

# A.A. TRADITION HOW IT DEVELOPED BY BILL W.

This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.

A TOUR OF THE  
HISTORICAL EVENTS  
THAT LED TO OUR UNIQUE  
TWELVE TRADITIONS



**unity**

*ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS*<sup>®</sup> is a fellowship of men and women who share their experiences, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

- The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions
- A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation or institution; does not wish to engage nor oppose any causes.
- Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

*Copyright by © A.A. Grapevine, Inc.;  
reprinted with permissions*

*©2016 Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. All rights reserved.  
Reproduced with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.  
Copyright in the English language version of this work is owned by A.A.W.S., New York NY.*

*Mailing address:*

PO Box 1, 10 Toff Green, York, YO1 7NJ

[www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

*THIS pamphlet tells the story of the emergence and development of the principles believed essential to A.A. unity and survival.*

*Bill W.'s foreword presents in their original form the "Twelve Points to Assure Our Future". In all but the Second Tradition, the original language has been modified or shortened.*

*There are two pieces by Bill W. on the Anonymity Traditions, one written when the Fellowship was eleven years old; the other nine years later. Together they buttress our best known — and perhaps least understood — Traditions, Eleven and Twelve.*

---

## **FOREWORD**

by BILL W.

—1955\*—

How shall we A.A.'s best preserve our unity? That is the subject of this booklet. When an alcoholic applies the Twelve Steps of our recovery program to his personal life, his *disintegration* stops and his *unification* begins. The Power which now holds him together in one piece overcomes those forces which had rent him apart.

Exactly the same principle applies to each A.A. group and to Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole. So long as the ties which bind us together prove far stronger than those forces which would divide us if they could, all will be well. We shall be secure as a movement; our essential unity will remain a certainty.

\*Originally published in The A.A. Grapevine.

If, as A.A. members, we can each refuse public prestige and renounce any desire for personal power; if, as a movement, we insist on remaining poor, so avoiding disputes about extensive property and its management; if we steadfastly decline all political, sectarian or other alliances, we shall avoid internal division and public notoriety; if, as a movement, we remain a spiritual entity concerned only with carrying our message to fellow sufferers without charge or obligation; then only can we most effectively complete our mission. It is becoming ever so clear that we ought never accept even the most alluring temporary benefits if these should consist of considerable sums of money or could involve us in controversial alliances and endorsements or might tempt some of us to accept, as A.A. members, personal publicity by press or radio. Unity is so vital to us A.A.'s that we cannot risk those attitudes and practices which have sometimes demoralised other forms of human society. Thus far we have succeeded because we have been different. May we continue to be so!

**But A.A. unity** cannot automatically preserve itself. Like personal recovery, we shall always have to work to maintain it. Here, too, we surely need honesty, humility, open mindedness, unselfishness and, above all — vigilance. So we who are older in A.A. beg you who are newer to ponder carefully the experience we have already had of trying to work and live together. We would like each A.A. to become just as much aware of those disturbing tendencies which endanger us as a whole as he is conscious of those personal defects which threaten his own sobriety and peace of mind. For whole movements have, before now, gone on benders too!

The “Twelve Points of A.A. Tradition” reproduced herein is our first attempt to state sound principles of group conduct and public relations. As one of the originators of A.A., I was asked to publish these “Points”, together with supporting articles, serially in our principal monthly journal, The A.A. Grapevine. Many A.A.'s already feel that these Twelve Traditions are sound enough to become the basic guide and protection for A.A. as a whole; that we ought to apply them as seriously to our group life as we do the Twelve Recovery Steps to ourselves individually. Of this, it will take time to tell.

May we never forget that without permanent unity we

can offer little lasting relief to those scores of thousands yet to join us in their quest for freedom.

Nobody invented Alcoholics Anonymous. It grew. Trial and error has produced a rich experience. Little by little we have been adopting the lessons of that experience, first as policy and then as tradition. That process still goes on and we hope it never stops. Should we ever harden too much, the letter might crush that spirit. We could victimise ourselves by petty rules and prohibitions; we could imagine that we had said the last word. We might even be asking alcoholics to accept our rigid ideas or stay away. May we never stifle progress like that!

Yet the lessons of our experience count for a great deal. We now have had years of vast acquaintance with the problem of living and working together. If we can succeed in this adventure — and keep succeeding — then, and only then, will our future be secure.

Since personal calamity holds us in bondage no more, our most challenging concern has become the future of Alcoholics Anonymous; how to preserve among us A.A.'s such a powerful unity that neither weakness of persons nor the strain and strife of these troubled times can harm our common cause. We know that Alcoholics Anonymous must continue to live. Else, save few exceptions, we and our brother alcoholics throughout the world will surely resume the hopeless journey to oblivion.

Almost any A.A. can tell you what our group problems are. Fundamentally they have to do with our relations, one with the other and with the world outside. They involve relations of the A.A. to his group, the relation of his group to Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole and the place of Alcoholics Anonymous in that troubled sea called modern society, where all of humankind must presently shipwreck or find haven. Terribly relevant is the problem of our basic structure and our attitude toward those ever-pressing questions of leadership, money, and authority. The future may well depend on how we feel and act about things that are controversial and how we regard our public relations. Our final destiny will almost surely hang upon what we presently decide to do with these danger-fraught issues!

Now comes the crux of our discussion. It is this: Have we yet acquired sufficient experience to state clear cut policies on these, our chief concerns; can we now

declare general principles which could grow into vital traditions — traditions sustained in the heart of each A.A. by his own deep conviction and by the common consent of his fellows? That is the question. Though full answers to all our perplexities may never be found, I'm sure we have come at last to a vantage point whence we can discern the main outlines of a body of tradition which, God willing, can stand as an effective guard against all the ravages of time and circumstance.

Acting upon the persistent urge of old A.A. friends and upon the conviction that general agreement and consent among our members are now possible, I shall venture to place in words these suggestions for An Alcoholics Anonymous Tradition of Relations — Twelve Points to Assure Our Future:

*Our A.A. experience has taught us that:*

1. Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.

*(Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity).*

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.

*(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).*

3. Our membership ought to include all who suffer alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. 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.

*(The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking).*

4. 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 neighbouring 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 Alcoholic Foundation.\* On such issues our common welfare is paramount.

*(Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole).*

5. 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.

*(Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers).*

6. 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.

*(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).*

7. The A.A. groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members. We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholics Anonymous

\*Now known as The General Service Board of A.A., Inc.

is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals or other outside agencies; that acceptance of large gifts from any source or of contributions carrying any obligations whatever, is unwise. Then too, we view with much concern those A.A. treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated A.A. purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money and authority.

*(Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions).*

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional. We define professionalism as the occupation of counseling alcoholics for fees or hire. But we may employ alcoholics where they are going to perform those services for which we might otherwise have to engage nonalcoholics. Such special services may be well recompensed. But our usual A.A. Twelfth Step work is never to be paid for.

*(Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers).*

9. Each A.A. group needs the least possible organisation. Rotating leadership is the best. The small group may elect its secretary, the large group its rotating committee and the groups of a large metropolitan area their central or intergroup committee, which often employs a full-time secretary. The trustees of The Alcoholic Foundation are, in effect, our A.A. General Service Committee. They are the custodians of our A.A. tradition and the receivers of voluntary A.A. contributions by which we maintain our A.A. General Service Office at New York. They are authorised by the groups to handle our overall public relations and they guarantee the integrity of our principal journal, The A.A. Grapevine. All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in A.A. are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.

*(A.A., as such, ought never be organised; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve).*



10. No A.A. group or member should ever, in such a way as to implicate A.A., express any opinion on outside controversial issues — particularly those of politics, alcohol reform or sectarian religion. The Alcoholics Anonymous groups oppose no one. Concerning such matters they can express no views whatever.

*(Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy).*

11. Our relations with the general public should be characterised by personal anonymity. We think A.A. ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed or publicly printed. Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us.

*(Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films.)*

12. And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him Who presides over us all.

*(Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities).*

# WHO IS A MEMBER OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS?

—1946—

*(Tradition Three grew out of this piece by  
Bill W. in The A.A. Grapevine)*

The first edition of the book "Alcoholics Anonymous" makes this brief statement about membership: "The only requirement for membership is an honest desire to stop drinking. We are not allied with any particular faith, sect or denomination nor do we oppose anyone. We simply wish to be helpful to those who are afflicted". This expressed our feelings as of 1939, the year our book was published.

Since that day all kinds of experiments with membership have been tried. The number of membership rules which have been made (and mostly broken!) are legion. Two or three years ago the General Office asked the groups to list their membership rules and send them in. After they arrived we set them all down. They took a great many sheets of paper. A little reflection upon these many rules brought us to an astonishing conclusion. If all of these edicts had been in force everywhere at once it would have been practically impossible for any alcoholic to have ever joined Alcoholics Anonymous. About nine-tenths of our oldest and best members could never have got by!

**In some cases** we would have been too discouraged by the demands made upon us. Most of the early members of A.A. would have been thrown out because they slipped too much, because their morals were too bad, because they had mental as well as alcoholic difficulties. Or, believe it or not, because they did not come from the so-called better classes of society. We oldsters could have been excluded for our failure to read the book "Alcoholics Anonymous" or the refusal of our sponsor to vouch for us as a candidate. And so on ad infinitum. The way our "worthy" alcoholics have sometimes tried to judge the "less worthy" is, as we look back on it, rather comical. Imagine, if you can, one alcoholic judging another!

At one time or another most A.A. groups go on rule making benders. Naturally enough, too, as a group commences to grow rapidly it is confronted with many alarming problems. Panhandlers begin to panhandle. Members get drunk and sometimes get

others drunk with them. Those with mental difficulties throw depressions or break out into paranoid denunciations of fellow members. Gossips gossip and righteously denounce the local Wolves and Red Riding Hoods. Newcomers argue that they aren't alcoholics at all, but keep coming around anyway. "Slippees" trade on the fair name of A.A. in order to get themselves jobs. Others refuse to accept all the Twelve Steps of the recovery program. Some go still further, saying that the "God business" is bunk and quite unnecessary. Under these conditions our conservative program — abiding members get scared. These appalling conditions must be controlled, they think, else A.A. will surely go to rack and ruin. They view with alarm for the good of the movement!

