

One Day at a Time(s)

24 Hollywood Blvd. SW, Suite 7—Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548

"Happy, Joyous and Free!"

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Tradition Three:

July 1952—Vol. 9 No. 2

The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.

THIS tradition is packed with meaning. For AA is really saying to every serious drinker, "You are an AA member if *you* say so. You can declare yourself in; nobody can keep you out. No matter who you are, no matter how low you've gone, no matter how grave your emotional complications. . .even your crimes. . .we still can't deny you AA. We don't *want* to keep you out. We aren't a bit afraid you'll harm us, never mind how twisted or violent you may be. We just want to be sure that you get the same great chance for sobriety that we've had. So you're an AA member the minute you declare yourself."

To establish this principle of membership took years of harrowing experience. In our early time nothing seemed so fragile, so easily breakable as an AA group. Hardly an alcoholic we approached paid any attention; most of those who did join us were like flickering candles in a windstorm. Time after time their uncertain flames blew out and couldn't be relighted. Our unspoken, constant thought was, "Which of us may be the next?"

A member gives us a vivid glimpse of those days. "At one time," he says, "every AA group had many membership rules. Everybody was scared witless that something or somebody would capsize the boat and dump us all back into the drink. Our Foundation office asked each group to send in its list of 'protective' regulations. The total list was a mile long. If all those rules had been in effect everywhere, nobody could have possibly joined AA at all. So great was the sum of our anxiety and fear.

"We were resolved to admit nobody to AA but that hypothetical class of people we termed 'pure alcoholics.' Except for their guzzling, and the unfortunate results thereof, they could have no other complications. So beggars, tramps, asylum inmates, prisoners, merely plain crackpots and fallen women were definitely out. Yes sir, we'd cater *only* to pure and respectable alcoholics! Any others would surely destroy us. Besides, if we took in those odd ones, what would decent people say about us? We built a fine-mesh fence right around AA.

"Maybe this sounds comical now. Maybe you think we old-timers were pretty intolerant. But I can tell you there was nothing funny about the situation then. We were grim because we felt our lives and homes were threatened, and that was no laughing matter. Intolerant, you say? Well, we were frightened. Naturally we began to act like most everybody does when afraid. After all, isn't fear the true basis of intolerance? Yes, we were intolerant."

How could we then guess that all those fears were to prove groundless? How could we know that thousands of these sometimes frightening people were to make astonishing recoveries and become our greatest workers and intimate friends? Was it credible that AA was to have a divorce rate of probably no more than one percent? Could we then foresee that troublesome people were to become our principal teachers of patience and tolerance? Could any then imagine a society which would include



Step 3

"Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

3rd Tradition

"Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

Tradition Three Checklist

The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.

1. In my mind, do I prejudge some new AA members as losers?
2. Is there some kind of alcoholic whom I privately do not want in my AA group?
3. Do I set myself up as a judge of whether a newcomer is sincere or phony?
4. Do I let language, religion (or lack of it), race, education, age, or other such things interfere with my carrying the message?
5. Am I overimpressed by a celebrity? By a doctor, a clergyman, an ex-convict? Or can I just treat this new member simply and naturally as one more sick human, like the rest of us?
6. When someone turns up at AA needing information or help (even if he can't ask for it aloud), does it really matter to me what he does for a living? Where he lives? What his domestic arrangements are? Whether he had been to AA before? What his other problems are?

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every conceivable kind of character, and cut across every barrier of race, creed, politics and language with ease?

Why did AA finally drop all its membership regulations, why did we leave each newcomer to decide if he were an alcoholic and whether he would join us? Why did we dare say, contrary to the experience of society and government everywhere, that we would not punish nor deprive any AA of membership, that we must never compel anyone to pay anything, believe anything, or conform to anything?

The answer, now seen in Tradition Three, was simplicity itself. At last experience taught us that to take away any alcoholic's full chance was sometimes to pronounce his death sentence, and often to condemn him to endless misery. Who dared to be judge, jury, and executioner of his own sick brother?

As group after group saw these possibilities, they finally abandoned all membership regulations. One dramatic experience after another clinched this determination until it became our universal tradition. Here are two examples:

On the AA calendar it was Year Two. In that time nothing could be seen but two struggling, nameless groups of alcoholics trying to hold their faces up to the light.

A newcomer appeared at one of these groups, knocked on the door and asked to be let in. He talked frankly with that group's oldest member. He soon proved that his was a desperate case, and that above all he wanted to get well. "But," he asked, "will you let me join your group? Since I am the victim of another addiction even worse stigmatized than alcoholism, you may not want me among you. Or will you?"

