

Tradition 12

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.

The first reception of the Twelve Traditions was interesting and amusing. The reaction was mixed, to say the least. Only groups in dire trouble took them seriously. From some quarters there was a violent reaction, especially from groups that had long lists of 'protective' rules and regulations. There was much indifference. Several of our 'intellectual' members cried loudly that the Traditions reflected nothing more than the sum of my own hopes and fears for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Therefore I began to travel and talk a lot about the new Traditions. People were at first politely attentive, though it must be confessed that some did go to sleep during my early harangues. But after a while I got letters containing sentiments like this: "Bill, we'd love to have you come and speak. Do tell us where you used to hide your bottles and all about that big, hot-flash spiritual experience of yours. But for heaven's sake, please don't talk any more about those blasted Traditions!"

Time presently changes all that. Only five years later, several thousand A.A. members, meeting at the 1950 Cleveland Convention, declared that A.A.'s Twelve Traditions constituted the platform upon which our Fellowship could best function and hold together in unity for all time to come.

The A.A. Service Manual combined with Twelve Concepts for World Service, 2009 - 2010 Edition,
Page S9.

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. And this leads to Tradition Twelve...

In my belief, 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. Obsessed by these evil genii, we might well founder and break up. I devoutly believe this will never happen. No A.A. principle merits more study and application than this one. I am positive that A.A.'s anonymity is the key to long term survival.

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 all these Traditions. It is A.A.'s proved willingness to make these sacrifices that gives people high confidence in our future.

Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age. Pages 131-132.

Then came our first few excursions into major publicity, and these were breathtaking. Cleveland's *Plain Dealer* articles about us ran that town's membership from a few dozen into hundreds overnight. The news stories of Mr. Rockefeller's dinner for Alcoholics Anonymous helped double our total membership on a year's time. Jack Alexander's famous *Saturday Evening Post* piece made A.A. a national institution. Such tributes as these brought opportunities for still more recognition. Other newspapers and magazines wanted A.A. stories. Film companies wanted to photograph us. Radio and finally television companies besieged us with requests for co-operation. What should we do?

As this tidal offering of top public approval swept in, we realized that it could do us incalculable good or great harm. Everything would depend upon how it was channeled. We simply could not afford to take the chance of letting self-appointed members present themselves as messiahs representing A.A. before the whole public. The promoter instinct in us might be our undoing. If even one such person publicly got drunk or was lured into using A.A.'s name for his own purposes, that damage might be irreparable. At this altitude (press, radio, films, and television), anonymity - **100 per cent anonymity** - was the only possible answer. Here principles would have to come before personalities, without exception.

These experiences taught us that anonymity is real humility at work. It is an all-pervading spiritual quality which today keynotes A.A. life everywhere. Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction as A.A. members both among fellow alcoholics and before the general public. As we lay aside these very human aspirations, we believe that each of us takes part in the weaving of a protective mantle which covers our whole society and under which we may grow and work in humility.

We are sure that humility, expressed by anonymity, is the greatest safeguard that Alcoholics Anonymous can ever have.

Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age. Page 134.

At the beginning, we sacrificed alcohol. We had to, or it would have killed us. But we couldn't get rid of alcoholism unless we made other sacrifices. Big shot-ism and phony thinking had to go. We had to toss self-justification, self-pity, and the anger right out the window. We had to quit the crazy contest for personal prestige and big bank balances. We had to take personal responsibility for our sorry state and quit blaming other for it.

Were these sacrifices? Yes, they were. To gain enough humility and self-respect to stay alive at all we had to give up what had really been our dearest possession - our ambitions and our illegitimate pride.

But even this was not enough. Sacrifice had to go much further. Other people had to benefit too. So we took on some Twelfth Step work; we began to carry the A.A. message. We sacrificed time, energy and our own money to do this. We couldn't keep what we had unless we gave it away.

Did we demand that our new prospects give us anything? Were we asking them for power over their lives, for fame for our good work or for a cent of their money? No, we were not. We found that if we demanded any of these things our Twelfth Step work went flat. So these natural desires had to be sacrificed; otherwise, our prospects received little or no sobriety. Nor, indeed, did we.

Thus we learned that sacrifice had to bring a double benefit, or else little at all. We began to know about the kind of giving of ourselves that had no price tag on it.

When the first A.A. group took form, we soon learned a lot more of this. We found that each of us had to make willing sacrifices for the group itself, sacrifices for the common good. The group, in turn, found that it had to give up many of its own rights for the protection and welfare of each member, and for A.A. as a whole. These sacrifices had to be made or A.A. couldn't continue to exist.

Gradually we saw that the unity, the effectiveness - yes, even the survival - of A.A. would always depend upon our continued willingness to sacrifice our personal ambitions and desires for the common safety and welfare. Just as sacrifice meant survival for the individual, so did sacrifice mean unity and survival for the group and for A.A.'s entire Fellowship.

Viewed in this light, A.A.'s Twelve Traditions are little else than a list of sacrifices which the experience of twenty years has taught us that we must make, individually and collectively, if A.A. itself is to stay alive and healthy.

In our Twelve Traditions we have set our faces against nearly every trend in the outside world.

We have denied ourselves personal government, professionalism and the right to say who our members shall be. We have abandoned do-goodism, reform and paternalism. We refuse charitable money and prefer to pay our own way. We will cooperate with practically everybody, yet we decline to marry our Society to anyone. We abstain from public controversy and will not quarrel among ourselves about those things that so rip society asunder - religion, politics and reform. We have but one purpose: to carry the A.A. message to the sick alcoholic who wants it.

We take these attitudes not at all because we claim special virtue or wisdom; we do these things because hard experience has told us that we must - if A.A. is to survive in the distraught world of today. We also give up rights and make sacrifices because we ought to - and better yet, because we want to. A.A. is a power greater than any of us; it must go on living or else uncounted thousands of our kind will surely die. This we know.

A.A. Tradition, How it Developed. Pages 42-43.