

Tradition 1

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 closely.

What brings A.A. together and keeps it unified?

The feeling of having shared in a *common peril* is one element in the powerful cement which binds us. But that in itself would never have held us together as we are now joined.

The tremendous fact for every one of us is that we have discovered a *common solution*. We have a way out on which we can *absolutely agree*, and upon which we can *join* in brotherly and harmonious action. —**Alcoholics Anonymous, pg 17**

We thought focusing on our individual sobriety would suffice....

And so we asked ourselves: What further precautions could we take that would definitely guard us against an impairment or a collapse? Nevertheless the period 1945 to 1950 was one of such exuberant success that many A.A.'s thought that our future was completely guaranteed. Nothing, they believed, could possibly happen to our Society as a whole, because God was protecting A.A. This attitude was in strong contrast to the extreme vigilance with which our members and groups had been looking after themselves. They had quite prudently declined to charge Providence with the entire responsibility for their own effectiveness, happiness, and sobriety. —**Twelve Concepts for World Service, pg 7**

...but we found that group survival and unity requires the same vigilance.

When an alcoholic applies the Twelve Steps of our recovery program to his personal life, his *disintegration* stops and his *unification* begins. The Power which now holds him together in one piece overcomes those forces which had rent him apart.

Exactly the same principle applies to each A.A. group and to Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole. So long as the ties which bind us together prove far stronger than those forces which would divide us if they could, all will be well. We shall be secure as a movement; our essential unity will remain a certainty.

Unity is so vital to us A.A.'s that we cannot risk those attitudes and practices which have sometimes demoralized other forms of human society.

But A.A. unity cannot automatically preserve itself. Like personal recovery, we shall always have to work to maintain it. Here, too, we surely need honesty, humility, open-mindedness, unselfishness, and, above all—vigilance. So we who are older in A.A. beg you who are newer to ponder carefully the experience we have already had of trying to work and live together. We would like each A.A. to become just as much aware of those disturbing tendencies which endanger us as a whole as he is conscious of those personal defects which threaten his own sobriety and peace of mind. For whole movements have, before now, gone on benders, too!

Many A.A.'s already feel that these Twelve Traditions are sound enough to become the basic guide and protection for A.A. as a whole; that we ought to apply them as seriously to our group life as we do the Twelve Recovery Steps to ourselves individually.

May we never forget that without permanent unity we can offer little lasting relief to those scores of thousands yet to join us in their quest for freedom. –**AA Tradition, How it Developed pamphlet, pg 3-4**

For one thing, our A.A. program is spiritually centered. Most of us have found enough humility to believe in and depend upon God. We have found that humility by facing the fact that alcoholism is a fatal malady over which we are *individually powerless*. The Washingtonians, on the contrary, thought drinking to be just another strong habit which could be broken by will power as expressed in pledges, plus the sustaining force of mutual aid through an understanding society of ex-drunks. Apparently they thought little of personality change, and nothing at all of spiritual conversion.

Mutual aid plus pledges did do a lot for them but it wasn't enough; their individual egos still ran riot in every channel save alcohol. Self-serving forces having no real humility, having little appreciation that the penalty for too much self will is death to the alcoholic, having no Greater Power to serve, finally destroyed the Washingtonians. When, therefore, we A.A.s look to the future, we must always be asking ourselves if the spirit which now binds us together in our common cause will always be stronger than those personal ambitions and desires which tend to drive us apart. So long as the positive forces are greater we cannot fail. Happily, so far, the ties which bind us have been much stronger than those which might break us. Though the individual A.A. is under no human coercion, is at almost perfect personal liberty, we have, nevertheless, achieved a wonderful unity on vital essentials. – **Language of the Heart, pg 7-8**

For the sake of the welfare of our entire society, the Traditions ask that every individual and every group and every area of A.A. shall lay aside all desires, ambitions, and untoward actions that could bring serious division among us or lose for us the confidence of the world at large.

The Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous symbolize the *sacrificial* character of our life together and they are the greatest unity that we know... Alcohol always threatens the individual, but we know that it cannot destroy the common welfare...Pride and fear and anger – these are the prime enemies of our common welfare. True brotherhood, harmony, and love, fortified by clear insights and right 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 96-98**

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 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... Then we find there is plenty of that Ego still with us. It may lead us to take other members' inventories and gossip about their supposed shortcomings. It may lure us into hogging the floor at every discussion meeting.

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 a 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.

