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The ninth of a new series
of articles explaining
The Twelve Traditions

by
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Tradition Nine

*"AA, AS SUCH, OUGHT NEVER BE ORGANIZED; BUT WE MAY
CREATE SERVICE BOARDS OR COMMITTEES DIRECTLY RESPON-
SIBLE TO THOSE THEY SERVE."*

WHEN Tradition Nine was first written, it said that "Alcoholics Anonymous needs the least possible organization." In years since then, we have changed our minds about that. Today we are able to say with assurance that Alcoholics Anonymous . . . AA as a whole . . . should never be organized at all. Then, in seeming contradiction, we proceed to create special service boards and committees which in themselves are organized.

How, then, can we have an unorganized movement which can and does create a service organization for itself? Scanning this puzzler, people say, "What do they mean, no organization?!"

Well, let's see. Did anyone ever hear of a nation, a church, a political party, even a benevolent association that had no membership rules? Did anyone ever hear of a society which couldn't somehow discipline its mem-

bers and enforce obedience to necessary rules and regulations? Doesn't every society on earth give authority to some of its members to impose obedience upon the rest and to punish or expel offenders? Therefore every nation, in fact every form of society, has to be a government administered by human beings. Power to direct or govern is the essence of organization everywhere.

Yet Alcoholics Anonymous is an exception. It does not conform to this pattern. Neither its General Service Conference, its Foundation Board, nor the humblest group committee can issue a single directive to an AA member and make it stick, let alone mete out any punishment. We've tried it lots of times, but utter failure is always the result. Groups have tried to expel members, but the banished come back to sit in the meeting place saying, "This is life for us; you can't keep us out." Committees have instructed many an AA to stop working on a chronic backslider, only to be told: "How I do my Twelfth Step work is my business. Who are you to judge?" This doesn't mean an AA won't take advice or suggestion from more experienced members, but he surely won't take orders. Who is more unpopular than the old-time AA, full of wisdom, who moves to another area and tries to tell the group there how to run its business? He and all like him who "view with alarm for the good of AA" meet the most stubborn resistance or, worse still, laughter.

You might think AA's headquarters

in New York would be an exception. Surely the people there would have to have some authority. But long ago, trustees and secretaries alike found they could do no more than make suggestions, and very mild ones at that. They even had to coin a couple of sentences which still go into half the letters they write: "Of course you are at perfect liberty to handle this matter any way you please. But the majority experience in AA does seem to suggest . . ." Now, that attitude is far removed from central government, isn't it? We recognize that alcoholics can't be dictated to . . . individually or collectively.

At this junction we can hear a churchman exclaim, "They are making disobedience a virtue!" He is joined by a psychiatrist who says, "Defiant brats! They won't grow up and conform to social usage!" The man in the street says, "I don't understand it. They must be nuts!" But all these observers have overlooked something unique in Alcoholics Anonymous. Unless each AA member follows to the best of his ability our suggested Twelve Steps to recovery, he almost certainly signs his own death warrant. His drunkenness and dissolution are not penalties inflicted by people in authority; they result from his personal disobedience to spiritual principles.

The same stern threat applies to the group itself. Unless there is approximate conformity to AA's Twelve Traditions, the group too can deteriorate and die. So we of AA do obey spir-

itual principles, first because we must, and ultimately because we love the kind of life such obedience brings. Great suffering and great love are AA's disciplinarians; we need no others.

It is clear now that we ought never to name boards to govern us, but it is equally clear that we shall always need to authorize workers to serve us. It is the difference between the spirit of vested authority and the spirit of service; two concepts which are poles apart. It is in this spirit of service that we elect the AA's group informal rotating committee, the Intergroup Association for the area, and the General Service Conferences of Alcoholics Anonymous for AA as a whole. Even our Foundation, once an independent Board, is today directly accountable to our fellowship. Its trustees are the

caretakers and expeditors of our world services.

Just as the aim of each AA member is personal sobriety, the aim of our services is to bring sobriety within reach of all who want it. If nobody does the group's chores, if the area's telephone rings unanswered, if we do not reply to our mail, then AA as we know it would stop. Our communications lines with those who need our help would be broken.

AA has to function, but at the same time it must avoid those dangers of great wealth, prestige, and entrenched power which necessarily tempt other societies. Though Tradition Nine at first sight seems to deal with a purely practical matter, in its actual operation it discloses a society without organization, animated only by the spirit of service ... a true fellowship.



"... become as little children."

AS a small child I remember quite well that in prayer I learned that my soul would be kept inviolate and that if the unforeseen happened I would have nothing to fear. As a chronic alcoholic it was quite the opposite.

Actually I was frightened to death all the time that I was drinking. Perhaps most of us alcoholics are once again learning the same thing that we once learned as children, that we will have nothing to fear if we stay sober and live the best that we can by following the Twelve Suggested Steps of the program

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