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TRADITION



*First
Thought
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Group*

Short Form:

“A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.”



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Long Form:

“Each A.A. group needs the least possible organization. Rotating leadership is the best. The small group may elect its secretary, the large group its rotating committee, and the groups of a large metropolitan area their central or intergroup committee, which often employs a full-time secretary. The trustees of the General Service Board are, in effect, our A.A. General Service Committee. They are the custodians of our A.A. Tradition and the receivers of voluntary A.A. contributions by which we maintain our A.A. General Service Office at New York. They are authorized by the groups to handle our overall public relations and they guarantee the integrity of our principal newspaper, the A.A. Grapevine. All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in A.A. are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.”



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Overriding Idea of This Tradition:

Organization and Service Aren't Mutually Exclusive

Spiritual Principle of This Tradition:

SPIRIT OF SERVICE

SUMMARY

Organization and Service Aren't Mutually Exclusive

In the beginning, our founders really felt like we didn't need much organization and structure in the Fellowship, and then they went and created a bunch of it. "It is clear 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."
(12×12, Page 174)



TRADITION 9



SUMMARY

Organization and Service Aren't Mutually Exclusive

One of the best examples of this is if you should ever find yourself needing to reach out to GSO for their ideas on a specific issue that your group, District or Area may be having; you can be relatively sure regardless of what you are asking about will garner a response that generally starts off with something like, "That's a great question. Our shared experience in A.A. is...." and they will offer suggestions of solutions from those that have gone before us to help you with your concern. They cannot tell us what to do, but they can help us.



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SUMMARY

Organization and Service Aren't Mutually Exclusive

The organization of our Fellowship is crucial to our being able to carry the message to the still suffering alcoholic, but that structure is not there to govern, but to serve.



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THE LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Bill W.'s
Grapevine Writings

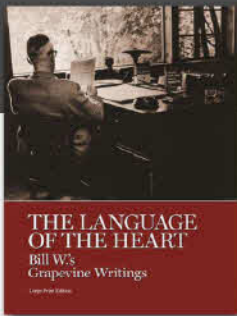
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LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Tradition Nine August 1948

The least possible organization, that's our universal ideal. No fees, no dues, no rules imposed on anybody, one alcoholic bringing recovery to the next; that's the substance of what we most desire, isn't it?

But how shall this simple ideal best be realized? Often a question, that.



LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Tradition Nine August 1948

We have, for example, the kind of AA who is for simplicity. Terrified of anything organized, he tells us that AA is getting too complicated. He thinks money only makes trouble, committees only make dissension, elections only make politics, paid workers only make professionals, and clubs only coddle slippers.

Says he, let's get back to coffee and cakes by cozy firesides. If any alcoholics stray our way, let's look after them. But that's enough. Simplicity is our answer.

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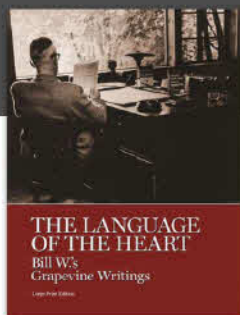


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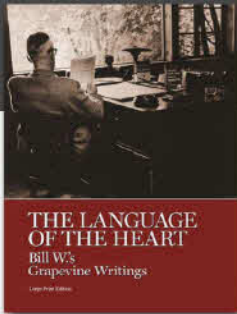


LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Tradition Nine August 1948

Quite opposed to such halcyon simplicity is the AA promoter. Left to himself, he would “bang the cannon and twang the lyre” at every crossroad of the world.

Millions for drunks, great AA hospitals, batteries of paid organizers, and publicity experts wielding all the latest paraphernalia of sound and script; such would be our promoter’s dream. “Yes, sir,” he would bark. “My two-year plan calls for one million AA members by 1950!”



LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Tradition Nine August 1948

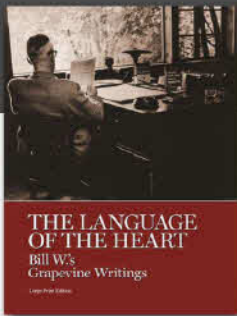
For one, I'm glad we have both conservatives and enthusiasts. They teach us much. The conservative will surely see to it that the AA movement never gets overly organized.

But the promoter will continue to remind us of our terrific obligation to the newcomer and to those hundreds of thousands of alcoholics still waiting all over the world to hear of AA.

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Tradition Nine August 1948

We shall, naturally, take the firm and safe middle course. AA has always violently resisted the idea of any general organization.

Yet, paradoxically, we have ever stoutly insisted upon organizing certain special services; mostly those absolutely necessary to effective and plentiful Twelfth Step work.

