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We come to this program from homes and apartments, offices and schools, treatment centers and jails, parks and gutters. We come from many different places; but they're all called loneliness, and pain, and fear. Somehow addiction ~~has~~ draws us together; to Narcotics Anonymous.

We come to this program for many different reasons; but those of us who stay all do so for the same reason. The desire to stop using and stay clean. After we've actually stopped ~~using~~, and after the fog has cleared a bit, most of us take a look around to see what this program is all about. ~~Many of us like what we see and want to become a part of this way of life - N.A.~~ We start trying to do the things that we see those around us doing. Eventually we come to the Twelve Steps and try to work them as best we can. The result is a degree of freedom that we have never known before. We find freedom from drugs and the obsession to use them; and in time a bit of freedom from that part of ourselves that has been destroying us.

We're taught that we can only keep what we have by giving it away. So, we seek out or are led to other addicts who have problems like ours and who want help. Usually, one of the ^{first} things we try to do when we're working with a newcomer is to get them to a meeting, ~~as soon~~ as possible. After all, that's what worked for us.

Why is this so? What is it about our meetings that's so special? Usually, about all we can say is that there's a feeling there; a feeling of strength, and hope, and love; an atmosphere of recovery. Our meetings are very special to most of us; a place that's "safe", a place where we fit in; but what keeps them that way? One would think that any time that people like us got together the result would be chaos. Groups of self-centered, strong-willed, isolated individuals just can't meet together

peacefully and safely; but we do. The reason that we can is that we have Twelve Traditions that help to keep our groups "safe" and free.

For most of us understanding of these traditions comes slowly over a period of time. We pick up a little information here and there as we talk to members and visit various groups. It usually isn't until we get involved in service that someone points out that "Personal recovery (our recovery) depends on N.A. unity", and that unity depends on how well we stick to our traditions. ~~When we learn this, most of us get interested quick and try to learn about our traditions.~~ ^{Because} We hear about "suggested steps" and "no musts" so often, ~~that~~ some of us make ~~the~~ ^a mistake and assume that this applies to our groups the same way that it applies to the individual member. The Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous are not suggested; they are not negotiable. They are the rules that keep our fellowship alive and free.

By following these principles in our dealings with others in N.A. and with society at large we avoid many problems. This isn't to say that our traditions ~~will~~ eliminate all our problems. We ~~will~~ still have to face difficulties as they arise; communications problems, differences of opinion, internal controversies, problems with individuals and groups outside the fellowship, and the like. However, ^{when we} ~~if we can~~ apply these principles ~~when they are needed we can~~ avoid some of the pitfalls, ~~and the fewer the pitfalls the smoother our road will be.~~

Many of our problems are ~~very~~ much like those our predecessors had to face, ^{and overcome.} Their hard won experience gave ^{birth to} ~~us~~ the Traditions; and our own experience has shown that these principles are just as valid today as they were yesterday. ^{Our traditions are what protect us from internal and external forces which could destroy us. They can use them. Our Traditions don't work automatically, it is only through application that they have power.} ~~The better we understand the tools, the better we can use them. Our Traditions don't work automatically, it is only through application that they have power.~~ ^{don't work automatically, it is only through understanding and application that they have power.}

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1- Jan 81

TRADITION ONE

Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on N.A. unity

It makes sense that our first Tradition concerns unity and our common welfare. One of the most important parts of our new way of life is being a part of a group of addicts also seeking recovery. Our survival is directly related to the survival of our group and of our fellowship.

Before coming to N.A. most of us tried to clean up or stay clean on our own. Many of us sought treatment or professional help. These efforts were unsuccessful for us; it wasn't until we came to N.A. that recovery seemed possible. Somehow this program could do for us what we could not do for ourselves. We came and saw this program working in the lives of other addicts. Their recovery gave us hope for ourselves. We became a part of the group and found out that we could make it too. We learned that those who came to our meetings regularly stayed clean. We also learned that those who did not continue being an active part of this fellowship faced a rough road and often relapsed. Most of us agree that without N.A. we would be in real trouble. We know that we can't do it alone, and nothing else ever worked for us. For our own good we try to do what's best for the group.

This isn't to say that the group is shoved down the individuals throat. Most of us have ^{never} experienced the kind of personal attention and care that we find in N.A. We are accepted and loved for what we are instead of in spite of what we are. The individual is precious to the group, and the group is precious to the individual. We become members when we choose to; and can leave whenever we want. No one can revoke our membership or punish us or make us do anything that we don't choose to do.

