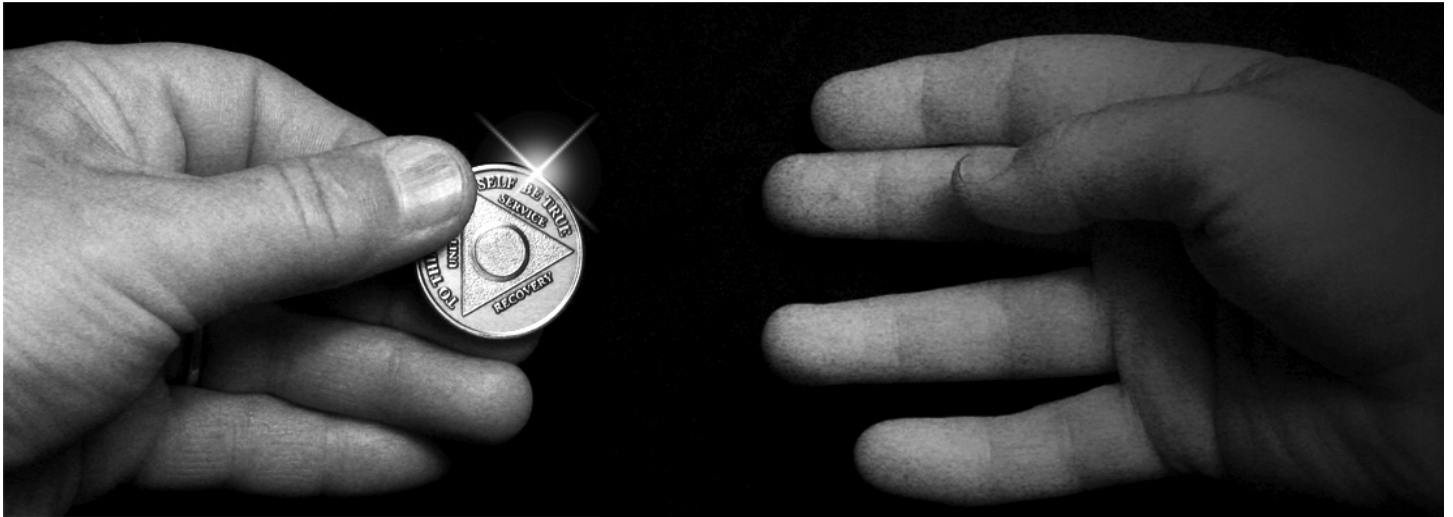




The Voice Within



SINGLENESSE OF PURPOSE

“Our Singleness of Purpose – The Cornerstone of A.A.,”

(reprinted in part from PO Box 459 April/May 2004)

theme of this year’s General Service Conference, highlights one of the principal reasons the Fellowship has endured for nearly 70 years as a safe haven for the suffering alcoholic. Since that afternoon in 1935 when Bill W. and Dr. Bob first met and talked for hours, drunks have been sharing their experience, strength and hope with one purpose alone: to help themselves and other alcoholics recover through A.A.’s Twelve Steps. During the week of April 18-24, 2004, Conference members will reexamine our singleness of purpose – its spiritual foundation and the challenges the Fellowship faces today. They will hear presentations on such topics as responsibility to the newcomer, safeguarding our unity, and the role of the home group, and will participate in a workshop on the importance of singleness of purpose to the individual, group, district, area, and G.S.O. and Grapevine offices.

On the face of it, the idea is simplicity itself. **Traditions Three and Five state it clearly: “The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.” “Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”** A.A. is for alcoholics and people who think they might have a drinking problem, and as a Fellowship we do one thing only – share our program of recovery.

Yet time and again, members, groups, and A.A. as a whole have encountered roadblocks as they sought to live out these most basic and essential of our traditional principles.

All Twelve Traditions were hammered out over years of trial and error, and for the most part, they were shaped less by the founders’ inherent wisdom than by the recognition that they, as well as future generations, needed safeguards against their own character defects. In the formative years, power

drivers among the early members would have diverted A.A.'s energies into hospitals, alcohol education, and other grandiose projects. Yet in tandem with their grandiosity ran a constant fear of losing their newfound sobriety. In *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Bill wrote that the early members, "scared witless that something or somebody would capsize the boat and dump us all back into the drink," devised membership rules to protect themselves. "Our Foundation office asked each group to send in its list of 'protective' regulations. The total list was a mile long. If all those rules had been in effect everywhere, nobody could have possibly joined A.A. at all, so great was the sum of our anxiety and fear. "We were resolved to admit nobody to A.A. but that hypothetical class of people we termed 'pure alcoholics.' . . . Maybe this sounds comical now. . . . Well, we were frightened. . . . After all, isn't fear the true basis of intolerance?... How could we then guess that all those fears were to prove groundless?"

