

PREPARING FOR THE EIGHTH TRADITION

(Read pp. 166—171 of the “12 & 12.”)

THE EIGHTH TRADITION:

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

The one word that describes the eighth tradition is “zeal”. Let us prepare for next week by examining the state of our “zeal” in carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

- 1) Do I carry the message out of gratitude and enthusiasm or out of possible gain to myself? Do I have non-professional willingness? Am I like an enthusiastic amateur in sharing my experience, strength and hope or is my message jaded with negativity and reluctance? Do I give an example of zealous sobriety or do I carry the message out of a sense of duty?
- 2) Do I extend this selfless sense of “zeal” into my prayer life? Do I approach God and others for what I can do for them or for what they can do for me?
- 3) Do I share my opinions or myself? Am I afraid that a message of zealous love will bring me too close to the sufferings of the sick alcoholic?

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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

Read pp. 166-171 of the “12 & 12”.

I saw some of the best professionals in the field of psychology and they couldn't save me from my alcoholism. Religion couldn't help me, either. I could not identify with these well-meaning people.

After I hit bottom (bottom is that place in my life where I am even willing to ask a God I don't believe in anymore to rescue me from my alcoholism), it was the stumbling efforts of alcoholics less than ninety says sober who inspired me and helped me stay sober. They told me to empty coffee cups and ashtrays after meetings to show my gratitude for my sobriety. This worked when the advice of the world's greatest professionals did not.

When a sober alcoholic came to me carrying a message of sobriety, I had to stop and listen because this person was not being paid to do this. They weren't being paid to be patient with me, to sit up with me and to patiently explain things to me night after night answering my questions. They have to be doing it for some other reason. Therefore, I trust them. I think that is what marks the difference between my reaction to the professional and the non-professional. I trust those who have no financial motives in my sobriety. As a suspicious drinking alcoholic, I didn't trust anybody. But these sober alcoholics in A.A. whose only motive was to be of service in A.A. were not doing it for pay or profit. I, who trusted no one, had to trust them! Their hands were clean!

There are three levels of existence in sobriety: obedience, enthusiasm, and zeal.

Obedience is the safety net of my sobriety. I practice the twelve steps, traditions and concepts of service on a daily basis regardless of how I feel – depressed or joyful! No matter what, I don't take the first drink, and I don't let a day pass without nightly written inventory, Morning Prayer and meditation, and daily twelve step work (at least on the phone, if not face to face). “Unless each A.A. member follows to the best of his ability our suggested Twelve Steps to recovery, he almost certainly signs his own death warrant. His drunkenness and dissolution are not penalties inflicted by people in authority; they result from his personal disobedience to spiritual principles.” (“12 & 12”, Ninth Tradition, p.174)

So, my guide to sobriety is personal obedience! I had to learn to quit listening to my emotions and to start to listen to some principles that I had to follow to stay sober. I'm not putting my emotions down. I'm saying that I had volatile emotions gone astray. Whenever

they got too happy, they wanted to drink. And whenever they go too unhappy, they wanted to drink. So obedience is the life-net of my sobriety. When all else fails, just simply be obedient.

There is a second and higher level of existence, and that is “enthusiasm”. Enthusiasm comes from a Greek expression, which means, “to be filled with God”. When I am enthusiastic about sobriety, I do God’s will because of how good I feel as a result of doing His will.

There is a third level of existence to sobriety, and that is called “zeal”. I am zealous when I carry the message simply because of the joy I feel in doing God’s will. I look for no return. When I am living in the rarefied air of “zeal” no job requires effort.

The one word that describes the eighth tradition is “zeal”.

When I applied the principle of “zeal” to my relationship with God, my life changed completely, and I was led to my soul mate.

There is only one of two attitudes I can have toward God: I either praise him or blame him for what is happening in my life. I am guilty of spiritual pride when I pass judgment on God by blaming him for my difficulties in life. The answer is trust. And trust is surrender without understanding!

The change happened when I began to praise (not blame) God for everything that happened in my life, especially the negative appearance. I demonstrated in prayer that I trusted him without having to understand his actions. I knew that he only permitted conditions to happen to me because I needed to learn through the experience of difficulties. I simply praised him for his love of me and that he would guide me. I knew that He would guide me again because He rescued me from my alcoholism to bring me sobriety.

My old attitude has been what I would term a reluctant surrender, rather than a surrender with enthusiasm or zeal. If you had an employee who took your orders with gritted teeth and told you that he had a better idea, when it was clear that his answer would ruin the company, would you give him a raise or more responsibilities?

I was the reluctant employee with God, and when I became a zealous employee, God brought me my heart’s desire in addition to sobriety – a soul mate and a child!

If I will pray to surrender with a zealous attitude, my reluctant attitude changes, and I begin to find joy in my life.

When I become zealous in my attitude, my relationship with God changed dramatically. He began to give me more responsibilities because I could handle more due to the gift of zeal. The more responsibilities I had, the more joy I found. The road gets narrower in order that the rewards may become greater. And zeal in carrying the message leads the way.

There is one other aspect to the eighth tradition: “but our service centers may employ special workers.”

