

Tradition Twelve

THE KEY phrases in Tradition Twelve are anonymity, spiritual foundation, and principles above personalities. Tied together, these words and phrases embody basic principles of our program. Whenever and wherever a potential member reaches to Al-Anon for help, we want to be assured that Al-Anon is there. It is in learning about Tradition Twelve that we learn the spiritual guidance anonymity offers, its intent, and how we can humbly apply the program to our daily lives.

When we first came to Al-Anon, the fear of knowing someone in the meeting was immense. Many of us were afraid someone, possibly the alcoholic, would know of our attendance and not approve. Although many were familiar with the principle behind anonymity, few of us truly realized the power it provides to each and every one of us. As a new member, we heard these words read at the opening of a meeting: “Anonymity is an important principle of the Al-Anon/Alateen program. Everything that is said here, in the group meeting and member-to-member, must be held in confidence. Only in this way can we feel free to say what is in our minds and hearts, for this is how we help one another in Al-Anon/Alateen.”

In meetings we also heard it said or saw the table card which states, “Whom you see here, What you hear here, When you leave her, Let it stay here.” This meant that members, for many reasons, depended on anonymity for their personal recovery and safety. It is anonymity that helped many of us open up and become willing to share, to ask questions. New members learn, by listening to others, that Al-Anon provides a place where they can talk about the effects of living with the disease of alcoholism and its impact on them. We can also talk about how we are feeling about the alcoholics in our lives. In meetings members talk about their confusion, anger, concern, and resentment as well as their first steps to recovery and their personal successes. We learn that, by sharing our

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experience, strength, and hope, our sharing is safe and that no one will repeat it.

Understanding that anonymity goes beyond the identity of individual members is a portion of the spiritual foundation of Al-Anon. Anonymity embodies each Step, Tradition, and Concept by stating that what we learn in Al-Anon is far more important than the member of the group who is sharing or getting help. Anonymity implies that, no matter who we are, where we live, what car we drive, or what book we have read, the basic premise is humility. By practicing humility in recovery by remaining anonymous, we can be assured that Al-Anon will always be here and that its legacy is sound and maintained.

As we attend more and more meetings, we understand how the principle of anonymity works. As newcomers many of us were handed a phone list containing the name and phone numbers of the regular members. All of us are encouraged to call another Al-Anon member if we need to talk with someone. Not knowing who might hear a telephone message, we learn to leave a name, phone number, and brief message, not mentioning Al-Anon, on an answering machine or when someone else answers. Conversely, many a member in service has been challenged in not knowing how to contact another Al-Anon member by phone because they didn't have a last name. Others have wanted to visit a member in a hospital only to find themselves not being able to identify their good friend. We can know each other. We just don't tell others about each other. This protects the anonymity of all.

Why is anonymity the spiritual foundation of our whole program? There are many significant spiritual concepts embodied in the practice of anonymity. Among them are safety and respect for our fellow members, humility and the willingness to trust a Power greater than ourselves, acceptance of each other, and the willingness to live by principles we

value rather than always reacting to the personalities of those around us. Anonymity unifies our fellowship by removing individual status so we can listen to the message rather than the messenger.

As we begin to serve our groups, we are called upon to expand our understanding of anonymity to include humility and trust in a Higher Power. Our job as a trusted servant is not to govern, but to serve and to carry out our assigned tasks. We have to listen and forgo the temptation to take charge. Performing the job becomes the principle and who is doing the job—the personality—becomes unimportant. Instead we need to keep the guidance of a Power greater than ourselves always foremost in our considerations.

Our recovery and the health of our groups is assured when we place principles above personalities. Many a squabble over who is right can be avoided by focusing on principles. Even if we argue about what they mean, placing principles above personalities helps us reconnect after we have had a big discussion. Sometimes we tend to discount a message just because we don't like the messenger. Remembering to focus on principles helps us to listen to the message and not judge its content by the personality of the one delivering it. In the process many of us are surprised to discover that we even come to appreciate the messenger—we grow in tolerance. We don't have to like each other to respect each other, offer courtesy, and love each other in a very special way.