We are taught this way of life by example rather than by direction. We share our experiences and learn from each other. In our addiction we consistently placed our personal welfare before everything else. Here we find that in the long run what's best for the group is usually good for us. We choose to conform to the common good because that's what works for us.

Our personal experiences while using differ from member to member. However, as a group we have found many common themes in our addiction. One of these shared symptoms was our need to prove our self-sufficiency. We convinced ourselves that we could make it alone and proceeded to live life on that basis. The results were disastrous, and in the end, each of us has had to admit that our self-sufficiency was a lie. We found that we could not control our addiction and that we could no longer manage our own lives successfully. This surrender was the starting point of our recovery, and because we have all experienced it, surrender is a primary point of unity for our fellowship.

Not only are there common themes in our addiction, but we find that in recovery we also have much in common. We share a common desire to stop using and stay clean. We have the Twelve Steps, a common method. Each of us has learned to depend on a power greater than ourselves, this is our common strength. We have a common purpose of carrying the message to the addict who still suffers. We have our Traditions, the rules that protect us from ourselves. We share many things, and all of these are points of unity for us.

Unity is a reality in Narcotics Anonymous. This isn't to say that we don't have our disagreements and conflicts, we do. Whenever people get together there are differences of opinion and preference. However, when the chips are down we pull together. Time and time again we've seen this; in times of trouble or crisis we set aside our differences

and work for the common good. How often have we seen two members who usually don't get along very well working together with a newcomer? How often have we seen a group painting or cutting weeds to pay the rent for their meeting hall? How often have we seen members drive hundreds of miles to help support a new group? These activities and many others are commonplace within our fellowship. Unity and the common good are very important to us. They must be, because without these ^{things} N.A. could not have survived, ~~and~~ ^{and} without N.A. few of us would have survived, ~~our drug-addiction,~~ and fewer still would have found recovery.

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* How to realign our misguided instincts,

- 1 -

Tradition 2

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.

In N.A. we have a great concern for protecting ourselves from ourselves. Our second tradition is another example of this. By nature we seem to be strong willed, self-centered people seeking self-gratification in the realms of Money, Power, and Sex. An important part of our recovery is learning how to live with these drives; * how ~~not~~ to ^{stop} ~~act~~ out our insatiable ~~and~~ to disarm our self-destruct mechanisms and how to "channel our energies towards constructive ends. In other words we have to replace our "Dying Program" with a "Living Program". ~~we find in A.A.~~ Early in our recovery we learn that we did a pretty poor job with our lives. One of our sayings is that "Our best Ideas got us here" This seems apt when we look back and see how many times our schemes and plans got us into trouble despite their original intent. We were powerless over our addiction and could not manage our own lives. Now we find ourselves thrust together in N.A., mis-managers all, not one of us capable of consistently making good decisions. When we realize this and relate it to our ~~strong~~ group-oriented way of life we often experience a sort of gut-level panic feeling. ~~the~~

"But... But... But then... who's running the ship?"

At this point our old-timers usually come forward to reassure us. "Don't worry, God Takes care of fools and Dope Friends. This is a spiritual program and he won't let us screw it up." They go on to explain that in N.A. we rely on a loving god as he expresses himself in our Group Conscience

rather than personal opinion or ego. In working the steps we ^{each} come to depend on a power greater than ourselves and we carry this relationship forward and utilize it for our Group purposes. If we have each turned our will and lives over to the care of God and seek to do his will then it's obvious that our God will express himself at the Group level. When a decision needs to be made for the group each of us should take the time to meditate on what is God's will and what is most beneficial to our common welfare. If we do this then the results will ^{truly} be an expression of the spiritual conscience of our Group.

We know that this is a fact for our fellowship, but sometimes we are confused when it seems our decisions don't work out very well. We forget that we're not perfect, we forget that we only experience spiritual progress. When personalities and self-will creep into our efforts then the results suffer. We must be constantly on guard that our decisions are truly an ~~the~~ ^{often} expression of God's will. There is a vast difference between Group conscience and Group opinion, powerful personalities, or popularity. Some of our most painful growing pains have come as a result of decisions made in the name of "Group conscience". Our experience has ~~that~~ shown that ~~some~~ ^{some} there was nothing spiritual about our group decisions. ~~"We took a Group Conscience and decided that..."~~ ^{was a minute}