**At this point** the group enters the rule and regulation phase. Charters, bylaws and membership rules are excitedly passed and authority is granted committees to filter out undesirables and discipline the evildoers. Then the Group Elders, now clothed with authority, commence to get busy. Recalcitrants are cast into the outer darkness; respectable busybodies throw stones at the sinners. As for the so-called sinners, they either insist on staying around or else they form a new group of their own. Or maybe they join a more congenial and less intolerant crowd in their neighbourhood. The elders soon discover that the rules and regulations aren't working very well. Most attempts at enforcement generate such waves of dissension and intolerance in the group that this condition is presently recognised to be worse for the group life than the very worst that the worst ever did.

After a time fear and intolerance subside. The group survives unscathed. Everybody has learned a great deal. So it is that few of us are any longer afraid of what any newcomer can do to our A.A. reputation or effectiveness. Those who slip, those who panhandle, those who scandalise, those with mental twists, those who rebel at the program, those who trade on the A.A. reputation — all such persons seldom harm an A.A. group for long. Some of these have become our most respected and best loved. Some have remained to try our patience, sober nevertheless. Others have drifted away. We have begun to regard these not as menaces, but rather as our teachers. They oblige us to cultivate patience, tolerance and humility. We finally see that they are only people sicker than the rest of us, that we who condemn them are the Pharisees whose false righteousness does our group the deeper spiritual damage.

Every older A.A. shudders when he remembers the names of persons he once condemned; people he confidently predicted would never sober up; persons he was sure ought to be thrown out of A.A. for the good of the movement. Now that some of these very persons have been sober for years, and may be numbered among his best friends, the old timer thinks to himself, "What if everybody had judged these people as I once did? What if A.A. had slammed its door in their faces? Where would they be now?"

**That is why we all judge the newcomer** less and less. If alcohol is an uncontrollable problem *to him* and *he* wishes to do something about it, that is enough for us. We care not whether his case is severe or light, whether his morals are good or bad, whether he has other complications or not. Our A.A. door stands wide open and if he passes through it and commences to do anything at all about his problem, he is considered a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. He signs nothing, agrees to nothing, promises nothing. We demand nothing. He joins us on his own say-so. Nowadays, in most groups, he doesn't even have to admit he is an alcoholic. He can join A.A. on the mere suspicion that he may be one, that he may already show the fatal symptoms of our malady.

Of course this is not the universal state of affairs throughout A.A. Membership rules still exist. If a member persists in coming to meetings drunk he may be led outside; we may ask someone to take him away. But in most groups he can come back next day, if sober. Though he may be thrown out of a club, nobody thinks of throwing him out of A.A. He is a member as long as he says he is. While this broad concept of A.A. membership is not yet unanimous, it does represent the main current of A.A. thought today. We do not wish to deny anyone his chance to recover from alcoholism. We wish to be just as inclusive as we can, never exclusive.

Perhaps this trend signifies something much deeper than a mere change of attitude on the question of membership. Perhaps it means that we are losing all fear of those violent emotional storms which sometimes cross our alcoholic world; perhaps it bespeaks our confidence that every storm will be followed by a calm; a calm which is more understanding, more compassionate, more tolerant than any we ever knew before.

## HOSPITALS AND A.A.

**(Excerpts from Bill W.'s "Adequate Hospitalisation" article in The A.A. Grapevine in 1947... background for Tradition Six)**

Many sanitariums and private hospitals are necessarily too high priced for the average alcoholic. Public hospitals being too few, asylums and religious institutions too seldom available, the average group has been hard put to find spots where prospective members can be hospitalised a few days at modest expense.

This urgency has tempted some A.A. groups to set up drying-out places of their own, hiring A.A. managers, nurses and securing the services of a visiting physician. Where this has been done under the direct auspices of an A.A. group it has almost always backfired. It has put the group into business, a kind of business about which few A.A.'s know anything at all. Too many clashing personalities, too many cooks spoiling the broth, usually bring about the abandonment of such attempts. We have been obliged to see that an A.A. group is primarily a spiritual entity; that, as a group the less business it has to transact, the better. While on this theme it ought to be noted that practically all group schemes to finance or guarantee hospital bills for fellow members have failed also. Not only do many such loans go unpaid, there is always the controversial question in the group as to which prospects deserve them in the first place.

**In still other instances** A.A. groups, driven by their acute need for medical aid, have started public money raising campaigns to set up "A.A. hospitals" in their communities. These efforts almost invariably come to naught. Not only do these groups intend to go into the hospital business, they intend to finance their ventures by soliciting the public in the name of Alcoholics Anonymous. Instantly all sorts of doubts are generated; the projects bog down. Conservative A.A.'s realise that business ventures or solicitations carrying the A.A. endorsement are truly dangerous to us all. Were this practice to become general the lid would be off. Promoters, A.A. and otherwise, would have a field day.

This search for reasonably priced and understanding medical treatment has brought into being still another class of facilities. These are rest farms and drying-out places operated by individual A.A.'s under suitable

medical supervision. These setups have proved far more satisfactory than group directed projects. As might be expected their success is in exact proportion to the managerial ability and good faith of the A.A. in charge. If he is able and conscientious, a very good result is possible; if neither, the place folds up. Not being a group project and not bearing the A.A. name, these ventures can be taken or left alone. The operation of such establishments is always beset with peculiar difficulties. It is difficult for the A.A. manager to charge high enough rates to make the venture include a fair living for himself. If he does, people are apt to say that he is professionalising or “making money out of A.A.”. Nonsense though this may often be, it is a severe handicap nevertheless.

**Yet, in spite of the headaches** encountered, a good number of these farms and sobering-up spots are in active operation and can seemingly continue just as long as they are tactfully managed, do not carry the A.A. name and do not publicly solicit funds as A.A. enterprises. When a place has an A.A. in charge we sometimes do take thoughtless advantage of the fact. We dump alcoholics into it just to get them off our hands; we promise to pay bills and do not. Any A.A. who can successfully manage one of these “drunk emporiums” ought to be congratulated. It is a hard and often thankless job though it may bring him deep spiritual satisfaction. Perhaps this is the reason so many A.A.’s wish to try it!

# CLUBS IN A.A. ARE THEY WITH US TO STAY?

—1947\*—

## *(More background for Tradition Six)*

The club idea has become part of A.A. life. Scores of these hospitable havens can report years of useful service; new ones are being started monthly. Were a vote taken tomorrow on the desirability of clubs a sizable majority of A.A.'s would record a resounding "yes". There would be thousands who would testify that they might have had a harder time staying sober in their first months of A.A. without clubs and that in any case, they would always wish for the easy contacts and warm friendships which clubs afford.

Being the majority view, we might suppose that a blanket endorsement for clubs; we might think we couldn't get along without them. We might conceive them as a central A.A. institution — a sort of "Thirteenth Step" of our recovery program without which the other Twelve Steps wouldn't work. At times club enthusiasts will act as though they really believed we could handle our alcoholic problems by club life alone. They are apt to depend upon clubs rather than upon the A.A. program.

But we have A.A.'s, rather a strong minority, too, who want no part of clubs. Not only, they assert, does the social life of a club often divert the attentions of members from the program, they claim that clubs are an actual drag on A.A. progress. They point to the danger of clubs degenerating into mere hangouts, even "joints"; they stress the bickerings that do arise over questions of money, management and personal authority; they are afraid of "incidents" that might give us unfavourable publicity. In short, they "view with alarm". Thumbs down on clubs, they say.

**Toward a middle ground**, for several years now, we have been feeling our way. Despite alarms it is quite settled that A.A.'s who need and want clubs ought to have them. So the real concern is not whether we shall have clubs. It is how we shall enhance them as assets, how we may diminish their known liabilities; how we shall be sure, in the long future, that their liabilities do not exceed their assets.

\*Originally published in The A.A. Grapevine.

club-minded and two are not. I happen to live in one which is.\* The very first A.A. club was started in New York. Though our experience here may not have been the best, it is the one I know. So, by way of portraying the principles and problems we need to discuss, I shall use it, as an average illustration of club evolution, rather than as a model setup.

**When A.A. was very young** we met in homes. People came miles, not only for the A.A. meeting itself, but to sit hours afterward at coffee, cake and eager, intimate talk. Alcoholics and their families had been lonely too long.

Then homes became too small. We couldn't bear to break up into many little meetings, so we looked for a larger place. We lodged first in the workshop of a tailoring establishment, then in a rented room at Steinway Hall. This kept us together during the meeting hour. Afterward we held forth at a cafeteria, but something was missing. It was the home atmosphere; a restaurant didn't have enough of it. Let's have a club, someone said.

So we had a club. We took over an interesting place, the former Artists and Illustrators Club on West 24th Street. What excitement! A couple of older members signed the lease. We painted and we scrubbed. We had a home. Wonderful memories of days and nights at that first club will always linger.

But, it must be admitted, not all those memories are ecstatic. Growth brought headaches; growing pains, we call them now. How serious they seemed then! "Dictators" ran amuck; drunks fell on the floor or disturbed the meetings; "steering committees" tried to nominate their friends to succeed them and found to their dismay that even sober drunks couldn't be "steered". Sometimes we could scarcely get up the rent; card players were impervious to any suggestion that they talk to new people (nowadays, most clubs have abandoned card playing altogether); lady secretaries got in each other's hair.

A corporation was formed to take over the clubroom lease so we then had "officials". Should these "directors" run the club or would it be the A.A. rotating committee?

