

Tradition 2

Short Form: For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

Long Form: For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.

AA is both a democracy and, in Bill W.'s words, "a benign anarchy." A group elects its own officers – who have no power to *order* anybody to do anything. In most groups, most of the slate rotates out of office at the end of six months, and new officers are elected.

If a group wants to be a part of the whole A.A. service structure, it elects a G.S.R. (general service representative, with a two-year term). G.S.R.s elect area committee members and then join them in electing a delegate from their area to the annual General Service Conference. The Conference is about the closest approximation of a government that A.A. has; it produces opinions on important matters of policy; it approves the choice of some trustee nominees for the General Service Board and directly elects others. But neither the Conference nor the board can give orders to any group or member.

Then who's in charge around here? A.A. is a spiritual movement, and so the "ultimate authority" is the spiritual consent of the "group conscience" Its voice is heard when a well-informed group gathers to arrive at a decision. The result rests on more than arithmetic, a "yes" and "no" count. Minority ideas get thoughtful attention. What about that annoying character who's always sure she's right. If she's wrong, then she will – if she remembers the First Tradition as well as the Second – go along with the decision of the group conscience. Does this notion seem too cloudy? Let's think back to our first meetings. The presence we newcomers felt in those rooms was the same as the group conscience. And it was real – welcoming us in, setting no barriers or rules... *The Twelve Traditions Illustrated*

We are coming to realize that each group, as well as each individual, is a special entity, not quite like any other. Though AA groups are basically the same, each group does have its own special atmosphere, its own peculiar state of development. We believe that every AA group has a conscience. It is the collective conscience of its own membership. Daily experience informs and instructs his conscience. The group begins to recognize its own defects of character and, one by one, these are removed or lessened. As this process continues, the group becomes better able to receive right direction for its own affairs. Trial and error produces group experience and out of corrected experience comes custom. When a customary way of doing things is definitely proved to be best, then that custom forms into AA Tradition. The Greater Power is then working through a clear group conscience.....

..... Despite the fact that we do veer off at times on tangents, we are becoming more able to depend absolutely on the long-term stability of the AA group itself. With

respect to its own affairs, the collective conscience of the group will, given time, almost surely demonstrate its perfect dependability. The group conscience will, in the end, prove a far more infallible guide for group affairs than the decision of any individual member, however good or wise he may be. This is a striking and almost unbelievable fact about Alcoholics Anonymous. Hence we can safely dispense with those exhortations and punishments seemingly so necessary to other societies. And we need not depend overmuch on inspired leaders. Because our active leadership of service can be truly rotating, we enjoy a kind of democracy rarely possible elsewhere. In this respect, we may be, to a large degree, unique. *Language of the Heart - pg 78*

Tradition Two, like all the A.A. Traditions, is the voice of experience, based upon the trials of thousands of groups in our pioneering time. The main principles of Tradition Two are crystal clear: the A.A. groups are to be the final authority; their leaders are to be entrusted with delegated responsibilities only.

Tradition Two had been written in 1945, and our Trustees had then authorized its publication. But it was not until 1951 that the first experimental General Service Conference was called to see whether Tradition Two could be successfully applied to A.A. as a whole, including its Trustees and founders. It had to be found out whether the A.A. groups, by virtue of this Conference, could and would assume the ultimate responsibility for their world service operation. It took five years more for all of us to be convinced that Tradition Two was for everybody. But at St. Louis in 1955, we knew that our General Service Conference – truly representing the conscience of A.A. world-wide – was going to work and work permanently. *Twelve Concepts for World Service, pg 12*

Discussion Questions:

1. How does AA arrive at a group conscience? (at the group, intergroup, area, and General Service Conference)
2. How do I make sure my group has an informed group conscience?
3. Do I criticize or do I trust and support my group and it's members? How about my local AA committees and Office workers? Newcomers? Old-timers?
4. Do I have to save face in group discussion, or can I yield in good spirit to the group conscience and work cheerfully along with it?
5. How have I applied this tradition outside of AA? (Family discussions, Workplace discussion, etc)