There was the dilemma. What should the group do? The oldest member summoned two others, and in confidence laid the explosive facts in their laps. Said he, "Well, what about it? If we turn this man away, he'll soon die. If we allow him in, only God knows what trouble he'll brew. What shall the answer be. . .yes or no?"

At first the elders could look only at the objections. "We deal," they said, "with alcoholics only. Shouldn't we sacrifice this one for the sake of the many?" So went the discussion while the newcomer's fate hung in the balance. Then one of the three spoke in a very different voice. "What we are really afraid of," he said, "is our reputation. We are much more afraid of what people might say than the trouble this strange alcoholic might bring. As we've been talking, five short words have been running through my mind. Something keeps repeating to me 'What would the Master do?'" Not another word was said. What more indeed *could* be said.

Overjoyed, the newcomer plunged into Twelfth Step

work. Tirelessly he laid AA's message before scores of people. Since this was a very early group, those scores have since multiplied themselves into thousands. Never did he trouble anyone with his other difficulty. AA had taken its first step in the formation of Tradition Three.

Not long after the man with the double stigma knocked for admission, AA's other group received into its membership a salesman we shall call Ed. A power driver, this one, and brash as any salesman could possibly be. He had at least an idea a minute on how to improve AA. These ideas he sold to fellow members with the same burning enthusiasm with which he distributed automobile polish. But he had one idea that wasn't so saleable. Ed was an atheist. His pet obsession was that AA could get along better without its "God nonsense." He browbeat everybody, and everybody expected that he'd soon get drunk. . .for at the time, you see, AA was on the pious side. There must be a heavy penalty, it was thought, for blasphemy. Distressingly enough, Ed proceeded to stay sober.

At length the time came for him to speak in a meeting. We shivered, for we knew what was coming. He paid a fine tribute to the fellowship, he told how his family had been reunited, he extolled the virtue of honesty, he recalled the joys of Twelfth Step work, and then he lowered the boom. Cried Ed, "I can't stand this God stuff! It's a lot of malarkey for weak folks. This group doesn't need it, and I won't have it! To hell with it!"

A great wave of outraged resentment engulfed the meeting, sweeping every member to a single resolve. "Out he goes!"

The elders led Ed aside. They said firmly, "You can't talk like this around here. You'll have to quit it or get out." With great sarcasm Ed came back at them. "Now do tell! Is that so?" He reached over to a bookshelf and took up a sheaf of papers. On top of them lay the foreword to the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, then under preparation. He read aloud, "the only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking." Relentlessly, Ed went on, "When you guys wrote that sentence, did you mean it, or didn't you?"

Dismayed, the elders looked at each other, for they knew he had them cold. So Ed stayed.

Ed not only stayed, he stayed sober. . .month after month. The longer he kept dry, the louder he talked. . .against God. The group was in anguish so deep that all charity had vanished. "When, oh when," groaned members to each other, "will that guy get drunk?"

Quite a while later, Ed got a sales job which took him out of town. At the end of a few days, the new came in. He'd sent a telegram for money, and everybody knew what *that* meant! Then he got on the phone. In those days, we'd go anywhere on a Twelfth Step job, on matter how unpromising. But this time nobody stirred. "Leave him alone! Let him try it by himself for once; maybe he'll learn a lesson!"

About two weeks later, Ed stole by night into an AA member's house and, unknown to the family, went to bed. Daylight found the master of the house and a friend drinking their morning coffee. A noise was heard on the stairs. To their consternation, Ed appeared. A quizzical smile on his lips, he said, "Have you fellows had your morning meditation?" They quickly sensed that he was quite in earnest. In fragments, his story came out.

In a neighboring state, Ed had holed up in a cheap hotel. After all his pleas for help had been rebuffed, these words rang in his fevered mind: "They have deserted me. I have been deserted by my own kind. This is the end. . .nothing is left." As he tossed on his bed, his hand brushed the bureau nearby, touching a book. Opening the book, he read. It was a Gideon Bible. Ed never confided any more of what he saw and felt in that hotel room. It was the year 1938. He hasn't had a drink since.

Nowadays, when old timers who know Ed foregather they exclaim, "What if we had actually succeeded in throwing Ed out for blasphemy? What would have happened to him and all the others he later helped?"

So the hand of Providence early gave us a sign that any alcoholic is a member of our society when *he* says so.

BILL W.

Step Three

"Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him."