Such were our problems. We found the use of money, the need for a certain amount of club organisation and the crowded intimacy of the place created situations

\*This situation soon changed; New York has not been "clubbanded" for more than 65 years.



we hadn't anticipated. Club life still had great joys. But it had liabilities too, that was for sure. Was it worth all the risk and trouble? The answer was "yes", for the 24th Street Club kept right on going, and is today occupied by the A.A. seamen.\* We have, besides, three more clubs in this area; a fourth is contemplated.

Our first club was known, of course, as an "A.A. clubhouse". The corporation holding its lease was titled "Alcoholics Anonymous of New York, Inc". Only later did we realise we had incorporated the whole of New York State, a mistake recently rectified. Of course our incorporation should have covered "24th Street" only. Throughout the country most clubs have started like ours did. At first we regarded them as central A.A. institutions. But later experience invariably brings a shift in their status. A shift much to be desired, we now think.

For example, the early Manhattan A.A. club had members from every section of the metropolitan area, including New Jersey. After a while dozens of groups sprang up in our suburban districts. They got themselves more convenient meeting places. Our Jersey friends secured a club of their own. So these outlying groups originally spawned from the Manhattan clubhouse began to acquire hundreds of members who were not tied to Manhattan either by convenience, inclination or old-time sentiment. They had their own local A.A. friends, their own convenient gathering places. They weren't interested in Manhattan.

**This irked New Yorkers** not a little. Since we had nurtured them, why shouldn't they be interested? We were puzzled why they refused to consider the Manhattan club the A.A. center for the metropolitan area. Wasn't the club running a central meeting with speakers from other groups? Didn't we maintain a paid secretary who sat in the New York clubhouse taking telephone calls for assistance and making hospital arrangements for all groups in the area? Of course, we thought, our outlying groups ought financially to support the Manhattan club; dutiful children should look after their "parents". But our parental pleas were of no use. Though many outlying A.A. members personally contributed to the 24th Street Club, nary a cent did their respective groups ever send in.

Then we took another tack. If the outlying groups would not support the club, they at least might want to pay the salary of its secretary. She was really doing an

\*The building was later torn down.

“area” job. Surely this was a reasonable request. But it never got anywhere. They just couldn’t mentally separate the “area secretary” from the Manhattan club. So, for a long time, our area needs, our common A.A. problem and our club management were tied into a trying financial and psychological snarl.

**This tangle slowly commenced to unravel**, as we began to get the idea that clubs ought to be strictly the business of those individuals who specially want clubs and who are willing to pay for them. We began to see that club management is a large business proposition which ought to be separately incorporated under another name — “Alanon”\*, for example; that the “directors” of a club corporation ought to look after club business only; that an A.A. group, as such, should never get into active management of a business project. Hectic experience has since taught us that if an A.A. rotating committee tries to boss the club corporation or if the corporation tries to run the A.A. affairs of those groups who may meet at the club, there is difficulty at once. The only way we have found to cure this is *to separate the material from the spiritual*. If an A.A. group wishes to use a given club, let them pay rent or split the meeting take with the club management. To a small group opening its first clubroom, this procedure may seem silly because, for the moment, the group members will also be club members. Nevertheless separation by early incorporation is recommended because it will save much confusion later on as other groups start forming in the area.

Questions are often asked: “Who elects the business directors of a club?” “Does club membership differ from A.A. membership?” “How are clubs supported and financed?”. As practices vary, we don’t quite know the answers yet. The most reasonable suggestions seem these: any A.A. member ought to feel free to enjoy the ordinary privileges of an A.A. club whether he makes a regular voluntary contribution or not. If he contributes regularly, he should, in addition, be entitled to vote in the business meetings which elect the business directors of his club corporation. This would open all clubs to all A.A.’s. But it would limit their business conduct to those interested enough to contribute regularly. In this connection, we might remind ourselves that in A.A. we have no fees or compulsory dues. But it ought to be added, of course,

\*No longer appropriate, because of potential confusion with Al Anon Family Groups (formed about five years after this was written).

that since clubs are becoming separate and private ventures, they can be run on other lines if their members insist.

Acceptance of large sums from *any source* to buy, build or finance clubs almost invariably leads to later headaches. Public solicitation is, of course, extremely dangerous. Complete self-support of clubs and everything else connected with A.A. is becoming our universal practice.

Club evolution is also telling us this: in none but small communities are clubs likely to remain the principal centers of A.A. activity. Originally starting as the main center of a city, many a club moves to larger and larger quarters thinking to retain the central meeting for its area within its own walls. Finally, however, circumstances defeat this purpose.

Circumstance number one is that the growing A.A. will burst the walls of any clubhouse. Sooner or later the principal or central meeting has to be moved into a larger auditorium. The club can't hold it. This is a fact which ought to be soberly contemplated whenever we think of buying or building large clubhouses. A second circumstance seems sure to leave most clubs in an "off center" position, especially in large cities. That is our strong tendency toward central or intergroup committee management of the common A.A. problems of metropolitan areas. Every area, sooner or later, realises that such concerns as intergroup meetings, hospital arrangements, local public relations, a central office for interviews and information, are things in which every A.A. is interested, whether he has any use for clubs or not. These being strictly A.A. matters, a central or intergroup committee has to be elected and financed to look after them.

**Groups of an area** will usually support with group funds these truly central activities. Even though the club is still large enough for intergroup meetings and these meetings are still held, the center of gravity for the area will continue to shift to the intergroup committee and its central activities. The club is left definitely outside, where, in the opinion of many, it should be. Actively supported and managed by those who want clubs, they can be "taken or left alone".

*If you have a CLUB problem, write also for the free service bulletin "A.A. Guidelines on Clubs".*

# DANGERS IN LINKING A.A. TO OTHER PROJECTS

—1947\*—

*(Dangers which Traditions Six  
and Eight recognise)*

Our A.A. experience has been raising the following set of important, but as yet unresolved, questions. First, should A.A. as a whole enter the outside fields of hospitalisation, research and noncontroversial alcohol education? Second, is an A.A. member, acting strictly as an individual, justified in bringing his special experience and knowledge into such enterprises? And thirdly, if an A.A. member does take up these phases of the total alcohol problem, under what conditions should he work?

With respect to these questions, almost any opinion can be heard among our groups. Generally speaking, there are three schools of thought: the “do everything” school; the “do something” school; and the “do nothing” school.

We have A.A.’s so fearful we may become entangled or somewhat exploited, that they would keep us a strictly closed corporation. They would exert the strongest possible pressure to prevent all A.A.’s, whether as individuals or groups, from doing anything at all about the total alcohol problem, except, of course, their straight A.A. work. They see the spectre of the Washingtonian movement among alcoholics of a hundred years ago which fell into disunity partly because its members publicly took up cudgels for abolition, prohibition — and whatnot. These A.A.’s believe that we must preserve our isolation at any cost; that we must keep absolutely to ourselves if we would avoid like perils.

**Then we have the A.A.** who would have us “do everything” for the total alcohol problem — any time, any place and any way! In his enthusiasm, he not only thinks his beloved A.A. a “cure-all” for drunks, but he also thinks we have the answer for everybody and everything touching alcohol. He strongly feels that A.A. ought to place its name and financial credit squarely behind any first rate research, hospital or educational project. Seeing that A.A. now makes the headlines, he argues that we should freely loan out our

\*Originally published in The A.A. Grapevine.

huge goodwill. Says he, "Why shouldn't we A.A.'s stand right up in public and be counted? Millions could be raised easily for good works in alcohol". The judgment of this enthusiast is sometimes beclouded by the fact he wants to make a career. But with most who enthuse so carelessly, I'm sure it's more often a case of sheer exuberance plus, in many instances, a deep sense of social responsibility.

So we have with us the enthusiasts and the ultra-cautious; the "do everything's" and the "do nothing's". But the average A.A. is not so worried about these phenomena as he used to be. He knows that out of the heat and smoke there will soon come light. Presently there will issue an enlightened policy, palatable to everyone. Tested by time, that policy, if sound, will become A.A. tradition.

**Sometimes I've feared that A.A.** would never bring forth a workable policy. Nor was my fear abated as my own views swung with complete inconsistency from one extreme to the other. But I should have had more faith. We are commencing to have enough of the strong light of experience to see more surely; to be able to say with more certainty what we can and what we surely cannot do about causes such as education, research and the like.

For example, we can say quite emphatically that neither A.A. as a whole nor any A.A. group ought to enter any activity other than straight A.A. As groups, we cannot endorse, finance or form an alliance with any other cause, however good; we cannot link the A.A. name to other enterprises in the alcohol field to the extent that the public gets the impression we have abandoned our sole aim. We must discourage, our members and our friends in these fields from stressing the A.A. name in their publicity or appeals for funds. To act otherwise will certainly imperil our unity and to maintain our unity is surely our greatest obligation — to our brother alcoholics and the public at large. Experience, we think, has already made these principles self-evident.

Though we now come to more debatable ground, we must earnestly ask ourselves whether any of us, as individuals, ought to carry our special experience into other phases of the alcohol problem. Do we not owe this much to society, and can it be done without involving A.A. as a whole?

To my mind, the "do nothing" policy has become unthinkable, partly because I'm sure that our members

can work in other non-controversial alcohol activities without jeopardising A.A., if they observe a few simple precautions and partly because I have developed a deep conviction that to do less would be to deprive the whole of society of the immensely valuable contributions we could almost certainly make. Though we are A.A.'s, and A.A. must come first, we are also citizens of the world. Besides, we are, like our good friends the physicians, honor-bound to share all we know with all men.

Therefore it seems to me that some of us must heed the call from other fields. And those who do need only remember first and last they are A.A.'s; that in their new activities they are individuals only. This means that they will respect the principle of anonymity in the press; that if they do appear before the general public they will not describe themselves as A.A.'s; that they will refrain from emphasizing their A.A. status in appeals for money or publicity.

**These simple principles of conduct**, if conscientiously applied, could soon dispel all fears, reasonable and unreasonable, which many A.A.'s now entertain. On such a basis A.A. as a whole could remain uncommitted yet friendly to any non-controversial cause seeking to write a brighter page in the dark annals of alcoholism.

