

## FIRST TRADITION

**Short Form:** *Our common welfare should come first. Personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity*

**Long Form:** *Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.*

*"...Our traditions are a guide to better ways of working and living...they are to group survival what the 12 steps are to each member's sobriety and serenity...."*

Our brother the noisy drunk affords the simplest illustration of this tradition. If he insists on disrupting the meeting, we invite him to leave, and we bring him back when he's in better shape to hear the message. We are putting the "common welfare" first. But it is in his welfare, too: if he's ever going to get sober, the group must go on functioning, ready for him.

Yet he is only one rare aspect of the problem. When we do get sober in A.A., we shed a few small bits of the Big Ego: We admit, "I can't handle alcohol and I can't stay away from it on my own." Fine so far! Then we find there is plenty of that ego still with us. It may lead us to take other members' inventories and to gossip about their shortcomings. It may lure us into hogging the floor at every discussion meeting.

Oh well, it's a selfish program, isn't it? After all the miseries of alcoholism, why shouldn't we indulge ourselves a little? We all know one good reason why we shouldn't: Self-indulgence of this kind is an immediate personal danger; it threatens the individual's own sobriety. More than that, it threatens the very basis of our sobriety—the unity of the A.A. group. For self-righteous gossip can damage the mutual trust that is vital to every group. And a compulsive talker can ruin the effectiveness of a discussion meeting—“I've stopped going to that group. Nobody but Joe can get a word in edgewise.”

When A.A. was very young, the first members saw the preservation of its unity as a life-or-death matter for themselves and for the alcoholics still unrecovered. The First Tradition states this aim, and it is the common aim of all the 12 Traditions. When A.A. reached the age of 35, the aim was restated in the theme of the 1970 International Convention:

This we owe to A.A.'s future:  
To place our common welfare first  
To keep our fellowship united  
For on A.A. unity depend our lives  
And the lives of those to come

*From: The Twelve Traditions Illustrated*

....Probably no society sets a higher value on the personal welfare of the individual member as does A.A. But long ago we found that the common welfare had to come first; without it there could be mighty little personal welfare. In the beginning we felt very much like Eddie Rickenbacker and his company when their plane crashed in the Pacific. They had been saved from death but found themselves still floating upon a dangerous sea. There was no doubt in their minds that the common welfare came first. Nobody dared rock that raft, lest they all perish. Bread and water were shared equally; there were no gluttons...

...Pride and fear and anger-these are the prime enemies of our common welfare. True brotherhood (and sisterhood), harmony and love, fortified by clear insights and rightly practices, are the only answers. And the purpose of A.A.'s traditional principles is to bring these forces to the top and keep them there. Only then can our common welfare be served; only then can A.A.'s unity become permanent.

*Alcoholics Anonymous Comes Of Age pg. 97-98*

*The unity of A.A is the most cherished quality our society has... We stay whole, or A.A. dies. (12 and 12)*

Our traditions are key elements in the ego deflation process necessary to achieve and maintain sobriety in A.A. The 1<sup>st</sup> Tradition reminds me not to take credit, or authority, for my recovery. Placing our common welfare first reminds me not to become a healer in this program. I am still one of the patients. Self-effacing elders built the ward. Without it, I doubt I would be alive. Without the group, few alcoholics would recover. The active role in renewed surrender of will enables me to step aside from the need to dominate, the desire for recognition, both of which played so great a part in my active alcoholism. Deferring my personal desires for the greater good of group growth contributes toward A.A. unity that is central to all recovery. It helps me to remember that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

*Daily Reflections pg.39*

**Questions for discussion**

1. Am I in my group a healing, mending, integrating person, or am I divisive? What about gossip and taking other members' inventories?
2. Do I make competitive AA remarks, such as comparing one group with another or contrasting AA in one place with AA in another?
3. Am I a peacemaker? Or, am I argumentative?
4. Am I considerate of AA members as I want them to be of me?
5. Do I go to enough meetings and read enough literature to really keep in touch?
6. Do I put down some AA activities as if I were superior for not participating in this or that aspect of AA?
7. Am I gentle with those who rub me the wrong way, or am I abrasive?