

# Concept One; A Challenge

Aloha kākou. My name is Bob H, and I am an alcoholic. It is a privilege and a pleasure to be asked to share some of my thoughts with you today at this first Panel 71 assembly. I was honored to serve as your Panel 67 Area Delegate, and I've seen some of our Twelve Concepts of World Service in action at our General Service Conference. But just as General Service Conference's work, which our new Panel 71 Delegate, my dear friend Kunane, will be attending this Spring, continues throughout the year, our Twelve Concepts likewise can be found throughout our entire Fellowship.

Before I dive into Concept One, I'd like us to remember back to last March when we first learned that the COVID-19 pandemic was going to shut down our neighborhoods, our islands, our state, our nation, our world, and yes, and very important to us, our meetings.

Do you remember the weeks after the shelter-in-place orders came down with no meetings anywhere? We did our best with the literature we had on hand and our phone lists, but we were isolated, perhaps afraid, and definitely in need of fellowship. Finally, the day came when we received a letter from the General Service Board telling us it'd be okay if we used video-conferencing software to hold meetings online. Remember that?

No.

I don't either, because that isn't what happened. Our Fellowship, our groups, sprung into action, sometimes even before the shelter-in-place orders came and began to do what we do, practice our Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a wonderful organization because, at its heart, it isn't an organization, or a program, a corporation, or an agency. It has aspects of all of those, to be sure, but it is none of them. Alcoholics Anonymous is, in the words of the Long Form of Tradition Five, "...spiritual entity having but one primary purpose—that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers." During the pandemic, we did that because each of you, each of our groups, has recognized that we are a spiritual entity with a mission.

But that's not actually why I bring it up. I've used up a lot of my time already without mentioning my topic, Concept One of the Twelve Concepts of World Service. Before we talked about the "what," I felt it was essential to remember who and what we are, a spiritual entity with a primary purpose.

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The long form of Concept One reads: "The final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship." In the A.A. Service Manual combined with the Twelve Concepts of World Service, the contents page for the Concepts section lists it a little differently, "The Ultimate Responsibility for A. A. World Services Belongs to the A. A. Groups."

When COVID-19 struck, who stood up and said, "Let there be meetings?" It was the A.A. Groups. Our collective group conscience spoke, and A.A. turned on a dime, not away from its mission, its primary purpose, but to it.

Now I could read the Service Manual itself, but honestly, you should do that for yourselves. My suggestion is that you do it with a group, small or large, it's a lot of fun that way. You'll challenge yourself and each other in seeing how all these pieces you are learning about today fit together. I won't spoil it for you.

Instead, I will say this. The history of Alcoholics Anonymous before the formation of the Conference, so lovingly described in A.A. Comes of Age, was one in which the affairs of A.A. were managed by the able trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation and by our co-founders, Bill and Dr. Bob. We were growing by leaps and bounds, overcoming many pitfalls culminating in the development of our Twelve Traditions.

There were many discussions about protecting A.A.'s future, and opinions, as they ever are in A.A., and outside as well, were divided. But events have a way of forcing an issue, as we saw ourselves last year. Then news came that Dr. Bob had a fatal illness. The prospect of a co-founder, and eventually both co-founders passing away dawned.

The answer to protecting our future, as you'll see when you read the full chapter on Concept One, and please, A.A. Comes of Age as well, was the establishment of our General Service Conference, our collective Group Conscience.

Let's talk about our group conscience and our Traditions for a bit. Given the nature of this body, I'm quite sure all of you have attended more than a few, some smooth, some fractious, most somewhere in-between. My favorites are those where we have a rousing discussion about some pressing issue, make a collective decision or not, and then trot off to lunch together. My sincere wish is that we will all be able to do that again soon in person.

Tradition One states that "Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward."

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It's pretty dire, "A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die." That's a problem. Indeed the major problem A.A. faces now, in the past, and the future is Unity.

Tradition Two supplies the answer: "For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience."