When A.A. was very young, the first members clearly saw that 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 Twelve Traditions....Each of the other eleven Traditions explains one specific way to protect the unity of the Fellowship and the A.A. group. –**The Twelve Traditions Illustrated pamphlet**

We believe there isn't a fellowship on earth which lavishes more devoted care upon its individual members; surely there is none which more jealously guards the individual's right to think, talk, and act as he wishes. No A.A. can compel another to do anything; nobody can be punished or expelled. Our Twelve Steps to recovery are suggestions; the Twelve Traditions which guarantee A.A.'s unity contain not a single "Don't." They repeatedly say "We ought..." but never "You must!"

To many minds all this liberty for the individual spells sheer anarchy. Every newcomer, every friend who looks at A.A. for the first time is greatly puzzled. They see liberty verging on license, yet they recognize at once that A.A. has an irresistible strength of purpose and action. "How," they ask, "can such a crowd of anarchists function at all? How can they possibly place their common welfare first? What in Heaven's name holds them together?"

Those who look closely soon have the key to this strange paradox. The A.A. member has to conform to the principles of recovery. His life actually depends upon obedience to spiritual principles. If he deviates too far, the penalty is sure and swift; he sickens and dies. At first he goes along because he must, but later he discovers a way of life he really wants to live. Moreover, he finds he cannot keep this priceless gift unless he gives it away. Neither he nor anybody else can survive unless he carries the A.A. message. The moment this Twelfth Step work forms a group, another discovery is made—that most individuals cannot recover unless there is a group. Realization dawns that he is but a small part of a great whole; that no personal sacrifice is too great for the preservation of the Fellowship. –**Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, pg 130-131**

A.A.s cannot really do as we please, though there is no constituted human authority to restrain us. Actually, our common welfare is protected by powerful safeguards. The moment any action seriously threatens the common welfare, group opinion mobilizes to remind us; our conscience begins to complain. If one persists, he may become so disturbed as to get drunk; alcohol gives him a beating. Group opinion shows him that he is off the beam, his own conscience tells him that he is dead wrong, and, if he goes too far, Barleycorn brings him real conviction.

So it is we learn that in matters deeply affecting the group as a whole, "our common welfare comes first." Rebellion ceases and cooperation begins because it *must*; we have disciplined ourselves. **–A.A Grapevine, December 1947**

I was sitting in my home group meeting one morning a little after seven A.M., not quite awake but aware that I was safe and among friends... That morning, a fellow (a new face) stood and began to hold forth, to preach really, about the Bible. Suddenly, I was no longer in a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous but in a revival meeting. I was extremely uncomfortable and fearful. I wanted to say something, to interrupt him, but either I couldn't figure out a way to do it so as not to embarrass him or myself or I didn't have the courage. So I sat there looking at my feet, feeling miserable and hoping that any newcomers in the room would somehow know that this was not the message of AA.

After a few minutes, a member of the group interrupted the man--rather gruffly everyone later agreed--and told him that this was an AA meeting, that we really didn't want to hear about the Bible, and he asked him to sit down. Thank goodness someone had thought more of the group, thought more of our common welfare, than of his own ego and had the courage to speak up.

It provided the basis for a lengthy discussion about Tradition One and how we could deal with disruptive people in the future. We all worried that telling someone that their sharing wasn't appropriate might jeopardize their sobriety. If embarrassed, they might go out and drink. Others felt strongly that the welfare of the group as a whole was more important and that we had a responsibility to the newcomer to carry the message of AA. If our group failed in our primary purpose, newcomers would not be attracted to our meetings or worse yet, would not stay.

The result of this discussion was increased unity for the group. Everyone had their say and in the end we agreed that our common welfare as a group must come first. We would do our best to lovingly explain Tradition One to anyone who disrupted the group.

I understood that in being a member of AA and of my home group, I was a part of something much greater than I was. The principle of putting AA's welfare above my own self-interest teaches me humility and self-sacrifice. These are principles that do not come naturally to a "me-first" alcoholic. But it's a tremendous way to live. **–Unity Disrupted, A.A Grapevine, January 1998**

Discussion Questions

- 1.** What efforts can I make as an individual to help maintain the unity of our fellowship?
- 2.** What efforts can groups make to help maintain the unity of our fellowship?
- 3.** How do our efforts to pass the message or the mess impact A.A. unity? And how can we improve?
- 4.** How does unity and connection through A.A World Services impact our ability to respond to the need for AA throughout the world?
- 5.** How can I become informed and connected to A.A. and how does this improve A.A. unity?
- 6.** How can apply this principle of common welfare in my personal life? Such as putting my family's common welfare before my own or my co-worker's common welfare before my own.