

Recovery Times

A newsletter from Alcoholics Anonymous San Fernando Valley Central Office

VOL 33, NO. 3 MAR 2009

Tradition Three: An Anchor Of AA

Embracing the spirit of the Tradition

Tradition Three: The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.

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.

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

37th Annual ACYPAA

March 12 - 15, 2009
Irvine, CA
Info: 949-230-9259
Website: www.acypaa2009.org

21st Annual Indian Wells Valley AA Roundup

April 3 - 5, 2009
Ridgecrest, CA
Mailing Address: PO Box 2021, Ridgecrest, CA 93556
Website: www.orgsites.com/ca/iwvroundup/

32nd Annual San Diego Spring Round Up

April 9 - 12, 2009
San Diego, CA
Registration Info: 760-583-1658
Website: www.SanDiegoSpringRoundUp.com

28th Annual Hospital and Institution Conference

April 24 - 26, 2009
Orange, CA
Registration Info: 714-593-0469
Website: www.socalhandi.org

25th Tri-State Round-Up

May 14 - 17, 2009
Laughlin, NV
Registration Info: 928-753-6035
Website: www.TriState-Roundup.com

A.A. Desert Pow Wow

June 18 - 21, 2009
Indian Wells, CA
Info: 760-321-6568
Website: www.desertpowwow.com

Things We Cannot Change...

*Jim M. — 30 Years
(moved to Arizona)*

Obviously, the staff of Valley Central Office cannot know all the members of the local fellowship. If you have knowledge of the passing of one of our members, please notify us here at Central Office during literature sales hours or mail us the obituary from the local newspaper. You can also email us at sfvaanews@sbcglobal.net.

Service Committee Schedule

- Mar. 16, 2009 **SFV H&I
THIRD MONDAY**
8PM Business Meeting
7PM Get Acquainted Workshop
5657 Lindley Ave.

- Apr. 6, 2009 **G.S. District #11
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
315 W. Vine St., Glendale

- Apr. 6, 2009 **G.S. District #16
SECOND MONDAY**
6:15PM meeting
15950 Chatsworth (church), Granada Hills

- Apr. 6, 2009 **G.S. District #17
FIRST MONDAY**
6PM New GSR orientation, 6:30pm meeting
5000 Colfax (church), N. Hollywood

- Apr. 7, 2009 **G.S. District #2
FIRST TUESDAY**
5:30PM, 4011 Dunsmore, La Crescenta

- Apr. 1, 2009 **G.S. District #1
FIRST WEDNESDAY**
6:30PM, 7552 Remmet, Canoga Park

- Apr. 8, 2009 **SFV Board of Directors**
6:30PM, Central Office

- Apr. 11, 2009 **G.S. District #7
SECOND SATURDAY**
9AM, Agua Dulce Woman's Club
33201 Agua Dulce Cyn Rd

- Apr. 13, 2009 **SFV Intergroup
SECOND MONDAY**
6:30PM Orientation, 7PM Business Meeting
St. Innocents Church
5657 Lindley Ave., Tarzana

Opportunities for Service

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>.

To All Meeting Secretaries

Help us keep your meeting information up to date.

If your meeting has changed its Location, Time of Meeting, Meeting Name or Type of Meeting, please update this information *as soon as possible* with your Central Office. Updates can be completed by mail or in person during Literature Sales Hours at San Fernando Valley Central Office. Our address is listed on the back cover of this newsletter. Meeting updates *must* be completed in writing. Any questions can be answered by calling your Central Office at (818) 988-3001 and asking for a staff member.

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 2010 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 February 9, 2009

Josh S. 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: Dennis - 2 yrs, Liz - 4 yrs,
Rick - 13 yrs, Hal - 37 yrs.*

Motion to adjourn 7:28 PM
*The long form of the Intergroup Meeting Minutes
for February is available at Central Office
or at the Intergroup Meeting.*
*These minutes are pending approval on
March 9, 2009*
Next Meeting - March 9, 2009
Prepared and submitted by:
Di V., Recording Secretary

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

February 2009

Anonymous	20 years
Kevin Mc.	25 years
Hal S.	37 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.

Step Two: I Didn't Drink And I Didn't Run

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

When I came to Alcoholics Anonymous, all I wanted was to drink a little less. I did not want to find God, get spiritual, become a better person, or stop drinking. I did not have the power to change anything about my drinking, however. That's why I decided to try AA. That is also the summary of my twenty-five year experience with Step One.

Step Two baffled me. I understood all of the words in the Step but could not comprehend how or why any benevolent force would ever have any connection with me. I had no real religious background, and what I did know made me skeptical. I was taught by my parents, teachers, and popular thought that I could control my destiny and achieve whatever I wanted—if I was willing to work hard enough. If I wanted something done, I should do it myself, they told me. There was no room for the divine in the picture I developed of the world. In fact, there wasn't room for anything or anyone but me.