Briefly summarising, I'm rather sure our policy with respect to "outside" projects will turn out to be this: A.A. does not sponsor projects in other fields. But, if these projects are constructive and non-controversial in character, A.A. members are free to engage in them without criticism if they act as individuals only and are careful of the A.A. name. Perhaps that's is. Shall we try it?

# MONEY

—1946\*—

## **(What led up to the writing of Tradition Seven)**

In Alcoholics Anonymous, does money make the mare go or is it the root of all evil? We are in the process of solving that riddle. Nobody pretends to have the complete answer. Where the proper use of money ends — and its misuse begins — is the point in “spiritual space” we are all seeking. Few group problems are giving thoughtful A.A.’s more concern than this. Everyone is asking, “What shall be our attitude toward voluntary contributions, paid workers, professionalism, and outside donations?”

**In the first years of A.A.** we had no money problems. We met in homes where our womenfolk made sandwiches and coffee. If an individual A.A. wished to grubstake a fellow alcoholic, he did so. It was purely his own affair. We had no group funds, hence no group money troubles. And it must be recorded that many an old-time A.A. wishes we could now return to those early days of halcyon simplicity. Knowing that quarrels over material things have crushed the spirit of many a good undertaking, it is often thought that too much money may prove an evil for us too.

It’s small use yearning for the impossible. Money *has* entered our picture and we *are definitely committed* to its sparing use. No one would seriously think of abolishing our meeting places and clubs for the sake of avoiding money altogether. Experience has shown that we very much need these facilities, so we must accept whatever risk there is in them.

But how shall we keep these risks to a minimum; how shall we traditionally limit the use of money so that it may never topple the spiritual foundation upon which each A.A. life so completely depends? That is our real problem today. So let us look together at the main phases of our financial situation, seeking to discover what is essential, what is non-essential, what is legitimate and harmless and what may be dangerous or unnecessary.

Suppose we begin with voluntary contributions. Each A.A. finds himself dropping money in “the hat” to pay

\*Originally published in The A.A. Grapevine.

the rent of a meeting place, a club or the maintenance of his local or national headquarters. Though not all of us believe in clubs and while a few A.A.'s see no necessity for any local or national offices, it can be said fairly that the vast majority of us believe that these services are basically necessary. Provided such facilities are efficiently handled, and their funds properly accounted for, we are only too glad to pledge them our regular support, with the full understanding, of course, that such contributions are in no wise a condition of our A.A. membership. These particular uses of our money are now generally accepted and, with some qualifications, there is little worry of dire long-range consequences.

**Yet some concern does remain**, arising mostly in connection with our clubs, local offices and the General Office. Because these places customarily employ paid workers and because their operation implies a certain amount of business management, it is sometimes felt that we may get bogged down with a heavy officialdom or, still worse, a downright professionalisation of A.A. Though it must be said that these doubts are not always unreasonable, we have already had enough experience to relieve them in large part.

To begin with it seems most certain that we need never be overwhelmed by our clubs, local offices or by the General Office at New York City. These are places of service; they cannot really control or govern A.A. If any of them were to become inefficient or overbearing the remedy is simple enough. The average A.A. would stop his financial support until conditions were changed. As our *A.A. membership does not depend on fees or dues*, we can always "take our special facilities or leave them alone". These services must always serve us well or go out of business. Because no one is compelled to support them, they can never dictate, nor can they stray from the main body of A.A. tradition for very long.

In direct line with the principle of "taking our facilities or leaving them alone" there is an encouraging tendency to incorporate all such special functions separately if they involve any great amount of money, property or management. More and more, the A.A. groups are realising that they are spiritual entities, not business organisations. Of course the smaller club rooms or meeting places often remain unincorporated because their business aspect is only nominal. But as large growth takes place it is usually found wise to



incorporate and so set the club apart from surrounding groups. *Support of the club then becomes an individual matter rather than a group matter.* If, however, the club also provides a central office secretary serving the surrounding area, it seems only fair that group treasuries in that area should shoulder this particular expense because such a secretary serves all groups, even though the club itself may not. Our evolution in large A.A. centers is beginning to indicate most clearly that while it is a proper function of a cluster of groups, or their central committee, to support a paid secretary for their area, it is not a group or central committee function to support clubs financially. Not all A.A.'s care for clubs. Therefore club support has to come mainly from those individual A.A.'s who need or like clubs, which, by the way, is the majority. But the majority ought not to try to coerce the minority into supporting clubs they do not want or need.

Of course clubs also get a certain amount of help from meetings held in them. Where central meetings for an area take place in a club it is customary to divide the collections between the club and the central committee for the area, heavily favouring the club of course, because the club is providing the meeting place. The same arrangement may be entered into between the club and any particular group which wishes to use the club whether for meeting or entertainment. Generally speaking, the board of directors of a club looks after the financial management and the social life of the place. But strictly A.A. matters remain the function of the surrounding groups themselves. This division of activity is by no means the rule everywhere: it is offered as a suggestion only, much in keeping, however, with the present trend.

**A large club or central office** usually means one or more paid workers. What about them — are they professionalising A.A.? About this, there is a hot debate every time a club or central committee gets large enough to require paid help. On this subject we have all done a pile of fuzzy thinking. And I would be one of the first to plead guilty to that charge.

The reason for our fuzzy thinking is the usual one — it is fear. To each one of us, the ideal of A.A., however short we may be of it personally, is a thing of beauty and perfection. It is a power greater than ourselves which has lifted us out of the quicksand and set us safe on shore. The slightest thought of marring our ideal, much less bartering it for gold, is to most of us unthinkable. So we are constantly on the alert against

the rise, within A.A., of a paid class of practitioners or missionaries. In A.A., where each of us is a goodwill practitioner and missionary in his own right, there is no need for anyone to be paid for simple Twelfth Step work — a purely spiritual undertaking. While I suppose fear of any kind ought to be deplored, I must confess that I am rather glad that we exercise such great vigilance in this critical matter.

**Yet there is a principle** upon which I believe we can honestly solve our dilemma. It is this: a janitor can sweep the floor, a cook can boil the beef, a steward can eject a troublesome drunk, a secretary can manage an office, an editor can get out a newspaper — all, I am sure, without professionalising A.A. If we didn't do these jobs ourselves we would have to hire non-alcoholics to do them for us. We would not ask any non-alcoholic to do these things full-time without pay. So why should some of us, who are earning good livings ourselves in the outside world, expect other A.A.'s to be full-time caretakers, cooks or secretaries? Why should these A.A.'s work for nothing at jobs which the rest of us could not or would not attempt ourselves? Or why, for that matter, should they be any the less well paid than for similar labor elsewhere? And what difference should it make if, in the course of their duties, they do some Twelfth Step work besides? Clearly the principle seems to be that we may pay well for special services — but never for straight Twelfth Step work.

How then, could A.A. be professionalised? Quite simply. I might, for example, hire an office and hang on the door a sign reading: "Bill W. — Alcoholics Anonymous Therapist. Charges \$10.00 per hour". That would be face-to-face treatment of alcoholism for a fee. And I would surely be trading on the name of Alcoholics Anonymous, a purely amateur organisation, to enlarge my professional practice. That *would* be professionalising A.A. — and how! It would be quite legal, but hardly ethical.

Now does this mean we should criticise therapists as a class — even A.A.'s who might choose to go into that field? Not at all. The point is that no one ought to advertise himself as an A.A. therapist. As we are strictly amateur there can be no such thing. That would be a distortion of the facts which none of us could afford to try. As the tennis player has to drop his amateur status when he turns professional so should A.A.'s who become therapists cease publishing their A.A. connection. While I doubt if many A.A.'s ever go

into the field of alcohol therapy, none ought to feel excluded, especially if they are trained social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists. But they certainly ought never to use their A.A. connection publicly or in such a way as to make people feel that A.A. has such a special class within its own ranks. That is where we all must draw the line.

To sum up — we have observed:

- (a) That the use of money in A.A. is a matter of the gravest importance. Where its use ends and its misuse begins is the point we should vigilantly watch.
- (b) That A.A. is already committed to a qualified use of money, because we would not think of abolishing our offices, meeting places and clubs simply for the sake of avoiding finances altogether.
- (c) That our real problem today consists in setting intelligent and traditional limits upon our use of money, thus keeping its disruptive tendency at the minimum.
- (d) That the voluntary contributions or pledges of A.A. members should be our principal and eventually our sole support; that this kind of self-support would always prevent our clubs and offices from getting out of hand, because their funds could readily be cut off whenever they failed to serve us well.
- (e) That we have found it generally wise to separately incorporate those special facilities which require much money or management; that an A.A. group is a spiritual entity, not a business concern.
- (f) That we must, at all costs, avoid the professionalisation of A.A.; that simple Twelfth Step work is never to be paid for; that A.A.'s going into alcohol therapy should never trade on their A.A. connection; that there is not, and can never be, any such thing as an "A.A. therapist".
- (g) That A.A. members may, however, be employed by us as full-time workers, provided they have legitimate duties over and beyond normal Twelfth Step work. We may, for example, surely engage secretaries, stewards and cooks without making them professional A.A.'s.

Continuing now the discussion of professionalism: A.A.'s frequently consult local committees or The

Alcoholic Foundation\* saying they have been offered positions in related fields. Hospitals want A.A. nurses and doctors, clinics ask for A.A.'s who are social workers, universities ask for A.A.'s to work in the field of alcohol education on a non-controversial basis and industry wants us to recommend A.A.'s as personnel officers. Can we, acting as individuals, accept such offers? Most of us see no reason why we cannot.

**It comes down to this.** Have we A.A.'s the right to deny society the benefit of our special knowledge of the alcohol problem? Are we to tell society, even though we might make superior nurses, doctors, social workers or educators in the field of alcohol that we cannot undertake such missions for fear of professionalising A.A.? That would certainly be farfetched, even ridiculous. Surely no A.A. should be barred from such employment because of his membership with us. He needs only to avoid "A.A. therapy" and any action or word which might hurt A.A. as a whole. Aside from this he ought to be just as employable as the non-alcoholic who would otherwise get the job and perhaps not do it half as well. In fact, I believe we still have a few A.A. bartenders. Though bartending, for obvious reasons, is not a specially recommended occupation, I have never heard anyone point out that these few members are professionalising A.A. on account of their very special knowledge of barrooms!

