

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

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Jacksonville, Florida

Revised 1994,1995, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011

It doesn't much signify whom one marries, for one is sure to find out the next morning that it was someone else.

- Samuel Rogers

Foreword

Ideas and inspiration for this workshop came from published material and friends in the AA and Alanon community. Sources include Alcoholics Anonymous (the Big Book) 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, The AA Grapevine, a couple of AA pamphlets on the traditions, Chuck C. ("A New Pair of Glasses"), the First Minnesota Weekend Workshop on the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, the Houston Al-Anon Intergroup, and from many other AA and Alanon friends all over the world. This material is presented in the spirit of Alcoholics Anonymous: that is, one alcoholic sharing with another alcoholic for fun and for free.

The notes that have been written for this workshop may be found at:

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The Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous

It is said that the unity of Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon is the most cherished and valuable quality that our societies have. Our lives and the lives of all to come depend squarely upon it. The practice of our 12 steps puts our lives in order, but not necessarily our relationships. How to live successfully with others can be found within our traditions. They are our guidelines for behavior.

Unfortunately, we have all seen folks who are getting healthy individually but who are mired in relationships that are not emotionally healthy. It has become our belief that the quality of our lives and those of our relationships will improve significantly through the use and practice of spiritual principles, especially those found in the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. The when, where, what, how, and why of that belief, based on our own experience, is what this workshop is all about.

Most of what we will be sharing with you is based on our personal adventures, both before and since our marriage. It is our wish to share what has actually happened to us and what we really did rather than what we think - the emphasis being on our experience of what we did rather than our opinion of what you should do.

Men Are like Waffles – Women are like Spaghetti

So, how are you to understand the differences between men and women? We like to think of them this way: Men are like waffles, women are like spaghetti. At first this may seem silly, even juvenile, but stay with us. It is a picture that works and men "get it" (because it involves food).

Men Are like Waffles

We do not mean that men "waffle" on all decisions and are generally unstable. What we mean is that men process life in boxes. If you look down at a waffle, you see a collection of boxes separated by walls. The boxes are all separate from each other and make convenient holding places. That is typically how a man processes life. Our thinking is divided up into boxes that have room for one issue and one issue only. The first issue of life goes in the first box, the second goes in the second box, and so on. The typical man lives in one box at a time and one box only. When a man is at work, he is at work. When he is in the garage tinkering around, he is in the garage tinkering. When he is watching TV, he is simply watching TV. That is why he looks as though he is in a trance and can ignore everything else going on around him. Social scientists call this "compartmentalizing" -that is, putting life and responsibilities into different compartments.

As a result, men are problem solvers by nature. They enter a box, size up the "problem," and formulate a solution. **In** their careers, they consider what it will take to be successful and focus on it. **In** communication, they look for the bottom line and get there as quickly as possible. **In** decision-making, they look for an approach they can buy into and apply it as often as possible. A man will strategically organize his life in boxes and then spend most of his time in the boxes *he can succeed in*. This is such a strong motivation for him that he will seek out the boxes that work and will ignore the boxes that confuse him or make him feel like a failure. For instance, a man whose career holds the possibility of success will spend more and more time at work at the expense of other priorities. On the other hand, a man who always falls short at work or feels he never meets the expectations around him may find out that he is pretty good at being lazy. He will then develop a commitment to being lazy because he knows he can do that today with the same proficiency as yesterday.

Men also take a "success" approach to communication. If they believe they can successfully talk with their wives and reach a desirable outcome, they will be highly motivated to converse. If, on the other hand, the conversation seems pointless to him or

he finds understanding his wife impossible, he loses his motivation to talk and clams up. That is why men come up with profound things to say, such as, "Is there any point to this conversation? Is this conversation leading anywhere? Can you just get to the point?" These are statements a man makes out of frustration because he doesn't know how to make conversation with his wife work.

The "success" drive is why men find it so easy to develop hobbies that consume their time. If a man finds something he is good at, it makes him feel good about himself and about his life. Because men tend to be good with mechanical and spatial activities, they get emotionally attached to building, fixing, and chasing things. Yard projects become expressions of his personality. The car becomes his signature. Fishing becomes an all-consuming pursuit of the right equipment, the right fishing spot, and the right friends. The computer stops being a tool of work as it transforms into an educational, entertaining, intimate friend. It makes predictable moves and gives predictable feedback. Because a man knows what he will get back from his computer, he spends more and more time with this keyboard while he spends less and less time face to face with his wife.

The bottom line with men is: they feel best about themselves when they are solving problems. Therefore, they spend most of their time doing what they are best at while they attempt to ignore the things which cause them to feel deficient.

Women Are like Spaghetti

In contrast to men's waffle-like approach, women process life more like a plate of pasta. If you look at a plate of spaghetti, you notice that there are lots of individual noodles that all touch one another. If you attempted to follow one noodle around the plate, you would intersect a lot of other noodles, and you might even switch to another noodle seamlessly. That is how women face life. Every thought and issue is connected to every other thought and issue in some way. Life is much more of a process for women than it is for men.

This is why women are typically better at multitasking than men. She can talk on the phone, prepare a meal, make a shopping list, work on the agenda for tomorrow's business meeting, give instructions to her children as they are going out to play, and close the door with her foot without skipping a beat. Because all her thoughts, emotions, and convictions are connected, she is able to process more information and keep track of more activities.

As a result, most women are in pursuit of connecting life together. They solve problems but from a much different perspective than men. For women to quickly solve a problem when the issues involved in the discussion are disconnected from each other is an act of denial. And so women consistently sense the need to talk things through. In conversation she can link together the logical, emotional, relational, and spiritual aspects of the issue. The links come to her naturally so the conversation is effortless for her. If

she is able to connect all the issues together, the answer to the question at hand bubbles to the surface and is readily accepted.

This often creates significant stress for couples because while she is making all the connections, he is frantically jumping boxes trying to keep up with the conversation. The man's eyes are rolling back in his head while a tidal wave of information is swallowing him up. When she is done, she feels better and he is overwhelmed. The conversation might look something like this:

Joan gets home and says, "Honey, how was your day? I had a good day today. We just committed to a new educational wing at the university, and I have been asked to oversee the budget. I am so excited that they didn't rule me out because I am a woman. You know women have been fighting for a place in society for decades, and it is good to see so much progress being made. I think it is neat that you treat the women who work for you with so much respect. Our daughter is so lucky to have you for a dad. Did you remember that Susie has a soccer game tonight? I think it is important we are there because the Johnsons are going to be there, and I really want you to meet them. Susie and Bethany are getting to be good friends, and I think we should get to know her parents as well."

As Joan is exploring this conversation, Dan is getting lost. He has no idea what the budget at the university has to do with their daughter's soccer game and their need to have a friendship with the Johnsons. He admires her ability to connect seemingly unrelated thoughts but he just can't seem to understand how she does it.

One of the characteristics that create havoc in male/female interaction is the fact that most men have boxes in their waffle that have no words. There are thoughts in these boxes about the past, their work, and pleasant experiences, but these thoughts do not turn into words. A man is able to be quite happy in these wordless boxes because the memories he carries in them have significant meaning to him. The problem is that he cannot communicate these experiences to others, and so his wife may feel left out.

Not all of the wordless boxes have thoughts, however. There are actually boxes in the average man's waffle that contain no words and no thoughts. These boxes are just as blank as a white sheet of paper. They are EMPTY. To help relieve stress in his life, he will "park" in these boxes to relax. Amazingly, his wife always seems to notice when he is in park. She observes his blank look and the relaxed posture he has taken on the couch. She assumes this is a good time to talk as he is so relaxed, and so she invariably asks, "What are you thinking, sweetheart?"

He immediately panics because he knows if he tells the truth, she will think he is lying. She cannot imagine a moment without words in her mind. If he says, "Nothing," she thinks he is hiding something and is afraid to talk about it. She becomes instantly

curious and mildly suspicious. Not wanting to disappoint his wife, his eyes start darting back and forth hoping to find some box in close proximity that has words in it. If he finds a box of words quickly he will engage his wife in conversation and both will feel good about the relationship. If he is slow in finding words, her suspicion fails to be extinguished, and he feels a sense of failure. He desperately wants to explain to his wife that he sometimes just goes blank. Nothing is wrong, nothing is in denial, and nothing is being hidden. This is the way he has been his whole life, but she cannot imagine it.

These blank boxes have an interesting characteristic that often gets in the way of meaningful conversation. In the middle of conversation a man will periodically be moving from one box to another, and in between two boxes of words he passes through one of these blank boxes. Right in the middle of conversation, he goes silent. He knows he should have something to say, but he is blank. He knows it is awkward to go blank in the middle of a thought, but no amount of effort has ever made it go away. It is an awkwardness he must live with and hope his wife adapts to.

Different by Design

The differences are not limited to conversation, however. As research accumulates, it is becoming increasingly obvious that God made men and women different in many ways. They think differently, they process emotions differently, they make decisions differently, and they learn differently. And yet men and women complement one another so beautifully that a healthy relationship makes both partners more complete.

Introduction

Polly and I were married on October 27, 1980. We each believe we have the most wonderful mate in the world and we hope you feel that way about yours (or will when you get one) (if you want one). We are, however, not each other's first spouse. I was married three times before Polly and she was married once before me. All of these marriages inexorably ground down into dreary failure. Neither of us knew how to conduct a relationship with a spouse - or anybody else for that matter. Worse, we didn't know we didn't know.

What was the problem? The problem was that we were selfish and self-centered. Being selfish and self-centered does not mean that we thought well of ourselves - it means that **we thought *only* of ourselves.**

A symptom of alcoholism, or perhaps more appropriately, **our humanness**, is that from time to time, we become restless, irritable, and discontent. The exact quote from Doctor Silkworth in "The Doctors Opinion" is "They are restless, irritable and discontented, unless they can again experience the sense of ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks..." Or eating a half-gallon of ice cream at midnight or being sexually frantic or gambling away the grocery money, or in any number of other ways we may use to try to manage and control our thoughts and emotions. This condition continues to overwhelm us from time to time as the good doctor predicted and we never seem to understand why. Those around us when we are in that state are usually repelled by the negative energy we radiate. They typically want to know what caused this condition, what it will take to end it, when will it end, and will it ever happen again. They frequently insist on assuming part or all of the responsibility for our being in this condition and we often encourage this. If we succeed in implanting this belief, they will find no peace until we have disclosed how we have misunderstood them or misconstrued their behavior or thoughts. The truth is that from time to time, all of us will find ourselves in this state. It seems to be a transient symptom of alcoholism. If you press me for an explanation of why I am restless, irritable, or discontented (which you will do if you think you are being accused, justly or unjustly, of causing the problem) and if I have no answer, then being a true blue alcoholic, I will just "make stuff up". And it may or may not be aimed toward making you responsible in some way for my state of being, thus causing more discontent and defensiveness on your part. It will also not be aimed at revealing any behavior of mine which will allow you to paste any part or all of the blame on me.

