and pray? Do I attend certain meetings to seek approval rather than to make a contribution?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: Sometimes I prefer speaking at larger meetings.
 - b) What did I do wrong? I speak for approval rather than solely to carry the message.
 - c) What would God have me do instead the next time? Pray to be a tool to the one person I was sent to share with.
2. RELATIONSHIPS: Is my marriage or soul mate relationship autonomous? Do I make decisions for my good or our good? Do I seek my mate's approval for doing some things I feel I shouldn't rather than seeking God's approval?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: Sometimes I won't go someplace with my wife unless I choose where we go.
 - b) What did I do wrong? I don't surrender for the good of the relationship.
 - c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for the willingness to surrender to my wife's choices that we may grow closer.
3. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Do I stand on principle at work, or do I make decisions in order to get approval? Do I consult God before I make business (or other) decisions?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: I tend to want to agree with persuasive people rather than take unpopular stands based on principle that I think would please God
- b) What did I do wrong? I am swayed by personalities because I get approval of others when I agree with them.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Take stands based on principles dictated by my inner voice.

HOMEWORK: WRITING INVENTORY – PART TWO

The other half of the fourth tradition suggests that I not be autonomous affecting others. Let us take inventory on any misuses of our autonomy. Do I fail to consult others when making decisions that affect them?

4. GOD AND A.A.: Do I fail to consult God about decisions? Am I a dictator in A.A.? Do I share with those I sponsor, or do I tell them?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: I find myself saying, “You do this” to those I sponsor.
 - b) What did I do wrong? I am acting like a dictator rather than sharing my experience, strength and hope.
 - c) What would God have be do instead the next time? Pray that I only share my experiences and not my opinions.
5. RELATIONSHIPS: Am I a dictator in relationships, or do I consult my mate about decisions that affect her?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: I sometimes make financial decisions without discussing the situation with my mate.
 - b) What did I do wrong? I act unilaterally rather than seek unanimity in decisions that affect my marriage.
 - c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for a trusting attitude and fully discuss the situation with my mate and trust the decision of our group conscience.
6. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Do I consult the opinions of others at work about decisions I must make that affect our common good? Do I consult customers to see how they view my services?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: I tend to run my business life like a dictator.
- b) What did I do wrong? I sometimes don’t consult the people I work with and others about decisions that might affect them.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to seek the advice of others and try to make decisions based on consensus and become more sensitive to the group conscience.