More than half a century later, those words still do not sound comical. With the influx of prospective members who suffer from other problems, our faith that those fears are groundless is tested daily. As A.A. has become increasingly well known and respected in the eyes of the public, many other organizations have adapted our Twelve Steps to recovery for a wide variety of addictions and problems. One result has been a blurring of the distinction between A.A. and other fellowships – "a drug is a drug," we hear from newcomers who are not alcoholics but believe (often because well-meaning friends of A.A. have told them so) that A.A. meetings are the place for those with any addiction.

The guidelines for that situation are clear. In a 1958 Grapevine article, "Problems Other Than Alcohol," Bill W. wrote: "Our first duty, as a Society, is to insure our own survival. **Therefore we have to avoid distractions and multipurpose activities.** . . . Sobriety – freedom from alcohol – through the teaching and practice of the Twelve Steps, is the sole purpose of an A.A. group. . . . We have to confine our membership to alcoholics and we have to confine our A.A. groups to a single purpose. **If we don't stick to these principles, we shall almost surely collapse. And if we collapse, we cannot help anyone.**" (reprinted in part from PO Box 459 April/May 2004)

Singleness of Purpose: There are those who predict that A.A. may well become a new spearhead for a spiritual awakening throughout the world. When our friends say these things, they are both generous and sincere. But we of A.A. must reflect that such a tribute and such a prophecy could well prove to be a heady drink for most of us -- that is, if we really came to believe this to be the real purpose of A.A., and if we commenced to behave accordingly. Our Society, therefore, will prudently cleave to its single purpose: the carrying of the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

Let us resist the proud assumption that since God has enabled us to do well in one area we are destined to be a channel of saving grace for everybody. AA Comes of Age page 232.

**HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE GROUP
ANNUAL TRIBUTE TO BILLY L.
AUGUST 30th**

BOSTON BILLY, the quiet power of love from the October '05 AA Grapevine, this article on Billy Lovett, longtime friend to many in District 12, is the *Heard It Through the Grapevine Group's* annual tribute to the man who helped many along the Road to Happy Destiny. Chaired by Richie D., this meeting serves as a perfect opportunity to acknowledge Billy's love for all in AA, as well as our love for him on this eighth anniversary of his passing.

**St. Andrew's Episcopal 102 N. Main St. (adjacent to West High)
special hours: Tuesday 8/30/2011 Desserts 7pm - 7:30pm Meeting 7:30pm - 8:30pm
dessert donations welcomed!**

August 2011
DISTRICT 12 NH ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Singleness of Purpose

When I think of this, I think of Tradition Five and that each groups' primary purpose is to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Which brings me to Tradition Four, each group is **autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.**

I seem to have become more tolerant over this matter the longer I stay sober, which doesn't mean I like it. I am an alcoholic and would prefer to hear and talk about alcohol. There are certain meetings that are stricter on this matter (tradition four) than others. I try to attend those meetings.

When I first got sober, I mentioned an AWOL at the podium and was told to be quiet, it wasn't AA, and so I didn't mention them anymore. I mentioned drugs very briefly once and was told this is AA not NA, so I usually do not mention drugs. I've never been able to bring myself to tell someone to be quiet when they're speaking at a meeting and they're not talking about alcohol. **The longer I stay sober the more I understand the traditions and try to respect them.** The rest will take care of itself.

I was at a meeting recently and a person was called up to the podium to speak. The first thing they said was that they checked the meeting list code and saw that it was an open meeting, and they were glad about it. **They went on to identify themselves as an alcoholic, and an overeater, and a cutter. An open meeting does not mean anything goes.** I immediately thought I was in for an account of a bloody donut eating frenzy. (Sorry I just still think that way sometimes) I need to give the speaker credit, that's all that was mentioned about the other addictions.

Regarding Tradition 3 where the newcomer with the other addiction was allowed to stay, - the paragraph that always gets read at meetings when speaking of this matter (The "*what would the master do paragraph*") The very next paragraph reads: ***Overjoyed, the newcomer plunged into 12th step work. Tirelessly he laid AA's message before scores of people... Never did he trouble anyone with his other difficulty.***

I believe at some point a line needs to be drawn. Where is that line? I don't really know. Maybe it's an individual thing. Bill W. said if AA fails it will fail from within. We will become the fellowship we crave. Just like it says in the Big Book, either God is everything or God is nothing, what was my choice to be? Someday I may have to decide, either AA is *Alcoholics Anonymous* or AA is *Everything Anonymous*! For now I'll just keep coming; more will be revealed tomorrow! Thanks to all for helping me stay sober today. Ron P.

