

Traditions as a Guide to Healthy Relationships

By Mary Pearl T.

It is said that the unity of Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon is the most cherished quality our fellowships have. Our lives and the lives of all to come depend squarely upon it. The practice of our *Twelve Steps* puts our lives in order, but not necessarily our relationships. How to live successfully with others can be found within our Traditions. They are in reality, guidelines for our behavior.

Unfortunately, many times in our fellowships, we find members who are getting healthy and their partners are getting healthy, but their relationships are far from healthy. Getting well does not necessarily mean that you will be able to retain all your relationships. However, if the use and application of the *Twelve Traditions* are used in the relationships, they can also become healthy, "providing" both partners make unity the most important part of the relationship. This same principle can be used in any relationships, i.e., marriage, friends, relatives, in the workplace, shopping, driving, literally wherever we come into contact with others.

The following material is a result of studying these *Traditions* in relation to having a healthy marriage or relationship and discussions held one on one and in groups over the last several years. The ideas and principles contained herein have been tested in our homes and in our relationships and found to work – when we work them. We hope they will work for you too.

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Tradition I

Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity.

Unity begins with an individual. Having unity within oneself with one's Higher Power is vital to expressing unity in any other relationship. When one is following the guidance and will of a Higher Power, inner balance is achieved and then the ability to participate in a healthy relationship is greatly improved. Thus the relationship's unity is best service by each individual's unity with a Higher Power.

Unity - all for one and one for all; the greatest good for the greatest number is our goal. This applies in any groups (two or more people). The unity of the group has to come first, otherwise we will find ourselves pulling in different directions. Working together depends upon the harmonious cooperation of the family or relationship's members. This will include a willingness to listen to the ideas, feelings and opinions of each other with an open mind; sharing our own various views, feelings and opinions and then being willing to accept what the majority of the family or relationship's members have agreed upon as a plan of action, etc., and not the insistence that our way be the only one. Flexibility is a great asset to unity within a family or relationship.

In a family or relationship unit, each member has the responsibility to be open and honest in the expressing of his/her ideas and feelings. This also means that all members of the family or relationship must be willing to share in the day to day duties and responsibilities of the family or relationship and to serve the family or relationship as a whole - thus the unity will prevail.

Communication is a most vital commodity. The strength of the family or relationship comes from recognition and understanding of our mutual needs and when we discuss them openly, we help each other. Sometimes one has to agree with what is best for the family or relationship as a whole, but not necessarily one's own desires. A free and tolerant exchange of views is something that requires a persistent practice of the *Twelve Steps* in all our affairs and especially within the family or relationship unit.

Unity keeps the family or relationship together. Any dissension or controversy hurts the unity and thus hurts the relationship as a whole. Quantity of program is not as important as quality of program. No one is an all-wise authority on everything. All members of the family or relationship have a purpose and a part to play in the relationship as a whole. Remember, together we stand - divided we fall. We must maintain unity to survive.

We have relationships in the first place because we believe "WE IS BETTER THAN ME." Please note that the *Traditions for Relationships* are written in the plural just as the *Twelve Steps*. This denotes that we are no longer alone in our search for healthy relationships. However even though we are together, we must retain our individuality. Each person enhances the relationship. We each can stand alone and be independent of the other, YET, we prefer to stand together as a unit.

The partners in a healthy relationship must believe that two are better than one for a relationship to work. Each has to pull his/her own load in order to maintain any kind of unity. Being joined by a mutual desire to have a healthy relationship, the life of that relationship will depend upon the maintenance of unity within the relationship.

Tradition I
Ask Yourself Honestly

1. What exactly is meant by unity?
2. Why is unity so important to a healthy relationship?
3. How does prejudice and narrow-mindedness affect unity with others?
4. How important is open-mindedness in a relationship? Do you express your thoughts and feelings to your partner freely?
5. Are you more of a "giver" or a "taker" in your relationships?
6. Do you have a balance in your relationships, avoiding extremes?
7. Do you use silence as a refuge or punishment, while expecting others to read your mind?
8. Have you defined your needs in the relationship and openly discussed them with the others involved?
9. Can you be flexible in matters of what you want in a situation or what you desire in the relationship? Can you accept others as they are?
10. How do fights, arguments and controversy affect the unity of a relationship?
11. Are you honest or self-deceived by your own thoughts and actions in the relationship?
12. How does stubbornness affect your relationship and its unity?
13. How healthy are your current relationships?
14. What action can you take to change your feelings about something or someone?
15. In your current relationships what can you do personally to promote more unity?

