

6th Tradition Background

Implicit throughout A.A.'s Twelve Traditions is the confession that our fellowship has its sins. We confess that we have character defects as a society and that these defects threaten us continually. Our Traditions are a guide to better ways of working and living, and they are also an antidote for our various maladies. The Twelve Traditions are to group survival and harmony what A.A.'s Twelve Steps are to each member's sobriety and peace of mind.

But the Twelve Traditions also point straight at many of our individual defects. By implication they ask each of us to lay aside pride and resentment. They ask for personal as well as group sacrifice. They ask us never to use the A.A. name in any quest for personal power or distinction or money. The Traditions guarantee the equality of all members and the independence of all groups. They show how we may best relate ourselves to each other and to the world outside. They indicate how we can best function in harmony as a great whole. For the sake of the welfare of our entire society, the Traditions ask that every individual and every group and every area in A.A. shall lay aside all desires, ambitions, and untoward actions that could bring serious divisions 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 force for unity that we know.

(A.A. Comes of Age pp. 96-97)

A logical outgrowth of Tradition Five, Tradition Six reads: "*An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money property of prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*"

In the old days our Foundation (now the General Service Board) was originally chartered to do everything but lobby for Prohibition. We were chartered for education; we were chartered for research; we could do almost anything. And we used to think we wanted a lot of money to do a lot of things. Out in the groups the same ideas were often prevailed.

At that time hospitals did not want us, so we thought we would build and operate our own. People needed to be told what alcoholism was, so we thought we would educate the public, perhaps rewrite school and medical textbooks. We thought we would revise the laws of the land and have it declared that alcoholics are sick people. We would carry A.A. into the dark regions of dope addiction and criminality. We would form groups for depressive and paranoid folks, and the deeper the neurosis the better we would like it.

If alcoholism could be licked, so could any problem! A.A.'s uncompromising honesty might soon clean up politics. In the factories it could cause laborers and capitalists to love each other. Having learned to live so happily, we would show

everybody else how. We thought our society of Alcoholics Anonymous might prove to be the spearhead of a new spiritual advance. Our principles might transform the world!

Yes, we did dream those dreams. How natural that was, since most alcoholics are bankrupt idealists. Nearly every one of us had wished to great good, perform great deeds that embodied great ideals. We were perfectionists who, failing to attain perfection, had gone to the other extreme and settled for the bottle and the blackout. Providence through A.A. had brought us within reach of our highest expectations. So why shouldn't we share our way of life with everyone?

Well, we tried A.A. hospitals. And they all bogged down because you cannot put an A.A. group into business; too many busybody cooks always spoil the broth. A.A. groups had their fling at education and when they began publicly to whoop up the merits of this or that brand of education, people became confused. Did A.A. fix alcoholics, or was it an educational project? Was A.A. spiritual or was it medical? Was it a reform movement? In consternation, we saw ourselves getting married to all kinds of enterprises, some good and some not so good.

When we saw alcoholics committed willy-nilly to prisons and asylums, we began to say, "There ought to be a law." In full public view, some A.A.'s commenced to thump tables in legislative committee rooms and to agitate for legal reform. That made good newspaper copy but little else. We saw that we would soon be mired in politics. We found it imperative even inside A.A. to remove the A.A. name from clubs and Twelfth Step Houses. These strenuous adventures implanted the deep-rooted conviction that in no circumstances could we endorse any related enterprise, no matter how good. We of Alcoholics Anonymous could not be all things to all men, and we should not try to be. The moment we lent the A.A. name to any outside enterprise, we got into trouble, sometimes very serious trouble.

At one time we nearly got embroiled in then "wet-dry" controversy. A liquor trade association wanted to hire an A.A. member as an educator. Its members wanted to teach that too much grog is bad for everybody and that alcoholics cannot drink at all. So far, so good. But as further appeared that in all their publicity, they wished to stress the fact that their educator, Mr. X, was a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. That was something else again. The public would at once think that Alcoholics Anonymous had gone into the field of education, via the liquor industry. If that happened, the "drys" would instantly hire another A.A. member for "educational purposes." This would land us, of course, smack in the middle of endless controversy. We simply could not take sides in this fight and do business with sick alcoholics too.

The would-be educator showed up at the New York office, asking for advice. Of course we told him that we thought factual education to be a very good thing and that as a public relations expert and as a citizen he certainly had a perfect right to take the job. But did he think that he should advertise his A.A. membership at the same time?

Our member got the point. He said, "Alcoholics Anonymous saved my life. It comes first. I certainly won't be the guy to land A.A. in big-time trouble, and this might really do it." Our friend had summed up the whole endorsement problem. We saw as never before that we could not lend the A.A. name to any cause other than our own.

Long afterward we saw something else. We saw that the more A.A. minded its own business the greater its general influence would become. Medicine and religion and psychiatry began to borrow some of our ideas and experience. So did research,

rehabilitation, and education. All sorts of therapeutic groups began to spring up. They dealt with gambling, divorce, delinquency, dope addiction, mental illness, and the like. They, too, borrowed from A.A., but they made their own adaptations. They worked their own fields, and we did not have to endorse them or tell them how live.

Our influence has not been confined just to these fields. It is beginning now to be general. It crops out in political and business life. People who know alcoholics and their families are deeply afflicted. The very developments that we once wanted to force have begun to take place of themselves.

Today we understand and accept this paradox: The more A.A. sticks to its primary purpose, the greater will be its helpful influence everywhere.

(A.A Comes of Age pp. 107-109)