To Light the Way

The Fifth Tradition: Each group has but one primary purpose- to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

To deal with the frantic pace of modern life, we need support from friends and mentors. In searching for these, we're drawn to those with whom we have certain similarities- profession, religion, an interest in sports, intelligence, and level of education. And we usually determine these using external cues: the Red Sox shirt, tools carried, the college bumper sticker, the Ford or the Harley, the clothes, or the playlist. While it helps us feel safe, this tendency also separates us from people who are different only on the surface. We may miss the deeper connections made between intimate friends.

While we sort and separate ourselves, alcoholism ignores all of our economic, political, ethnic, religious, and social boundaries. Once you've become an alcoholic, no amount of money, intelligence, faith, or social prestige will change that fact. No amount of scientific study, self-knowledge, or denial will make it go away. If you're determined to "just not drink," and control the problem yourself, chances are you're headed for the hospital, the police station, or the morgue.

If we are lucky, we find our way into Alcoholics Anonymous. The shared experiences of struggle, loneliness, and defeat get us to the rooms, where the Third Tradition tells us, "The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking." Period. It does not matter whether or not you've broken the law, whether or not you are homeless, whether or not you've been publicly disgraced. It doesn't matter if you're dually diagnosed. Everyone is welcome.

Once you've been around a while, you will hear your story from other people. You will recognize yourself in what others share. Some common references around the halls include "the baseball bat" we use to beat ourselves up, "egomaniac with an inferiority complex," and "you're only as sick as your secrets." (contd)

We can hear each other's advice (and sometimes wisdom) because it comes from experience. We begin to respect others, and we start to learn humility.

Now if you go to regular AA meetings, the chances are excellent that you have met and befriended people you never would have met otherwise. Friends I've met in AA include homeschooling parents, a water lawyer (out in Montana), a nun, an organic farmer, a minister, a financial planner, and a motorcycle mechanic, as well as the teachers, social workers, fire fighters, and others I would've met anyway. Some are conservative, some are liberal, some have a lot of formal education, some do not. We could start our own country. Our diverse experiences and points of view enrich discussions at meetings, and force us to learn patience and tolerance from each other.

But at the heart of the meetings is the hope of recovery, the yearning for healthy sobriety and a better life. To get there, we must surrender our egos, the pride or shame in our material circumstances, and our fear of change. What binds us together is our shared experience of alcoholism, the strength of the steps, and our hope of recovery. This is the kind of acceptance and deep connection so many of us were missing. And the steps lead us to a relationship with our Higher Power and a spiritual awakening. What a difference to the person broken by alcoholism! Here we are no longer excluded, but included. Here is where we learn to live.

The strength of this connection, the flame of this hope, is what we have to offer. The active drinker, the shaky newcomer, the five year celebrant, the old timer- we are all "alcoholics who still suffer." The disease does not vanish; there is no cure. There is healing and remission. Our recovery, our progress, depends on working the steps. Our understanding of one another and our hope for better things can light the way for the next alcoholic to step across the threshold. The acceptance we have learned through working the program is made real as we humbly extend our hand in welcome. Cathy H.

Common Thread

In my early AA days members always "suggested" that at meetings I listen carefully for the common thread that connects us all. In the past I would take exception to anyone discussing "other" issues at a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. This was a reaction largely based on the premise that AA was being attacked or compromised by folks pushing their own personnel agendas. My heartfelt concern was that they were attempting to change AA into Addicts Anonymous, Emotions Anonymous or Group Therapy Sessions. I even heard of an AA meeting where the speaker spent 30 minutes discussing a horrible disease they were afflicted with that had nothing to do with any phenomenon of craving.

I now believe it does no-one any good to lecture on what AA is or is not. In many ways this goes against my nature but I have found it to be a requirement if I am to stay a participating member of A.A. A major reason for much of this confusion is that far too many members with long term, continuous sobriety walk away from AA disgusted by what they see and hear at meetings.

Today I am attempting to practice non-confrontational responses to these situations. My home group meeting opening statement includes this request; **"We ask all who share to confine their discussion to their problems with alcohol."** This simple request was arrived at by Group Conscious discussions, reflection and votes at our business meetings.

When the meeting starts down another road I take it as my responsibility as a member to raise my hand and speak about Alcohol related issues. Sometimes it works. Other times it doesn't. My experience has been that when several members participate in this endeavor the meeting turns around and focuses on our common disease.

The Old-Timers used to say that if AA was to crumble it would be from forces within. The phrase "Divide and conquer" comes to mind. **My hope is that by focusing on our common thread the fabric of AA will continue to provide protection for the still sick and suffering Alcoholics.** ALK

Statement of Purpose

The Voice Within is the newsletter for A.A. District 12. It communicates District business, provides a forum for individual stories of experience, strength, and hope from District 12 members, and provides other information relating to the pulse of A.A. District 12. The editorial team reserves the right to edit materials for length and content. Quotations from AA literature are copyrighted and reprinted with permission from its source.

Newsletter Chair: Lance C. Voicewithinnews@gmail.com