

PREPARING FOR THE SIXTH TRADITION

(Read pp. 155-159 of the "12 & 12").

THE SIXTH TRADITION:

“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 and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.”

1. In preparation for our next meeting, let us think about any problems we have that drain our energies from fulfilling our primary purpose - carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Do these problems result from concerns about money, property, or our prestige?
2. Are we giving our time and energies to worthy causes that have brought to a standstill our progress in A.A.? Have we been dedicating our primary efforts to outside activities or to carrying the message?

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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

Read pp. 155 - 159 of the “12 & 12”.

Would you be surprised if I told you that I found the solution to my worries about financial problems by working the sixth tradition in my life?

When I was drinking my primary purpose was pursuing females and finances. In my early sobriety I did the same thing by devoting my energy to acquiring “money, property, and prestige.”

I was a bankrupt idealist. “We are all perfectionists who failing perfection, have gone to the other extreme and settled for the bottle and the blackout.” (“12 & 12”, Sixth Tradition, p. 156). The areas that affected my “money, property and prestige” and sex were the areas I gave all my perfectionist energy.

Without realizing it, I was losing my dedication to sobriety from my primary purpose: carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

It never occurred to me that God would take care of financial and relationship concerns a day at a time if I would let go of them and trust his plan with the same patience he had waited for me to come to him for sobriety.

By devoting time and efforts to pursuing females and finances I was endorsing these things as my primary purpose by lending my name to their pursuit.

Is my primary purpose to worry about money or carry the message? To me, this is the area of surrender raised by the sixth tradition. If I let financial problems dominate my thinking I am unable to carry the message of sobriety with much spiritual vigor. The two interests cannot exist together. One will dominate the other. It’s either an attitude of service or trying to pile up money.

I had to give up my old ideas about worrying. I learned that I cannot handle financial problems by myself. I found that if I truly turn my will and financial life over to the care of God on a daily basis and am busy in carrying the message as my primary purpose and doing the things God places in front of me each day, he

will take care of me. I become God's primary purpose if I let him take care of me.

The more I stick to carrying the message, the less worries I have – a wonderful paradox.

Bill Wilson comments in "A.A., Comes of Age", (p. 109) on a similar paradox concerning the fellowship, "The more A.A. sticks to its primary purpose, the greater will be its helpful influence everywhere."

Money and property are not the only distractions from carrying the message. I like to include loneliness as part of the defect of prestige. There is a certain prestige in having a soul mate and a certain lack of prestige in not having one.

Before I met my soul mate in A.A., I spent much energy in pursuing one which detracted from my ability to carry the message. I needed to carry a message of purity or motive. When I finally surrendered this pursuit and was working the twelve steps on a daily basis, God led me to my soul mate.

The relationship between the sixth step and the sixth tradition became clear to me: I was not entirely ready to have my character defects removed as long as I gave my self to the pursuit of money, property and prestige.

The sixth step poses the question, how can I become entirely ready to have my defects of character removed? The answer is in the sixth tradition. In fact the sixth tradition describes my main character defects: the problems involved from seeking money, property, and prestige. I become entirely ready to have these defects removed when carrying a message of sobriety becomes my primary purpose.

When I become willing to have God remove these defects in a sixth step, I become closer to him. It is also true when carrying the message is not my primary purpose, I become obsessed with problems of money, property and prestige.

Lack of self esteem results from a dependence on money, property and prestige rather than dependence on a Higher Power.

There is another interesting relationship between the sixth step and the sixth tradition. The sixth step encourages me to strive for perfect ideals. ("It is suggested that we ought to become entirely willing to air toward perfection." "12 & 12," p. 69)

My defects in the sixth tradition are the result of perfectionism, my "all or nothing at all" attitude. Since I could not accomplish all the good things that I wanted to when I drank, I got drunk at them and did nothing.

The same problems arise in sobriety. Do I stop carrying the message as my primary purpose if the person I am working with doesn't stay sober?

Not at all. I am responsible for carrying the message as my primary choice in life. I lack the power to get anybody drunk or sober, including myself. I came to A.A. because I was powerless over alcohol. What I can't do by myself, the group can do.

