

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 32, NO. 4 APR 2008

Tradition Three: An Anchor Of AA

Embracing the spirit of the Tradition

I often hear discussions among members that address the question: "Is AA different today from what it used to be?" Of course, the answer is, "In some ways, yes, and in other ways, no."

I came to AA in 1959 and have watched the evolution of our Fellowship over four decades. The basis of our program remains the same. The details are in the Big Book, the "Twelve and Twelve," and *AA Comes of Age*. But yes, there have been subtle changes in members' attitudes and commitment and in the application of established and proven approaches.

I believe this is most evident in the practice and application of the Traditions. In the past, members sought to determine the spirit of each Tradition; today, I frequently encounter members and groups seeking to debate the "legal" interpretation of a Tradition, and arriving at an interpretation that is usually slanted in a way that supports their particular point of view.

Members stay away from Tradition meetings in droves and attend discussion meetings in hordes. This says to me, "I do not care to know what the spirit of AA is all about; all I want to do is vent my feelings." I would remind these folks of a chapter in the Big Book entitled "Into Action." There is no chapter entitled "Into Feelings." It is this I-want-it-to-be-my-way approach to the Traditions that may someday destroy our Fellowship from within.

For those not familiar with the spirit of the Traditions, I would certainly advise reading both the long and short form of the first three Traditions printed in the back of the Big Book, and the first three Traditions in the "Twelve and Twelve." These Traditions form the spiritual approach required to keep AA vibrant and alive—the spirit of AA, so to speak.

Tradition One says: Hey, buddy, you aren't the most important thing here, the group is. Whatever you do or

say should be in the best interests of the membership of AA as a whole, not you. "Selfishness, self-centeredness, that, we think, is the root of our problem." Tradition One deals with the root of our problem.

The first three Traditions form the spiritual approach required to keep AA vibrant and alive.

Tradition Two says: Hey, buddy, you aren't in charge here, God is. Understanding God's will requires time for prayer and meditation before a major decision is made. In a group, any and all decisions can be major. Tradition Two deals with the development of trust in God, and patience.

Tradition Three says: Hey, buddy, if you agree with points one and two and are willing to embrace the spirit of these Traditions, you can be a member if you have a desire to stop drinking. Tradition Three deals with our need to serve others in a meaningful way to acquire and maintain long-term sobriety. It should be noted that the member comes third after the group and after God.

The May 2004 edition of the Grapevine is dedicated to the topic "Singleness of Purpose." Sit very quietly and think of all the AA groups throughout the world, about God's will for AA, about our historical roots, and about how you are less important than your group or God. If you do, you should have no difficulty understanding the cofounders' intentions regarding the spirit and meaning of "singleness of purpose."

Ed T.

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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Calendar Events