We were persistently frustrated at not knowing what our role in a relationship was or should be or could be. We believed in quid pro quo as a way of life. We believed that life was situational and conditional.

7 ways to live a life of Chronic Frustration and Anxiety

1. Make sure you are easily offended. Be alert for opportunities to appear slighted.
2. Insist on being right – in everything. Being right is mission critical.
3. Cling to the belief that you are somehow superior, more sensitive, or more deserving and simply need more understanding and consideration. It helps if you try to disguise this attitude.
4. Make sure you win or appear to win at everything. Winning is paramount and is on a co-footing with being right in importance. Remember the question is not “how am I?” – The question is, “how do I look?”
5. Pay close attention to how much stuff you have. See to it that you have more than anyone else. We’re talking here about quantity – not quality.
6. Rely on your achievement, real or imagined, for your self-esteem. Well thought out lies can be of great benefit here.
7. Do what you can to make your reputation and character *appear* immaculate at all times. Lying is entirely appropriate here also...just never ever open the kimono and give them a peek at the real you.

Because of views such as this, our expectations were rarely met. Perhaps most importantly, there was not the slightest trace of unselfishness and spirituality in our approach to romance, marriage, children, stepchildren, or friendships. If our relationships, indeed our lives, were ever going to work, we had to change. And in order to change, we had to first conquer our fear of change and bolster our willingness to change.

Polly and I set about our redemption in several ways. For example, we tried psychotherapy, both individually and as a couple.

There seems to be patchy pockets of distrust in psychotherapy in Alcoholics Anonymous. While this is not the place to fight that war, the Big Book seems to be relatively clear on the matter. On page 133, it says:

“Now about health: A body badly burned by alcohol does not often recover overnight nor do twisted thinking and depression vanish in a twinkling. We are

convinced that a spiritual mode of living is a most powerful health restorative. We, who have recovered from serious drinking, are miracles of mental health. But we have seen remarkable transformations in our bodies. Hardly one of our crowd now shows any dissipation.”

“But this does not mean that we disregard human health measures. God has abundantly supplied this world with fine doctors, psychologists, and practitioners of various kinds. Do not hesitate to take your health problems to such persons. Most of them give freely of themselves, that their fellows may enjoy sound minds and bodies. Try to remember that though God has wrought miracles among us, we should never belittle a good doctor or psychiatrist. Their services are often indispensable in treating a newcomer and in following his case afterward.”

We now understand that part of our motivation for therapy was one that we think is fairly common in the early bloom of sobriety: we wanted to be on the fast track to a happy, joyous, and free healing. Many of us, when in the early bloom of recovery, understandably become impatient for more, more, faster, faster. In fact, our serenity prayer was:

Me, me, me, me

More, more, more, more

Now, now, now, now

Amen

We have come to understand that there is no fast track to ultimate, realized recovery. In fact, our definition of "recovery" has been adrift since we joined AA. It started out as simply not drinking and has evolved into learning how to live the life that wants to live us. So we have (reluctantly) abandoned the idea of a quick fix. Recovery seems more like a faucet drip on your tongue rather than having a fire hose shoved into your mouth.

Our experience with therapy had mixed results. Generally speaking, it informed but did not really heal. That is to say, it helped us understand ourselves better. But then, after

all, is that not its promise? We are now comfortable with that idea. Psychotherapy informs and can open the door to healing. God heals. Another way of stating our belief is that therapy can be helpful -- Alcoholics Anonymous and/or Alanon are indispensable.

The information we received from our therapy sessions was mostly a broader and more complete understanding of the nature of men and women and how they differ sexually, intellectually, and behaviorally. Our idiosyncrasies, dishonesty, laziness, and manipulative scheming did not feel so threatening when they were pointed out to us by an impartial helpful professional. We have thus been able to relax many of our tight unrealistic expectations of each other. We have dropped our expectations that we each act in a way that is really not attuned to our sexual, psychological, and gender-based nature. This has allowed us to abandon many "Old Ideas".

Fortunately, we became steadfast and loyal members of Alcoholics Anonymous and Alanon and, as promised, we have had a spiritual awakening. We are confident that we will therefore never be the same. AA is a design for living that removes most of the scratchiness from our personalities in a way that lets us enjoy our lives. We have been using it for over 30 years and it continues to work.

We freely and happily admit that everything we know about how to successfully conduct a relationship with another human being was learned in Alcoholics Anonymous. Our book says, "The alcoholic is like a tornado roaring his way through the lives of others. Hearts are broken. Sweet relationships are dead. Affections have been uprooted. Selfish and inconsiderate habits have kept the home in turmoil. We feel a man is unthinking when he says that sobriety is enough".

For a slightly different perspective, consider this: what I do is not only for another's' benefit – it is for my benefit as well. Being understanding with my wife, my children, co-workers, AA friends, in fact everyone is for my benefit. I want to be understood. In keeping with the spiritual axiom that what goes around comes around (we reap what we sow) I know that I must be understanding. My forgiveness, my courtesy, my compassion, my love – all are extended as much for my benefit as for yours. And after all the compassion and forgiveness that has been shown to me by God and my friends, on what grounds would I withhold my forgiveness and compassion from anyone? It is how I see to it that my side of the street is clean and that my relationship with Him is right. It is what produces my great events. It is not between me and Polly. It is between me and

God. It always has been. The book says we claim spiritual progress – not spiritual perfection. And be assured: we absolutely claim spiritual progress.

Some Characteristics of AA: Our Traditions in Action

We are an inclusive organization - not exclusive. All alcoholics are welcome as members - everybody else is welcome at open meetings. I had a long conversation with a friend named Don P. about this idea. Our Responsibility Statement says, in part, “When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there” . . . It does not say an *alcoholic* anyone – it just says anyone. It is clearly not my responsibility to extend membership in AA -- our third tradition answers that question by stating that the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. But do I have a self-imposed responsibility to you if you have such a desire? What is it? It lies in love and service which to me means that when drug addicts or gamblers or overeaters wander in, I should talk to them, try to be friendly and understanding, and to help them find their path to freedom. Who, in such a circumstance, understands that they are not bad people who need to learn how to be good but rather sick people who need to get well? Clearly, I can be expected to understand that better than they. Over and above that, it is beneficial to my sobriety, my character, my self-image – indeed my life, to be kind, loving, and compassionate, especially those not easy to love. Compassion is the antitoxin of the soul: where there is compassion, even the most poisonous impulses remain relatively harmless. They too are God's kids after all.

Tradition Three states, “The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.” Here are two examples of why this Tradition came about:

“December 5, 1941

“From the Executive Committee of the Los Angeles Group of Alcoholics Anonymous

“Dear Mrs. Irma L.,

“At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Los Angeles Group of Alcoholics Anonymous held December 4, 1941, it was decided that your attendance at group meetings was no longer desired until certain explanations and plans for the future were made to the satisfaction of this Committee. This action has been taken for reasons which should be most apparent to yourself. It was decided that, should you so desire, you may appear before members of this Committee and state your attitude. This opportunity may be afforded you between now and December 15, 1941. You may communicate with us at the above address by that date. In case you do not wish to appear, we shall consider the matter closed and that your membership is terminated.”



December 11, 1946

To: Mr. Burton R. (a member of AA in Colorado Springs, CO.)

My Dear Friend,

This is to advise you that one Bob W. who claimed to be a very good AA member has asked to appear before the Denver Group 1 Committee to defend charges unbecoming an AA member. The Committee found him guilty. All seven members voted for expulsion. He claimed unfairness of the Committee and asked to be heard before the entire group. Request granted. The final vote was 31 for expulsion and two against. Since we no longer have him with us, we look forward to less friction and more harmony at our club. Mr. K. has advised me of a request by Mr. W. to join him in a social drink. We are very sorry that occurred and assure you that all of us regret it very much. Trusting to have the pleasure of having you with us in the very near future, I wish to remain sincerely yours.

Source: Wally P.

And it is not just OK with us that you are here - we want you here. We go everywhere looking for you: asylums, hospitals, jails, and detox and treatment centers. You are even welcome you if you come drinking (as many of us did).

We demand nothing - our steps of recovery are suggested - never demanded. Think about that: we demand nothing! What does God demand? Have we not been given free will? Did God meddle in your life or mine before He was invited in. Our book says, "If you want what we have and are willing to go to any lengths to get it..." So it seems to me that one of my jobs is to show you what we have so you can decide whether or not you want it. Then, if you decide you want what we have, it is my job, through friendship and sponsorship, to help you get it.

Not only do we demand nothing, you are free to totally ignore all our suggestions without forfeiting your membership. Just remember that our twelfth step states, "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps..." followed closely by the three pertinent ideas:

- (a) That we were alcoholic and could not manage our own lives.
- (b) That probably no human power could have relieved our alcoholism.
- (c) That God could and would if He were sought

AA is essentially free. We are self-supporting through our own voluntary contributions. We have no money or property. If we did, we would just bicker over it. The general

service board sets the prudent reserve for our fellowship based on advice from our outside auditing firm. We are debt free, we own no property.

In addition to routine alcoholics, we have unsocialized unhousebroken barbarians, neurotics, psychotics, sociopaths, thieves, liars, cheats (all by our own admission), Bleeding Deacons and Traditions Lawyers, all of whom are convinced that they represent the true spirit of AA and each and every one of them is willing to die for their way. Yet to our amazement, we all care for each other. We take a sincere interest in each other. We support each other. Alcoholism is an implacable foe and we wrestle with it together, hand in hand. We must or it kills us. Can it be surprising that our code is (and must be) love and tolerance?

Many of us have an astonishing willingness to practice medicine, law, psychotherapy, pharmacology, and other professions - despite our complete lack of education and credentials in any of these areas. Many of us feel that it is our responsibility to advise others on whether or not they qualify for the term "sober", depending on what some well-meaning doctor may have carelessly given them to control seizures or other types of physical or psychotic infirmities. Read pages 19 or 133 in the Big Book and see if you think you have been given a license to practice the healing arts.

AA has an ad hoc self-appointed internal group that I call the REA, Rules Enforcement Authority. This flies in the face of our ideas regarding no leaders -- only trusted servants, and our inspired concept of traditions, not rules. These self-appointed skinheads of recovery make sure that every last nuance of all agreements made at business and group conscience meetings are codified into a set of rules that cry out for enforcement. Then they happily go about enforcing their rules, making sure that nobody saves extra seats (Seat Police), parks in the wrong spot, or eats cookies at the wrong time. We happily coexist with their ministry.

