

TRADITION FOUR

(Alcoholics Anonymous Pages 564 & 565)

Short Form: Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

Long Form: With respect to its own affairs, each A.A. group should be responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when its plans concern the welfare of neighboring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect A.A. as a whole without conferring with the trustees of the General Service Board. On such issues our common welfare is paramount.

(Alcoholics Anonymous Grapevine Inc.)

Tradition Four is a specific application of general principles already outlined in Traditions One and Two. **Tradition One states:** *"Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. AA must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward."* **Tradition Two states:** *"For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority -- a loving God as he may express himself in our group conscience."*

With these concepts in mind, let us look more closely at **Tradition Four**. The first sentence guarantees each AA group local autonomy. With respect to its own affairs, the group may make any decisions; adopt any attitudes that it likes. No overall or inter group authority should challenge this primary privilege. We feel this ought to be so, even though the group might sometimes act with complete indifference to our Tradition. For example, an AA group could, if it wished, hire a paid preacher and support him out of the proceeds of a group nightclub. Though such an absurd procedure would be miles outside our Tradition, the group's "*right to be wrong*" would be held inviolate. We are sure that each group can be granted, and safely granted, these most extreme privileges. We know that our familiar process of trial and error would summarily eliminate both the preacher and the nightclub. These severe growing pains, which invariably follow any radical departure from AA Tradition, can be absolutely relied upon to bring an erring group back into line. Any human government over and above its own members need not coerce an AA group. Their own experience, plus AA opinion in surrounding groups, plus God's prompting in their group conscience would be sufficient. Much travail has already taught us this. Hence we may confidently say to each group, "You should be responsible to no other authority than your own conscience."

Yet, please note one important qualification. It will be seen that such extreme liberty of thought and action applies only to the group's own affairs. Rightly enough, this Tradition goes on to say, "*But when its plans concern the welfare of neighboring groups also, these groups ought to be consulted.*" Obviously, if any individual, group, or regional committee could take an action that might seriously affect the welfare of Alcoholics

Anonymous as a whole or seriously disturb surrounding groups, which would not be liberty at all. It would be sheer license; it would be anarchy, not democracy.

Therefore, we AAs have universally adopted the principle of consultation. This means that if a single AA group wishes to take an action that might affect surrounding groups, it consults them. Or, it confers with the inter group committee for the area, if there be one. Likewise, if a group or regional committee wishes to take any action that might affect AA as a whole, it consults the trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation, who are, in effect, our overall general service committee. For instance, no group or inter group could feel free to initiate, without consultation, any publicity that might affect AA as a whole. Nor could it assume to represent the whole of Alcoholics Anonymous by printing and distributing anything purporting to be AA standard literature. This same principle would naturally apply to all similar situations. Though there is no formal compulsion to do so, all undertakings of this general character are customarily checked with our AA general Headquarters. This idea is clearly summarized in the last sentence of Tradition Four, which observes, "*On such issues our common welfare is paramount.*"

Twelve and Twelve pgs. 147-147

When AA's traditions were first published, in 1946, we had become sure that an A.A. group could stand almost any amount of battering. We saw that the group, exactly like the individual, must eventually conform to whatever tested principles would guarantee survival. We had discovered that there was perfect safety in the process of trial and error. So confident of this had we become that the original statement of A.A.

tradition carried this significant sentence: *“Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group provided that as a group they have no other affiliation.”*

With Love and Service;

Anonymous