Upcoming Events

5th Annual Round Up

April 25 - 27, 2008

Pahrump, NV

Info: 775-253-0338

Email questions to: earthart@teknnett.com

24th Annual Tri-State Round Up

May 16 - 18, 2008

Laughlin, NV

Info: 928-753-6035 Website: www.tristate-roundup.com

23rd Annual AALA Roundup

May 23 - 26, 2008

Burbank, CA

Info: 310-285-3272

Website: www.aalaroundup.com

18th Annual Bike-N-4-Books

June 7, 2008

Woodley Park Picnic Area #2, Van Nuys, CA

Info: 818-346-4812

Website: www.sfvhi.org/BN4B.html

A.A. Desert Pow Wow

June 12 - 15, 2008

Indian Wells, CA

Info: 760-321-6568

Website: www.desertpowwow.com

24rd Annual South Bay Roundup

July 3 - 6, 2008

Burbank, CA

Info: 310-354-7660

Website: www.southbayroundup.org

Service Committee Schedule

April 21, 2008

SFV H&I

THIRD MONDAY

8PM Business Meeting

7PM Get Acquainted Workshop

5657 Lindley Ave.

May 5, 2008

G.S. District #11

FIRST MONDAY

6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting

315 W. Vine St., Glendale

May 5, 2008

G.S. District #16

FIRST MONDAY

6:15PM meeting

15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

May 5, 2008

G.S. District #17

FIRST MONDAY

6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting

5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

May 6, 2008

G.S. District #2

FIRST TUESDAY

5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

May 7, 2008

G.S. District #1

FIRST WEDNESDAY

6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

May 7, 2008

SFV Board of Directors

6:30PM, Central Office

May 10, 2008

G.S. District #7

SECOND SATURDAY

9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club

33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd

May 12, 2008

SFV Intergroup

SECOND MONDAY

6:30PM Orientation

7PM, Business Meeting

St. Innocents Church

Valley Events

Your Central Office needs **telephone volunteers** for **all** shifts, especially the Overnight (12 Midnight - 9 AM) shift.

If you have one year or more of continuous sobriety, we invite you to join us and help your fellow alcoholics. You can sign up in the office or online at <http://www.sfvaa.org/involve.html>.

Opportunities for Service

Your Central Office needs **telephone volunteers** for the Late Evening (9 PM - 12 Midnight) shift and the Overnight (12 Midnight - 9 AM) shift. If you have one year or more of continuous sobriety, you can sign up to do a shift (from your home!) once per month and help you fellow alcoholics.

Service Opportunities & News

Service Opportunities in the San Fernando Valley

PUBLIC INFORMATION COMMITTEE -

Provides information to the general public about what A.A. does and does not do. Could always use volunteers, especially young people and Spanish speaking A.A.'s for health fairs and to speak at various schools and businesses. Contact Central Office (818) 988-3001.

HOSPITAL AND INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE -

Carries the message of Alcoholics Anonymous into hospitals, prisons & treatment facilities to those who are unable to get out to meetings. Meets the third Monday of each month 8:00 pm (Get Acquainted Workshop, 7:00 pm) at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. For more information, contact Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY INTERGROUP -

Elected Intergroup representatives maintain and develop policies for Central Office, and inform other IG Reps about Alkathons, fund raisers, etc. Meets second Monday, monthly, St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA. Orientation 6:30 pm, Meeting at 7:00 pm. Contact: Central Office at 988-3001.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY CONVENTION -

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the planning of the 2008 Convention. The Committee meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month (except February and March); 7 pm at St. Innocent's Church, 5657 Lindley Ave, Tarzana, CA.

Central Office News

San Fernando Valley Central Office is On the Web

The SFV Central Office website is now available for Internet browsers. On the website, you can find a map to our office in Van Nuys, a listing of upcoming events in the Valley, service organization information and links to other cool A.A. websites. Our meeting schedule is also accessible on the website. Meetings are listed by day, Sunday through Saturday.

Check it out: <http://www.sfvaa.org>

Do you have an article for the Recovery Times?

Email it to us at: sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net

San Fernando Valley Central Office Intergroup Representatives Meeting March 10, 2008

Rick A. Co-Chairperson – Meeting opened at 7:00 PM

Treasurer's Report: See Insert

Service Committee information - see page 2 and 3 of the Recovery Times for more information

Old Business: None.

New Business: None

Birthdays: David - 20 yrs.

Motion to adjourn 7:28 PM

The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes for March is available at Central Office or at the Intergroup Meeting.

These minutes are pending approval on April 14, 2008

Next Meeting - April 14, 2008

Prepared and submitted by:

Dawn H., Recording Secretary

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

March 2008

Bonnie H. 17 years

Sandra F. 19 years

Patricia K. 20 years

June B. 26 years

Learning to Live

Men's Stag 179 years

Your Birthday Gift to Central Office

Many A.A. members share their birthdays with those who need the same help and opportunity that A.A. gave to them.

By sending a donation to Central Office you share your birthday with Recovery Times readers. Send a dollar (\$1.00) a year - or \$1.00 for each year of your sobriety - or send as much as you wish to give to celebrate your birthday. The amount doesn't matter - it's the "counting" that counts.

May your special day be filled with joy from morning until night, and may the "24's" that lie ahead be especially glad and bright.

Why Have a Home Group?

In a recent letter to a member of the Fellowship, a member of the General Service Office staff referred to the home group as the heartbeat of AA. That made a big impression on me, and I believe that just as surely as we are aware of, sensitive to, and in need of our own heartbeat, each of us needs a home group.