Bill Wilsons Family Reunions -- recently in San Antonio and before that in Toronto, Minneapolis, San Diego, Seattle, Montreal, New Orleans, Denver, -- tens of thousands of mixed cultures, races, nationalities, and social strata were to be seen recklessly laughing, smiling, doing the wave, knocking huge beach balls around the stadium, hugging, loving, tolerating, being courteous and friendly. This characteristic of this event, the 5-year cycle of International AA Conventions, is predictable and repeatable. It is a splendid demonstration of serendipity to those attending one for the first time. It is not happenstance.

What makes all this possible? How do we achieve a Toronto? How do we tolerate “misguided” members? How do we preserve AA? How can we stay united and focused? Was it always this way?

Three Questions

Let me ask you three questions:

1. Do you think the idea that alcoholism is a disease originated with AA?
2. Do you think AA is the first to have effectively dealt with alcoholism?
3. How has AA been able to last (so far)?

Assume the Position . . .

We offer what we intend to be a fairly strong position statement: We have an unwavering belief that any successful ongoing relationship (or individual life for that matter) must have an underlying set of values or principles by which it is conducted. There are a couple of reasons for this: One is that we have to have something to rely on when our lives fall off a cliff. Any relationship is going to be stressed from time to time by misfortune: someone will lose a job; gossip will float by; illness will come along; financial hardship will strike; a parent will grow old and need help. If we don't have a set of values or *traditions* to get through these rough times, our relationships can be placed at risk. They can become unstable under such stresses.

The other reason for having traditions is that values and principles are needed to guide us in the way we treat each other. They characterize what we believe is fair and just. They constitute the "out of bounds" markers where we agree not to drag the other or allow ourselves to be dragged. Our values define our policies governing anger and arguments and money and property and power and control and all the other things which frequently rankle in a relationship, no matter how close the parties may be or how much

they love each other. If we are to be able to relax in our relationships, we must be reasonably safe from being frequently blindsided.

What values are we talking about? They are fidelity or loyalty, commitment, honesty, integrity, fairness, equity, virtue, and the meaning of love. Without values, there is no morality. If there is no truth, there are no lies.

Let's briefly look at the history of the traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous: There is a point to be made here that is very important.

A Touch of History

About 1796, a doctor named Rush (who by the way was a signer of the Declaration of Independence) wrote a paper describing alcohol abuse as a disease. The name alcoholism was not yet invented and the disease concept of alcoholism did not originate with Alcoholics Anonymous. Dr. Rush explored the subject in some depth in his paper but few, except those who delve into the history of AA ever heard of him or his paper.

Later, around 1840 when the temperance movement was thriving, there were a half dozen or so alcoholics in Baltimore who drank together every day in a local tavern. One day, while discussing the temperance movement, it was decided that they should check it out. With true alcoholic wisdom, they decided that only one of them needs to go and he could then report his findings back to the group. The report had an impact and from that was born a movement called the Washingtonians. Within six months, there were several hundred members and within a few years, there were thousands. Abraham Lincoln spoke at one of their gatherings so they were successful and accepted in society without any kind of stigma. Remember, AA was formed in 1935 and by 1940, when the Big Book was written, there were only about 100 members.

Around the turn of the century, another movement got started called the Emmanuel movement. This was a religion-based movement founded by a man named Elwood Wooster in New England and was successful for a time in helping people to get sober.

A short time later, the Oxford Group got started under a man named Frank Buckman. This group believed in the principles of first century Christianity, that is, one Christian sharing with another. No grand edifices, no liturgy, no costumes - just simple Christianity as they understood it. If you recall, the Oxford movement was quite successful. Roland Hazard and Ebby Thatcher were members and it was essentially the Oxford Group credo that both credited for their recovery. When Ebby visited Bill Wilson in Townes Hospital, it was the message of the Oxford Group that he carried. To give you an indication of their size and power, the Oxford Group had a meeting in the Hollywood Bowl in 1937. There were 27,000 people in the bowl and another 10,000 outside who couldn't get in.

All of these movements enjoyed some success. Yet where are they today? They have all failed in attaining longevity. What happened? It is our belief, and that of many others, that they lost their way because they had no guiding principles or traditions. The ever-increasing enjoyment the Washingtonians took in their success and power became such that they felt empowered to address problems other than alcoholism. They also got into politics and social issues.

The Oxford Group, through Buckman, decided to alter the course of the world by "converting" the world's leaders. Buckman would say, "If I could convert Hitler, I could change the course of history." His first attempt at conversion was the Duke of Windsor and it failed - just as his movement was finally to do.

Yet AA has thus far succeeded. How? We believe that our survival as a society is no less miraculous than our personal recoveries from a terminal illness. The fact that we are still thriving is due in no small part to the guiding principles of our 12 traditions. Naturally, like true alcoholics, the members of AA resisted their adoption. Bill wrote about them extensively in the Grapevine in mid-1940 but they were not well received. There were times when Bill was asked to speak only on the condition that he not talk about those "damn traditions". Finally, however, in 1950 at the conference in Cleveland, the short form was adopted in principle. They have served us well.

If you are beginning to suspect that we think relationships should have mutually agreeable values and should be based on principles or traditions, you are right. It is our belief that when someone is asked point blank what they stand for, that person should be able to give a coherent reasoned answer. And we are not talking about ones' "philosophy of life", presented in elegant prose nor are we talking about what one "thinks". We are talking about what one does, and more specifically, what one does when he is alone and nobody is watching or will ever find out.

So how do we integrate a set of principles or values into our lives that we can and will live by and what should they be? That is the question we are trying to answer in this workshop.

Perhaps nothing in life is more fun and exciting than a romantic relationship with another person. Certainly nothing is more painful when it's not working. And nothing is more frightening or feels more emotionally hazardous than facing uncertainty when your heart is on the line. So we admire your willingness to take that chance.

Some of us approach relationships or marriage as though it were a game of some sort. Many of us think the trick is to find the right person. Actually, the trick is to be the right person. So the question is not: Is he/she the right person? The question is: Am I the right person? Do my attitude, behavior, and appearance attract the kind of person that I would like to have with me?

How would a truthful full-disclosure ad in the personals column read if you were seeking a mate? For many alcoholics, it might go something like this:

Wanted: Single M/F. Must be willing to tolerate slovenly insensitive lazy mate. Must cheerfully endure for long periods without interactive communication other than occasional grunts. Must happily accept constructive criticism regarding dress, personal habits, vocabulary, hygiene, driving, language, housekeeping, laundry methods, cooking, and clothes folding. Must remain calm and unflappable during loud immature sometimes crude or vulgar outbursts and must quickly overlook and forget all threats and false bravado. Tolerance of poor hygiene and flatulence a plus.

Our question then is this: Would you want to have a relationship with anyone who would answer such an ad? Are you the right person? This workshop is therefore meant to encourage you be the right person - *not fix your partner*.

A change in perspective

Let's take a look at some common negative or undesirable feelings and try to figure out how to change our perspective. To make a fundamental shift in perspective, we must first take some kind of action. Unless we **do** something, nothing will change. And the action we take frequently **must be** contrary to the way we feel. It is typically against our "better judgment". (But we must remember that our better judgment is what got us a front row seat in a recovery program.) Action will change the way we think which will, in turn, change the way we feel.

As you have probably heard many times, we cannot think our way into good living. We must live our way into good thinking. This means that we must **do** something - not think something. If we want self-esteem, we must **do** estimable things...not think estimable

thoughts. If we want respect, we must **be** respectable. We must **act** in a respectable manner, not think in a respectable way. We must try to remember that we are what we repeatedly do - not what we repeatedly think. We are judged by our words and our deeds - not our intentions.

We will also need to take a look at the baggage we bring into our relationships. We have a friend who says that all emotional baggage must fit under the seat. We all have it. It is important therefore to stop and consider the conscious and unconscious behaviors we display in our everyday lives that came from our families, friends, and previous relationships. So we need to ask ourselves: What baggage do I bring into my relationships? It comes from many areas of our lives:

- Dysfunctional behavior from my family of origin.
- Functional behavior from my family of origin.
 - * taste or preference in food or the way it is prepared
 - * ways to do things - make beds, fold socks
 - * attitudes toward social customs, institutions, education, religion, gender equality
 - * political leanings
- Sexual abuse, both physical and emotional, from family or previous relationships
- Emotional and mental abuse
 - * Accusations of laziness, stupidity, or incompetence
 - * Perpetual, relentless nagging
 - * Being an unremitting “critical parent”
 - * Criticizing appearance.
- Bad habits/good habits - smoking, eating, exercise
- Ideas about personal hygiene, dress, behavior.
- Fundamental fossilized attitudes (usually in the form of sweeping generalizations), especially about members of the opposite sex. Many of these

were implanted by our well-meaning parents prior to the beginning of our cognitive activity.

In addition, many of us are either alcoholic or have been exposed to alcoholism and there are behavioral symptoms to examine there as well. For example, many of us were always afraid to be seen as we really were: We were afraid of humiliation. We were afraid of being laughed at. We were afraid of ridicule. We were afraid of rejection. In other words, we viewed ourselves as victims. This is a load to carry into a relationship. It puts us in a defensive posture. Such attitudes are not only incapacitating to the individual, in the sense that they exert a powerful negative force on our lives and affairs - *but they are distasteful to our mates as well*. My mate doesn't want to have a partner who is emotionally crippled.

All of these things help determine our nature as individuals. What else can we expect our nature as alcoholics to be?

- In the Big Book, it says we can become restless, irritable, and discontented.
- In the 12&12, it says: "It is a spiritual axiom that every time we are disturbed, no matter what the cause, there is something wrong with us".
- In the Big Book, it says: selfishness and self-centeredness, we think, are the root of our problem. (I suspect that after the last dong of the last ding-dong of the bell of doom has echoed from the last hill, the only sound to be heard on planet earth will be that of a whiney alcoholic somewhere plaintively asking, "what about me???")
- In the Big Book it says we must let go of **all** our old ideas or the results will be **nil**, meaning these old ideas are destructive and prevent a happy existence. And happiness is a mode of travel, not a state of being.

Over and above such learned behavior, there are also other differences:

Men and Women are different. Beyond the obvious physical and hormonal differences, they differ as well in the organization of their thoughts and emotions. Recent findings suggest that women's experiences, thoughts, and feelings do not pass through an "intellectual" filter. It appears to some that women have a direct physical connection between sensory and emotional areas of their brain that is simply not there in men. Science is suggesting, in other words, that we men can never think like a woman or feel

like a woman. Thus our old-fashioned common sense is perhaps finally being underscored by scientific proof.