I keep aiming toward perfection and I am "ready to walk in that direction" ("12 & 12," p. 69) despite any setback in carrying the message. I pursue this ideal with the same determination I have not to take the first drunk.

I like Chuck Chamberlain's phrase, when he says that he carries the message "for free and for fun." I like that because it says to me that he's doing the sixth tradition. It tells me that he is carrying the message without expecting any pay for it, without expecting anything back for it, without external reward.

But what happens is that we do get external rewards. The unrelated problems that we seem to have, financial problems, love problems, and other problems seem to straighten out the more I concentrate on carrying the message.

When I'm working with somebody, I like to say if you have a problem with your girlfriend or wife, the surest way to answer that is to go on a twelve step call, carry the message to somebody, take the unrelated action. Carrying the message keeps the spirit of love alive in our other relationships. The more I do my primary purpose, the more God takes care of me.

The sixth tradition contains the solution to my problems of money, property and prestige: the more primary in my life carrying the message becomes, the less problems of any kind I have!

The first half of the sixth tradition talks about a different set of problems stemming from my priorities in life in regard to worth related interests and outside activities. The tradition warns me about not getting involved with "related facilities or outside enterprises," no matter how worthy they are.

Once I got some sobriety behind me, I thought about trying to solve other problems in living: religion, worship, other spiritual approaches, seeing shrinks, work and other good related activities.

It is my experience that I do not need shrinks as long as I devote myself to doing the steps, traditions, and concepts. All of the related problems that I had when I drank and in sobriety gradually disappeared, as I have grown in the program.

There might be an exception to this notion but I have found that those I have sponsored were seeing shrinks as a substitute for working the program. When

they started to work the program, they wanted to stop seeing their shrinks since the shrinks were no longer needed. (I am not talking about sober alcoholics who have had brain damage.)

Experience has shown that therapy in place of working the program in A.A. will not work. Temporary therapy in support of an A.A. program may be helpful or a useful bridge to working the A.A. program. The “Big Book” states on p. 64 in a discussion of the fourth step that “When the spiritual malady is overcome, we straighten out mentally and spiritually.”)

It is also my experience that I can be involved again with religion as long as it is secondary to my involvement with A.A. I like religion as an outlet for my need to worship a loving God. But I do not believe in a denominational God. I believe in the God I discovered in A.A. who is beyond the denominational God I understood when I was drinking.

I went back to worshipping God in sobriety as I now understand him in A.A., quite a bit differently than I did before. My involvement in organized religion though is secondary to A.A. I’m not involved in theology squabbles. I am what I call a selective believer. I believe those things I can as I understand God and I don’t believe those things in the Catholic Church that I don’t understand. As I grow I am able to understand more and advance in faith.

The sixth tradition becomes abused when I substitute the direction of religion, philosophy, or shrink for that of one of the steps, traditions, and concepts of service to A.A.

My relationship with God improved dramatically when I stopped devoting myself to outside financial pursuits and related therapies or substitute religion for A.A.

Other approaches to God work for the non-alcoholic. For others there is nothing wrong in making these related approaches to God primary.

But for me, they are not needed and even inhibit my growth. My primary purpose in life is simple: don’t drink and carry that message to the sick and suffering alcoholic. My life was greatly simplified when I discovered that God had designed a way of life that would work for me and I would follow it. He even numbered it one to twelve so that I would know what to do first. Without this guidance I would be off in three hundred directions at once.

Inventory and amends are generally the steps we try to avoid that bring our program to a standstill. Creeping complacency sets in and soon improvement programs begin to look attractive to the detriment of a program of sobriety based on the steps, traditions, and concepts of service of A.A. We begin to seek the easier, softer way again.

If I let anything else become primary in my life, A.A. becomes secondary. Many of us alcoholics are people of total enthusiasm for whatever we are involved in at the moment.

It can become easier to substitute a relationship in place of carrying the message, or substitute ambition in place of spiritual growth, or place money in place of the A.A. program.

