PRAASA 2015

Friday, March 6, 2015, 3:45 PM to 5:00 PM

Panel 3 - Traditions - Our Primary Purpose.

3.) How Can A.A. Members Continue to Share our Message

and Prevent Confusion with Other Fellowships? Coleen A. (17)

Aloha, I’m Coleen and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is July 28, 1984, and I currently serve on Panel 65 as Chair for Area 17. Thank you Utah Area 69 and PRAASA volunteers for making this event possible, and thank you for asking me to be of service.

When I received the topic “How can A.A. members continue to share our message and prevent confusion with other fellowships?” I recalled something a professor once said in class: “I don’t know why you people don’t understand this, I’ve been teaching it for 30 years.”

Alcoholics Anonymous started in 1935 with the word of mouth approach. Soon, we wrote a book that explained our program. Through A.A. World Services, Inc., we now have access to almost 80 years worth of experience. We have a wealth of meetings, groups, members and sponsors willing to pass on our steps. We need more opportunities to pass on our traditions, concepts, and history.

My sponsor shared, “There is a letter to the editor about your topic in the new Grapevine.” We can share material published by A.A. Grapevine, Inc.

The preamble to the second edition of our Big Book states, that although frightening, it was disruptions that taught us “We had to unify our fellowship or pass off the scene.” Disruptions helped us “evolve principles by which the A.A. group and A.A. as a whole could survive and function effectively.” So, maybe confusion in and of itself isn’t a bad thing. Confusion gives us opportunities to grow and mature as well as to explain and clarify.

A.A. Comes of Age (pages 287-288) tells us “A.A.’s Twelve Traditions are little else than a list of sacrifices which the experience of twenty years has taught us that we must make, individually and collectively, if A.A. itself is to stay alive and healthy.” The traditions are sacrifices our founders made for us.

The first tradition states that our common welfare should come first. Still, A.A. makes suggestions, not demands. We all have the right to think, talk, and act as we wish.

In tradition two our hope is a loving power greater than us is expressed in the group conscience. We give no spiritual advice, judge no one’s conduct, and issue no orders. Hopefully, we lead by example.

I know people, and I bet you do too, who have been reprimanded and corrected while sharing. They describe feeling shamed, embarrassed and angry. When newcomers share, don’t expect them to know what A.A. is and is not… they are ***new***. Show respect and listen for similarities. After the meeting, go and talk with that person and see if they would like your help to stay sober. We live in what the Big Book describes as an “atmosphere of grace” Let’s invite other to join us.

A desire to stop drinking is our only requirement for membership and our third tradition. In A.A.’s second year of existence, they figured out protective regulations were fear based. Instead of creating a program of intolerance, A.A. made room for not just the pure alcoholics, but also for alcoholics who had what they called ”other stigmas.”

Tradition four tells us we are autonomous and can do as we please. My favorite example is when A.A. literature was translated in Thailand. A Buddhist monk thought the twelve steps were fine. But, Buddhists don’t interpret God in the same way our culture traditionally does. GSO was asked if it was OK to insert the word “good” in the steps instead of “God.” Turning our will and our lives over to the care of good, and having a loving good as our ultimate authority does express the intent of A.A.’s message. That simple change cleared the way for our twelve steps to be accepted by Buddhists who have alcoholism.

This tradition also gives us the right to be wrong. It is through being wrong that we learn to not take ourselves too seriously, and hopefully acquire a little humility too.

Tradition 5 tells us to carry our message to the alcoholic who still suffers. We have a book titled Advisory Actions of the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous. From 1951 to the present, advisory actions focus on alcoholics who are in jails, institutions, hospitals and rehabs. They also address how we talk with the professional community, and provide the public with information. Only one other fellowship is mentioned; we have advisory actions that clarify cooperation but not affiliation with Al Anon.

"Where did all these other fellowships come from? They asked A.A. if they could modify our twelve steps and traditions and use them to address their problems. We know we cannot be all things to all people. A.A. gave them permission, and asked them to not link the A.A. name to their cause."

My own experience includes forums and workshops.

Some time ago, GSO visited Maui as part of our outreach to remote communities. They asked if our message was still relevant. Maui has a problem with other substances that are devastating families, so one newcomer thought we should include everything in A.A. The opposite end of that spectrum was an alcoholic who said, if you don’t get what you need in A.A. you have other programs you can go to. Where do I go if I don’t hear how to recover from alcoholism at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting?

Maui A.A. also held a workshop with service representatives from Al Anon and Narcotics Anonymous. Each took a turn, clarifying what each program does and doesn’t do. NA had written a Grapevine article saying NA was perfectly capable of helping people recover from drug addiction, and didn’t need outside help. In turn, A.A.’s focus is recovery from alcoholism. The spiritual principle of cooperation without affiliation was alive and well that day.

I’ll close with a thought from A.A.’s service manual. One day in 1937, Dr. Bob and Bill W. realized, for the first time that wholesale recovery of alcoholics was possible. How could they tell millions of alcoholics throughout the world the great news? That moment of clarity in that conversation seems to be the origin of our primary purpose. And if there is confusion along the way, we have each other, we have our experiences, and we have a loving power greater than ourselves to help us stay sober and help others achieve sobriety.

Thank you for listening.