Who hurts whom?

The question, “Who Hurts Whom?” unavoidably arises and demands an answer and, typically, the answers come in the form of sweeping generalizations. Consider these points:

MEN hurt women with coldness and disconnection

WOMEN hurt men with their “hot” emotionalizing and constant need for intimacy.

MEN hurt women with their need for control and their inability to be “wrong”.

WOMEN hurt men by falsely going along with what he wants. Thus, she loses her identity and makes him feel responsible for everything.

MEN hurt women with their negativity, cynicism and distrust of people and emotions.

WOMEN hurt men with their relentless “niceness”, “positive thinking”, and naïve optimism about people and problems. This makes him feel more insecure and responsible.

MEN hurt women with their aggressiveness and eruptive anger.

WOMEN hurt men with their fears, tears, helplessness, anxiety, insecurity, and powerlessness.

MEN hurt women by looking at them as sex objects

WOMEN hurt men by using sex for reward and control.

MEN hurt women with their resistance to making a commitment.

WOMEN hurt men by pressuring for intense involvement and commitment too early in the relationship, especially when they threaten to leave men if they don’t get what they want.

MEN hurt women with their seeming insatiable greed for money and power.

WOMEN hurt men with their lack of planning and preparing for the future and their Pollyannaish belief that 'everything will work out for the best' which men see as making them responsible for everything.

MEN hurt women by harshly criticizing their competence.

WOMEN hurt men by viewing them as far stronger and more capable of dealing with life than they actually are, but later resenting them for not turning out that way.

MEN hurt women with their silences, lack of emotion, and withdrawal when there is a problem.

WOMEN hurt men by constantly pressuring them for openness, closeness and involvement when they are least able to open up.

MEN hurt women with their analytic, logical, and mechanical approach to personal problems

WOMEN hurt men by making 'irrational' assertions and wild accusations and by making demands that seem unreasonable.

Men and women alike are often victims of an unconscious destructive cycle. And often it goes like this:

"Have you ever been dependent on someone? Horrible isn't it? It makes you so vulnerable. It opens your chest and it opens up your heart and it means that someone has found a way into you and can mess you up. You build up all these defenses, you build up a whole suit of armor, so that nothing can hurt you, then one stupid person, no different from any other stupid person, wanders into your stupid life...You give them a piece of you. They didn't ask for it but your head gets the idea that they can "fix" you so an insidious dependency sets in. Then you discover that dependency takes hostages. It gets inside you. It eats you out from the inside and leaves you crying in the darkness. It can really hurt. Not just in the imagination. Not just in the mind. It's a soul hurt. A real "gets-into-your-heart-and-shreds-it" pain."

Unfortunately, many people are unable to see or own their contribution to a relationship's problems. Instead, they go from partner to partner, thinking that sooner or later things will get better. But a person must become aware of the part he or she plays in creating

their own pain. Only then can they begin to personally change and improve their relationships.

Bill W. wrote a letter to the Grapevine on emotional sobriety which speaks to "unhealthy dependencies". It's called "The Next Frontier: Emotional Sobriety" and it can be found in the book, "Language of the Heart". It is copyrighted or I would include it in these notes. It can be Googled or be found at:

<http://silkworth.net/aahistory/emotionalsobriety.html>

The Next Frontier: Emotional Sobriety by Bill Wilson

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SEXUALITY AND INTIMACY

Personal Relationships are about Loving

Primary personal relationships are about loving. Making love work is the goal of relationships.

If ever there was a topic on which you could gather lots of opinions it would be love. For some, love is a decision, cold and clear. For others, it is a feeling; if the feeling is not there, neither is love. For still others, it is a mystical experience of union and fulfillment, the hard, cold fact is that no matter what love means to your partner, if he or she does not experience that love, the relationship is in trouble. We can have widely different concepts about what food tastes good, but there is no question about whether or not a person is starving. For years I've seen people in clinical situations trying to build or rebuild relationships without knowing the key factor: what their partners are asking of them: If I am to be present to another person in a meaningful way, I absolutely need to know what that person considers important emotional and spiritual food. Without this knowledge, working our relationship is like being in a boxing ring with a world champion and being blindfolded. Unlike the football coach who was more than ready for the Rose Bowl game, we're often not ready to deal with something as important as our relationships. If I were to ask you to write down your partner's three most important needs or requests, what would they be? Try it then check with your partner to see if you're correct.

Are you surprised that their responses are wide of the mark, sometimes so wide that they don't even get one right? Yet if we are so much in the dark about the felt needs of our mates, how can we be present to them? As we will soon discuss, building trust with others requires being present to them in ways that are significant *to them*. And trust is the central issue in all relationships.

Three Questions

People we encounter often find it extremely helpful to get firm, concrete answers from their partners to these questions:

1. What does it mean to you to be loved?
2. What does it take for you to feel loved?
3. What are you asking of me in this regard?

The answers yield clues for building a healthy relationship.

What Does It Mean to You to Be Loved?

When you ask your partner this question, you ask, "What are your values, perceptions, and dreams about what it means to you (given who you are and where you've come from) to be loved?" The answers are typically these:

1. ***Safe:*** Feeling safe has to do with sensing a freedom from abuse. The minimal requirement is to sense that "I will not be hurt here."

2. **Defended**. Being defended means having the sense that "I am not alone against the world." this doesn't mean that your partner has to agree with you on everything; but it does mean that, agree or not, your partner won't turn against you or side with others in a disrespectful way.

3. **Supported**. Feeling supported means having the sense that your partner is offering you encouragement-not just coming to your side during the hard times, but helping you grow, dream, and become better than you already are, and in a noncompetitive way. Support means that you don't have to compete with your partner, but will assist each other to be all that you can,

4. **Belonging**. Belonging means being included, believing that you are important enough to your partner to feel that you're part of a team. This often has to do with the inner realities, the sense that you want your partner to admit you into his or her inner world where you can share dreams, feelings, thoughts, and hidden hurts without fear of ridicule or betrayal.

5. **Cared about**. Feeling cared about is the same as feeling nurtured, which means being told, through certain actions or events (all the way from the giving of inexpensive cards, to being held, to making affectionate love) that you occupy an important place 'in your partner's life.

6. **Accepted**. feeling accepted, which people seem to place enormous value on, means not being prodded by your partner to be other than, different than, or better than you are. It is also understood that no One is perfect and that growth is always desirable, but this doesn't preclude the need to be accepted as who you are at this moment in time. Knowing that your partner is not disappointed or unhappy with who you are and, in fact, cherishes you is a very powerful part of the experience of being loved.'

7. ***Special***. While the term "special" may seem nebulous, it has a very concrete meaning. Feeling special means being prized, being treated the way anything precious in life would be treated. Although the analogy is often made to the way people treats pets, antique cars, china, household treasures or anything of that sort of value, feeling special is given the rating in the hierarchy of the experience of being loved.

What Does It Take For You to Feel Loved?

Once you know what love means to your partner as a practical experiential matter, you are in a position to study this second question: What does it take from you for your partner to feel loved? You're not responsible for what your partner feels, and it's not necessary to need the same things your partner needs, of course. But it is important to know what is on your partner's list and in his or her heart, and you are responsible for doing everything in your power, short of sacrificing your integrity, to create an environment in which your partner can feel loved.

Building on the hierarchy of responses generated by the first question, we can see how respondents answered the second one.

1. Don't abuse me. If being safe represents the minimal level of being loved, then what it takes is to be free not only from physical abuse, but from the verbal and emotional abuse created by such dishonest actions as blaming, alibis, and indifference.
2. Stand by me. If being defended is the next level, then it means perceiving the other as willing to stand by you. What it takes for me to feel loved is that you stand by me.

3. Tell me I count as a Person to you. If being loved means being supported, then what it takes is that your partner communicates to you that you count as a person. People need to know that they have value over and above the function they perform.
4. Share yourself. If feeling included is an important part of being loved, then what it takes is for partners to be willing and able to share themselves, their feelings, their thoughts, their lives with each other.
5. Be willing to go beyond your comfort zone. To create an atmosphere where the partner feels cared about requires a willingness to move beyond just what is comfortable or what you are inclined to do.
6. Provide hospitality. If acceptance is important, then hospitality is how it is put into practice. Hospitality encourages a sense that you're welcome - that your hosts are glad you've come to visit. At the heart of every runaway, every failed relationship, every divorce, is a lack of hospitality, the feeling that "you don't care about me." On the other hand, every healthy relationship radiates the opposite: a sense that hospitality is a priority, that someone cares about you.
7. Surrender. To surrender in a relationship means not to give up but to deliberately remain within the boundaries of what you've chosen, to remain faithful to your commitment to your partner. Even if an opportunity for another relationship arises, you say no - not because you're afraid of being caught but because you choose not to for the sake of the good you have chosen. Surrender gives serenity to your fidelity.

So, after all of this teeing up, let's go through the traditions and see how we may apply their underlying ideas to our relationships. The traditions are sort of like the AA Torah. These are our AA customs -- the embodiment of values for which AA stands. And notice that they are called "traditions" - not "laws" or "rules". We all know how far we would get if we tried to impose laws or rules on alcoholics - bloody mutiny. But what is important is the underlying meaning or "spirit" of these traditions and that is what we want to look at. To this end, we have taken the liberty of slightly re-wording them here and there.

The Twelve Traditions in Relationships:

1. Our common welfare should come first. A healthy relationship depends upon unity.

"If you have one hundred people who live together, and if each one cares for the rest, there is One Mind."

--Shining Arrows, CROW

One of the principles of Community is Unity. The alignment of thoughts in groups of people will cause One Mind to form. One Mind is Unity. Each individual in the community must align their thoughts with what other members are thinking. If all the people think of helping one another, then the community will be service oriented and powerful results will be enjoyed. Having our thoughts aligned within a group will cause our children to experience a positive environment. When they have children, the grandchildren will automatically experience these results also.

Unity means that the two of us make one whole. Ask yourself: Do I think of my partner and myself as a unit? Our book says that selfishness and self-centeredness are, we think, the root of our problem. Are you selfish or self-centered with respect to your marriage or relationship? Do you think in terms of our house, our cars, our bank account, our dogs, our furniture? Or do you think in terms of my car, my money, my phone, my stuff? If you are thinking mostly about yourself, you are not likely to have a relationship with another person that will bring you joy and happiness.