It all began in the home group, didn't it? Not all of us readily identified that mysterious group of people who were trying to help us get sober as our home group. In fact, I am painfully aware that the commitment to become a part of anything escapes many in the early stages of recovery.

Most members of the Fellowship will never have the rewarding experience of attending a General Service Conference. Only a few are even touched by our area assemblies, state and national conventions, and other functions which bring members together from many home groups. Even the district functions might be attended by only a small portion of the membership of the groups involved. To many, their only AA is the home group. If this is so, what should the home group be to the member, and why should a member have a home group?

When we took those first faltering steps to recovery, many of us would have stumbled and fallen once again if we had to make what was to be a miraculous change by ourselves. In my case, the first rays of hope came from those sometimes loving, sometimes cantankerous old geezers who sat around the table in my hometown. A long time before I believed, or even heard, what they told me, I began thinking there might be a chance simply because I thought if they could do it, so could I.

The first slogans I heard came from them. Later, when I heard the same things from speakers at a convention, I thought it was so wise; but it was months before I realized that I first heard those thoughts from the fat little guy who I thought was so windy and who eventually became my sponsor. In fact, after I got into service work, I thought I needed to go to conventions, assemblies, and forums to get my batteries recharged because things were so dull and routine in my home group.

Now I know that it's not the wonderful people I've met from throughout these great lands who have helped keep me sober most of the time, but those wonderful people sitting around the table in my hometown who loved me when I

could not love, who waited for me to quit lying, who tolerated me when I would be part of nothing, and who never asked me to leave when I was obnoxious. Because of their love and patience, I was able finally to get outside of myself and make some sort of commitment to the group.

It seems to me that, in the beginning, a home group is all most of us can possibly handle. It's where we first find a sponsor, where someone first sees that we get a Big Book, where we first see the Steps on the wall, where we learn again to pray, and where we first begin to recover. (Remember the heartbeat?) But most of all, because of the trust that develops through the meetings of a home group, it is where we might first begin to care about someone else so that we might eventually begin to love again, both in AA and among our friends and family.

It is where we first learn to take responsibility so that we might eventually take responsibility for our lives. In my case, that began with the simple chore of cleaning out ashtrays. (How wise that they knew I could do no more!) It was there we learned to do Twelfth Step work so that we could eventually pass on to others what was so freely given to us, thereby assuring the very future and survival of the Fellowship. It was there we first learned about the rest of the Fellowship, and someone began answering the questions about all the mysteries of what makes the whole thing work.

Oh yes, the home group is the heartbeat of the Fellowship. There are many reasons why the Fellowship needs these wonderful groups, and there are many reasons why the groups need each and every member running through their life veins. But most important, we need our home groups. That's where it all began, and it's where it will all end for us. Yes, all of us have also had the job of burying some of those people who passed the recovery program on to each of us.

With this week at the Conference, this phase of my service to the Fellowship, of paying back a small measure of my gratitude, begins to wind down. What will I do now? If I am very, very lucky, those who are doing such a marvelous job of serving the Fellowship in my home group might, just might, allow me to make coffee next week and maybe even talk to a drunk.

R. B., Neosho, Missouri

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Keep an Eye on the Door

*"...watch for new faces at every meeting,
and see to it that strangers were welcomed..."*

As far back as I can remember in my association with AA, I have heard it said at meeting after meeting, that the new-comer is the most important person in the AA fellowship. If this is true, and common sense tells me that it is, then I believe it is high time that we did a little constructive organizational work, dedicated to that principle.

A short time ago, my wife and I were spending a few days in a city of nearly a million inhabitants, about 600 miles from home. We found that there was to be a meeting of an AA group in the vestry of a magnificent church a few blocks from where we were staying, so we set out to find it. Being strangers, and not accustomed to the traffic regulations, we were a little late in arriving, and walked in full view of the assembled 30 or so members.