Years ago we used to think A.A. should have its own hospitals, rest homes and farms. Nowadays we are equally convinced we should have nothing of the sort. Even our clubs, well inside A.A., are somewhat set apart. And in the judgment of practically all, places of hospitalisation or rest should be well *outside* A.A. — and medically supervised. Hospitalisation is most definitely the job of the doctor, backed, of course, by private or community aid. It is not a function of A.A. in the sense of management or ownership. Everywhere we cooperate with hospitals. Many afford us special privileges and working arrangements. Some consult us. Others employ A.A. nurses or attendants. Relationships such as these almost always work well. But none of these institutions are known as "A.A. hospitals".

Now what about donations or payments to A.A. from outside sources? There was a time some years ago when we desperately needed a little outside aid. This we received. And we shall never cease being grateful

\*Now known as The General Service Board of A.A., Inc.

to these devoted friends whose contributions made possible The Alcoholic Foundation, the book “Alcoholics Anonymous” and our General Office. Heaven has surely reserved a special place for every one of them. They met a great need, for in those days we A.A.’s were very few and very insolvent!

But times have changed. Alcoholics Anonymous now has thousands\* of members whose combined earnings each year amount to untold millions of dollars. Hence a very powerful feeling is spreading among us that A.A. ought to be self-supporting. Since most members feel they owe their very lives to the movement, they think we A.A.’s ought to pay its very modest expenses. And isn’t it high time, they ask, that we commence to revise the prevalent idea that an alcoholic is *always* a person who must be helped — usually with money? Let us A.A.’s, they say, be no longer takers from society. Instead let us be givers. We are not helpless now. Neither are we penniless any more. Were it possible to publish tomorrow that every A.A. group has become fully self-supporting, it is probable that nothing could create more goodwill for us than such a declaration. Let our generous public devote its funds to alcohol research, hospitalisation or education. These fields really need money. But we do not. We are no longer poor. We can, and we should, pay our own way.

**Of course, it can hardly be counted** an exception to the principle of self-support if a non-alcoholic friend comes to a meeting and drops a dollar in the hat.

But it is not these small tokens of regard which concern us. It is the large contributions, especially those that may carry future obligations, which should give us pause. Then too, there is evidence that wealthy people are setting aside sums for A.A. in their wills under the impression we could use a great deal of money if we had it. Shouldn’t we discourage them? And already there have been a few alarming attempts at the public solicitation of money in the name of Alcoholics Anonymous. Few A.A.’s will fail to imagine where such a course would lead us. Every now and then we are offered money from so-called “wet” or “dry” sources. Obviously dangerous, this. For we must stay out of that ill-starred controversy. Now and then the parents of an alcoholic, out of sheer gratitude, wish to donate heavily. Is this wise? Would it be good for the alcoholic himself? Perhaps a wealthy A.A. wishes to

\*Estimated membership in 2014 is over 2,000,000.

make a large gift. Would it be good for him, or for us, if he not, especially if a newcomer, begin to think he had bought a ticket to a happy destination, sobriety?

**In no case have we ever been able to question** the true generosity of these givers. But is it wise to take their gifts? Although there may be rare exceptions, I share the opinion of most older A.A.'s that acceptance of large donations from any source whatever is very questionable and almost always a hazardous policy. True, the struggling club may badly need a friendly gift or loan. Even so, it might be better in the long run to pay as we go. We must never let any immediate advantage, however attractive, blind us to the possibility that we may be creating a disastrous precedent for the future. Strife over money and property has too often wrecked better societies than we temperamental alcoholics!

It is with the deepest gratitude and satisfaction that I can now tell you of a recent resolution passed by our over-all service committee, the trustees of The Alcoholic Foundation, who are the custodians of our national A.A. funds. As a matter of policy, they have just gone on record that they will decline all gifts carrying the slightest obligation, expressed or implied. And further, that The Alcoholic Foundation will accept no earnings which may be tendered from any commercial source. As most readers know, we have been approached of late by several motion picture concerns about the possibility of an A.A. film. Naturally money has been discussed. But our trustees, very rightly I think, take the position that A.A. has nothing to sell: that we all wish to avoid even the suggestion of commerce, and that in any case A.A., generally speaking, is now self-supporting.

To my mind, this is a decision of enormous importance to our future — a very long step in the right direction. When such an attitude about money becomes universal through A.A., we shall have finally steered clear of that golden, alluring, but very treacherous reef called Materialism.

In the years that lie just ahead Alcoholics Anonymous faces a supreme test — the great ordeal of its own prosperity and success. I think it will prove the greatest trial of all. Can we but weather that, the waves of time and circumstances may beat upon us in vain. Our destiny will be secure!

## A.A. AND ALCOHOLISM

**(This statement of A.A.'s policies in relation to the public and to other organisations has been affirmed and reaffirmed by the General Service Conference. It appears also in "How A.A. Members Cooperate", a useful pamphlet on the application of our Traditions to A.A. life)**

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS is a worldwide fellowship of men and women who help each other to maintain sobriety and who offer to share their recovery experience freely with others who may have a drinking problem. The A.A. program consists basically of Twelve Steps designed for personal recovery from alcoholism.

THE FELLOWSHIP functions through over 114,000 groups, and there is A.A. activity in more than 180 countries. Hundreds of thousands of alcoholics have achieved sobriety in A.A. but members recognise that their program is not always effective with all alcoholics and that some may require professional counseling or treatment.

A.A. IS CONCERNED solely with the personal recovery and continued sobriety of individual alcoholics who turn to the Fellowship for help. The movement does not engage in the field of alcoholism research, or medical or psychiatric treatment, and does not endorse any causes — although A.A. members often participate in other activities as individuals.

THE MOVEMENT has adopted a policy of "cooperation but non-affiliation" with other organisations concerned with the problem of alcoholism.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS is self-supporting through its own groups and members and declines contributions from outside sources. A.A. members preserve personal anonymity at the level of press, films and broadcast media.

# WILL A.A. EVER HAVE A PERSONAL GOVERNMENT?

—1947\*—

***(Today Tradition Nine says: A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve)***

The answer to this question is almost surely “no”. That is the clear verdict of our experience.

To begin with, each, A.A. has been an individual who, because of his alcoholism, could seldom govern himself. Nor could any other human being govern the alcoholic’s obsession to drink, his drive to have things his own way. Time out of mind, families, friends, employers, doctors, clergymen and judges have tried their hand at disciplining alcoholics. Almost without exception the failure to accomplish anything by coercion has been complete. Yet we alcoholics can be led, we can be inspired: coming into A.A. we can, and we gladly do, yield to the will of God. Hence it is not strange that the only real authority to be found in A.A. is that of spiritual principle. It is never personal authority.

Our unreasonable individualism (egocentricity if you like) was, of course, the main reason we all failed in life and betook ourselves to alcohol. When we couldn’t coerce others into conformity with our own plans and desires, we drank. When others tried to coerce us, we also drank. Though now sober, we still have a strong hangover of these early traits which caused us to resist authority. Therein probably hangs a clue to our lack of personal government in A.A.: no fees, no dues, no rules and regulations, no demand that alcoholics conform to A.A. principles, no one set in personal authority over anyone else. Though no sterling virtue, our aversion to obedience does pretty well guarantee us freedom from personal domination of any kind.

**Still it is a fact** that most of us do follow, in our personal lives, the Twelve *Suggested* Steps to recovery. But we do this from choice. We prefer recovery to death. Then, little by little, we perceive the spiritual basis of life is the best. We conform because we want to.

Likewise, most A.A. groups become willing to follow the “Twelve Points of Tradition to Assure Our Future”. The groups are willing to avoid controversy over

\*Originally published in The A.A. Grapevine.



outside issues such as political reform or religion; they stick to their single purpose of helping alcoholics to recover; they increasingly rely on self-support rather than outside charity. More and more do they insist on modesty and anonymity in their public relations. The A.A. groups follow these other traditional principles for the very same reason that the individual A.A. follows the Twelve Steps to recovery. Groups see they would disintegrate if they didn't and they soon discover that adherence to our tradition and experience is the foundation for a happier and more effective group life.

Nowhere in A.A. is there to be seen any constituted human authority that can compel an A.A. group to do anything. Some A.A. groups, for example, elect their leaders. But even with such a mandate each leader soon discovers that while he can always guide by example or persuasion he can never boss, else at election time he may find himself passed by.

The majority of A.A. groups do not even choose leaders. They prefer rotating committees to handle their simple affairs. These committees are invariably regarded as servants — they have only the authorisation to serve, never to command. Each committee carries out what it believes to be the wishes of its group. That is all. Though A.A. committees used to try to discipline wayward members, though they have sometimes composed minute rules and regulations and now and then have set themselves up as judges of other people's personal morals, I know of no case where any of these seemingly worthy strivings had any lasting effect — except, perhaps, the election of a brand new committee!

Surely I can make these assertions with the greatest of confidence. For in my own turn I, too, have tried a hand at governing A.A. Each time I have strenuously tried it I have been shouted down.

After struggling a few years to run the A.A. movement I had to give it up — it simply didn't work. Heavy-handed assertion of my personal authority always created confusion and resistance. If I took sides in a controversy, I was joyfully quoted by some, while others murmured, "And just who does this dictator think he is?". If I sharply criticised, I usually got double criticism on the return bounce. Personal power always failed. I can see my older A.A. friends smiling. They are recalling those times when they, too, felt a mighty call to "save the A.A. movement" from something or other. But their days of playing "Pharisee" are now

over. So those little maxims “Easy Does It” and “Live and Let Live” have come to be deeply meaningful and significant to them and to me. In such fashion each of us learns that, in A.A., one can be a servant only.