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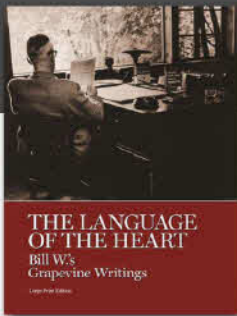


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Tradition Nine August 1948

If, for instance, an AA group elects a secretary or rotating committee, if an area forms an intergroup committee, if we set up a foundation, a general office or a Grapevine, then we are organized for service. The AA book and pamphlets, our meeting places and clubs, our dinners and regional assemblies —these are services, too.

Nor can we secure good hospital connections, properly sponsor new prospects, and obtain good public relations just by chance. People have to be appointed to look after these things, sometimes paid people. Special services are performed.

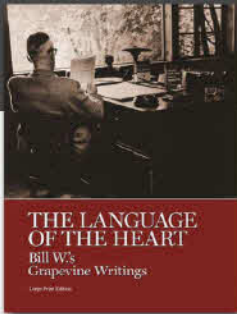


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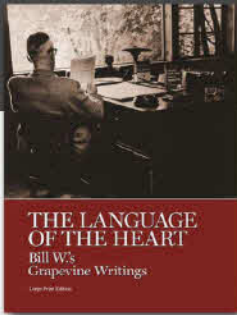


LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Tradition Nine August 1948

But by none of these special services has our spiritual or social activity, the great current of AA, ever been really organized or professionalized. Yet our recovery program has been enormously aided. While important, these service activities are very small by contrast with our main effort.

As such facts and distinctions become clear, we shall easily lay aside our fears of blighting organization or hazardous wealth. As a movement, we shall remain comfortably poor, for our service expenses are trifling.



LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Tradition Nine August 1948

With such assurances, we shall without doubt continue to improve and extend our vital lifelines of special service; to better carry our AA message to others; to make for ourselves a finer, greater Society, and, God willing, to assure Alcoholics Anonymous a long life and perfect unity.

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What's the most important thing I need to know about A.A.'s Tradition 9

What It Means:

No central authority in A.A. – The fellowship itself is a spiritual movement, not an organization with power or control. There's no “top-down” governance in A.A. the way businesses or governments work.

Service, not rule – While A.A. as a whole isn't “organized,” local groups, intergroups, and the General Service Office do exist—but only as tools of service. Their role is to help A.A. carry its message and function smoothly, not to direct or dominate members.

Responsibility flows upward – Any service boards or committees are accountable to the fellowship, not the other way around. The emphasis is always on trusted servants rather than rulers.

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What's the most important thing I need to know about A.A.'s Tradition 8

Why It Matters:

Tradition 9 protects A.A. from becoming a rigid institution or power structure. It reminds us that unity and effectiveness come from shared responsibility and spiritual principles, not from authority or hierarchy.

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What's the most important thing I need to know about A.A.'s Tradition 8

In A Nutshell:

A.A. is not an organization in the usual sense—it's a spiritual fellowship held together by service and shared responsibility. Committees exist only to serve, never to govern.



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TRADITION
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Short Form:

“Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues;
hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public
controversy.”



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TRADITION 10



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Long Form:

“No A.A. group or member should ever, in such a way as to implicate A.A., express any opinion on outside controversial issues — particularly those of politics, alcohol reform, or sectarian religion. The Alcoholics Anonymous groups oppose no one. Concerning such matters they can express no views whatever.”



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Overriding Idea of This Tradition:

Outside Issues Can Tear Us Apart

Spiritual Principle of This Tradition:

OUTSIDE ISSUES

SUMMARY

Outside Issues Can Tear Us Apart

What is an outside issue? An outside issue is anything outside of my relationship with God through sobriety.

The tenth tradition is rather clear as it applies to A.A. We have prospered by having no opinion on outside matters and not being drawn into controversy. For instance, A.A. has avoided the outside issues that tore apart the Washingtonians. A.A. has never become crusaders or taken stands on important but outside issues, “particularly those of politics, alcohol reform, or sectarian religion”. (See the long form of this tradition)



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SUMMARY

Outside Issues Can Tear Us Apart

Bill Wilson differentiates the responsibilities of the A.A. member and the A.A. group in this tradition by saying on p. 177 of the “12 & 12” that the tenth tradition does not “mean that the members of Alcoholics Anonymous, now restored as citizens of the world, are going to back away from their individual responsibilities to act as they see the right upon issues of our time. But when it comes to A.A. as a whole, that’s quite a different matter. In this respect, we do not enter into public controversy because we know that our society will perish if it does.”