It was a good meeting, with excellent speakers, but when it was over the members broke up into little groups, chatting together either completely unconscious or completely indifferent to the fact that there were a couple of strangers present. After standing around five minutes or so, I walked over to the chairman of the meeting, stuck out my hand and said, "I'm so-and-so from Worcester, Massachusetts." "Nice to see you," he replied, giving me a limp fin: then promptly turned his back to talk with someone else.

Don't get me wrong. I wasn't looking for a red carpet and a brass band. The point I'd like to make is. . .that for all anyone there knew. . . I might have been a drunk who was looking for help for the first time. Even the chairman didn't try to find out why I was there. Looking back at my own

advent, I find myself pretty sure that had I received that kind of reception when I was a newcomer, my sobriety would have been very considerably delayed!

Would it not be a good idea for *every group* to have a rotating "hospitality committee" whose duty it would be to watch for new faces at every meeting, and see to it that strangers *were* welcomed? Most of us who have been through this rat-race have had enough of feeling unwanted *outside* of AA. We desperately needed to feel wanted and welcome. Let's not get so involved in sociability *among ourselves* that we can't keep at least one eye on the door!

F. S. H., Worcester, Massachusetts

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Humor from the Grapevine

"Norman, I liked you better when you were drinking!" declared an old pal, feeling no pain.

"That makes us even," replied Norman. "When I was drinking I liked you better, too."

« « « » » »

Two guys throwing them down at a bar, one saying, "And when I think about all the wasted money...a dollar every time for no dues or fees, gas to get there, gas to get home, five bucks for the Big Book, which I didn't even read...!"



*Cofounder
Quotes*

Bill W.

The essence of all growth is a willingness to change for the better and then an unremitting willingness to shoulder whatever responsibility this entails.

Reprinted from As Bill Sees It, page 115, with permission of A.A. World Services, Inc.

The Meeting Is the Key to AA

“Mental sobriety is contagious and can be contracted at an AA meeting.”

In a few postwar years a Churchill can turn out five volumes of magnificent history while carrying on a heavy program in Parliament and painting creditable pictures at Chartwell. Another man lives the life of a recluse and after his death from malnutrition the police find a large fortune in his shabby apartment. The human mind can rise to great heights or it can be twisted into frightening shapes.

Something had happened to our minds, else we would not have drunk and acted as we did. Our process of recovery requires a healing of the mind as well as of the body. Physical sobriety can come quickly and in many cases is achieved upon first contact with AA. Mental sobriety usually takes much longer. This should not surprise us for the treatment of mental conditions is usually a long, drawn out process compared with the rather brief hospitalization for most physical surgery. The danger to the newcomer is that his physical sobriety may deceive him and lull him into complacency. Like the miser, he does not realize how far he has strayed from reality, how twisted his thinking still is.

So often do we hear in meetings, “You have to change your thinking.” Most AAs who have been sober for a reasonable period see a gradual change in their own thought processes, the acceptance today of principles and conclusions that seemed anathema a month or a year ago. Hence we might admit, “Anything I say is strictly my own opinion—today! Next week or next year I may have different views.” It is inevitable that our thinking must change and develop if we are to grow and progress in AA.

Our thinking changes through the technique of the meetings. We are indeed fortunate that the meeting came to be the principal channel for the AA message. AA did not necessarily have to take that form. It might have become a \$50 correspondence course. Or a consulting service at \$5.00 a visit and then training courses that would produce other licensed consultants. But the founders decided against such methods and somehow the meeting assumed its present important place in the program.

In a large measure the meeting is the key to AAs phenomenal and unexpected success. The meeting is a much more effective persuader and convincer than a book or pamphlet. It is practically impossible to learn to swim by reading a book or to drive a car, run a large corporation, converse fluently in a modern language. You have to get into the water, sit behind the wheel, beat your way up the economic ladder, live among foreigners and listen to the music of their inflection and cadence. AA is like that in many respects.

The meeting has a two-fold effect upon those who attend with an open mind and the right attitude. First of all it makes a direct intellectual appeal. The AA member sits in the audience and listens. He is not on the psychiatrist’s couch and does not have to say a word. He can admit anything and everything to himself but he need not tell anyone in the world about it. At least not tonight. He may agree with the speaker or think silently to himself, “That’s the bunk. It is really like this...” In his act of agreement or disagreement he is beginning to think creatively about alcohol, himself and AA. His process of mental recovery is under way.

