

The Twelfth Tradition

Short Form: Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Long Form: And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all.

One may say that anonymity is the spiritual base, the sure key to all the rest of our Traditions. It has come to stand for prudence and, most importantly, for self-effacement. True consideration for the newcomer if he desires to be nameless; vital protection against misuse of the name Alcoholics Anonymous at the public level; and to each of us a constant reminder that principles come before personal interest- such is the wide scope of this all-embracing principle. In it we see the cornerstone of our security as a movement; at a deeper spiritual level it points us to still greater self-renunciation (The Language of the Heart pg. 93).

The spiritual substance of anonymity is sacrifice. Because A.A.'s Twelve Traditions repeatedly ask us to give up personal desires for the common good, we realize that the sacrificial spirit- well symbolized by anonymity- is the foundation of them all. It is A.A.'s proved willingness to make these sacrifices that gives people their high confidence in our future.

But in the beginning, anonymity was not born out of confidence; it was the child of our early fears. Our first nameless groups of alcoholics were secret societies. New prospects could find us only through a few trusted friends. The bare hint of publicity,

even for our work, shocked us. Though ex-drinkers, we still thought we had to hide from public distrust and contempt (Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions pg. 184).

As we have seen, anonymity is the protective mantle that covers our whole society. But it is more than protection; it has another dimension, a spiritual significance... the entire future of our fellowship hangs upon this vital principle. If we continue to be filled with the spirit and practice of anonymity, no shoal or reef can wreck us. If we forget this principle, the lid to Pandora's box will be off and the spirits of Money, Power, and Prestige will be loosed among us (Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age pg. 131).

Probably the best story in this class tells how the A.A. name was used to back up a libel lawsuit. A member, whose name and professional attainments are known on three continents, got hold of a letter which she thought damaged her professional reputation. She felt something should be done about this and so did her lawyer, also an A.A. They assumed that both the public and A.A. would be rightfully angry if the facts were known. Forthwith, several newspapers headlined how Alcoholics Anonymous was rooting for one of its lady members- name in full, of course- to win her suit for libel. Shortly after this, a noted radio commentator told a listening audience, estimated at twelve million people, the same thing. This again proved that the A.A. name could be used for purely personal purposes... this time on a nationwide scale. The old files at A.A. headquarters reveal many scores of such experiences with broken anonymity. Most of them point to the same lessons.

They tell us that we alcoholics are the biggest rationalizers in the world; that fortified with the excuse we are doing great things for A.A. we can, through broken anonymity, resume our old and disastrous pursuit of personal power and prestige, public honors, and money.... Moreover, they make clear that enough spectacular anonymity

breakers could someday carry our whole Society down into that ruinous dead end with them (AA Tradition: How It Developed pg. 48).

Bill Wilson himself, one of A.A.'s greatest anonymity breakers, came to realize the true nature of Tradition Twelve when he wrote "the realization has come strongly in the last year or so that we older folk are actually getting less important to the movement. Though it's a little hard on the old ego, I begin to see how truly providential that is. Here are people lifted up by their principles rather than by their preachers. How well this all augurs for the future."

Rather than deplore the time ahead when he would have outlived his own usefulness, he assured the Fellowship that the most desirable state of affairs was that individual members, himself included, should always be less important to A.A. than the principles of the program itself. By making A.A. primarily dependent on idea, spirit, and concept, rather than on any temporal force or individual personality, Bill's "Twelve Points to Assure Our Future" did exactly that (Pass It On pgs. 314-315).

Tradition Twelve, in its mood of humble anonymity, plainly enough comprehends the preceding eleven. The Twelve Points of Tradition are little else than a specific application of the spirit of the Twelve Steps of recovery to our group life and to our relations with society in general. The recovery steps would make each individual AA whole and one with God; the twelve points of Tradition would make us one with each other and while with the world about us. Unity is our aim (The Language of the Heart pg. 94).

As Tradition Twelve reminds us, we have something stronger than our human personalities to rely on. Our principles come first- and they are not our own invention. They reflect eternal spiritual values. With this Tradition, both as individuals and as a

fellowship, we humbly acknowledge our dependence on a power higher than ourselves
(The Twelve Traditions Illustrated).