

The Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous in Relationships  
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### **Foreword**

In this workshop, we go over some ideas on how the 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous can be used in a relationship, specifically a romance-based or love-based relationship. We look at some of the more typical problem areas found in relationships and see how some of these problems can be dissolved by incorporating the principles found in the 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Ideas for this workshop came from published material and friends in the AA and Al-Anon community. Sources include 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, The AA Grapevine, a couple of AA pamphlets on the traditions, Chuck C. ("A New Pair of Glasses"), Dick and Peggy M., Clancy I. from Los Angeles, Cecil C. from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada, the First Minnesota Weekend Workshop on the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous held in Minneapolis in 1993, Blanche M. from Salado, TX, Francine W., Albert and Sally M. from Dallas, TX, the Houston Al-Anon Inter-group, and from many other AA and Al-Anon friends all over the U.S., Canada, Iceland, and Australia.. This material is presented in the spirit of Alcoholics Anonymous: that is, one alcoholic sharing with other alcoholics for fun and for free.

### **The Traditions**

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 find members and their partners who are getting healthy individually but who are in relationships that are far from robust. It has become our belief that the quality of a relationship will improve significantly through the use and practice of the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous. The when, where, what, how, and why of that belief, based on our own actual 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 experience rather than opinion.

### **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). We are, however, not each others first spouse. I have been married three times before Polly and she 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. What was the problem? The problem was, we were alcoholics - 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. We became restless, irritable, and discontented when we didn't get our way. We were continually frustrated at not knowing what our role as a spouse was or should or could be. We believed in quid pro quo as a way of life. We believed that life was situational and conditional. Rarely were any of our expectations met. Perhaps most importantly, there was not the slightest trace of unselfishness and spirituality in our approach to romance, marriage, children, or stepchildren. If our marriage, indeed our lives, were ever going to work, we had to change.

We set about our redemption in several ways. For example, we tried psychotherapy:

There seem to be underlying 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."

Earlier in our marriage, we tried psychotherapy, individually and as a couple. We now understand that part of our motivation was one that we think is fairly routine in AA. We wanted to be on the fast track to Realized Ultimate Reality Sobriety. When we are in the early stages of recovery, we naturally become impatient for more, more, faster, faster. We have come to understand that there is no fast track and we have abandoned any such hopes. Sobriety seems more like having a faucet drip water on the tongue rather than having someone shove a fire hose in your mouth.

Our experience with psychotherapy had mixed results. Generally speaking, it informed but did not really heal. That is to say, it helped us understand ourselves better. But then is that, after all, not its promise? We have become now peaceful with that idea. God heals. Psychotherapy informs and can open the door to healing. Another way of stating our belief is that therapy is occasionally helpful -- Alcoholics Anonymous is indispensable.

The information we received from our intercourse with psychotherapy was mostly a broader and more complete understanding of the nature of men and women and how they differ sexually, intellectually, and behaviorally. This understanding has allowed us to relax our tight unrealistic expectations of each other. We have dropped our requirements that each of us acts in a way that is really not attuned with our sexual, psychological, and gender-based nature. It has allowed us to abandon many Old Ideas.

Fortunately, we found Alcoholics Anonymous and we have changed. AA has a program for living in a way that lets us enjoy our lives. We have been using it for over twenty-five years and it continues to work.

We both freely and happily admit that everything we know about how to conduct a relationship with another human being was learned in Alcoholics Anonymous. It is that information that we share with you now.

#### **Some Characteristics of AA: Our Traditions in Action**

We are an inclusive organization - not exclusive. . We pride ourselves on saying, "whenever anyone anywhere reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there". All alcoholics are welcome as members - everybody else is welcome at open meetings. 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, 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. And you are free to totally ignore all our suggestions without forfeiting your membership.

AA is essentially free. We have no money or property. If we did, we would just squabble over it. The general service board, working with our auditing firm, decides what our prudent reserve should be and all our bills are net 30. We are debt free, we own no property.

In addition to routine alcoholics, we have 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 are each and every one of them is willing to die for their way.

Many of us have an astonishing willingness to practice medicine, law, psychotherapy, and other professions - despite our complete lack of education and credentials in any of these areas.

Bill Wilson's Family Reunions -- recently in Minneapolis, San Diego, Seattle, Montreal -- feature tens of thousands of mixed cultures, races, ethnic origins, nationalities, and social strata all laughing, smiling, doing the wave, hugging, tolerating, being courteous and friendly. That was not an accident.

What makes all this possible? How do we achieve a Minneapolis? How do we tolerate misguided members? How can we stay united and focused? Was it always this way?

### **Three Questions**

Let me ask you three questions:

Do you think the idea that alcoholism is a disease originated with AA?

Do you think AA is the first to have effectively dealt with alcoholism?

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 into the marginal to unbearable area. Any relationship is going to be assailed from time to time by misfortune: someone will lose a job; a bit of gossip will float in; 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 relationship is at risk. Relationships can decompose under such stress.

The other reason is that values and traditions 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. Values define the rules 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.

What values are we talking about? The values we refer to 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.

We are going to spend the next few pages briefly looking at the history of the traditions: 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 need to go and he could then report his findings back to the group. The report had an impact and from that arose 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 sobriety. 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 back in the mid-1940's 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 he stands for, that person should be able to tell him. And we are not talking about one's "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.

### **The right person...**

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 romance 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? Does my attitude, behavior, and appearance attract the kind of person that I would like to have with me?

How would an accurate 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.

My 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**

We need to 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 something we do is frequently going to be contrary to the way we feel. It is typically against our "better judgment". However, 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 institutions and groups - 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"

Bad habits/good habits - smoking, eating, exercise

Ideas about personal hygiene, dress, behavior.