We have had couples ask us about money. Money is, or should be, uncomplicated and a sign of unity is how infrequently money is a topic of heated discourse in your house. Polly and I have a joint bank account. It contains ALL of our money. Whenever either of us comes into possession of money, we put it in our bank account. From that bank account, we pay our bills and then share the rest. During any given period, she may get a little more or a little less than me but we believe that over any long period, it works out even. The problem I most often see is that one or both people are afraid they are not going to get their share (more if possible) so they watch and sneak and try to deprive and ultimately fight and haggle. If there is \$100.00 to share, you have a \$50.00 problem. To solve it, worry about your partners \$50 instead of your own. Do everything you can to make sure your partner gets their \$50.00. The problem will disappear.

We encourage each other to follow our passions and because of that, neither one of us ever feels cheated. Several years ago, a friend and I were discussing how much fun it would be to take a month off and go to Nepal and hike up to Everest base camp. I told Polly about it that night when I got home. She did not say what about me. She did not say how much will it cost. She did not say what will I do. She immediately said, "Why don't you go".

Unity begins with each individual. Having a solid relationship with a Higher Power within is vital to expressing unity in a relationship. If you are following the guidance and will of God, as you understand him, you are more able to participate in a healthy loving relationship. Why? Because a working relationship with God provides faith and faith removes fear. Unity requires harmonious cooperation. Unity demands a willingness to listen to the ideas, feelings, and opinions of the other with an open mind. Unity means sharing views and not insisting on promoting our own way as the only way.

There are at least three areas in a relationship where I believe there must be union: The intellect, the emotions, and the genitals. There should be attachment in all three areas. You should find your partner intellectually stimulating, emotionally attractive, and sexually enticing.

Polly is my rock and that is a very unifying characteristic. I admire her. I like her. I think she is beautiful and even sensual when she wants to be. She is fun to be with. She doesn't give me a lot of attitude. I learn a lot from her. It amazes me how easily she does some things that are so difficult for me. She is very trusting, generous, and non-

judgmental; qualities that enrich her life and the lives of those about her. She is bright, has a nimble mind, and a lot of enthusiasm for life.

Unity cannot automatically preserve itself. Like personal recovery, we shall always have to work to maintain it. Here too, we need honesty, humility, open-mindedness, unselfishness and, above all, vigilance. So we must ponder carefully the experience others have already had of trying to work and live together. Relationships can go on benders too.

"Hear me! A single twig breaks, but the bundle of twigs is strong."

--Tecumseh, SHAWNEE

You can take one arrow and break it in half. But if you take 12 arrows in a bundle, it's almost impossible to break any of them. There is strength in Unity. When we are together we are very powerful. This is the way the ancestors told us we need to be. Strong. We need to unite ourselves. This is why the Elders say, when we make decisions, we must first consider the good of the people. If every person in the community thinks this way, then we will always make strong decisions.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 1:

- How important are my relationships to me? What am I willing to sacrifice for my marriage?
My relationships?
- What affect do my actions have on our relationship? On our family?
- Am I a giver or a taker?
- Do I use silence (AKA pouting) as a refuge or punishment while expecting my mate to read my mind?
- Do I try to listen when my mate has something to say? Do I get defensive? Angry?
- Do I admire and approve of my mate? Does he/she **know** that? Do I admire and approve of anyone who does not know that I do? Why haven't I told them? Do I know that it would be of great personal benefit for me to do so?
- Am I a healing, mending, integrating force in life or am I divisive? Quick to criticize? Slow to praise??
- Am I a peacemaker? Am I willing to do things somebody else's way. Or, because of my own insecurity, is it critical to my ego that I be right?
- Can I be flexible? Flexibility is taught by nature. You will see the trees bend in the wind. You will see that tree branches are flexible. To be rigid is to break. When we have life problems it is good for us to be flexible. Sometimes we need to flow with what is going on. If we resist, it becomes more painful. We need to be on the path of least resistance. Water flows down the mountain through the path of least resistance. Electricity flows through the path of least resistance. Power flows through the path of least resistance. ***Flexible strength is better than inflexible. Let the storm flow over you, and then pop back up.***
- What must others do to accommodate my insecurities? My ego? Can we have both male and female friends? Can we go wherever we want with whomever we want, mostly whenever we want?
- Do I try to be understanding and forgiving when my mate rubs me the wrong way or does something that upsets me or am I abrasive and rageful? Do I know that sometimes I get to be the windshield and sometimes I get to be the bug?

- Do I spout platitudes about love while indulging in and secretly justifying behavior that bristles with hostility? Do I sneak around and do things that I know my mate won't like or that will violate our values. Do I think I can successfully prolong such behavior without being found out?
- Do I share all of me - good and bad? Or do I have secrets? ***Have some secrets.*** We do not advocate emotional nudity. We all need a well-placed emotional fig leaf at certain times. Never, never will we suggest that anyone "let it all hang out". You may say that doing so makes you feel better. Well, so does throwing up, but it's hard on the people around you.

2. For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority: A loving God as he may express Himself in our group conscience. Each of us is God's trusted servant - neither governs

God is the boss. He is the one authority and we must learn somehow to put our opinions and egos aside and allow Him to do what he does best: guide his children. We have proven that our inability to govern is complete. We merely have to look back at our own lives to see that our perceptions are askew. Our judgment is faulty. We mistakenly think we know what is right with metaphysical certitude. Ultimately, we have to face the fact that our way of doing things produced a crisis of overwhelmingly tragic proportions. So when one partner speaks for the relationship without consulting the other member, they take on responsibilities for which they have no claim. Often, one partner is a dominating individual. Sometimes, one partner is very content to allow the other to dominate the relationship. This allows the one who dominates to feel indispensable and important and without realizing it, they then assume a managing and controlling attitude. This is especially true when the one being dominated is afraid and unsure of themselves and want someone else to be responsible for all the decisions. They may feel that this absolves them of any kind of blame for mistakes or failure. In a situation such as this, love doesn't exist. We must remember that active participation by both members in the relationship is vital to its growth. No partner can assume the position of speaking for the other without first having consulted him or her. Another word for this, at the very least, is courtesy. Usually, most of us find that courtesy is easy with strangers or those outside our relationships yet when we are dealing with the most precious persons in our lives, we sometimes leave simple kindness out of our manner.

Of course, we are not aware of God personally sorting out our arguments and disagreements. We have to somehow work those out. There are times when each of us thinks the other is dead wrong about something. We are certain of it. After all, being right is one of the 7 Deadly Needs. Being right with metaphysical certitude is not nice, it is critical. The 7 deadly needs are ubiquitous and they terrorize relationships. I'll go over them briefly:

1. The need to be right. Always needing to be right separates me from you. If I am right, obviously you are wrong. Being right means I am bulletproof. You can't touch me. I am emotionally indestructible. What can you say to someone who is always right? Who has this sword of righteousness in his hand? There is nothing wrong with being right. It is the *need to be right all the time* that is poisonous.

2. The need to look good. Loosen your death grip on the need to always seem hip, slick, and cool. Looking foolish does the spirit good. It is healthy to know that there is life after appearing foolish. The need *not* to look foolish is one of our many burdens and suggests that we have misplaced our sense of humor. Look around. You'll find it. It's probably under the sofa or maybe you left it out in the back yard.

There were times in our lives when looking good was more important than just about anything. There were times when we would literally put it all on the line just so we could look hip, slick, and cool. So people would think we were smart, educated, fearless, attractive, important, and impervious to things mortal.

3. The need to control: Here, there is good news and bad news. The bad news is that your way does not work. It never has worked. And there is no reason to believe it will ever work. You are, after all, a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. If your approach to life worked, why the hell are you in this outfit? You can ask me the same question because I am sitting next to you. So what can be done? You can't ask me to suggest an approach. I'm in the same boat you are. If I admit that my life is unmanageable by me, what would lead you or me for that matter, to believe that I can manage yours? I am as powerless over people, places, and things as you are. I can control nothing. So what can we do? We can surrender. What other option do we have? We have done our very best to control our lives in such a way as to be healthy, prosperous, happy, successful, and admired. Yet doing our very best, we have wound up as members in good standing of Alcoholics Anonymous. We came here festooned in the tattered cloak of defeat. We were failures. It was only after we quit trying to personally manage our lives that we began to have any success at all.

4. The need to get even: The question is why do we have to get even? And what would happen if we stopped trying to get even? What if the person flipped you off saw you

smile and wave at him. Do you think that would disarm him? You reap what you sow or, if you like, “What goes around comes around”. There is the idea that if you let people do things like flip you off, you are a weak person, a wimp. The question arises: what happens tomorrow if the same guy cuts me off and flips me the bird again? What if the other guy is a divine messenger?

5. The need to knowing everything: Let go of the need to know. Do you have a voice lurking about (I named my voice Igor) that says, “We must know. It is important to know. We will be safe if we know. We will be better off if we know. If I know why I am an alcoholic will help resolve the problem (it won’t but it seems like it should). The need to know is like a disease. A wise man said, “Make no judgments . . . give up the need to know everything”. It causes your brain to spin so fast it begins to smoke and finally burns itself out. It is the intellectual equivalent of a dog chasing its’ tail. Once it starts, the only outcome is death by thinking.

The Universe inclines toward you. It wishes you well. It is of good intent. Is there a God? A Great Spirit? Don’t worry about it. Accept that there is. The truly BIG THING you need to know is how is your life today? Are you sober? Are you drug-free? Are you gambling away the grocery money? Are you yelling at your spouse or your children or at anybody? If you’re loaded on booze or food or sex or groveling in self-pity or seething with resentment what difference does it make if there is a God or not? Besides, at some gut level, every fiber of your existence knows that there is a God. The Tao says, “The more you know, the less you understand.

6. The need to keep score: Our program of recovery does not suggest we try to win at any cost. We are not urged to press on to victory, whatever the difficulty. We are not encouraged to never give up, whatever the price. We are emphatically advised to surrender to a power greater than ourselves. If beating my spouse in the game of life is unimportant, nobody needs to keep score. And nobody is keeping score unless it is us. There is no big Scorekeeper in the sky. There is Somebody up there – not keeping score but rather paying attention. That could mean that our Creator considers all things holy, or in a secular context, connected. There is no outside – everything is inside. And God may be telling us that what He would really like from us is a snappy salute and a cheery Yes Sir!

7. The need to judge: Stop relentlessly judging and criticizing everything. One of the antidotes to the need to judge is the Serenity Prayer: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

The need to judge and to criticize is deadly. It isolates us. It is our method of parceling out blame which means that we are deciding who or what is right and who or what is wrong. Have you noticed that we rarely assess the good in ourselves, other people, places or things? Most of our judgments are critical. It is also true that you will find what you look for. If you are looking for thorns, you will never see a rose because you are not looking for them. But your attention will be drawn to every thorn on every branch and you will unfailingly see each of them.