"We took a group conscience and decided That...." Wait a minute! We don't take Group Consciences, we take Votes. One group decided that ~~members~~ members ~~must~~ must ~~also be~~ also be graduates of a specific treatment program. Another felt that only Heroin Addicts should attend. Another accepted only Christians. Another decided that residents at a Half-way house could attend if they promised not to participate. Another let non-addicts sit in on their group ^{only} if they would contribute to the collection. Another group decided to pay its officers. One group promised that anyone who attended their meetings would be able to get a job at the local counseling center. And so on! And so on! We've made a lot of bad decisions, and pawned them off as "Group Consciences". This worries a lot of us. How can we ^{really} tell if our decisions are really Group Conscience or not, and how do we prevent painful mistakes. ~~There is one truth which helps guide us.~~


There is one truth which helps guide us. True spiritual principles are never in conflict; they always compliment each other. The true spiritual conscience of a group will never contradict any ~~other~~ of our spiritual principles. Whenever we are faced with a Group decision we try first to eliminate personalities, prejudice, ~~and self seeking~~ and self-centeredness. Then we review our decisions to make sure that they are ~~not~~ obviously not in violation of any of our 12 traditions. If ^{we} then find ~~potential~~ problems, inconsistencies or uncertainties. we take another look

at our decision and try to ^{resolve} ~~reconcile~~ them. This approach hasn't proven fool-proof but it has help to prevent problems many times.

The second Tradition also concerns the nature of Leadership in N.A. We have seen that we try to vest authority primarily in the spiritual conscience of the group. In keeping with this we make a special point of trying to prevent authoritarian leadership. We have learned that for our fellowship leadership by example and self-less service works, and that Captains who lead by direction ~~or manipulation fail.~~ ~~were even gone~~ ~~so far~~ The way we designate our group officers shows this. We chose not to have presidents, chairmen, Masters, or Directors. Instead we have secretaries, treasurers, and Representatives these titles in themselves imply service rather than control. Our experience shows that if a group ~~loses their~~ ~~and~~ becomes an extension of the personality of certain members or a leader then they loose their effectiveness. Newcomers don't stay and member stop coming. The group must then change or die. This is sometimes a difficult and painful process. Those ~~of us~~ who stay grow through the experience; but what happens to those who leave? An atmosphere of recovery in our groups is one of our most precious assets; and we must guard it carefully lest we loose it to politics and personalities.

Those of us who have been involved in service for a long time or ~~involved~~ in getting a group started and keeping the doors open through the hard, early days sometimes have a hard time letting go of the reins. Sometimes our egos get in the way, sometimes ungrounded fears get in the way, and sometimes the group gets in the way. Most of us have come with with a poor self-image and little self-worth. With time and some successes we begin to recover somewhat and develop healthier egos. ~~Some~~ We enjoy these feelings and they are healthy for us. We like recognition and attention and often deserve them. However, this sometimes gets out of hand. We ^{may} begin to pursue these things as ends in themselves and find ourselves in trouble. ~~When we are~~ ~~we are~~ With more time, and maturity we ~~learn to deal with~~ grow in humility and learn to deal with these new feelings in a more realistic and spiritual way. Another situation which often causes us problems as leaders is fear. We sometimes fear that there is no one else who can serve the group as well as we. If we turn responsibility over to newer members something terrible is going. We may ^{even} have tried to get others involved before without success. It doesn't matter, whenever we are unwilling to take a chance and let the group grow on its own, or whenever we become afraid of change we are playing God. ~~Our~~ Our friends may tell us let go and work the third step, but sometimes we are deaf to their love. ~~In these cases it is ourselves who must grow or go.~~ But again, what about those we reins

loss in the process? Still another situation which often causes leadership problems is when senior members are thrust into ~~the same positions~~ positions of power. Sometimes a group ^{or part of it} will be afraid to let their leaders step down gracefully. The ^{members} group with time and time again draft their leaders; demanding that they perform, demanding that they rule the roost. ~~But~~ In these cases ~~the~~ change is especially hard because it seems ^{that} only a crisis will do the job. Usually the leader himself must refuse to serve. This goes against the grain because we are told never to refuse an M.A. request. ~~making~~ and this has been a valuable part of our program. To refuse to lead because it is not what's best for the group requires a lot of maturity and humility.



unity - we are united by our common purpose, our basic approach to living (the twelve steps) and by the principle of anonymity. This doesn't mean that there ^{shouldn't be} ~~isn't~~ controversy and disagreement ^(these are the stepping stones for growth) between within the fellowship, but it does mean that our greater ideals sobriety, personal growth, and service