Here at the General Office we have long known that we can merely supply certain indispensable services. We can supply information and literature; we can usually tell how the majority of A.A.’s feel about our current problems; we can assist new groups to start, giving advice if asked; we can look after the over all A.A., public relations; we can sometimes mediate difficulties. Similarly, the editors of our monthly journal, *The A.A. Grapevine*, believe themselves simply a mirror of current A.A., life and thought. Serving purely as such, they cannot rule or propagandise. So, also, the trustees of The Alcoholic Foundation (our A.A. general service committee) know themselves to be simple custodians, custodians who guarantee the effectiveness of the A.A. General Office and *The A.A. Grapevine* and who are the repository of our general funds and Traditions — caretakers only.

It is most clearly apparent that, even here at the very center of A.A., there can only exist a center of service — custodians, editors, secretaries and the like — each, to be sure, with a special vital function, but none of them with any authority to govern Alcoholics Anonymous.

**That such centers of service**, international, national, metropolitan area or local, will be sufficient for the future, I can have no doubt. So long as we avoid any menacing accumulation of wealth or the growth of personal government at these centers, we cannot go astray. While wealth and authority lie at the foundation of many a noble institution, we of A.A. now apprehend, and thoroughly well, that these things are not for us. Have we not found that one man’s meat is often another man’s poison?

Shall we not do well if, instead, we can cling in some part to the brotherly ideals of the early Franciscans? Let all of us A.A.’s, whether we be trustees, editors, secretaries, janitors or cooks — or just members — ever recall the unimportance of wealth and authority as compared with the vast import of our brotherhood, love and service.

# ANONYMITY

—1946\*—

*(One of the first articles on our  
vital Anonymity Traditions)*

In the years that lie ahead the principle of anonymity will undoubtedly become a part of our vital tradition. Even today we sense its practical value. But more important still, we are beginning to feel that the word “anonymous” has for us an immense spiritual significance. Subtly but powerfully it reminds us that we are always to place principles before personalities; that we have renounced personal glorification in public; that our movement not only preaches but actually practices a true humility. That the practice of anonymity in our public relations has already had a profound effect upon us, and upon our millions of friends in the outside world, there can hardly be doubt. Anonymity is already a cornerstone of our public relations policy.

**How this idea first originated** and subsequently took hold of us is an interesting bit of A.A. history. In the years before the publication of the book “Alcoholics Anonymous”, we had no name. Nameless, formless, our essential principles of recovery still under debate and test, we were just a group of drinkers groping our way along what we hoped would be the road to freedom. Once we became sure that our feet were set on the right track we decided upon a book in which we could tell other alcoholics the good news. As the book took form we inscribed in it the essence of our experience. It was the product of thousands of hours of discussion. It truly represented the collective voice, heart and conscience of those of us who had pioneered the first four years of A.A.

As the day of publication approached we racked our brains to find a suitable name for the volume. We must have considered at least two hundred titles. Thinking up titles and voting upon them at meetings became one of our main activities. A great welter of discussion and argument finally narrowed our choice to a single pair of names. Should we call our new book “The Way Out” or should we call it “Alcoholics Anonymous”? That was the final question. A last minute vote was taken by the Akron and New York Groups. By a narrow majority the verdict was for naming our book “The Way Out”. Just

\*Originally published in The A.A. Grapevine.

before we went to print somebody suggested there might be other books having the same title. One of our early lone members (dear old Fitz M., who then lived in Washington) went over to the Library of Congress to investigate. He found exactly twelve books already titled "The Way Out". When this information was passed around, we shivered at the possibility of being the "Thirteenth Way Out". So "Alcoholics Anonymous" became first choice. That's how we got a name for our book of experience, a name for our movement and, as we are now beginning to see, a tradition of the greatest spiritual import. God does move in mysterious ways His wonders to perform!

**In the book "Alcoholics Anonymous"** there are only three references to the principle of anonymity. The foreword of our first edition states: "Being mostly business or professional folk some of us could not carry on our occupations if known" and "When writing or speaking publicly about alcoholism, we urge each of our Fellowship to omit his personal name, designating himself instead as 'a member of Alcoholics Anonymous'" and then, "very earnestly we ask the press also to observe this request for otherwise we shall be greatly handicapped".

Since the publication of "Alcoholics Anonymous" in 1939 hundreds of A.A. groups have been formed. Every one of them asks these questions: "Just how anonymous are we supposed to be?" and "After all, what good is this principle of anonymity anyway?". To a great extent each group has settled upon its own interpretation. Naturally enough wide differences of opinion remain among us. Just what our anonymity means and just how far it ought to go are unsettled questions.

Though we no longer fear the stigma of alcoholism as we once did, we still find individuals who are extremely sensitive about their connection with us. A few come in under assumed names. Others swear us to the deepest secrecy. They fear their connection with Alcoholics Anonymous may ruin their business or social position. At the other end of the scale of opinion we have the individual who declares that anonymity is a lot of childish nonsense. He feels it his bounden duty to cry his membership in Alcoholics Anonymous from the housetops. He points out that our A.A. Fellowship contains people of renown, some of national importance. Why, he asks, shouldn't we capitalise on their personal prestige just as any other organisation would?

In between these extremes the shades of opinion are

legion. Some groups, especially newer ones, conduct themselves like secret societies. They do not wish their activities known even to friends. Nor do they propose to have preachers, doctors or even their wives at any of their meetings. As for inviting in newspaper reporters — perish the thought!

Other groups feel that their communities should know all about Alcoholics Anonymous. Though they print no names, they do seize every opportunity to advertise the activities of their group. They occasionally hold public or semipublic meetings where A.A.'s appear on the platform by name. Doctors, clergymen and public officials are frequently invited to speak at such gatherings. Here and there a few A.A.'s have dropped their anonymity completely. Their names, pictures and personal activities have appeared in the public print. As A.A.'s they have sometimes signed their names to articles telling of their membership.

So while it is quite evident that most of us believe in anonymity, our practice of the principle does vary a great deal. And, indeed, we must realise that the future safety and effectiveness of Alcoholics Anonymous may depend upon its preservation.

The vital question is: Just where shall we fix this point where personalities fade out and anonymity begins?

As a matter of fact, few of us are anonymous so far as our daily contacts go. We have dropped anonymity at this level because we think our friends and associates ought to know about Alcoholics Anonymous and what it has done for us. We also wish to lose the fear of admitting that we are alcoholics. Though we earnestly request reporters not to disclose our identities, we frequently speak before semipublic gatherings under our right names. We wish to impress audiences that our alcoholism is a sickness we no longer fear to discuss before anyone. So far, so good.

If, however, we venture beyond this limit we shall surely lose the principle of anonymity forever. If every A.A. felt free to publish his own name, picture and story we would soon be launched upon a vast orgy of personal publicity which obviously could have no limit whatever. Isn't this where, by the strongest kind of tradition, we must draw the line?

1. Therefore, it should be the privilege of each A.A. to cloak himself with as much personal anonymity as he desires. His fellow A.A.'s should respect his wishes and help guard whatever status he wants to assume.

2. Conversely, the individual A.A. ought to respect the feeling of his local group about anonymity. If members of his group wish to be less conspicuous in their locality than he does, he ought to go along with them unless they change their views.
3. It ought to be a worldwide policy that no member of Alcoholics Anonymous shall ever feel free to publish, in connection with any A.A. activity, his name or picture in mediums of public circulation. This would not, however, restrict the use of his name in other public activities provided, of course, he does not disclose his A.A. membership.

**If these suggestions, or variations of them,** are to be adopted as a general policy, every A.A. will want to know more about our experience so far. He will surely wish to know how most of our older members are thinking on the subject of anonymity at the present time. It will be the purpose of this piece to bring everybody up-to-date on our collective experience.

Firstly, I believe most of us would agree that the general idea of anonymity is sound, because it encourages alcoholics and the families of alcoholics to approach us for help. Still fearful of being stigmatised, they regard our anonymity as an assurance their problems will be kept confidential; that the alcoholic skeleton in the family closet will not wander in the streets.

Secondly, the policy of anonymity is a protection to our cause. It prevents our founders or leaders, so-called, from becoming household names who might at any time get drunk and give A.A. a black eye. No one need say that couldn't happen here. It could.

Thirdly, almost every newspaper reporter who covers us complains, at first, of the difficulty of writing his story without names. But he quickly forgets this difficulty when he realises that here is a group of people who care nothing for personal gain. Probably it is the first time in his life he has ever reported an organisation which wants no personal publicity. Cynic though he may be, this obvious sincerity instantly transforms him into a friend of A.A. Therefore his piece is a friendly piece, never a routine job. It is enthusiastic writing because the reporter feels that way himself. People often ask how Alcoholics Anonymous has been able to secure such an incredible amount of excellent publicity. The answer seems to be that practically everyone who writes about us becomes an A.A. convert, sometimes a zealot. Is not our policy of anonymity mainly responsible for this phenomenon?

Fourthly, why does the general public regard us so favourably? Is it simply because we are bringing recovery to lots of alcoholics? No, this can hardly be the whole story. However impressed he may be by our recoveries, John Q. Public is even more interested in our way of life. Weary of pressure selling, spectacular promotion and shouting public characters he is refreshed by our quietness, modesty and anonymity. It well may be that he feels a great spiritual power is being generated on this account — that something new has come into his own life.

If anonymity has already done these things for us, we surely ought to continue it as a general policy. So very valuable to us now, it may become an incalculable asset for the future. *In a spiritual sense, anonymity amounts to the renunciation of personal prestige as an instrument of general policy.* I am confident that we shall do well to preserve this powerful principle; that we should resolve never to let go of it.

Now what about its application? Since we advertise anonymity to every newcomer, we ought, of course, to preserve a new member's anonymity so long as he wishes it preserved — because, when he read our publicity and came to us, we contracted to do exactly that. And even if he wants to come in under an assumed name, we should assure him he can. If he wishes us to refrain from discussing his case with anyone, even other A.A. members, we ought to respect that wish too. While most newcomers do not care a rap who knows about their alcoholism, there are others who care very much. Let us guard them in every way until they get over that feeling.

