

The Fifth Tradition

May 5, 2012

Short Form:

“Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”

Long Form:

“Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity *having but one primary purpose*—that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”

Bill Wilson on the Fifth Tradition, from *The Language of the Heart* pages 82-83: “For to our kind, those who suffer alcoholism, recovery is a matter of life or death. So the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous cannot, it dare not, ever be diverted from its primary purpose.”

No matter how different our own personal concerns, we are all bound together by one common responsibility...to carry the message to the suffering alcoholic. Remember: AA’s function is to help alcoholics get sober.

The AA group is not a “friendly finance company, nor a welfare department, nor a housing bureau.” Additionally, the AA group does not diagnose or analyze member’s medical conditions. Nor is it the responsibility or duty of the AA group to educate the public on alcoholism. It is better to do one thing supremely well than many badly.

It is our responsibility as members of Alcoholics Anonymous to help the still suffering alcoholic. Experience has demonstrated that we alcoholics can help problem drinkers as others seldom can. It is the power of one alcoholic speaking with another. As members of Alcoholics Anonymous, it is the stories of our suffering and recovery that provide the key to sobriety.

Another reason for this singleness of purpose is the great paradox of AA: we can seldom keep the precious gift of sobriety unless we give it away. If we neglect those who are still sick, there is damage to our own lives and sanity. Under these compulsions of self-preservation, duty and love, it is not strange that AA has concluded that it has but one purpose—to carry the message to those who don’t know there’s a way out.

From The Tradition's Checklist:

- Do I ever cop out by saying, "I'm not a group, so this or that Tradition doesn't apply to me"?
- Am I willing to explain firmly to a newcomer the *limitations* of AA help, even if he gets mad at me for not giving him a loan?
- Have I today imposed on any AA member for a special favor or consideration simply because I am a fellow alcoholic?
- Am I willing to twelfth-step the next newcomer without regard to who or what is in it for me?
- Do I help my group in every way I can to fulfill our primary purpose?
- Do I remember that AA old-timers, too, can be alcoholics who still suffer? Do I try both to help them and to learn from them?

Thoughts:

- How does your group reach out to the still suffering alcoholic?
- The relationship between the 12th Step and the 5th Tradition.