

Tradition One

This article was written by Bo S., a member of the World Service Board of Trustees, in November 1983. It represents his views at the time of writing.

The Twelve Traditions sections of the White Booklet and our Basic Text contain lines about vigilance and the ties which bind us together. We have been discovering a great deal about these things in the last few years as individuals and as a fellowship.

We are finding that it is easier to avoid a tradition violation than it is to do anything much about it once such a violation has occurred. The reason for this lies in the spiritual nature of our program. The traditions aren't laws with jail sentences or legal penalties for violations. They are every bit as spiritual as our steps. What happens when we violate the principles of one of our Twelve Steps? We hurt! And so do those around us. Following the principles in our traditions is a way to stop hurting. Being a part of our local fellowship and NA as a whole, something we say before we address an NA meeting, gives us a sense of identity and security we have usually done without for a long time when we get here. As we grow in recovery, live our steps and increasingly function as a part of the NA Fellowship, our unity gives us peace.

The Twelve Traditions could well be called the "Twelve Essentials" because it would be impossible to imagine NA without them. We would quickly become involved in issues which have nothing to do with recovery and in place of our primary purpose being to help the suffering addict, we would have a bureaucratic nightmare. The reason this will never happen is that you can't have the controls on a spiritual fellowship of recovering addicts required to truly violate them. While the parts may suffer, the whole will survive and live to better days. To violate a tradition is to take a step away from NA, and for any

of our members pain and misery follow quickly. The only thing we can do is to turn around and come back. There will always be those who understand and want to help. We have to stay in touch with the whole.

We're all in this together and each of us is as important as the rest. We need to remember that we are involved with the process of learning to live without drugs. Our difficulties are compounded when we get sidetracked on issues which make us forget our personal need for help or our ability to help others. We addicts are great ones for getting caught up in problems which don't directly concern us, and we seem to have a characteristic fascination with taking sides.

Our First Step in recovery gives us a chance to get in touch with the fact that we lack the power to manage our lives and our First Tradition points to the fact that our best chance for survival lies with the group and not by going it alone. When we are critical of others or get our feelings hurt, we rebel and forget that we can give our very best to any situation before us by applying the principles of the Twelve Steps of NA. We can surrender, ask for help, take our own inventory, allow defects to be removed, make amends, admit fault, pray, meditate and enjoy a spiritual awakening complete with principles and a renewed interest in the welfare of others who suffer like we do. Our criticisms and hurt feelings make us imagine that we are greater or lesser than someone. The pain which comes from these feelings requires us to make peace with our group in some way so that we can get on with our recoveries.

Because of the nature of our program, we often have to accept things which seem to go against common sense. Only through conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves can we hope to accept some of these things. Many living problems, group problems and problems affecting our unity seem to have no solution until we can accept them as a reality over which we have no control whatsoever. Then, at last, we can truly ask for help with an open mind. Because of the love we have for one another, we sometimes have to let a member who is causing problems go on in their difficulty in hopes that they will in time come to see their inability to manage the affairs of NA at any level. Only in

extreme cases is some sort of group action taken. None of us are perfect people so it is generally thought best to stay well back from games of manipulation or control. Some of the changes we go through as groups or members take a while for us to become able to see a remedy. During these periods, our feelings of unity may suffer. We can get so caught up in things that it seems irrelevant to take the simplest viewpoint. We can feel powerful and fall to error that way, or feel that we are the only ones experiencing difficulty coming to terms with things the way they are and fall prey to the same error: namely, we stop communicating our real feelings. We build a house of cards which always falls in on us. Cut off from the relief we should be finding at meetings, we seek to reinforce our own sick position by persuading others to our point of view. We seem to forget the effects we may be having on others. Meanwhile, NA goes on. Just as there can be no conflict between spiritual principles, there can be no real conflict between spiritual people. Appearances to the side, all we can engage in as members of NA is lovers' quarrels and most of the suffering comes from different viewpoints or differences of information. It is natural to want to side with our friends. We can also, for the sake of unity, examine the other person's point of view and achieve some benefit. We can learn to hold our tongues when we would speak badly of another member. The old saying "love will find a way" seems to apply here, but for our purposes our love must be very real to carry us through.

It is impossible to address unity without addressing feelings. Too often we have seen members shroud themselves in mystery and evasive action, when they could be enjoying themselves. Going against any one of the traditions affects the ways members feel about their program. When any of our members feel that NA is not "for real" their surrender is threatened and they may be cut off from the help they need to stay clean, stay happy, and stay alive. These members are often on the sidelines and hear disturbing accusations and justifications which make them question the spiritual nature of our basic message of recovery from addiction. They may not stay around to see the problems resolved. If they are involved with the participants, they may get in over their heads and flounder amid heated debates or

waste away during the cold war periods, when members are giving the other side a chance to cool off or growing through a process of self-examination.

We have a right to be happy today and feel good about NA. Sooner or later we all make mistakes, especially when something we love is at stake. Without spiritual principles to guide us, we will take measures to ensure against loss of what we love and this generally leads to a real mess. It is not the purpose or function of our service committees or service structure to keep NA alive. Thank God! No service committee in the world can keep even one addict clean. Only another member who cares can do that. The most important and only essential service we can perform is that of personal service, directly filling the need of another addict who needs our help. It has been said that we don't even need a service structure. This might seem to be true for some rugged individualists at times in their recovery, but where would they be if there had been no hotline, no H&I meeting, no literature, no meeting directory, no meeting or no member willing to talk to them when they first came in. We have needs as members and as groups which we would have to go to some trouble to meet without our NA service structure. Through NA we each pay a part of the price it takes to get our service needs met. We can all feel good about our service effort. Our trusted servants take the emotional and financial support we give them and transform it into something wonderful. During crises it might help to comment on the fact that without the resources of the Fellowship of NA, our servants would be on the street again. This makes them truly our servants. It is our trust which makes them trusted. During difficult periods, it can be difficult to figure out who is on the power trip, the group or the individuals. Certainly without the group, the individual doesn't stand a chance but how about the group? A group which doesn't support good servants may have to go awhile without the things which help other groups, areas and regions prosper until they figure out how badly they need the individual's talents and energy. The group can't have servants beyond what they are able to encourage and support.

This article has dealt with the feelings of our members and some of the interactions which affect

our NA unity. As long as we can remember who we are, what we are, and where we came from, just that long will we be able to be grateful for what we have today through NA. We are facing many changes today in NA but the Twelve Steps haven't changed and neither have the traditions. None of us has to face our problems alone. In a sense, we are still doing what we recovering addicts have always done: learning to use the resources available to us in NA to help ourselves and others live a better life clean. The traditions allow us to maintain the spiritual nature of our program and focus our energies on recovery from addiction. They keep us from being troubled by things which have nothing to do with NA. The source

of our unity is the feeling within each of us reflected at the group level. This feeling reflects our gratitude and spiritual growth. It is the knowledge within that everything is going to be okay; no matter what this one does or that one, however any particular item is voted on, who gets elected, whatever trouble we may be having, there will still be some NA members to sit around with and say "Let's get on with the meeting." Recovery and the good feelings inside we get to share in meetings and with each other will always be the keys to NA and our sense of unity.

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