Tradition II

For our group purpose there is but one authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants—they do not govern.

In a relationship based upon the *Traditions* there is no such thing as individual authority. All decisions are arrived at by a majority agreement, reached after all elements of the problem or situation have been considered and a Higher Power has been contacted for guidance in the making of the decisions (an informed group conscience). Unfortunately, however, many times our relationships are unhealthy due to the dominance of one of the partners. The unfortunate who feels he/she has the ability to "know best" for the relationship and its individual participants and tries to impose this attitude of "playing God" in the relationship.

When one partner speaks for the relationship or partnership, without consulting the other (playing God) he/she then becomes responsible for the growth or lack of growth of that relationship. Often one of the partners may be a dominating individual and this tendency must be self-checked through growth in the use of the *Twelve Steps*. Sometimes one partner is very content to allow the other to dominate and run the relationship, which will enable the dominant one to feel indispensable and important and thus, without realizing it, takes a managing and controlling attitude. This situation is especially true when the one being dominated is afraid and unsure of himself and wants someone else to be responsible for all the decision thus absolving himself of any kind of mistake or failure. In this situation, unity doesn't exist and love cannot exist without being damaged.

Agreeable decisions can be reached in relationships when the partners or all members are as informed as possible on the various issues. This does not necessarily mean that the "right choices" are always made, but they are made together and no blaming occurs and the unity of the relationship is preserved. There are no authorities in a relationship except that of a Higher Power as he expresses Himself to the members of that relationship. Certainly some members of the relationship will have more expertise in some areas than other members, but no one is bound in any area and when the sharing of a responsibility exists, even on day to day responsibilities more harmony is achieved. In other words - it is a true joining of equals.

When this particular Tradition is practiced (each one being an equal in the relationship) a state of humility exists because the authority is a Higher Power and not any individual's desires. Participation by both or all members in the relationship is vital to its growth. No partner has the right to decide "I know what's best for us." No partner is in the position of speaking for the other without first having consulted the other as to his/her own wishes on a subject. Another word for this is "courtesy," a useful tool in preserving the unity in our relationships. So many times we will use this tool with complete strangers without a moment's thought, yet when we encounter the most precious areas of our lives, our intimate relationships, we leave courtesy outside the door.

Tradition II
Ask Yourself Honestly

1. When one partner speaks for his relationship without consulting the other member(s) involved, is this trying to control or run the relationship and its activities? Is this really healthy?
2. How is an informed family or relationship conscience taken?
3. Why is it necessary that a healthy relationship be one in which the members are equals?
4. How do you feel and react when someone tries to or dominates in your relationships?
5. Do you have an inherent tendency to dominate people around you? How can you correct his defect of character?
6. Are you someone who is always willing to allow someone else to take control and then complains because you don't like what was done, yet were unable to make a decision yourself?
7. In your relationships, how do you share the responsibilities?
8. What is the difference between suggestions, advice, and guidance?
9. Is God or a Higher Power the only authority in your relationships? How does this Higher Power express Himself to you when making any decisions?
10. Why is it necessary to give the minority opinion an open-minded evaluation in a family conscience?
11. Why is humility a necessary ingredient in applying Tradition II to your relationships?
12. When you find it desirable or necessary to end a relationship, do you honestly express your reasons for having to terminate the relationship to the other person? Why is this beneficial to both partners?
13. How do you break a stalemate in your relationship?
14. How does this Tradition promote confidence in the members of the relationship?
15. We learn in the program that "participation is the key to harmony." How does this relate to Tradition II?

Tradition III

The relatives of alcoholics, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves an Al-Anon Family group, provided that, as a Group, they have no other affiliation. The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend.