My alcoholism helped me fail at everything important to me. I failed to achieve the status and recognition I thought was due me in my profession. I withdrew from my family. I had no close relationships—drinking buddies were the best I could do. Worst of all, I felt the emptiness that many of us know. Life had no meaning for me. I had nothing to connect with, nothing to engage me, nothing to make my life worth living. This is the state I found myself in when I joined AA, a condition that turned out to be fortunate because it made me willing to consider ideas that I otherwise would have rejected immediately.

In the beginning, all I could do was not drink and not run away. When I listened to people talk about God at meetings, I didn't drink and I didn't run away. When I heard discussions at meetings about how God—or a higher power, or something—had come into the lives of members and done for them what they could not do for themselves, I didn't drink and didn't run away. I thought it was all nonsense but was afraid to dismiss it entirely. I had been beaten up enough to know that I would die if I drank again.

Because I did not drink and did not run away, I heard a lot of ideas about a power greater than myself that I considered—in spite of myself. I also saw that other alcoholics, who had been as desperate as I was, had stopped

drinking and, as a result, their lives had changed. Even if I did not identify with whatever power they said worked for them, I saw that something had happened to them. This gave me just enough hope to keep coming back to one more meeting, to listen to one more story, and to talk to one more alcoholic.

Because this program did not dictate the name, size, shape, or color of the power that works here, I was forced to find my own. My experience has been a gradual one. It was not anything specific that happened, because nothing really happened. It was not something special that someone said, because I don't remember much of what anyone says. I cannot point to a day or meeting or person or book that changed my thinking. That's not how I experienced it.

But little by little, over months and years, my thinking about other people changed. I started seeing them less in relation to myself—more than or less than me, useful or useless to me, or doing something to me—and more as people struggling just like I was to find a way to live. I lost many fears and some insecurities, and that has made it possible for me to do things, say things, and go places I never would have considered. I can now think about something other than myself, and I don't complain that life is not interesting or engaging.

In those instances when I give up my idea of how something should work, my life changes in a profound and wonderful way. The most powerful example, is my marriage. It is nothing like I thought it should be, and yet it works quite well. When something really difficult has happened in sobriety—despite my feelings of grief or loss or hurt—I have behaved in a way that made me feel good about myself and at peace with the outcome.

God is the name I call this power I have found, because that is the easiest way to express it to other people. If pressed to describe it, I say that I have found a power greater than myself that enables me to get out of myself and experience that rare and wonderful miracle of change.

Nancy C.

Coral Gables, Florida

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The Question of Clubs

What's the connection between clubs and AA?

I had “the gift of desperation” when I got to my first AA meeting at a club not far from my home. I was ready to do whatever it took to be free from drinking. So after hearing the pitch for joining the club at the beginning of an AA meeting, I filled out the application and turned it in. That’s when the old-timer I gave it to told me I had to have ninety days of sobriety before I could join. My heart sank. There was no way I would be able to stay sober for ninety days. I felt like crying.

The old-timer assured me there was nothing to cry about, however. Alcoholics Anonymous was free, and if I wanted to be a member, I was. That’s all there was to it. I didn’t need to fill out an application form, pay any money, or even promise sobriety.

I like to go wherever other alcoholics gather together to help one another. Most of the meetings I go to are not in a club setting, but some are. Recently, an AA member actually said she was “grateful to the club for her sobriety.” Of course, I can understand how easy it is to be confused about this. But a line from the “Guidelines on Clubs,” published by AA World Services, helps me to grasp the difference between AA and a club: “Even though the group meets in a club that may be composed exclusively of AA members, and many members of the group may be club members, too, the relationship of the AA group itself to the club should be the same as it would be to a church, hospital, school, or other facility in which it might rent space for its meetings.”

My home group meets in a church. The people at the church office are supportive and kind. We are happy to pay them rent, but we wouldn’t dream of letting them tell us what to say in a meeting. When our group first started, we discussed what to name it at the business meeting. One of the names included the name of the church where we meet. Someone pointed out that we wouldn’t want to do that because it implies affiliation. We meet at the church. In no other way are we affiliated with it.

Sometimes I get a helpful perspective on a Tradition by going through the Grapevine’s Traditions Checklist. The questions were originally published in the Grapevine in conjunction with a series on the Twelve Traditions that ran between November 1969 and September 1971. While they were originally intended for individual use, many AA groups have since used them as a basis for wider discussion.

Here is what the checklist says about Tradition Six: “Are all the officers and members of our local club for AAs familiar with the pamphlet ‘Guidelines on Clubs’?”

*Linda W.
Libertyville, Illinois*

Ed. Note: The Traditions Checklist is available for purchase at the Valley Central Office.

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*Co-founder
Quotes*

Dr. Bob

“Tolerance expresses itself in a variety of ways: in kindness and consideration toward the man or woman who is just beginning the march along the spiritual path; in the understanding of those who perhaps have been less fortunate in educational advantages, and in sympathy toward those whose religious ideas may seem to be at great variance with our own.