**Then comes the problem** of the newcomer who wishes to drop his anonymity too fast. He rushes to all his friends with the glad news of A.A. If his group does not caution him he may rush to a newspaper office or a microphone to tell the wide world all about himself. He is also likely to tell everyone the innermost details of his personal life, soon to find that, in this respect, he has altogether too much publicity! We ought to suggest to him that he take things easy; that he first get on his own feet before talking about A.A. to all and sundry; that no one thinks of publicising A.A. without being sure of the approval of his own group.

Then there is the problem of group anonymity. Like the individual, it is probable that the group ought to feel its way along cautiously until it gains strength and experience. There should not be too much haste to

bring in outsiders or to set up public meetings. Yet this early conservatism can be overdone. Some groups go on, year after year, shunning all publicity or any meetings except those for alcoholics only. Such groups are apt to grow slowly. They become stale because they are not taking in fresh blood fast enough. In their anxiety to maintain secrecy they forget their obligation to other alcoholics in their communities who have not heard that A.A. has come to town. But this unreasonable caution eventually breaks down. Little by little some meetings are opened to families and close friends. Clergymen and doctors may now and then be invited. Finally the group enlists the aid of the local newspaper.

In most places, but not all, it is customary for A.A.'s to use their own names when speaking before public or semipublic gatherings. This is done to impress audiences that we no longer fear the stigma of alcoholism. If, however, newspaper reporters are present they are earnestly requested not to use the names of any of the alcoholic speakers on the program. This preserves the principle of anonymity so far as the general public is concerned and at the same time represents us as a group of alcoholics who no longer fear to let our friends know that we have been very sick people.

In practice then, the principle of anonymity seems to come down to this: with one very important exception, the question of how far each individual or group shall go in dropping anonymity is left strictly to the

---

## WHY ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS IS ANONYMOUS

—1955\*—

As never before, the struggle for power, importance and wealth is tearing civilisation apart. Man against man, family against family, group against group, nation against nation.

Nearly all those engaged in this fierce competition declare that their aim is peace and justice for themselves, their neighbours and their nations

\*Originally published in The A.A. Grapevine.



individual or group concerned. The exception is: that all groups or individuals, when writing or speaking for publication as members of Alcoholics Anonymous, feel bound never to disclose their true names. It is at this point of publication that we feel we should draw the line on anonymity. *We ought not disclose ourselves to the general public through the media or the press, in pictures or on the radio.*

**Any who would drop their anonymity** must reflect that they may set a precedent which could eventually destroy a valuable principle. We must never let any immediate advantage shake us in our determination to keep intact such a really vital tradition.

*Great modesty and humility are needed by every A.A. for his own permanent recovery, if these virtues are such vital needs to the individual, so must they be to A.A. as a whole. This principle of anonymity before the general public can, if we take it seriously enough, guarantee the Alcoholics Anonymous movement these sterling attributes forever. Our public relations policy should mainly rest upon the principle of attraction and seldom, if ever, upon promotion.*

---

(How Bill W. felt about  
anonymity 20 years after  
A.A. was formed)

...give us power and we shall have justice; give us fame and we shall set a great example; give us money and we shall be comfortable and happy. People throughout the world deeply believe that and act accordingly. On this appalling dry bender, society seems to be staggering down a dead end road. The stop sign is clearly marked. It says "Disaster".

What has this got to do with anonymity and Alcoholics Anonymous?

We of A.A. ought to know. Nearly every one of us has traversed this identical dead end path. Powered by alcohol and self-justification, many of us have pursued the phantoms of self-importance and money right up to the disaster stop sign. Then came A.A. We faced about and found ourselves on a new highroad where the direction signs said never a word about power, fame or wealth. The new signs read, “This way to sanity and serenity — the price is self-sacrifice”.

Our new book, “Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions”, states that “Anonymity is the greatest protection our Society can ever have”. It says also that “The spiritual substance of anonymity is sacrifice”.

Let’s turn to A.A.’s twenty years of experience and see how we arrived at that belief, now expressed in our Traditions Eleven and Twelve.

At the beginning we sacrificed alcohol. We had to, or it would have killed us. But we couldn’t get rid of alcohol unless we made other sacrifices. Big shot-ism and phony thinking had to go. We had to toss self-justification, self-pity and anger right out the window. We had to quit the crazy contest for personal prestige and big bank balances. We had to take personal responsibility for our sorry state and quit blaming others for it.

Were these sacrifices? Yes, they were. To gain enough humility and self-respect to stay alive at all we had to give up what had really been our dearest possession—our ambitions and our illegitimate pride.

But even this was not enough. Sacrifice had to go much further. Other people had to benefit too. So we took on some Twelfth Step work; we began to carry the A.A. message. We sacrificed time, energy and our own money to do this. We couldn’t keep what we had unless we gave it away.

**Did we demand** that our new prospects give us anything? Were we asking them for power over their lives, for fame for our good work or for a cent of their money? No, we were not. We found that if we demanded any of these things our Twelfth Step work went flat. So these natural desires had to be sacrificed; otherwise, our prospects received little or no sobriety. Nor, indeed, did we.

Thus we learned that sacrifice had to bring a double benefit or else little at all. We began to know about the kind of giving of ourselves that had no price tag on it.

When the first A.A. group took form, we soon learned a lot more of this. We found that each of us had to make willing sacrifices for the group itself, sacrifices for the common welfare. The group, in turn, found that it had to give up many of its own rights for the protection and welfare of each member, and for A.A. as a whole. These sacrifices had to be made or A.A. couldn't continue to exist.

**Out of these experiences and realisations**, the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous began to take shape and substance.

Gradually we saw that the unity, the effectiveness — yes, even the survival — of A.A. would always depend upon our continued willingness to sacrifice our personal ambitions and desires for the common safety and welfare. Just as sacrifice meant survival for the individual, so did sacrifice mean unity and survival for the group and for A.A.'s entire Fellowship.

Viewed in this light, A.A.'s Twelve Traditions are little else than a list of sacrifices which the experience of twenty years has taught us that we must make, individually and collectively, if A.A. itself is to stay alive and healthy.

In our Twelve Traditions we have set our faces against nearly every trend in the outside world.

We have denied ourselves personal government, professionalism and the right to say who our members shall be. We have abandoned do-goodism, reform and paternalism. We refuse charitable money and prefer to pay our own way. We will cooperate with practically everybody, yet we decline to marry our Society to anyone. We abstain from public controversy and will not quarrel among ourselves about those things that so rip society asunder — religion, politics and reform. We have but one purpose: to carry the A.A. message to the sick alcoholic who wants it.

We take these attitudes not at all because we claim special virtue or wisdom; we do these things because hard experience has told us that we must — if A.A. is to survive in the distraught world of today. We also give up rights and make sacrifices because we ought to — and, better yet, because we want to. A.A. is a power greater than any of us; it must go on living or else uncounted thousands of our kind will surely die. This we know.

Now where does anonymity fit into this picture? What is anonymity anyhow? Why do we think it is the greatest single protection that A.A. can ever have? Why is it our

greatest symbol of personal sacrifice, the spiritual key to all our Traditions and to our whole way of life?

The following fragment of A.A. history will reveal, I deeply hope, the answer we all seek.

**Years ago a noted ballplayer** sobered up through A.A. Because his comeback was so spectacular, he got a tremendous personal ovation in the press and Alcoholics Anonymous got much of the credit. His full name and picture, as a member of A.A., were seen by millions of fans. It did us plenty of good; alcoholics flocked in. We loved this. I was specially excited because it gave me ideas.

Soon I was on the road, happily handing out personal interviews and pictures. To my delight, I found I could hit the front pages, just as he could. Besides, he couldn't hold his publicity pace, but I could hold mine. I only needed to keep travelling and talking. The local A.A. groups and newspapers did the rest. I was astonished when recently I looked at those old newspaper stories. For two or three years I guess I was A.A.'s number one anonymity-breaker.

So I can't blame any A.A. who has grabbed the spotlight since. I set the main example myself, years ago.

At the time, this looked like the thing to do. Thus justified, I ate it up. What a bang it gave me when I read those two column spreads about "Bill the Broker", full name and picture, the guy who was saving drunks by the thousands!

"Then this fair sky began to be a little overcast. Murmurs were heard from A.A. skeptics who said, "This guy Bill is hogging the big time. Dr. Bob isn't getting his share". Or, again, "Suppose all this publicity goes to Bill's head and he gets drunk on us?"

This stung. How could they persecute me when I was doing so much good? I told my critics that this was America and didn't they know I had the right of free speech? And wasn't this country and every other run by big name leaders? Anonymity was maybe okay for the average A.A. But co-founders ought to be exceptions. The public certainly had a right to know who we were.

Real A.A. power-drivers (prestige-hungry people, folks just like me) weren't long in catching on. They were going to be exceptions too. They said that anonymity before the general public was just for timid people: all the braver and bolder souls, like themselves, should stand right up before the flashbulbs and be counted.

This kind of courage would soon do away with the stigma on alcoholics. The public would right away see what fine citizens recovered drunks could make. So more and more members broke their anonymity, all for the good of A.A. What if a drunk *was* photographed with the Governor? Both he and the Governor deserved the honor, didn't they? Thus we zoomed along, down the dead end road!

The next anonymity-breaking development looked even rosier. A close A.A. friend of mine wanted to go in for alcohol education. A department of a great university interested in alcoholism wanted her to go out and tell the general public that alcoholics were sick people and that plenty could be done about it. My friend was a crack public speaker and writer. Could she tell the general public that she was an A.A. member? Well, why not? By using the name Alcoholics Anonymous she'd get fine publicity for a good brand of alcohol education and for A.A. too. I thought it an excellent idea and therefore gave my blessing.