One person alone cannot make a relationship work. Both partners have to want it to work and be willing to work on it. Each must have the same goal and each must try to achieve that goal. You must allow each other to grow and change and not put restrictions or rules on each other to force acceptance of one's own principles or beliefs. We must accept one another "as is" and leave room for growth or change.

Willingness to be in the relationship may ebb or flow. In other words, there may be days when your attitude is such that you become indifferent to being in the relationship or lazy about upholding your part of the relationship. But, these attitudes are usually a temporary thing and they will pass. There may also be days in which your partner has the indifferent attitude or is seemingly unwilling to work on his/her part of the relationship. These feelings and situations are not uncommon among us. However this is "not" a majority circumstance of great duration. If it becomes so, an inventory of the relationship and one's attitudes can be helpful in getting back on track.

There are many other reasons people stay in relationships than a mutual desire to be in the relationship. Financial security, emotional security (having a mate), being trapped due to responsibilities (children to raise and fear of doing so alone), are some reasons that do not fall under the "desire to be in the relationship."

Judging one another in a relationship is a real detriment to unity of the relationship. The mutual desire to make the relationship work needs to include "acceptance, understanding, tolerance and love."

When we allow outside things to divert us from our goal of making our marriage or relationship work, we create confusion and thus dilute our relationship and its unity. This can be done easily by our self-centered fear or self-centeredness in any aspect. When we pursue our own interests to the exclusion of our partners, this is not healthy. Outside interests could include hobbies carried to an extreme (and we do seem to be people of extremes - compulsive and obsessive) extra-marital affairs or unfaithfulness (by thought or deed) or any other thing that diverts us from our goal of wanting to make our relationship or marriage work. When we are tempted to do these kinds of things, the program suggests for us to fix our minds on the Tradition and our actions on the use of the *Twelve Steps* that can change our lives for the better and thus change our relationships for the better, as we refuse to allow distractions to confuse us.

Tradition III
Ask Yourself Honestly

1. What are the basic requirements for being in a healthy relationship or marriage?
2. Are understanding and encouragement given by you in your relationships?
3. How could having too many outside interests affect a family situation or relationship?
4. Why is it beneficial to limit our goals in a relationship?
5. Why is dilution harmful to your relationships? What are you doing now that could dilute and injure your relationships?
6. What is meant by a family conscience? How many people does it take to comprise a family group?
7. Do you have the desire to be in your current relationships? Are you working on being healthy in them?
8. How do the slogans apply in your relationships?
9. Are you able to share your feelings with your partner? Are you able to listen with an open mind to the feeling of your partner?
10. Are you committed to having healthy relationships?
11. How do you deal with vulnerability in your relationships?
12. How does this Tradition when practiced, promote unity within the relationship?
13. What are some positive suggestions for working on a relationship?
14. How important is honesty and trust to a healthy relationship?
15. Are you lazy about working on your part of the relationships?

Tradition IV

Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting another group or Al-Anon or AA as a whole.

This Tradition gives our relationships freedom - complete freedom in all essential matters. Each partner is free to choose its own way of functioning, yet this freedom carries the responsibility for preserving the unity of the relationship as a whole.

Autonomy means self-governing. In order to be autonomous we must first realize we are products of a Higher Power - one of God's kids, not just someone's child, mother, father, brother, sister, wife, husband, etc. You are You. There is only one You - you are an original - one of a kind. In order to find yourself, you have found the way to true freedom lies in your association with a Power greater than yourself. And the acceptance of this Power's will for your life and obedience to that will brings you peace and contentment within yourself. If you ask God what you're to do, one day at a time, and then go about trying to do His will - you'll probably not endanger your relationships. However, we know that as human beings self-will will take over from time to time and we feel as individuals we can do anything we want to - in this type of thinking we endanger ourselves and our relationships.

We are prone to go off into this self-centeredness and do whatever it is that self wants to do, not concerning ourselves with the responsibility of these actions - we use the saying, "if it feels good - do it." However many things will "feel good" for the moment which in actuality are not good for you or with whom you are trying to have a healthy relationship. Perhaps the better thing to say to yourself would be, "if it feels good and it doesn't hurt anyone, especially my partner or myself and our relationship, do it." Always keeping in mind the responsibility for your own actions lies squarely on yourself.