The negative practice of judgment and criticism means that I believe there is a right and wrong and that I can see and differentiate between them better than you. It is my right, if not my duty, to assess the way you drive, how you talk, dress, think, believe, and appear. Worse yet, I judge not only you but I also judge myself -- in the worst possible light. Every time.

Learn to live out loud. Be forthright. Don't take an exaggerated interest in what others think of you. *Don't make it difficult for others to be open, frank, and honest with you by overreacting with anger or judgment.*

And when it is you that is wrong, don't be defensive or evasive. In almost every case, being wrong on your part was not intentional and both sides need to remember that. And the only reasonable response that keeps you from looking bad is something like **"I'm sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me."**

One problem we have had is that neither of us likes confrontation. We would stuff things rather than risk a flare-up. We were too insecure. The risk for doing this however is that resentments can build up. So it is important that we do whatever it takes to communicate with each other. This tradition produces a state of humility because the authority is a Higher Power.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 2:

- Do I insist on being *the* leader. Do I feel that it is my place to govern? Do we strive for equity?
- Do I try to speak for others without consulting them?
- Do I criticize others? Or do I trust them?
- Am I absolutely trustworthy? Try this little prayer: **"God, treat me tomorrow the way I treat my mate today.** Or this one: **God, help me not do anything today that I can't tell my mate about tonight".**
- Is my ego so strong that I must have credit for more than I do? Am I so insecure that I must always have praise for my actions and ideas?
- Men like to be knights in shining armor...someone their mate looks up to and admires. Can others look up to and admire me? Do I understand that I cannot command respect -- I can only deserve it
- Do I do my share? And is that my opinion or my partners?
- Does the thought of God being in charge of our relationship cause me any discomfort or do I like and rely on that idea?

3. The basic requirement for a good relationship is a mutual desire to make it work.

There are many reasons why people stay in a relationship other than a mutual desire: feelings of financial security, the need for emotional security by having a mate, feeling trapped due to responsibilities such as having children to raise and the fear of having to do so alone. These are difficult problems to deal with and are the breeding ground for anger and resentments.

Some days, we are both intolerable or uncompromising and the desire is all there is. When either of us is being an jackass, the other must try to be accepting, kind, tolerant, loving, and understanding - *and silent*. After all, the next time the roles will be reversed and it will be the others turn to be a jerk. Believe us, during those times you will want kindness and understanding.

The first two years we were married we were totally obsessed with each other to the exclusion of nearly every other person or thing in our lives. We were absolutely inseparable and our whole existence was moonlight and passion. It has since become more. We are now also friends, helpmates, confidantes. We now try to be patient, tolerant, with regard for the others feelings. Do you know what we would do for each other? *Anything!*

Enthusiasm for our relationship ebbs and flows. There are days when one or the other of us become lazy about upholding our part of a relationship. But these attitudes are temporary and they pass because of the fundamental aspect of our relationship: we love each other - no matter what else may go on in the world, Polly and Dave truly, deeply love each other. And when our best is not very good, we always try to remember this bit of wisdom: if we *could* do better, we would.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 3:

- Do my actions say that I have a desire to be in this relationship.
- Do I set myself up as a judge of my partners intentions or sincerity? Do I judge my partner in anything?
- Do I approach my marriage unselfishly or do I depend on my mates language, looks, race, education, age, appearance, job, or other such things for my own self esteem? What does my mate have to do to keep my ego fluffed up.
- Am I committed to and do I encourage my mates spiritual, professional, and individual growth and freedom?
- Am I able to share my feelings with my partner? Can I listen to my partners feelings with an open mind?
- Am I reluctant to work on *my part* of the relationship?

4. Each of us should be autonomous except in matters affecting the other, our family, or society as a whole

Each partner should be autonomous except in matters affecting the other partner, other members (e.g. children or parents) or the relationship as a whole. Another way to say this is that we must *become* unselfish and unafraid. My mates *raison d'être* is not to attend to my wants and needs. Our thinking must become, how does this affect us rather than how does this affect me. My fondest wish for Polly is that she become the very best Polly she can be, *whatever that means to her*.

This tradition gives our relationships freedom in all essential matters. Each partner is free to choose their own way of functioning, yet this freedom carries the responsibility of preserving the unity of the relationship as a whole.

Autonomy means self-governing. In order to be autonomous, we must first realize we are God's kids - not just someone's child, mother, father, brother, sister, wife, husband, etc. When we individually ask God what we are to do, one day at a time, and then go about trying to do His will, we do not endanger our relationship. We talked a lot about unity. We ask God to treat us as a unit – as two halves of one whole. We ask God to keep us together, to support and encourage our love for each other, and to help us behave as he would want us to.

What does this mean in practical terms?

Dave likes backpacking, mountaineering, kayaking, rock climbing, working out at the gym. He is free to do these things or anything else as long as it does not hurt Polly in any way.

Polly is very feminine and has little interest in such things. She doesn't have to ask if it's OK for her to go away for the weekend to speak at a convention. She is her own person. It is not the responsibility of either of us to decide what is good for the other.

Allow your mate to be free - to be responsible for themselves without the others judgment and criticism. Stop relentlessly judging and criticizing everything. One of the antidotes to the need to criticize is the Serenity Prayer: God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. We are again reminded what Dr. Paul O. wrote: "And

acceptance is the answer to all my problems. When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing, or situation – some fact of my life – unacceptable to me and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens in God's world by mistake”.

The need to judge and to criticize is deadly. It isolates us. It is our method of parceling out blame which means that we are deciding who or what is right and who or what is wrong. Have you noticed that we rarely assess the good in ourselves or other people? Most of our judgments are critical and negative. The Third Patriarch of Zen says, *“If you wish to see the truth then hold no opinions for or against anything. To set up what you like against what you dislike is the disease of the mind. When the deep meaning of things is not understood, the mind's essential peace is disturbed to no avail.”*

It is also true that we find what we look for. If I am looking for thorns, I will never see a rose because I am not looking for them. But my attention is drawn to every thorn on every branch and I will unfailingly see each of them.

The negative practice of judgment and criticism also means that I believe there is a right and wrong and that I can see and differentiate between them better than you. Is it not my right, if not my duty, to assess the way you drive, how you talk, dress, think, believe, and appear? My ego, in trying to protect itself, suggests that yes, it is my right and even my duty. Thus we have yet another example where it is clear that our ego is not our amigo.

How can I stop this? I believe that the two most helpful spiritual practices are gratitude and forgiveness. If my attitude is one of gratitude and forgiveness, there is almost no way I can be critical. The Dalai Lama says: *“A negative attitude benefits no one.”*

Every morning I say the third step prayer. God, I offer myself to you...Therefore, I belong to God and for that reason, I must not whine about what happens to me. I must assume it is the work of God and therefore good. If it does not feel good, I believe it is because I do not fully understand what He is doing.

We each actively encourage the other to follow their bliss and their heart. We have become secure within ourselves and our relationship so we do not feel such an attitude is threatening. Neither of us is an extension of the personality or attitude or being of the other.

At the same time, we feel like we don't have the right to commit the other without asking first. And certainly when it comes to our children, autonomy is out of place. We must communicate and agree. This is especially difficult in blended families.

As always, such freedom brings responsibility. Because we are mostly autonomous, it is up to us individually to avoid any action that might harm our relationship. We must always remember that we have personal and relational defects and that these defects are forever lurking in the background ready to pounce.

The Fourth Tradition suggests that we should take an honest look at our relationship, asking about each of our independently planned actions. Will they in any way compromise or subvert the alliance that we have worked so hard on.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 4:

- Do I feel like there are only certain ways to do things? And do they happen to be my ways? And do I insist on things being done in those ways?
- Do I always think about how or if my decisions will affect my partner? And if so, do I communicate with my partner and come to agreement?
- Am I willing to go to any lengths - his/her lengths, not mine - to protect the integrity of the relationship?
- Do I carefully avoid injuring my mate emotionally, physically, or spiritually? Do I judge or criticize her in any way?
- How do I deal with my partners anger regarding something I've done through my autonomy? Am I defensive? Argumentative? Do I try to subdue her with still greater anger? Do I point out previous "mistakes" they have made? Do I try to punish her in any way?
- To what extent do I depend on my partners looks, race, education, age, dress, job, behavior, or other attributes for my personal self-esteem? What do I expect her to do to keep my ego fluffed up?

5. A relationship has but one primary purpose - to love each other and to serve as an expression of God's love.

This tradition has to do with our primary purpose and fully understanding what our primary purpose is. Our primary purpose is to express the theme of love, loyalty, family, and unity in all that we do and to share this knowledge freely with others. Conducting this relationship within AA (or AA/AFG) is a requirement for us. What we have is a relationship based on recovery. It always has been and must continue to be or it won't survive. We are self-admittedly alcoholics and our behavior is that of recovered alcoholics. That means that we are sometimes selfish and self-willed. We sometimes become restless, irritable, and discontented. Most importantly, we can easily deceive ourselves and the potential for our real underlying motives to escape our attention is always present. It is only within the framework of AA that we can remember that whenever either of us is upset, there is something personally wrong. That our troubles are of our own making. That we individually have a part in everything that goes on. Neither of us must ever forget that whenever there is a disagreement between us, we each sincerely believe that we are the one that is right!

Tradition five also asks us to give comfort, encouragement, and understanding to our partner. When one of us does something or says something that is harmful or hurtful, it is often because we are unhappy with something about ourselves and could possibly need compassion instead of judgment or an angry response. Rather than lashing out, we try to say to ourselves: "At a time like this, what do I think a loving mate would do?" We then try to do that. If you can't come up with an idea of what you think a loving mate would do, try to find someone that you feel displays those qualities and ask them how to respond. You might also ask God to allow you to see the other person through His eyes.

Neither of us is a reflection of the other. Each is their own person. We strive to be uncomplicated. Each of us tries to play a part in all aspects of our life together; however, we don't insist on fixed, precise equality. Things are seldom precisely equal. Sometimes the biggest share of the load one of us can carry is about 20% but we are putting out 100% of what we have just to cover that 20%. As we talked about earlier, we all bring our baggage with us into relationships and most of us had a lot of baggage.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 5:

- Do we have a "primary purpose" and do we know what it is?
- Do I resort to emotional blackmail? Do I ever start sentences with the phrase, "If you loved me you would...."
- Do I demand precise equality? And if so, do I monitor my share as closely as I monitor my mates?
- Do I *really* understand that my troubles are of my own making? Do I really understand that I have a part in everything and that whenever I am upset, there is something wrong with me?
- Do we express God's love in our relationship and do we share it with others?
- How important is liking myself to my relationship. Do I have or need self-esteem, self-respect?
- Am I a patient and uncritical listener?
- Can I see my partner through God's eyes or hear my partner through God's ears?