A.A. was already getting to be a famous and valuable name. Backed by our name and her own great ability, the results were immediate. In nothing flat her own full name and picture, plus excellent accounts of her educational project, and of A.A., landed in nearly every large paper in North America. The public understanding of alcoholism increased, the stigma on drunks lessened and A.A. got new members. Surely there could be nothing wrong with that.

But there was. For the sake of this short term benefit, we were taking on a future liability of huge and menacing proportions.

**Presently an A.A. member** began to publish a crusading magazine devoted to the cause of Prohibition. He thought Alcoholics Anonymous ought to help make the world bone-dry. He disclosed himself as an A.A. member and freely used the A.A. name to attack the evils of whiskey and those who made it and drank it. He pointed out that he too was an "educator" and that his brand of education was the "right kind". As for putting A.A. into public controversy, he thought that was exactly where we should be. So he busily used A.A.'s name to do just that. Of course, he broke his anonymity to help his cherished cause along.

That was followed by a proposal from a liquor-trade association that an A.A. member take on a job of "education". People were to be told that too much alcohol was bad for anyone and that certain people —

the alcoholics — shouldn't drink at all. What could be the matter with this?

The catch was that our A.A. friend had to break his anonymity; every piece of publicity and literature was to carry his full name as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. This of course would be bound to create the definite public impression that A.A. favoured "education", liquor trade style.

Though these two developments never happened to get far, their implications were nevertheless terrific. They spelled it right out for us. By hiring out to another cause, and then declaring his A.A. membership to the whole public, it was in the power of an A.A. to marry Alcoholics Anonymous to practically any enterprise or controversy at all, good or bad. The more valuable the A.A. name became, the greater the temptation would be.

Further proof of this was not long in showing up. Another member started to put us into the advertising business. He had been commissioned by a life insurance company to deliver a series of twelve "lectures" on Alcoholics Anonymous over a national radio hookup. This would of course advertise life insurance and Alcoholics Anonymous — *and naturally our friend himself* — all in one good looking package.

At A.A. Headquarters, we read the proposed lectures. They were about 50% A.A. and 50% our friend's personal religious convictions. This could create a false public view of us. Religious prejudice against A.A. would be aroused. So we objected.

**Our friend shot back a hot letter** saying that he felt "inspired" to give these lectures and that we had no business to interfere with his right of free speech. Even though he was going to get a fee for his work, he had nothing in mind except the welfare of A.A. And if we didn't know what was good for us, that was too bad! We and A.A.'s Board of Trustees could go plumb to the devil. The lectures were going on the air.

This was a poser. Just by breaking anonymity and so using the A.A. name for his own purposes, our friend could take over our public relations, get us into religious trouble, put us into the advertising business and, for all these good works, the insurance company would pay him a handsome fee.

Did this mean that any misguided member could thus endanger our Society any time or any place simply by breaking anonymity and telling himself how much good he was going to do for us? We envisioned every A.A.

advertising man looking up a commercial sponsor, using the A.A. name to sell everything from pretzels to prune juice.

**Something had to be done.** We wrote our friend that A.A. had a right to free speech too. We wouldn't oppose him publicly, but we could and would guarantee that his sponsor would receive several thousand letters of objection from A.A. members if the program went on the radio. Our friend abandoned the project.

But our anonymity dike continued to leak. A.A. members began to take us into politics. They began to tell state legislative committees — publicly, of course — just what A.A. wanted in the way of rehabilitation, money and enlightened legislation.

Thus, by full name and often by pictures, some of us became lobbyists. Other members sat on benches with police court judges, advising which drunks in the lineup should go to A.A. and which to jail.

Then came money complications involving broken anonymity. By this time, most members felt we ought to stop soliciting funds publicly for A.A. purposes. But the educational enterprise of my university-sponsored friend had meanwhile mushroomed. She had a perfectly proper and legitimate need for money and plenty of it. Therefore, she asked the public for it, putting on drives to this end. Since she was an A.A. member and continued to say so, many contributors were confused. They thought A.A. was in the educational field or else they thought A.A. itself was raising money when indeed it was not and didn't want to.

So A.A.'s name was used to solicit funds at the very moment we were trying to tell people that A.A. wanted no outside money.

Seeing what happened, my friend, wonderful member that she is, tried to resume her anonymity. Because she had been so thoroughly publicised, this has been a hard job. It has taken her years. But she has made the sacrifice and I here want to record my deep thanks on behalf of us all.

This precedent set in motion all sorts of public solicitations by A.A.'s for money — money for drying-out farms, Twelfth Step enterprises, A.A. boardinghouses, clubs and the like — powered largely by anonymity-breaking.

We were next startled to learn that we had been drawn into partisan politics, this time for the benefit of a single individual. Running for public office, a member splashed

his political advertising with the fact that he was an A.A. and, by inference, sober as a judge! A.A. being popular in his state, he thought it would help him win on election day.

**Probably the best story in this class** tells how the A.A. name was used to back up a libel lawsuit. A member, whose name and professional attainments are known on three continents, got hold of a letter which she thought damaged her professional reputation. She felt something should be done about this and so did her lawyer, also an A.A. They assumed that both the public and A.A. would be rightfully angry if the facts were known. Forthwith, several newspapers headlined how Alcoholics Anonymous was rooting for one of its lady members — name in full, of course — to win her suit for libel. Shortly after this, a noted radio commentator told a listening audience, estimated at twelve million people, the same thing. This again proved that the A.A. name could be used for purely personal purposes... this time on a nationwide scale.

The old files at A.A. Headquarters reveal many scores of such experiences with broken anonymity. Most of them point up the same lessons.

They tell us that we alcoholics are the biggest rationalisers in the world; that fortified with the excuse we are doing great things for A.A. we can, through broken anonymity, resume our old and disastrous pursuit of personal power and prestige, public honors and money — the same implacable urges that when frustrated once caused us to drink; the same forces that are today ripping the globe apart at its seams. Moreover, they make clear that enough spectacular anonymity-breakers could someday carry our whole Society down into that ruinous dead end with them.

So we are certain that if such forces ever rule our Fellowship, we will perish too, just as other societies have perished throughout human history. Let us not suppose for a moment that we recovered alcoholics are so much better or stronger than other folks; or that, because in twenty years nothing has ever happened to A.A., nothing ever can.

Our really great hope lies in the fact that our total experience, as alcoholics and as A.A. members, has at last taught us the immense power of these forces for self-destruction. These hard-won lessons have made us entirely willing to undertake every personal sacrifice necessary for the preservation of our treasured Fellowship.



This is why we see anonymity *at the general public level* as our chief protection against ourselves, the guardian of all our Traditions and the greatest symbol of self-sacrifice that we know.

Of course no A.A. need be anonymous to family, friends or neighbours. Disclosure there is usually right and good. Nor is there any special danger when we speak at group or semipublic A.A. meetings, provided, press reports *reveal first names only*.

But before the general public — press, radio, films, television and the like — the revelation of full names and pictures is the point of peril. This is the main escape hatch for the fearful destructive forces that still lie latent in us all. Here the lid can and must stay down.

We now fully realise that 100% personal anonymity before the public is just as vital to the life of A.A. as 100% sobriety is to the life of each and every member.

I say all this with what earnestness I can; I say this because I know what the temptation of fame and money really is. I can say this because I was once a breaker of anonymity myself. I thank God that years ago the voice of experience and the urging of wise friends took me out of the perilous path into which I might have led our entire Society. Thus I learned that the temporary or seeming good can often be the deadly enemy of the permanent best. When it comes to survival for A.A., nothing short of our very best will be good enough.

**We want to maintain 100% anonymity** for still another potent reason, one often overlooked. Instead of securing us more publicity, repeated self-serving anonymity breaks could severely damage the wonderful relation we now enjoy with press and public alike. We could wind up with a poor press and little public confidence at all.

For many years, news channels all over the world have showered A.A. with enthusiastic publicity, a never-ending stream of it, far out of proportion to the news values involved. Editors tell us why this is. They give us extra space and time because their confidence in A.A. is complete. The very foundation of that high confidence is, they say, our continual insistence on personal anonymity at the press level.

Never before had news outlets and public relations experts heard of a society that absolutely refused personally to advertise its leaders or members. To them, this strange and refreshing novelty has always been proof positive that A.A. is on the square; that nobody has an angle.

This, they tell us, is the prime reason for their great goodwill. This is why, in season and out, they continue to carry the A.A. message of recovery to the whole world.

If, through enough anonymity lapses, we finally caused the press, the public and our alcoholic prospects themselves to wonder about our motives, we'd surely lose this priceless asset and, along with it, countless prospective members.

For a long time now, both Dr. Bob and I have done everything possible to maintain the Tradition of anonymity. Just before he died, some of Dr. Bob's friends suggested that there should be a suitable monument or mausoleum erected in honor of him and his wife, Anne, something befitting a founder. Dr. Bob declined, with thanks. Telling me about this a little later, he grinned and said, "For heaven's sake, Bill, why don't you and I get buried like other folks?".

**Last summer I visited** the Akron cemetery where Bob and Anne lie. Their simple stone says never a word about Alcoholics Anonymous. This made me so glad I cried. Did this wonderful couple carry personal anonymity too far when they so firmly refused to use the words "Alcoholics Anonymous", even on their own burial stone?

For one, I don't think so. I think that this great and final example of self-effacement will prove of more permanent worth to A.A. than could any spectacular public notoriety or fine mausoleum.

We don't have to go to Akron, Ohio, to see Dr. Bob's memorial. Dr. Bob's real monument is visible throughout the length and breadth of A.A. Let us look again at its true inscription... one word only, which we A.A.'s have written. That word is "sacrifice".



## **A Declaration of Unity**

This we owe to A.A.'s future:  
To place our common welfare first;  
To keep our fellowship united.  
For on A.A. unity depend our lives,  
And the lives of those to come.

## **I am responsible...**

When anyone, anywhere,  
reaches out for help, I want  
the hand of A.A. always to be there.  
And for that: I am responsible.