Remember not to make someone or something else your Higher Power. You will want your actions and behavior to be in line with the common purpose of the relationship - to make it work for you and then do whatever is necessary to achieve this goal. In a relationship we are separate and independent persons and we each have the right to be right or the right to be wrong and each has the right to do our own thing except when the doing creates problems or threatens the unity of the relationship, the family, or society as a whole. Keep in mind, ego-driven individuals rarely have healthy relationships.

Each relationship is an individual entity strictly reliant on its own conscience as a guide to action with two exceptions: (1) when it injures anything or anyone else (This does not mean to imply that getting angry or disagreeing constitutes an injury. An injury is when a person is harmed, spiritually, emotionally or physically by our actions. The partner is responsible for his/her own reactions to our autonomy. We are responsible for actions, not someone else's reactions... these are in God's hands.) and (2) when it would affiliate with anything or anyone else as a partnership. Serenity through acceptance has to be objective and in all other respects there is freedom of will and action. When our unity is not maintained, confusion replaces acceptance and harmony in our relationships.

Be sure to take your program and your relationships seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously. The *Traditions* themselves provide their guidance, and a person who keeps himself familiar with them and is trying to practice them on a daily basis is not likely to make decisions which would damage the relationship.

Tradition IV
Ask Yourself Honestly

1. What is meant by autonomy in a relationship?
2. How with this kind of "unlimited freedom" can we preserve unity in our relationships?
3. How do you deal with a partner's anger regarding something you've done through your autonomy?
4. What are some things that could happen to a relationship that could not be justified by "personal autonomy?"
5. In your relationships must you come to an agreement on all goals?
6. What are some different kinds of goals in a relationship?
7. How important is a good relationship with a Higher Power to using your autonomy wisely?
8. How is any autonomous action in a relationship measured?
9. Why is autonomy a necessary ingredient to having healthy relationships?
10. What "questions" could we ask ourselves before we make a decision to use our autonomy?
11. How does an outside the relationship affiliation harm the relationship?
12. How important is it for you to know who you are before you can be truly autonomous?
13. Does autonomy excuse or justify improper behavior in a relationship?
14. How can you be autonomous in a relationship with your Higher Power?
15. How important is acceptance and serenity to this Tradition?

Tradition V

Each Al-Anon Family Group has but one purpose: to help families of alcoholics. We do this by practicing the Twelve Steps of AA ourselves, by encouraging and understanding our alcoholic relatives, and by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics.

As individuals we need a program of living principles that work. Our real purpose or job is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people around us. God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. God is love. So, if God's will is expressed in our relationships, love will be there. God's love enhances and takes nothing away from the relationship. To express god's love to another, we must have God's love within ourselves. We've learned that we cannot transmit that which we do not have.

One party in a relationship cannot love by themselves. You must have an object of love. We've heard, "people that pray together, stay together," and "God has joined the two and becomes the center of the relationship," thus the relationships endure. When God is removed from the relationship, the relationship dies because self takes over and self left undisciplined by the will of God is harmful and destructive. Do you pray together with your partner about your relationship? This is extremely helpful in healing a damaged relationship. "God bless our relationship" can bring about positive changes. By limiting ourselves to the one purpose - to serve as an expression of God's love - we eliminate fragmentation of our relationship and promote unity at the same time. We best help others when we ourselves practice the Twelve Step Principles as a pattern of daily living.

This Tradition also asks us to give comfort. We best do this as we share with one another. It also asks us to give encouragement and understanding to our partner. Has it ever occurred to you that when your partner does or says things that are harmful or hurtful he/she is probably not happy about being the way he/she is at that time and could possibly need our compassion (a form of God's love) instead of our being sensitive and judgmental? By encouraging our partner's recovery, we are working toward our own recovery.

The Al-Anon Program is a loving program. We need to be expressing God's love in our daily lives to all those we come in contact with, especially those the most important to us in our lives - our partners. Realizing that we, too, are victims of the disease of alcoholism and accepting that our growth - spiritual and emotional - has been damaged by this disease helps us to give the other person a break. And remember - when you don't deserve love, you need it the most! Practice of this Tradition can give us ideas so constructive and helpful that it can make a difference in one's total life and all our relationships.