6. We ought never single-handedly endorse, finance, or lend our name to any outside enterprise lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our commitment to each other.

This tradition means that either one can endorse things for themselves but not for both. Neither of us can make loans without the others prior knowledge and agreement. Neither can say, "come on and move into our house for awhile".

We have to remember that we are a team and that we must always consider the other.

It is our belief that a partner ought not try to be overly supportive spiritually, emotionally, or physically to the relationship. That is to say, *one should not work harder on their partner's program than they do*. Each one of us needs the assurance that our well-being and/or recovery is between us and God and does not depend on another person. There is no human alive that does not ultimately have feet of clay. Despite their very best intentions, others will unavoidably fail us from time to time.

This is important in protecting the relationship and its unity. It keeps each one of us personally responsible for themselves. Neither of us can meet all of the needs of the other. We are each responsible for taking care of ourselves, but we are enhanced by our association with each other. Our separateness is our mutual strength. It promotes a relationship of healthy equals.

While a partner should be supportive spiritually, emotionally and physically to the relationship, a mature partner doesn't do for the other what they can do for themselves. Doing so could promote an inflated ego which would divert the primary purpose of the relationship, which is to express God's love and not one's own self-will. God helps when we need something beyond our own power - this is part of God's love for us. We believe He realizes that to control us is to cripple us and to compromise his greatest of all gifts: free choice. Anything I do to divert my mates dependence from God to me will, I believe, harm them. Remember, being right is one of the seven deadly needs.

Being needed to be needed seems to be one of the symptoms of our disease. We have each found that from time to time, we have an over-developed sense of responsibility. Without realizing it we can create situations in which we place ourselves in the role of

helper, fixer, or enabler. This kind of behavior can create sick dependencies in those we try to help. We have a false sense of security when we are needed in this way. We think that we are okay because we think that we are fulfilling a vital role. The tragedy to this is that our self-esteem is placed in the hands of others and when they no longer "need us" we feel worthless.

We encourage each other and are interested in each other's growth, but we have found that we must each allow the other the dignity to grow, and perhaps to fail on their own without assistance, insistence, or advice. We allow each other to have different ideas, concepts, beliefs, and feelings.

Partners complement one another. They are not crutches for one another. Being totally dependent upon another person isn't living and it is surely not love. This tradition protects each individual's identity in the relationship and thus preserves the unity of the relationship.

We are proud of each other. We admire each other for different reasons. We learn a lot from each other. On a personal note, Polly is the kindest, most non-judgmental person I know. I watch her sponsor many people and work tirelessly on behalf of AA. That is what she does - that is Polly. I can't take credit for her acts. I know that Polly is also proud of me for what I do and she knows that I don't rely on her actions for my self-worth.

Kahlil Gibran wrote about marriage in his book, *The Prophet*:

Love one another, but make not a bond of love:

Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls.

Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.

Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf

Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone,

Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music.

Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.

for only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.

*And stand together yet not to near together:
for the pillars of the temple stand apart,
And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.*

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 6:

- Do I encourage and support my partner?
- What is motivating me when I try to be all things to my partner? Am I trying to create a dependency?
- Can I hear God's voice when I am screaming at my mate?
- Do I allow my partner the dignity to fail?
- Do I pretend to agree with my partner just to keep things going?
- Do I take responsibility for my own spiritual, emotional, and physical needs?
- Am I in this relationship just to feel needed or loved?

7. Each of us ought to strive to be fully self-supporting spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

To us, this means that each of us must be responsible for himself. We must fully concede that our troubles are of our own making. If we cannot understand and accept that notion, then we are clearly saying that our troubles are caused by other people or places or things. If that is so, then for us to get better, we must get people, places, or things to change. But we've already conceded that we are powerless over people, places, or things. So that line of thinking is a dead end. It is futile to think we will find anything in being a victim other than depression and a grinding, oppressive sense of defeat.

There is also the issue of control here. Neither of us must do anything to limit the options of the other to avoid being hurt or frightened. Examples: "you must behave so that I don't worry, or become embarrassed. You must do (or not do) something so that I don't become afraid.

Why is it important in a relationship that both members are independent spiritually, emotionally and physically? In our view, it is easy for the member of the relationship that is bringing in the finances, or the greater amount of finances, to control through the purse strings. This control can become ropes to bind the other partner. Resentments, fear, and other problems occur from this type of attitude and action. The non-earning or lesser-earning member the relationship may feel that they are losing their identity. The earning member of the relationship may begin to feel that their only purpose is to be a paycheck in the relationship.

Being self-supporting is impossible if one of the partners becomes the Higher Power for the other. The same is true when one person in the relationship is overly dependent on the other for their emotional well being. Our self-worth comes from within and from God, not from having to have someone in our life in order to feel to feel okay about ourselves.

When we are dependent upon someone else for our well being, we are vulnerable prey for sick relationships. This is especially true in the person who cannot feel whole without a love partner in their life all the time. Because of this sick, exaggerated need, the person fails to find a lasting relationship and thus goes from person to person trying to

find themselves and some security through someone else. We believe we are here to enhance each other's lives - not to *be* each other's lives.

When each partner of the relationship understands that they are responsible for their own survival and progress, a greater spiritual strength flows into each and the relationship is made doubly strong. Each partner is able to do their own part without asking or expecting the other to do it for them. We each are able to be responsible for our own growth.

We believe that if we are not responsible for ourselves, we cannot be an equal in our relationships. We become potential victims for the managers and controllers of the world.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 7:

- Do I try to be boss? Do I attempt to assume control of my partner and our relationship?
- Do my needs for comfort or a feeling of safety limit my partners options?
- Do I accept responsibility for myself? Can I admit to my innermost self that my problems are of my own making?
- Do I try to manage and control through the purse strings?
- Am I managed and controlled by the purse strings?
- Do I think that because something is good for me personally that it is also good for my mate?
- Do I deceive myself by thinking how unselfish and giving I am when in reality I am giving only when I can do it on my own terms? Do I take responsibility for my own physical needs (health, diet, exercise)?

8. Our relationship should remain forever an unprofessional, free, and giving relationship - each to the other.

Our individual contributions to the relationship should be free and from the heart. "Freely ye have received, freely give". We are not professional carpenters or plumbers or cooks or housekeepers. And when it comes to chores, we try to share. Most of the time, the who is most in need or is most interested does whatever needs to be done. The one who is hungry cooks. To a man, taking out the garbage is a chore. To a woman, taking out the garbage (without being asked or threatened) is an act of love. As we have said, neither of us is the boss. Being in charge is not all that important to either one of us. If anything, just the opposite is true. Nobody in our house wants to be in charge.

I must also avoid taking a "professional" or know-it-all attitude. In the final analysis, personal opinions are just that - personal. Neither of us is a certified expert on alcoholism, the twelve steps, sex, marriage, medicine, child psychology, spirituality, or humility. Neither of us knows when the other should call their sponsor or go to a meeting. God has never whispered in either of our ears, "Dave/Polly, here is what I want you to get Polly/Dave to do..." We believe that when God has information for one of us, He gives it to us directly or indirectly through a third person.

We have found that when we are individually living by the principles of the twelve steps and collectively by the principles of the twelve traditions and maintaining a good relationship with God, a sense of serenity and peace envelops us and reduces our self-centeredness. Being in touch with all of these things allows us to be free. *And if our spirits are to soar, they must be free.*

Our Big Book says "We will know a new freedom and a new happiness."

In "As Bill Sees It", Bill W. writes: "When we come into A.A. we find a greater personal freedom than any other society knows. We cannot be compelled to do anything. In that sense our Society is a benign anarchy. The word "anarchy" has a bad meaning to most of us. But I think that the

idealist who first advocated the concept felt that if only men were granted absolute liberty, and were compelled to obey no one, they would then voluntarily associate themselves in the common interest. A.A. is an association of the benign sort he envisioned.” -- As Bill Sees It --

How can freedom be defined? What are the symptoms of freedom? What are synonyms for freedom? Liberty, autonomy, lack of restrictions, unregulated, independence. Who would not want all of these? Freedom means:

- We regain our ability to decide under what terms and conditions we agree to exist in this relationship.
- We realize our ego is not our amigo. We quit wasting our energy trying to keep it fluffed up. We begin to understand that it will never be satisfied and will never quit making demands on us.
- We present a consistent appearance. We abolish subterfuge. We used to resort to honesty only when every means of deception had failed. Now, we try to wear honesty like a badge of honor.
- We become transparent. The difference between what is inside and what is seen on the outside melt away. It becomes safe to be ourselves. And if the inner voice says, "Don't tell Polly about this", I immediately tell her.
- We learn to make, honor, and keep commitments.
- We lose our obsession for judging others. Live and let live becomes comfortable, even desirable. We claim freedom for ourselves and unreservedly extend it to others.
- We grow increasingly unconcerned with being right. We begin to understand that "right" is an artificial construct disguised as metaphysical certitude. (Sometimes I just can't help it. ;>)) We begin, with the help of our Higher Power, to slowly develop a sense of integrity and reliability. Honesty becomes more and more important to us, not to win the approval of others but to be at peace within ourselves. The words, *if it's not yours, don't take it. If it's not true don't say it. If it's not right, don't do it* take on new significance. The voice in our head that is so quick to disavow us and criticize us slowly has his ammunition withdrawn from him and he grows ever more silent.

Once freedom finds a resting place in our hearts and our lives, it adds a dimension we could not have dreamed of when we entered this fellowship. It is truly being reborn.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 8:

- Do these traditions accurately describe my behavior? If not, what needs changing?
- Do I try to sound like an expert on things? If so, why do I need to do that? Is my security at risk? Is my fear triggered? Does my ego feel threatened?
- Do I believe that one or the other partner should be in charge based on their gender? Or experience? Or education? Or job? Or anything?
- Do I make an effort to understand my partners opinions and views? Do I really listen to my mate and show respect for those opinions and views?
- Do my identity and feelings of self worth depend upon my relationship with my mate?
- Who or what was my role model for a healthy relationship?
- Can I give for fun and for free - requiring nothing in return? Or do I draw on quid pro quo as a life strategy? After millions of years, the sun, which so generously supplies the earth with all the energy it needs to flourish, does not say, "you owe me".
- Do I believe my generosity toward my mate should be situational, conditional, or limited?
- Do I charge my mate a fee for being in a relationship with me? If so, how expensive is my love and companionship?
- Do I take hostages in my relationships? Do I feel that my mate *belongs* to me?
- Do I really understand that I will reap what I sow - that what goes around comes around?