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A Group Called Mona

An AA says we can't transmit what we don't have

Without AA unity, my common self would be dead! It is my uncommon self that has survived. The common thing for an alcoholic to do is get drunk. Only an uncommonly small percentage of us get sober and stay that way. Thanks to our common welfare coming first, I celebrated twenty-seven years of frequent happy, joyous, and free behavior last Halloween.

My personal recovery depends upon AA unity all the way from the people living in my home, through my Attitude Adjustment AA Group, the General Service Office, and the annual General Service Conference. With that many people in unity for me, my personal recovery ought to be a cinch. So far, so good.

For me to be a part of that unified group, I must take responsibility for my personal recovery. I must live by spiritual principles. And to keep the priceless gift of that recovery, I have to give it away in Twelfth Step work and as an active member of my home group. My sponsor, however—that ever-present listener who hands accountability back to me, at times in big, emotionally heavy chunks—has helped me to realize that there is another group for me to consider. In short, there's more than one me stumbling around in my head.

I'm a whole committee, and my personal welfare and, ultimately, that of my home group, depends upon the unity of that inner head-group. Inside me, I'm a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a business woman, a homemaker, and a lover. I'm also a seventy-year-old teenager, a self-appointed authority figure, a cynic, a seeker, a musician, and a preacher. And I have an inner coward and an inner fighter in there as well. It's a motley group and it's all mine to manage. At times I can raise my hand as an example of how well it all works; at other times I'm bloody and a bit bowed.

My husband knows me well enough to ignore some of the members of my internal committee. He says that usually he doesn't want me to verbalize my observations on his

nutrition, health, and hygiene, thank-you-very-much. But, you see, when I get to observing, I have trouble stopping. My inner authority figure wants to ignore his objections and hand the problem off to the inner wife, lover, and homemaker for prompt resolution. But ultimately, my head group comes up with the right solution: I close my mouth and breathe through my nose. We have no opinions on outside issues.

I like some of the members of my head-group, but I would like to bump a few of the others unceremoniously out of my crowded cranium. The business woman has served me well through the years, the grandmother gets positive feedback from a few pre-adolescent admirers, and I've learned to be a mother to adult daughters (after offering them a lot of domestic rubble in my drinking days). For that improvement I thank my Higher Power and AA unity.

I have come to believe that all members of my head-group are there to work together for my personal welfare. Sometimes the mother in me needs a quick sermonette; the business woman and homemaker can benefit from the confidence displayed by my inner authority figure.

And so it is with my home group. My AA group needs all of its members. Although some seem to have been handed off to the rest of us as a test of serenity, the unity—as well as the uniqueness—of our AA group is the result of the shared experience, strength, and hope of each of us as individuals. So it's up to me to manage the competing opinions and ambitions of this “group named Mona” so that the noise doesn't damage the unity of my home group.

In the process, I can learn about both the common and the uncommon side of myself and of others in my group, as we pursue our personal recovery by working for the common good.

Mona S.-S., Memphis, Tennessee

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Humor from the Grapevine

Marriage involving a drunk is difficult, at best. The first year the drunk speaks and the spouse listens. The second year the spouse speaks and the drunk listens. The third year they both speak and the neighbors listen.

« « « » » »

Fishing for a little sympathy, an AA member, quoting from the Bible, said, “I'm just a laborer in the vineyard.” In proper Al-Anon fashion, his wife retorted, “You're an alcoholic, what are you doing in a vineyard?”

« « « » » »

The Best Listeners

Sponsorship

I have bored my sponsor to tears and she has never once complained. She just let me go on and on.

Since I myself sponsor several women I've been on both sides of the telephone, hearing the same stories over and over again until the days turn into months and then become years of sharing. This sponsoring business requires patience.

To my own dear sponsor I have repeated the trials of my marriage breakup so many times that I bored even myself with it. She never once gave me the feeling that I was annoying her. In my attempt to stay sober, I've confessed my deepest secrets in a Fifth Step to her and admitted my drink signals when they came. She was always available to listen to me anytime I called.

I've heard a number of Fifth Steps in my own living room and across my kitchen table—stories of alcoholism, dependency, shameful past experiences, and enormous pain.

"What happens to recovering alcoholics who have no one to talk to this way?" a newcomer asked me one night after a lengthy conversation. For a second I didn't answer her and

in that second of silence I believe we both formed our own opinions about what happens. "They probably drink" was all I could say.

The process of one alcoholic confiding in another has without a doubt saved my life. Nowhere else have I ever found such devotion and understanding as with AA sponsoring.

Who else, other than an AA member, would accept a phone call in the middle of a busy work day to listen to: "I'm sorry to call you at work, but I'm terrified at this moment. I don't think I'll make it through the day without a drink. What should I do?"

What is most miraculous in this scenario is the fact that this person had someone to call instead of picking up a drink, and that is how it works.

We AAs are the best listeners in the world—that is, when we're not talking!

Linda M., Maspeth, New York

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\$.....

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