WHEN I came into A.A. four years ago, my will was very sick. I had been the confident master of my own affairs, heeding no desire but my own, yielding to no wish but my own. In the hour of disaster, I found myself alone and shaken, unable to think in consecutive steps, unable to arrive at decisions I could believe in, unable to enforce those decisions I did reach. I was so thoroughly in the grip of alcohol that my efforts to do without it worsened my nervous collapse.

I accepted the help of A.A. because I had to. But I accepted with strong reservations. I shied at the 2nd and 3rd Steps first because I didn't believe that this vague something in the universe that we call the Supreme Power had anything to do with me personally. There were other reasons. As a newspaper reporter I had had many contacts with missions dealing with drunks, and I didn't like the "Brother-have-you-

been-saved" guys I used to see running missions. And my pious, non-drinking, churchgoing friends who had suggested that I needed to mend my ways aroused me almost to assault and battery. So, when my sponsor mentioned the 3rd Step, I winced.

But I had to have help, and if I was unwilling to look up into the sky, I could look straight ahead. If I rejected a power higher than myself, I could accept a power other than myself. I could lean on the shoulder of another alcoholic and talk over my problems with him. I could go to meetings and make hospital calls. And when I could do none of these things, I could go off by myself and hold a mental conversation with my sponsor.

As I conducted my moral inventory and did it the way I knew my sponsor would want me to do it, I thought of all my troubles, of my waywardness, of my egotism. There was a slight shift. I was no longer talking mentally with my sponsor, but with something I had not identified. I thought of all the rules of life, the rules that people who don't get into trouble follow. I thought of the men who gave us those rules, some of them long, long ago.

Strangely, I needed little instruction. I knew what was right, and I was recognizing now that I couldn't shade the rules to suit my own pleasure. These rules guided men and women in civilized society for centuries. Great men and small had learned that in their lives something else must come first, that instead of looking within themselves they must look out. Great men and small had learned the need for self denial, the need for unselfishness, the need for doing for others. These are universal rules, and those who disregard them come to disaster eventually. I derided those rules and came to disaster; to escape disaster, I must obey.

The rules belong to the realm of what is good in life, and thus to the Good. As I look up to them, and talk mentally with myself about them and about my performance, I find myself looking to the source of the Good, talking with that source, asking to be judged according to whether I measure up to the standards.

What, then, is this? It is a power higher than my own, and it is the source of my help. It is the same power that I see at work in the group, whether individuals in the group recognize their dependence upon it or not.

I no longer worry about what the Supreme Power is. It is enough for me that my experience has taught me that the Supreme Power exists, and that it is my great help. And as long as I strive to place myself on the level on which I know this Good exists, I keep out of trouble.

Fred S.
Cleveland, Ohio
Grapevine January 1946
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**Events for
March 2011**

**Intergroup Break- 9:30 am
fast Amvets Sun March 6th**

**District 14 GSR Meeting Amvets
6:30 pm Mon Mar 7th**

**Intergroup Committee Meeting
6:30 pm Mon Mar 21st**

**MOSSYHEAD 6pm March 27th
GROUP 13 YEAR Speaker:
ANNIVERSARY Lester B.**

SUNSHINE CONVENTION

May 20-22, 2011
Crestview Community Center
For Info: email to
sunshineconvention@hotmail.com

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MARCH BIRTHDAYS

HONESTY GROUP

Len G. 2/24/96 15 yrs.

2ND CHANCE GRP

John B. 3/23/07 4yrs.

Troy W. 3/18/06 5yrs.

MIRACLE GROUP

Todd A. 3/21/09 2yrs.

Nell 3/12/77 34yrs.

Adam C. 3/27/00 1yr.

THE MEN'S GROUP

Joe P. 2/13/92 19 yrs.

Juan C. 3/18/07 4 yrs.

SPARKLE GROUP

Jim P. 3/1/93 18yrs.

Carol K. 3/11/96 15yrs.

Debra D. 3/13/98 13yrs.

MOSSYHEAD GROUP

Russ B. 26yrs.

STRAIGHT UP GROUP

Jimmy S. 3/9/10 1yr.

Debbie L. 3/25/08 3 yrs.

NICEVILLE GROUP

James A. 3/6/97 14yrs.

Darren A. 3/16/08 3yrs.

Ray C. 3/19/97 14yrs.

WEEKENDERS GRP

Jimmy S. 3/7/07 4yrs.

Darren P. 3/14/10 1yr.

GRAPEVINE "... a magic carpet on
which each of you can ride to the more
distant reaches and watch new brothers
and sisters emerge from darkness
into light." Bill W., 1959, referring to
the AA Grapevine.

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