It isn't always easy. Many of us are used to getting credit for what we contribute. In meetings we learn how to share our recovery with humility. We learn to surrender the satisfaction of being somebody special to the common good—we are all special. We come to know that our personal good is being served by furthering the common good.

The spiritual principle of humility through anonymity also helps us recognize that, while it is tempting to be the object of our group's admiration, it is

dangerous to our own recovery. Being put above other leaves us vulnerable to envy, criticism, and loneliness when we have challenges of our own and need supportive friends. It isn't worth it. The humility required to refuse to be put on a pedestal comes hard for many of us. However, we learn that when we try to elevate ourselves by forcing our will or insisting we know best, or even just by doing everything for everyone else, we reap hostility, isolation, and a good deal of misery. Practicing anonymity with humility within the group protects our recovery.

The Twelfth Tradition calls upon us to integrate all the Al-Anon principles. It is worth the effort. By attending meetings, our lives and relationships measurably improve. Our understanding of the spiritual foundation that anonymity provides grows as we grow.

Members Share Experience, Strength, and Hope

IT DOESN'T
MATTER

MY FAVORITE Tradition is the Twelfth. I feel that anonymity in an Al-Anon group means that we attend meetings without mentioning our professions or our status in life. A professional may sit next to someone on welfare and it doesn't matter. I feel that too many Al-Anon members have the wrong impression of what anonymity is. They seem to think it means keeping others in the group from knowing their last name.

We become members of the worldwide fellowship of Al-Anon. We strive for recovery completely unconcerned about what we do outside of Al-Anon or what other members may do. We share a common problem, alcoholism. That's the important issue. By keeping the focus on the program, no one person can ever become the voice of Al-Anon. If they have forceful personalities or prestige in the world, that doesn't matter in Al-Anon.

I THOUGHT I understood anonymity, but “principles above personalities” puzzled me for a long time. Now several years into my program, I’m grateful for all that Tradition Twelve has taught me. Because of it, I have received the gift of freedom to speak my deepest thoughts at meetings.

In my town several Al-Anon groups have members from different countries, cultures, and languages. Our different life styles and beliefs do not interfere with our respect for one another. At these meetings I appreciate insights from people whose paths would never have crossed mine if all of us didn’t practice Al-Anon’s “principles above personalities.”

Anonymity means that I respect the challenge of “principles above personalities.” When I meet a colleague or an employee at their first meeting, I say to myself, “We’re all growing. We are all human and deserve respect. All of us deserve a chance to grow using the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions.”

Working Tradition Twelve

Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities.

- Do I practice this Tradition in all of my affairs?
How?
- Am I able to listen to others with an open mind, or am I discounting them because they are not agreeing with me?
- Do I understand the spiritual foundation of my personal anonymity? My group’s? My Area’s?
- Am I able to see the good in others or just notice their faults?

- ✦ How do I remember not to identify anyone or tell an identifiable story even if I'm speaking to a group member?
- ✦ What is the relationship between anonymity and confidentiality?
- ✦ Do I put anyone in our group on a pedestal, expecting more of them than I do of myself?
- ✦ If a well-known member of my community comes into my group, do I resist letting people know I have seen them in Al-Anon?
- ✦ How do I let Al-Anon be known without breaking anyone's anonymity?
- ✦ What does it mean to understand that it is up to each of us to decide just how anonymous we want to be?
- ✦ Do I ever use Al-Anon to promote my personal agenda? Products? Ideologies?
- ✦ Do I respect Al-Anon's trusted servants and thank them for their service?
- ✦ Is Al-Anon a secret in my community?
- ✦ How does Tradition Twelve relate to Tradition Ten? To Tradition Eleven?
- ✦ When I meet people I know from Al-Anon outside of a meeting, how can I acknowledge them while protecting their anonymity?
- ✦ How does my group inform all members about our principle of anonymity? Do we do this on a regular basis?
- ✦ How does this Tradition impact Al-Anon's primary purpose?
- ✦ What is the importance of my membership in the Al-Anon fellowship to the worldwide fellowship?

- How has study of the Traditions improved my understanding of my role in my group?
- How has study of the Traditions improved my understanding of my group's role in our district? In our Area? In worldwide Al-Anon?
- How can I apply the Traditions to my personal life? To my work life?