Fundamental attitudes (usually in the form of sweeping generalizations), especially about members of the opposite sex.

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 being laughed at. We were afraid of ridicule. We were afraid of humiliation. We were afraid of rejection. In other words, we viewed ourselves as victims. This is a load to carry into a relationship. 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.
- 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 let us share a belief with you...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. They do not think, "how should I feel about this" as men so often do nor do they as frequently confused about how they feel as men are. It appears 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 finally being underscored by scientific proof.

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. They are the precepts of AA or 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 "spirit" of these traditions and that is what we want to look at.

### **The Twelve Traditions in Relationships:**

1. Our common welfare should come first. A healthy relationship depends upon unity. First, we'd like to clear something up. We frequently hear people refer to "my" program or "her" program or "his" program. In our opinion, neither of us has our own program. We share a program and it is found exclusively between pages i and 164 of Alcoholics Anonymous. AA and Al-Anon are not a cafeteria from which selections are made. They are cohesive programs which alcoholics and those they have infected employ to recover from the disease of alcoholism. The Big Book says, "We of Alcoholics Anonymous are more than 100 men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book." So I will assume that you and your mate share a program.

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.

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". We encourage each other to follow our passions and because of that, neither one of us ever feels cheated.

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, for example the way she trusts people .

She also has a lot of enthusiasm. She's bright and has a nimble mind, is the most non-judgmental person I know, and bears not grudges.

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.

#### CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION 1:

What am I willing to sacrifice for our relationship?

What affect do my actions have on our relationship? On our family?

Am I a giver or a taker?

Do I do unifying things? or am I quick to criticize? Slow to praise?

Do I use silence as a refuge or punishment while expecting my mate to read my mind?

Do I listen when my mate has something to say?

Do I admire and approve of my mate? Does he/she **know** that?

Am I a healing, mending, integrating force in our marriage or am I divisive?

Am I a peacemaker? Or, because of my own insecurity, is it critical to my ego that I be right? Can I be flexible?

What must my mate do to accommodate my insecurity? My ego? Can he/she have both male and female friends? Can he/she go wherever he/she wants with whomever he/she wants, mostly whenever he/she wants?

Do I try to be understanding when my mate rubs me the wrong way or does something that upsets me or am I abrasive and rageful?

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 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 subjugate our ego's and allow Him to do what he does best: guide his children. When one partner speaks for the relationship without consulting the other member, they take on responsibilities to 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 dominator to feel indispensable and important and without realizing it, he or she then assumes 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 courtesy easily practiced 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. But no matter what is done or said, he/she is not even going to see his/her error, much less admit it. Could such circumstances turn into a rip-roaring fight? You bet! We've all been in such predicaments. What does one do? We just say, "you could be right" and then drop it. This solution is absolutely magic.

There is another tool that we can recommend but you probably won't like it.. We call it the 8 miracle words for problem solving. Are you ready? **"I'm sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me."**

One problem we have had is that neither of us likes confrontation. We will stuff things rather than risk a flare-up. We are 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.

When this tradition is practiced, a state of humility exists 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 my mate without consulting him/her?

Do I criticize my mate? Or do I trust him/her?

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 to 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?

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 have the ability to become unselfish. Our thinking must become, how does this affect us rather than how does this affect me.

This tradition gives our relationships freedom - complete 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 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. 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.

Allowing your mate to be free - to be responsible for himself should not be a stumbling block. 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.

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 are they 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?

How do I deal with my partners anger regarding something I've done through my autonomy? Am I defensive? Do I try to subdue him/her with still greater anger? Do I point out previous "mistakes" they have made? Do I try to punish him/her in any way?

#### **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 our motives. 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 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. One needs the assurance that their well-being and/or sobriety is between them 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 ultimately fail from time to time.

This is important in protecting the relationship and its unity. It keeps each one of us 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.

A partner should be supportive spiritually, emotionally and physically to the relationship, but 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. It is our experience that God does not do for us what we should and can do for ourselves. 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 help us when we can help ourselves is to cripple us and to compromise his greatest of all gifts: free choice.

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 compliment 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.

The best relationship are those where dependence is mutual, independence is equal, and obligations are reciprocal."

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. There is some spillover from her actions that I get to enjoy. I get special attention at conferences where she

speaks when I go with her but I never lose sight of what that's all about. 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 others 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?  
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 others lives - not to be each others 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? Can I remember that giving is a position of control and that receiving is a position of powerlessness.

Do I take responsibility for my own physical needs (health, diet, exercise)?

Can I point to at least one thing, right now, that determines the degree of healthy independence I have?

#### **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 housekeepers or laundresses. And when it comes to chores, we try to share. Most of the time, he who is most interested does. The one who is hungry cooks. 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 with each other helps to diminish 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.

#### 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?

Does 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?  
Do I charge my mate a fee for being in a relationship with me? If so, what is it? 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 alcoholics 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? 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.**

Within the context of relationships, 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 scream and yell at another one of his kids?

We neither carry "our" opinion around. I carry mine - Polly carries hers. We don't agree on everything and I have to let Polly be Polly.

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 authenticity and longevity. 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 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 good's 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?  
How can my partners being in touch with reality help me.  
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, to express God's love, to treat others well.

How should your mate be treated? Ask yourself these questions:  
What would I like an article in the L. A. Times to say about the way I treat my mate?  
How should a good mate act toward their partner?  
How should one talk about their mate or their relationship?  
Is the way I treat my mate likely to improve or enrich our relationship or make it worse?

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?  
What is meant by 'discounting the message because of the messenger'?  
Do I have personal integrity? Can I be true to my own beliefs?  
Is my relationship growing more healthy or getting sicker?

**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, laughter, and pain. It is worth all of it's 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. We have a framed statement at home that says: :

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.

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