Over a series of meetings cases are cited, principles enunciated, philosophies evolved. Clashes of opinion may occur but they are provocative of thought. Which of the two views is correct? An answer may occupy a member for days but during that period he will be thinking in a way and in an area completely new to him. His errors, prejudices, resentments fade and shrivel in the light of group experience and the warmth of group therapy. It is the action of mind upon mind in the meetings, open or closed, that provides the mental exercise and experienced guidance which the fogged mind needs for recovery.

The great contribution of the meeting, however, is probably not intellectual at all. It is more indirect, more subtle. The late Justice Brandeis once said that he was convinced that good health was contagious just as disease was contagious. Surely conditions of the mind are even more contagious than those of the body. We know how moods, gloom, laughter are contagious. Someone asks you, “What is the name of that tall man?” You “catch” forgetfulness and cannot recall a name that is on the tip of your tongue. Mental sobriety, too, is contagious and can be contracted at an AA meeting. The new member whose thinking is twisted is thrown in with others well along the road to recovery. He somehow, “catches on” just as a boy “gets the hang” of swimming by splashing around in water with companions who can swim.

It is difficult to define mental sobriety, though you can recognize it when you see it. It includes a solid grounding in AA, a sane outlook on life, a reasonable amount of serenity, and in fact a fair share of all the fruits of the AA program. It can be had at the AA meeting and it is one more testimonial to the truth of the statement, “The best things in life are free.”

*Anonymous, Scarsdale, New York
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Out of the Pity Pot and Into the Program

“...telling each other our woes gave neither of us comfort.”

An AA friend and I were on our way to a morning discussion meeting. We had both decided, each being about six months sober, that we needed a meeting. Mutual back-patting and commiseration led us both to believe that we needed to unburden ourselves and let the group solve our woes.

Long faces and sighs were the order of the day as we sat down armed with coffee and cookies for the barrage we were about to come under. I could hear them telling us about self-pity and 101 ways to get out of it or avoid it. Of course a few of the hard-liners would tell us our problems were insignificant, but they couldn't know how big these problems really were.

Announcements and the Preamble were read, and I waited for the big question: “Does anyone have a problem this morning?”

Before either of us could stir to answer it, a voice came from the back of the room: “I'm drunk, and I don't know why.” I looked around, and there was a fellow, shirt half out, three days' worth of beard, pants dragging, doing that bobbing and weaving dance we all know so well.

A glance at my friend showed a reflection of the tears forming in my own eyes. A look of shame, then relief, was reflected, too. Yes, we had problems, but our failure to see that they were soluble came from dwelling on them instead of reaching out. The symbiotic relationship we had formed,

telling each other our woes, gave neither of us comfort. The man who had spoken had looked clean-cut and pleasant only three days before, when I had seen him at another meeting.

Needless to say, I said a prayer to my Higher Power thanking him for getting us to that meeting. He had shown us, in a way we couldn't refute, that it was all worth it, that the hard-liners were right. A few more days of what we had been doing would probably have ended with my friend or me asking, “How did I get drunk?” Many times since then, I've heard similar words.

After some discussion with our respective sponsors, our problems faded away as most do. Each time I get myself into that pity bag, I remember that morning. I believe that my Higher Power showed me what happens when you dwell too much on everyday problems. The advice I had been given at meetings was sincere, but it had to be put into action to do any good.

I don't know if our drunken friend got anything from that meeting; I haven't seen him since. I do know I'm glad I followed the first advice I was given in AA: “Don't drink, and go to meetings.” That morning, it saved my sobriety and possibly my life.

*F. M.
Catasauqua, Pennsylvania
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*San Fernando Valley Central Office
7417-E Van Nuys Boulevard
Van Nuys, CA 91405*

Current Information

Name

Address.....

City..... St ZIP

New Additional Contribution

Renewal \$.....

Moving ????: We need your former address as well as your new address to correct our records. Fill out both forms and mail to the address above.

Former Address

Name

Address.....

City..... St ZIP