

AA Harrisburg

MONTHLY FOCUS FEBRUARY TRADITION 2 DETAIL

Tradition 2 Checklist

WHERE does A.A. get its direction? Who runs it? This, too, is a puzzler for every friend and newcomer. When told that our Society has no president having authority to govern it, no treasurer who can compel the payment of any dues, no board of directors who can cast an erring member into outer darkness, when indeed no A.A. can give another a directive and enforce obedience, our friends gasp and exclaim, “This simply can’t be. There must be an angle somewhere.” These practical folk then read Tradition Two, and learn that the sole authority in A.A. is a loving God as He may express Himself in the group conscience. They dubiously ask an experienced A.A. member if this really works. The member, sane to all appearances, immediately answers, “Yes! It definitely does.” The friends mutter that this looks vague, nebulous, pretty naive to them. Then they commence to watch us with speculative eyes, pick up a fragment of A.A. history, and soon have the solid facts.

What are these facts of A.A. life which brought us to this apparently impractical principle?

John Doe, a good A.A., moves—let us say—to Middletown, U.S.A. Alone now, he reflects that he may not be able to stay sober, or even alive, unless he passes on to other alcoholics what was so freely given him. He feels a spiritual and ethical compulsion, because hundreds may be suffering within reach of his help. Then, too, he misses his home group. He needs other alcoholics as much as they need him. He visits preachers, doctors, editors, policemen, and bartenders ...with the result that Middletown now has a group, and he is the founder.

Being the founder, he is at first the boss. Who else could be? Very soon, though, his assumed authority to run everything begins to be shared with the first alcoholics he has helped. At this moment, the benign dictator becomes the chairman of a committee composed of his friends. These are the growing group’s hierarchy of service—self-appointed, of course, because there is no other way. In a matter of months, A.A. booms in Middletown.

The founder and his friends channel spirituality to newcomers, hire halls, make hospital arrangements, and entreat their wives to brew gallons of coffee. Being on the human side, the founder and his friends may bask a little in glory. They say to one another, "Perhaps it would be a good idea if we continue to keep a firm hand on A.A. in this town. After all, we are experienced. Besides, look at all the good we've done these drunks. They should be grateful!" True, founders and their friends are sometimes wiser and more humble than this. But more often at this stage they are not.

Growing pains now beset the group. Panhandlers panhandle. Lonely hearts pine. Problems descend like an avalanche. Still more important, murmurs are heard in the body politic, which swell into a loud cry: "Do these oldtimers think they can run this group forever? Let's have an election!" The founder and his friends are hurt and depressed. They rush from crisis to crisis and from member to member, pleading; but it's no use, the revolution is on. The group conscience is about to take over.

Now comes the election. If the founder and his friends have served well, they may—to their surprise—be reinstated for a time. If, however, they have heavily resisted the rising tide of democracy, they may be summarily beached. In either case, the group now has a so-called rotating committee, very sharply limited in its authority. In no sense whatever can its members govern or direct the group. They are servants. Theirs is the sometimes thankless privilege of doing the group's chores. Headed by the chairman, they look after public relations and arrange meetings. Their treasurer, strictly accountable, takes money from the hat that is passed, banks it, pays the rent and other bills, and makes a regular report at business meetings. The secretary sees that literature is on the table, looks after the phone-answering service, answers the mail, and sends out notices of meetings. Such are the simple services that enable the group to function. The committee gives no spiritual advice, judges no one's conduct, issues no orders. Every one of them may be promptly eliminated at the next election if they try this. And so they make the belated discovery that they are really servants, not senators. These are universal experiences. Thus throughout A.A. does the group conscience decree the terms upon which its leaders shall serve.

This brings us straight to the question "Does A.A. have a real leadership?" Most emphatically the answer is "Yes, notwithstanding the apparent lack of it." Let's turn again to the deposed founder and his friends. What becomes of them? As their grief and anxiety wear away, a subtle change begins. Ultimately, they divide into two classes known in A.A. slang as "elder statesmen" and "bleeding deacons." The elder statesman is the one who sees the wisdom of the group's decision, who holds no resentment over his reduced status, whose judgment, fortified by considerable experience, is sound, and who is willing to sit quietly on the sidelines patiently awaiting developments. The bleeding deacon is one who is just as surely convinced that the group cannot get along without him, who constantly connives for reelection to office, and who continues to be consumed with self-pity. A few hemorrhage so badly that—drained of all A.A. spirit and principle—they get drunk. At times the A.A. landscape seems to be littered with bleeding forms. Nearly every oldtimer in our Society has gone through this process in some degree. Happily, most of them survive and live to become elder statesmen. They become the real and permanent leadership of A.A. Theirs is the quiet opinion, the sure knowledge and humble example that resolve a crisis. When

solely perplexed, the group inevitably turns to them for advice. They become the voice of the group conscience; in fact, these are the true voice of Alcoholics Anonymous. They do not drive by mandate; they lead by example. This is the experience which has led us to the conclusion that our group conscience, well-advised by its elders, will be in the long run wiser than any single leader.

Alcoholics Anonymous World Service Inc.. Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (pp. 132-135). AA World Services, Inc. Kindle Edition.

As Bill Sees It p. 95

Spiritual Kindergarten

“We are only operating a spiritual kindergarten in which people are enabled to get over drinking and find the grace to go on living to better effect. Each man’s theology has to be his own quest, his own affair.”

When the Big Book was being planned, some members thought that it ought to be Christian in the doctrinal sense. Others had no objection to the use of the word “God,” but wanted to avoid doctrinal issues. Spirituality, yes. Religion, no. Still others wanted a psychological book, to lure the alcoholic in. Once in, he could take God or leave Him alone as he wished.

To the rest of us this was shocking, but happily we listened. Our group conscience was at work to construct the most acceptable and effective book possible.

Every voice was playing its appointed part. Our atheists and agnostics widened our gateway so that all who suffer might pass through, regardless of their belief or lack of belief.

AA World Services Inc. As Bill Sees It . A.A. World Services, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

1. LETTER, 1954

2. A.A. COMES OF AGE, PP. 162, 163, 167

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