If I may be so bold as to paraphrase this a bit, "there is no problem your group can't overcome if you participate in and listen to your group conscience ." I would love to have added the word "informed" before group conscience. We have to have done our homework before we can be of real service to each other and A.A. as a whole. But I'm editorializing a bit here.

Problem: Unity

Solution: Group Conscience

And that is the real heart of Concept One, Tradition Two.

Trust our collective group conscience; that was the decision at which they arrived. It is how we all found ourselves here today at the first assembly of the year.

That happened before the Twelve Concepts were formally adopted, which occurred in 1962. But as with our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, our Concepts rose out of our experience.

The rest of the Concepts will endeavor to set out a plan by which Concept One can come to life. But it is Concept One, the idea that we are responsible for A.A. World Services, our future, that is at the heart of the matter. And at the core of Concept One, as we have learned, is Tradition Two.

Now that would be all well and fine, except for some pretty harsh words used in Concept One. Let me reread it: "The final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship."

Final responsibility and ultimate authority, that's something.

To be responsible means we, you and I, our groups, the collective us, we are the folks that must ensure that the problem of Tradition One, a lack of Unity, never befalls us, or surely we will die. That's a heck of a responsibility. And yes, I know I'm speaking to the choir because we are all here today. But think of it, this isn't just a job, it isn't just a little bit of service to pass the time, or because my group elected me, it's a responsibility to see that we don't die.

I know, it seems like a big task. But there are many, many hands. I'd say look around if we were gathered together in a physical space, but take a second and look at the screen. All those little pictures are not GSRS, and DCMS, and Standing Committee Chairs, and Area Officers, and our

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Delegate; they are our hands reaching out to do the work of A.A. For indeed A.A. has called us to this responsibility.

Who turned on the video-conferencing when COVID-19 struck? We did. All those folks you see on your screen did. All those folks you don't see on your screen did. You did. I did. We did. That's the same sort of responsibility that is the real challenge of Concept One. It is a challenge, but look at what we've accomplished last year. What our spiritual entity, Alcoholics Anonymous, did, with many, many hands, with your hands, to preserve and extend our Three Legacies of Recovery, Service, and Unity. You can meet this challenge, too; it's a piece of cake compared to COVID-19.

And ultimate authority, what does that mean?

It means just what it says. We, the collective we, have the ultimate authority to decide the direction of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is achieved through the year-long Conference process with the participation of, as I've said, many, many hands. But keep in mind, while we have the authority to do just that, we also have the responsibility to do the work.

I was always told that with great authority goes great responsibility. To me, that means I have to make an effort to continue learning, continue listening to you and others, and put into practice everything I have learned as a servant in Alcoholics Anonymous. I do not feel it would be moral of me to try to be a part of our collective conscience unless I made that effort.

I know there's a lot to take in today, and there's more to come.

Let me leave you with this thought from Dr. Jack Norris, the late non-alcoholic trustee of the A.A. General Service Board, who in 1965 wrote:

"We must remember that A.A. will continue strong only so long as each of us freely and happily gives it away to another person, only as each of us takes our fair share of responsibility for sponsorship of those who still suffer, for the growth and integrity of our Group, for our Intergroup activities, and for A.A. as a whole. It is in taking responsibility that real freedom and the enduring satisfactions of life are found. A.A. has given us the power to choose – to drink or not to drink – and in doing so has given us the freedom to be responsible for ourselves. As we become responsible for ourselves, we are free to be responsible for our share in A.A., and unless we happily accept this responsibility, we lose A.A. Strange, isn't it?"

Concept One is A.A.'s answer to the problem of keeping our fellowship alive and united. Concept One is not a statement of fact or intent. It is a challenge. One I am honored to thank you for taking up today.

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In closing, let's always remember the words of our Declaration of Unity

This we owe to A.A.'s future:

To place our common welfare first;

To keep our fellowship united.

For on A.A. unity depend our lives,

And the lives of those to come.

Mahalo nui loa for allowing me to be of service.

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