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THE LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

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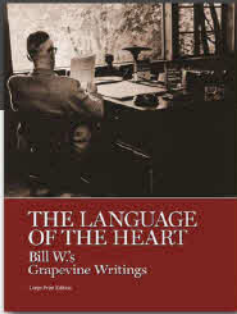
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LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Tradition Ten September 1948

To most of us, Alcoholics Anonymous has become as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar. We like to believe that it will soon be as well-known and just as enduring as that historic landmark.

We enjoy this pleasant conviction because nothing has yet occurred to disturb it; we reason that we must hang together or die. Hence we take for granted our continued unity as a movement.



LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Tradition Ten September 1948

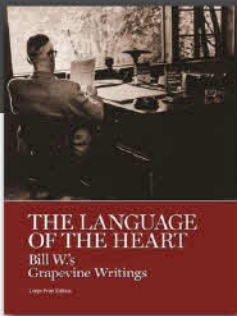
But should we? Though God has bestowed upon us great favors, and though we are bound by stronger ties of love and necessity than most societies, is it prudent to suppose that automatically these great gifts and attributes shall be ours forever?

If we are worthy, we shall probably continue to enjoy them. So the real question is, how shall we always be worthy of our present blessings?

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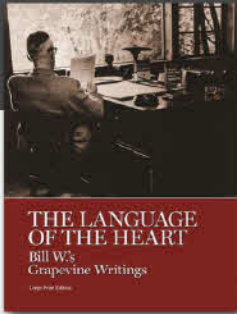
Tradition Ten September 1948

Seen from this point of view, our AA Traditions are those attitudes and practices by which we may deserve, as a movement, a long life and a useful one. To this end, none could be more vital than our Tenth Tradition, for it deals with the subject of controversy—serious controversy.

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LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Tradition Ten September 1948

On the other side of the world, millions have died even recently in religious dissension. Other millions have died in political controversy. The end is not yet. Nearly everybody in the world has turned reformer. Each group, society, and nation is saying to the other, "You must do as we say, or else." Political controversy and reform by compulsion have reached an all-time high. And eternal, seemingly, are the flames of religious dissension.

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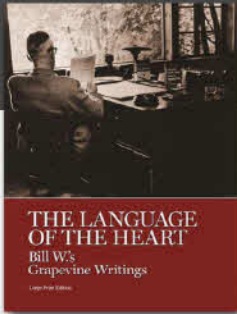


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Tradition Ten September 1948

Being like other men and women, how can we expect to remain forever immune from these perils? Probably we shall not. At length, we must meet them all. We cannot flee from them, nor ought we try. If these challenges do come, we shall, I am sure, go out to meet them gladly and unafraid. That will be the acid test of our worth.

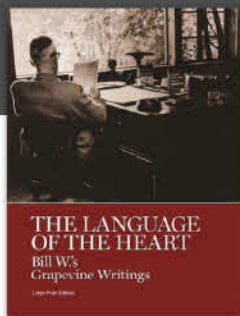


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LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Tradition Ten September 1948

Our best defense? This surely lies in the formation of a Tradition respecting serious controversy so powerful that neither the weakness of persons nor the strain and strife of our troubled times can harm Alcoholics Anonymous. We know that AA must continue to live, or else many of us and many of our fellow alcoholics throughout the world will surely resume the hopeless journey to oblivion. That must never be.

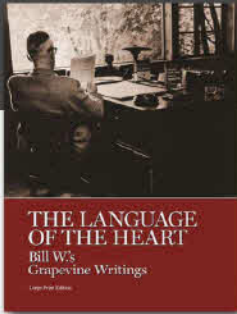


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LANGUAGE OF THE HEART

Tradition Ten September 1948

As though by some deep and compelling instinct, we have thus far avoided serious controversies. Save minor and healthy growing pains, we are at peace among ourselves. And because we have thus far adhered to our sole aim, the whole world regards us favorably.

May God grant us the wisdom and fortitude ever to sustain an unbreakable unity.

Core Message of Tradition 10

Tradition 10 exists to protect the spiritual integrity and unity of the Fellowship by keeping A.A. entirely focused on its primary purpose: helping alcoholics recover.

It clearly states that A.A. as a whole must stay out of politics, social issues, religious debates, and public controversies—no matter how important or emotionally charged those topics may seem.



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If A.A. were to take public stances on controversial or outside matters, it could:

- Divide the Fellowship internally.
- Distract members from the spiritual principles that unite them.
- Alienate newcomers who may not agree with those opinions.
- Jeopardize A.A.'s credibility or neutrality in the eyes of the public.

A.A. members, of course, can and should hold their own beliefs and convictions—but the Fellowship itself must remain neutral and focused solely on sobriety.



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Tradition 10 in One Sentence

A.A. doesn't take sides—on anything—so we can stay focused on the one thing that matters: **helping alcoholics find recovery.**



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