

Tradition 6

“ 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, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.”

Long form

“Problems of money, property, and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim. We think, therefore, that any considerable property of genuine use to A.A. should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the material from the spiritual. An A.A. group, as such, should never go into business. Secondary aids to A.A., such as clubs or hospitals which require much property or administration, ought to be incorporated and so set apart that, if necessary, they can be freely discarded by the groups. Hence such facilities ought not use the A.A. name. Their management should be the sole responsibility of those people who financially support them. For clubs, A.A. managers are usually preferred. But hospitals, as well as other places of recuperation, ought to be well outside A.A.-and medically supervised. While an A.A. group may cooperate with anyone, such cooperation ought never go so far as affiliation or endorsement, actual or implied. An A.A. group can bind itself to no one.”

(A Common sense approach – A.A. Grapevine June 2008)

The fifth tradition tells us what the primary purpose or spiritual aim, of an AA group is: “to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.” Anything that interferes with this or confuses people about what is and is not AA can compromise the mission of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is where the Sixth Tradition comes in.

Many years ago, I served on a local AA convention committee. A member of the committee also served on board of an alcoholism agency, which held an annual “fun run” to raise money. The committee member suggested that the convention allow runners to register, pay for the race, and select an alcoholism agency T-shirt through the AA convention registration form. At first the convention committee approved the idea. After all, the money would simply be run through the convention account and turned over to the agency. ~~and~~ “the fun run,” was the same weekend as the convention, most of the runners would be a convenience for everybody, right? But soon, uncomfortable murmurs were heard during convention committee meetings. Someone cited a line from the long form of tradition six: “While an AA group may cooperate with anyone, such cooperation ought never to go so far as affiliation or endorsement, actual or implied.” With that clarification, the committee voted down the proposal, and the member who suggested the idea graciously accepted the decision.

When I was new in AA, some AA groups at a nearby men’s recovery home named themselves after the facility, and they were listed that way in the AA meeting schedule. This created some hard feelings in the AA community. Eventually, the AA group changed its name so it wouldn’t look like it was affiliated with the recovery home.

Sometimes alcoholism treatment programs advertise themselves as “AA-oriented” or “based on twelve steps,” or in a manner that includes the initials “AA,” often to trade on the good name of AA. Although only AA members acting in their AA capacities can compromise our traditions, this usage has concerned many AA members because of the potential for confusion between AA and those treatment programs. To the extent that local AA groups allow this to go unchallenged, this practice can compromise the spirit of the sixth tradition, which includes actual and implied affiliation of AA with related facilities.

(Alcoholics Anonymous – Comes Of Age pg.110-114)

Let us now talk about money and AA’s attitude toward it. Wealth had ruined many men and nations. So would it ruin us? Especially in America, money was the symbol of prestige and power and comfort. Money can do a lot of good, yet there is practically no evil, which it cannot arouse. Would AA’s brand of spirituality mix with any money at all? Or, on the other hand, should we have a *lot* of money, the better to do good works? This was the age-old dilemma and the temptation that faced us.

The conservatives said, “Why tempt ourselves with money? We don’t need it. We can meet in homes; no group will have to have a treasury. Why do we need books, offices, and world services? One alcoholic carries the message to another. Let’s keep it that simple and stay out of money trouble.” The radicals thought otherwise: “Not only do we need essential services, we need plenty more. We need hospitals, paid therapists, traveling lecturers, rehabilitation centers, and heaven knows what else. It is going to take millions. And where will we get all this money? Well, we will get it from the public just as most other good works do.”

After a while we awoke to the pleasant fact that AA as such was not going to require much money after all. When we got rid of our grandiose ideas about hospitals, research, rehabilitation, and education, not much of a bill was left to pay. Other enterprises needed large sums, but we did not. We could be spared that headache.

A big factor in our thinking at the time was the philosophy of St. Francis and Assisi. He also began as a lay movement, one man carrying the good news to the next. In his day it was common enough for individuals to pledge themselves to poverty. But it was unusual, if not unique, for a whole organization or fellowship to do that same thing. For the purpose of his society Francis thought corporate poverty to be fundamental. The less money and property they had to quarrel about, the less would be the diversion from their primary purpose. And just like AA today, his outfit did not need much money to accomplish its mission. Why be tempted and diverted when there is no need for it?

Therefore, AA adopted the wisdom of Francis as its own. Not only would we have the least possible service organization; we would use the least possible money. For this does not mean the least possible money to do the job well. It is in this sense that AA has declared for the principle of corporate poverty. It is a chief safeguard of our future.

Despite our early Tradition of keeping A.A. poor for its own safety, we were still to have temptations. There were three of them.

The first came when we met with Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and his friends in the fall of 1937. At that time the possibility of unlimited financial backing pretty much dimmed our sharing of the vision of St. Francis. Dr. Bob and I, and indeed most of us, were awfully broke. Ideas of comfortable and well paid jobs, chains of A.A.'s hospitals, and tons of free literature for suffering alkie seized our imaginations. But Mr. Rockefeller had other ideas. He said, "I think money will spoil this." He acted accordingly, and AA stayed poor. St. Francis had given us the idea, but John D. wisely forced us to live up to it. This was the oddly assorted pair who were really responsible for A.A.'s tradition on money. Thank God for them both!

The second temptation veered to the other extreme. We got so scared of money that we went tightwad, half-refusing to support AA's simple but essential area-and-over-all services, without which we would fail to function and grow. Even now we haven't quite surmounted this one. We still drag our heels when the hat is passed to support local Intergroup offices and General Headquarters. And this holding back is not for lack of folding money either. The collective income of A.A.'s membership—the sum of our wages, salaries, and other emoluments—will presently reach a total of a billion dollars yearly. When sober and working, few alcoholics have any money trouble. Our earning power as individuals may actually be double the average. The material pay-off, as well as the spiritual pay-off, of AA's way of life is downright incredible. Nevertheless, we still balk a bit when it comes to paying AA's very reasonable service bills. Sometimes I think this may be all to the good. There is not the slightest danger that AA is ever going to get too rich from the voluntary contributions of its own members!

Our third money temptation was the greatest peril of all three. One night the Trustees of our foundation were having their quarterly meeting. The agenda included a crucial question: A certain lady had died, and when her will was read, it was discovered that she had left to Alcoholics Anonymous, in trust with the Foundation, a sum of \$10,000. The question was, should AA take the gift?

What a debate we had on this one! The Foundation was really hard up just then; the groups were not sending in enough money for the support of the office; we had been tossing in all the book income, and even that had not been enough; the reserve fund was melting like snow in springtime. We badly needed that \$10,000. "Maybe," some said, "the groups will never fully support the office. We can't let it shut down; it is far too vital. Yes, let's take the money. Let's take all such donations in the future. We're going to need them."

Then came the opposition. They pointed out that the Foundation Board already knew of a total of half a million dollars set aside for AA in the wills of people still alive. Heaven only knew how much we had *not* heard about. If outside donations were not declined, not absolutely cut off, the Foundation would one day become rich. More over, at the slightest intimation to the general public from our Trustees that we needed money,

we could become immensely rich. Compared to this prospect the \$10,000 under consideration was not much, but like the alcoholic's first drink, it would, if taken, inevitably set up a disastrous chain reaction. Where would that land us? Whoever pays the piper is apt to call the tune, and if the AA Foundation obtained money from outside sources, its Trustees might be tempted to run things without reference to the wishes of AA as a whole.

*On Love + Service,
Leslie*