The next thing that happens is a dry drunk (a period when I lose constant contact with God). I begin to blame God for my financial troubles. As a dry drunk, a wet drunk begins to look attractive.

Therefore, observing the sixth tradition in my life by placing my primary purpose of carrying the message first, and not problems of my property, prestige or worthy outside interests, keeps me sober.

Observing the sixth tradition improves all my relationships dramatically. When God sees that I am placing carrying the message over seeking money, he entrusts me with great opportunities to help others.

In love relationships, I no longer need to protect my image. My prestige isn't threatened by possible rejection since I feel self worth because I place carrying the message first in my life. I am no longer a taker in romantic relationships. I begin to carry a message of love and service to my soul mate.

At work I no longer place getting ahead first. My job is an opportunity to carry a message of service to the company's customers rather than a message of self seeking. Profit is no longer the bottom line, carrying the message is.

Now is the time where we stop for a few minutes and meditate on the sixth tradition. I would suggest that if we have gotten into worrying about money or worrying about a relationship or worrying about a death in the family, instead of thinking of how we can carry the message, that we might want to think about our priorities. What is my primary purpose right now in my life? What is really uppermost in my mind? Is it paying the mortgage or is it carrying the message?

Secondly, have we gotten sidetracked by religion, philosophy, shrinks, diets, or other worthy pursuits to the exclusion of our primary purpose in life, carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers? Let us center our thoughts to the place we need to be. I like to meditate in gratitude to God for my ability to carry the message.

I am relieved to know that the total answer to living for me is found in recovery, unity and service in A.A. I don't have to follow related paths. I don't have to be obsessed with money, property, and prestige. God takes care of me as I take care of my primary purpose in life, carrying the message.

I am grateful that I am an alcoholic because I have something that I can give to somebody else. It is my experience and strength and hope as a sober member of A.A.

If I were not an alcoholic, I would not have another primary purpose. I would be totally consumed with trying to make it in the United States the way the world says you should make. I have a different measurement of my life presented to through my primary purpose.

I am grateful that God has given me a way to approach him. Without my alcoholism, I would have no way to approach him. I am grateful that I know that I am called to be about my father's business and not the business of the world. I know that I have a high standing in God's opinion of me otherwise he would not ask me to carry the message. Let us praise God for our primary purpose.

(Pause for three minutes of meditation.)

Working a step, tradition, or concept to me means that I am willing to take inventory and allow it to surrender something within me. Let us now stop to examine two ideas and write inventory where it applies to us:

1) Is my primary occupation worrying about money or carrying the message?

Am

I ready to relate the sixth step and sixth tradition in all areas of my life? Am I entirely ready to have God remove any character defects by being ready to give up pursuing "money, property, and prestige" in favor of pursuing my primary purpose?

2) Have I gotten side-tracked by religion, philosophy, shrinks or other worthy pursuits to the exclusion of my primary purpose in life: to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers?

HOMEWORK: WRITING INVENTORY

1. GOD AND A.A.: Are my prayers obsessed with money please or do I ask for opportunities to carry the message?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: Thoughts of financial fear sometimes dominate my thinking.
 - b) What did I do wrong: I become concerned with the opinion of the world than the opinion of God and the kingdom about fulfilling my primary purpose.
 - c) What would God have me do instead the next time?: Do what God places in front of me to do a day at a time and concentrate on carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
2. RELATIONSHIPS: Do I seek prestige in a romantic relationship? Do I seek a beautiful woman to feed my ego? Am I a taker? What is the message I carry in my relationship or marriage?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: Sometimes I expect my wife to satisfy my needs and become unhappy if she doesn't.
 - b) What did I do wrong: I take her inventory rather than inventory the message I should be carrying to her.
 - c) What would God have me do instead the next time?: Pray that I center on what I can contribute to our relationship rather than take from it.
3. WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): What is my message at work? Have I become sidetracked from carrying it by my concern about getting paid more?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences)

- a) The Story: I sometimes accept the world's yardstick about the success of my company and become disappointed if the company is not profitable.
- b) What did I do wrong? Accept profit as the bottom line rather than carrying the message.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to stay centered on God's message in my business, not the worlds.