9. Our relationship ought never be organized or under the control of only one partner.

Each alcoholic has been an individual who, because of his alcoholism, could seldom control himself. Nor could any other human being govern the alcoholic's obsession to drink, his drive to have things his own way. Over and over, families, friends, employers, doctors, clergymen, and judges have tried their hand at disciplining alcoholics. Almost without exception, the failure to control an alcoholic by force or intimidation has been complete. Yet we alcoholics can be led, we can be inspired, we can and do yield to the will of God. It is not strange therefore that the only real authority to be found in AA is that of spiritual principal. It is never personal authority.

Our defiant individualism was the main reason we all failed in life and resorted to alcohol and drugs. When we couldn't compel others to conform to our plans and desires, we drank. When others tried to pressure us, we also drank. Even though we are now sober, we still resonate with these early traits which caused us to resist authority. Therein probably hangs a clue to our lack of personal government in AA, manifested by no fees, no dues, no rules and regulations, no demand that alcoholics conform, no leaders - just trusted servants.

With all this in mind, it follows that a relationship ought never be organized. It needs to be spontaneous, unpretentious, unrehearsed, and candid. Organization carries with it a certain level of safety. Organization is meant to avoid or pre-empt the unexpected, usually because of fear of the unknown.

This tradition is also an exhortation to have fun, be playful, lighten up. Don't take yourself too seriously. Our lives have been very difficult at times and there weren't a lot of laughs. Have some laughs. Exercise your sense of humor. As a friend of mine says, "if you want to hear God laugh, share your plans with Him". In a personal situation, I was without a job for about a year and a half. Throughout that entire time, Polly was steadfast in her love and support and the thing I treasure most was her cheerfulness and attitude and her letting me know that she still loved me and had faith in me.

We urge you to be wary. Organization leads to attempts at control, the nemesis of a happy relationship. As we have just said, attempts to control are so futile as to be

almost laughable and lead only to anger, rebellion, and resentments. A marriage or romantic relationship is no place for a constitution, org chart, bylaws, or Robert's Rules of Order.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 9:

- Do I try to be the boss?
- Am I mature enough to understand and use the principles of AA in my relationship - even if no one makes me do so - with a sense of personal responsibility?
- Do I exercise patience and humility in the things I do in my relationship?
- Do I assume responsibility or do I try to take on authority?
- Have I learned how and when to step aside gracefully when I begin to overstep my bounds?
- Who decides who does what in the day-to-day business of a relationship?
- Am I a “peace at any price” person? If so, doesn’t this get to be expensive at times?

10. We each are entitled to our own opinion on outside issues. Hence our name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

We believe this means that we are careful about our opinions and rely on "live and let live". We do not drag our relationship into public controversy. In fact, we avoid heated controversy completely. It is usually fired by some form of fear and carries with it power-driven anger, resentment, and emotional damage. Next time you get into a heated argument with your mate, listen very carefully and you will hear his or her mind snap shut. Then ask yourself this question: how likely is it that God's will for me is to hurt or scream and yell at one of his kids? Do I want to have to say to God, "I'm so sorry I hurt one of your children that you love so much but sometimes I just cannot (or will not) control myself".

We neither one carry "our" opinion around. I carry mine - Polly carries hers. We don't agree on everything nor could we tolerate our lives if we did? As the sages have observed, diversity gives life it's flavor. We have to let our mates be who they are. If you cannot be who you are, what's the point of your life?

We try to always be courteous. The very essence of Alcoholics Anonymous and Alanon Family Groups is treating others - all others - with patience, tolerance, courtesy, and kindness. A quiet composed response will dampen anger. It adds to our dignity and stature when we are able to avoid saying things we will surely regret.

We also don't speak ill of each other to friends or in public. Being publicly critical gets to be a habit and, in our opinion, is one of the symptoms of alcoholism. We are always railing away that it is someone else's fault. Besides, feelings are temporary unless stated publicly. Somehow, giving voice to them in public gives them an authenticity and longevity that we really don't intend for them to have. They are remembered. Look at the tabloids.

Love is an action - not a feeling. If you love someone, you treat them like you love them. If you want to know whether or not you are loved, ask your heart. Your heart knows everything. Do you ***feel*** loved? Do the words match the actions?

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 10:

- Do I give the impression that "we" have an opinion and I am it's keeper?
- Am I careful to keep confidences given to me by my partner?
- If my relationship with my partner were not guided by this tradition, what would it be like?
Where would I be?
- Am I publicly critical of my mate? If so, what evidence can I offer to substantiate that I have sound judgment? Am I not a member of a recovery program?
- What would my mate say if asked whether or not I loved her?
- Does either of us have emotional scars from repeated heated controversy and struggles for power and control.
- How important is it for me to be right? Would I rather be right than happy?
- Do I expect or need my partner to see and feel the same as me on issues? Can I believe in the idea that it is none of my business what others think of me but that my very life depends on what I think of them?
- Can I let my partner disagree with my ideas without feeling rejected and without getting defensive?

11. We individually convey our beliefs and philosophy through attraction rather than promotion. We are each in charge of our own anonymity.

To us, this says that we rely on our attraction to each other, and that our anonymity is a personal asset.. We don't hustle or jive each other. That was our style in other marriages and it never worked out. We often lied about where we were, what we were doing, or who we were with. One cannot successfully be dishonest with a mate for very long. If you are still trying that, give it up.

We both try very hard not to take cheap shots at each other. We know each other well so we know where the others Achilles tendon is. A thoughtless cheap shot can quickly and easily escalate into an angry disaster and the outcome can be devastating. Some remarks, no matter how much you may later regret them, will not - cannot - ever be forgotten.

Another aspect of this tradition, that of attraction, is that we need to be physically attractive to our partner. This concerns personal hygiene. We owe it to our mate to bathe and wear clean clothes (or clean skin - depending on what we are doing). We also believe we should not embarrass or humiliate our mate in public with obscenity or vulgar tasteless behavior of any kind - spoken or otherwise.

The spirit of this tradition is that we accept another person as they are, putting both the Golden and Silver Rules into practice within the relationship. The Golden rule is, of course, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The Silver rule is: "Don't do for others what they need to do for themselves".

Finally, anonymity in a relationship is that ability to do something good and not have to advertise it. Anonymity is a positive attitude, not complaining when things are not just as we would have them. Anonymity is keeping silent when our partner makes a mistake. Anonymity is saying encouraging things to our loved ones; showing gratitude for small favors, etc. Anonymity is the ability to do good for goods sake without having to take credit or receive special strokes. Anonymity is being happy doing good without expectations of reward or return. A nice by-product of this practice of anonymity is the spiritual principle, 'what we sow, so shall we reap.' There is no room in healthy

relationships for self-glorification and pride but there is much room for great amounts of gratitude, humility and a willingness to be of service to others

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 11:

- Is my relationship treated with care in public?
- Do I think my relationship is attractive to others? Or does it appear shabby?
- Is my partner ever embarrassed or humiliated by my appearance or actions?
- Do I give relationships a bad name?
- Am I guilty of promotion rather than attraction?
- Can I go about my affairs without giving my partner advice on how he or she should conduct theirs?
- **Can** I do good things for my relationship anonymously? **DO** I do good things for my relationship anonymously?
- Can I give my partner the right to be wrong? Can I give my partner the *right to be right*?
- How do I feel when my partner criticizes the way I am trying to live my recovery program?
- Which do I give more of to my partner: Positive strokes or negative zingers?
- What happens when one partner in the relationship is getting noticeably better and the other is not?

12. Anonymity or selflessness is a spiritual foundation of our way of life as mates, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

This tradition says that selflessness is a spiritual foundation of our relationship and reminds us to place principles before personalities. This does not mean your "lofty principles" before your mates contaminated unwholesome personality. It means AA principles before your contaminated unwholesome personality.

One of our greatest gifts or privileges as members of a 12-Step recovery program is the opportunity we have to be of help to God's kids. There is no room in our primary purpose for ego, pride, arrogance, selfishness, or unwillingness. There is however a lot of room for gratitude, humility, willingness, love, forgiveness, understanding, joy, and freedom.

We have learned that lessons can be learned from everyone. Some will teach us how to be and others will teach us how not to be. We are reminded that our primary purpose is to be of service, go anywhere – do anything, to express God's love, to treat others as he has treated us. Does Polly have discomfort or even pain because of my actions or because I am unable to control myself?

How do I treat my mate? If you're not pleased with the answers, ask yourself this: What can I do to change? None of us got here knowing how to be a good partner. We have all had to learn, *sometimes slowly and painfully*, how to do better. Our answer has been the steps and traditions of AA. We again recommend the short prayer we presented earlier:

God, treat me tomorrow the way I treat my mate today.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 12:

- Is there a spiritual foundation to our relationship? Have we had a spiritual awakening?
- Do I place our common welfare first? What would happen to me if my mate disappeared?
- Do I treat my mate in a way that I'm proud of? Do I treat my mate one way in public and another in private? Do I care if others see every aspect of how I treat my mate? Can I comfortably say, "I can't do anything my mate can't watch"?
- Do I have an immature need for attention and recognition?
- Do I have personal integrity? Can I be true to my own beliefs?
- Is my relationship growing more healthy or am I letting it become stagnant?

Conclusion:

Having a warm loving relationship with another is one of life's greatest achievements and one of God's premium gifts. It contains all there is in great measure if you let it...love, fun, sex, humor, tears, belly laughs, and pain. It is worth all of its trouble and tears ten times over.

Our ability to conduct a good relationship usually has to be learned and somehow it must become our way of life - our values - what we do when nobody is watching and there is no chance of getting caught. Socrates once said:

“You are what you repeatedly do.

Excellence then is not an act but a habit.”

By doing our best to adapt these traditions and their underlying concepts of good attitude, humility, communication, fearlessness, love, tolerance, courtesy, and honesty, we have seen not only our marriage benefit but all of our other relationships as well.

Anyway

- People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered: Forgive them anyway.
- If you are kind, they may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives: Be kind anyway.
- If you are successful, you will win some false friends and true enemies: Succeed anyway.
- If you are honest and frank, they may cheat you: Be honest anyway.
- What you spend years building, they may destroy overnight: Build anyway.
- If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous and scornful: Be joyous anyway.
- The good you do today, they often will forget tomorrow: Do Good anyway.
- Give the world the best you have, and it will never be enough: Give the world the best you've got anyway.

You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God - it was never between you and them anyway.

We hope that these traditions enrich your life as much as they have ours. We thank you for your time and your attention.