What does this mean for me personally? The first part of the eighth tradition clearly establishes the principle that I do not do twelve-step work for a fee. (“Alcoholics simply will not listen to a paid Twelve Stepper.”¹ “When we had agreed that the Twelfth Step couldn’t be sold for money, we had been wise.”²

The second aspect of the eighth tradition makes it equally clear that A.A. may employ professional secretaries and other professional staff members. “The job was not to do Twelve Step work; it was to make Twelve Step work possible. It was a service proposition, pure and simple.”³ “Our Twelfth Step is never paid for, but those who labor in service for us are worthy of their hire.”⁴

What about the A.A. member who works as a counselor for the alcoholic section of a hospital? We have heard criticisms of such counselors from the A.A. members who oppose this practice.

We do not agree and think that the “12 & 12” is very clear in its judgment on this point. “Are such activities to be branded as professionalism under A.A. tradition? We think the answer is ‘No’. Members who select such full time careers do not professionalize A.A.’s Twelfth Step.”⁵

There is a difference between doing twelve step work for pay and working for a master’s degree as a counselor in the field of alcoholism and being of service in a hospital where more and more newcomers first find sobriety. All of the professional counselors that I know do their counseling job and go to A.A. meetings and carry the message “for free and for fun”⁶ at meetings like the rest of us. Their job is not a substitute for working an A.A. program.

Such counselors, in my opinion, are to be commended for the service they give!

The spiritual principle behind the eighth step is “willingness” to work the steps.

The eighth tradition takes that idea one step further and teaches me that to have good relationships with other people, I must be “zealous” in carrying the message. Otherwise my message is suspect.

In our meditation, let us examine the state of our “zeal” in our relationships with God, A.A., mates and work. Let us begin with the state of our “zeal” in carrying the message to the sick and suffering alcoholic.

¹ “12 & 12”, Eighth Tradition, p.166

² “12 & 12”, Eighth Tradition, p. 167

³ “12 & 12”, Eighth Tradition, p. 168

⁴ “12 & 12”, Eighth Tradition, p. 171

⁵ “12 & 12”, Eighth Tradition, p. 170

⁶ “For free and for fun” is a favorite saying of Chuck Chamberlain

Do I carry the message out of gratitude and enthusiasm or out of possible gain to myself? Do I have non-professional willingness? Am I like an enthusiastic amateur in sharing my experience, strength, and hope or is my message jaded with negativity and reluctance?

Do I give an example of zealous sobriety, or do I carry the message out of a sense of duty?

Do I share my opinions or myself? Am I afraid that a message of zealous love will bring me too close to the sufferings of the sick alcoholic?

Can I maintain my zeal when I work with a vomiting alcoholic?

Do I extend this selfless sense of “zeal” into my prayer life? Or do I pray out of duty? Do I approach God and others for what I can do for them or for what they can do for me?

Do I surrender to God with zeal or reluctance? What is the state of my surrender at home?

I would like to ask God in my meditation to make zeal a part of my life. Zeal for me means two words. It means “effortless living”. I like that level of living.

I want to thank God for the zeal he had in rescuing me and for sending zealous people into my life to save me and carry the message to me. He carried a zealous message of sobriety to me when I needed to hear it. So let’s stop now for three minutes and meditate on renewed “zeal” in our life in carrying the message to the sick and suffering alcoholic.

(Pause for three minutes of meditation)

Working a step, tradition, or concept to me means that I am willing to write inventory and allow it to surrender something within me. Let us examine the state of our zeal.

HOMWORK WRITING INVENTORY

- 1) GOD and A.A.: (First half of the eighth tradition): What is the state of my zeal in carrying the message and in my prayer life?

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

- a) The Story: Sometimes I approach writing nightly inventory with dread.
- b) What did I do wrong? I am lazy and I project the effort it is going to take to face myself in writing.
- c) What would God have me do instead the next time? Pray for “zeal” and surrender to a zealous spirit and write my inventory a sentence at a time.

- 2) GOD AND A.A.: (Second half of the eighth tradition): Have we criticized A.A. members for being alcoholic counselors or been silent while others criticize such members?

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

- a) The Story: I let others criticize A.A. members for being alcoholic counselors without lovingly disagreeing.
- b) What did I do wrong? I was too lazy to research the question and afraid to disagree with such people who are generally determined.
- c) What would God have me do instead the next time? Pray for guidance in the principles of the traditions and pray for courage to state these principles in a loving way.

- 3) HOME: What is the state of my zeal in my love relationships? Do I surrender with enthusiasm or reluctance?

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

- a) The Story: Sometimes I reluctantly agree to go someplace my wife wants to go.
- b) What did I do wrong? My negativity takes joy out of the occasion.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for a zealous spirit of surrender so that my mate doesn't know I surrendered.

- 4) WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Would my fellow workers characterize me as a zealous worker? Have others told me to improve my attitude at work?

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

- a) The Story: There are some tasks I do at work with the greatest reluctance.
- b) What did I do wrong? When faced with a difficulty, I think I am supposed to solve it, so I don't pray.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray for a zealous spirit especially when faced with tough assignments.