One exercise to practice serving as an expression of God's love is to become willing to be a loving person. Ask yourself, "what would a loving (mother, father, brother, sister, husband, wife, friend, etc.) do?" And then do that. If you don't have any idea of what that loving person would do, then find someone you feel is that kind of person and ask them how to become a loving (mother, father, brother, sister, husband, wife, friend, etc.). Another exercise is to ask your Higher Power to allow you to see the other person through His eyes... this is very enlightening.

Tradition V
Ask Yourself Honestly

1. What is our sole purpose in a relationship and why do we limit ourselves to one purpose?
2. How do you express God's love in your marriage or relationships?
3. How can you express God's love with your fellow employees, supervisors and bosses in your work place?
4. How important is compassion and is it a form of love?
5. How does showing God's love for others free us of bitterness, resentments and the anguish of repeated defeat?
6. How important are understanding and acceptance in expressing God's love to others?
7. What does God's love do to your fears?
8. Why does the sharing of our experiences give comfort to one another?
9. How important is "liking" yourself and your partner to the relationship?
10. Have you experienced spiritual and emotional comfort from the practice of this Tradition?
11. Are you a patient and uncritical listener for your partner?
12. Your own spiritual needs can be fulfilled as long as you do not try to do things that are beyond your power - do you allow God to do for you what you cannot do for yourself?
13. Have you been able to "see others through God's Eyes" or "hear others through God's ears?" How has this helped in your relationships?
14. Can you practice God's love when you can't feel it for yourself?
15. How does "act as if" become a positive tool in practicing this Tradition?

Tradition VI

Our Family Groups ought never endorse, finance or lend our name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim. Although a separate entity, we should always co-operate with Alcoholics Anonymous.

This Tradition is important in protecting the relationship and its unity. It keeps each member responsible for themselves. No person can meet all the needs of another; we're responsible to take care of ourselves, but are enhanced by our association to each other. Our separateness is our mutual strength. It promotes a relationship of healthy equals.

A partner should be supportive - spiritually, emotionally and physically to the relationship, but a mature partner doesn't do for the other what he/she should do for themselves. Doing so could promote an inflated ego which would divert the primary purpose of the relationship which is to express God's love and not one's own self-will. You will note that God does not do for you what you should and can do for yourself - he only helps when you need something beyond your own power - this is part of God's love for us. He realizes that to help us when we can help ourselves is to cripple us and that he'd never do.

Being needed to be needed seems to be one of the symptoms of Al-Anonism. This over- developed sense of responsibility to help others. Without our realizing it we create situations in which we place ourselves in the role of helper, fixer, enable and create sick dependencies in those we try to help. We have a false sense of "security" when we are needed in this way... thus the ego gratification. We're okay because we're needed. The tragedy to this is that our self-esteem begins to be placed in the hands of others and when they no longer need our help - we feel "worthless."

Communication is vital in a relationship. You can encourage another and be interested in another's growth in all the important areas, but you must allow the other person the dignity to grow (and perhaps fail) on his/her own without your insistence or advice. Allow the other person to have different ideas, concepts, beliefs, feelings, etc., and allow yourself this same freedom also. One way to do this is to state what you see and how you feel about it. Remember too, when disagreements come, can God's voice or guidance be heard over your own voices?

Partners should compliment one another - not be crutches for one another in any area of the relationship. Caution: Being totally dependent upon another person isn't living and it is surely not love. This tradition protects each individual's identity in the relationship and thus preserves the unity of that relationship.

Our best relationship is one where "dependence is mutual, the independence is equal and the obligation is reciprocal."

Tradition VI
Ask Yourself Honestly

1. Are you using a healthy form of encouragement and support in your relationship?
2. Emotionally dependent people create what kinds of feelings in their partners?
3. When you are trying to be all things to your partner, what feelings are motivating you?
4. Are you an equal in your relationships - spiritually, emotionally and physically?
5. How can one become spiritually dependent upon another?
6. How can you hear God's voice or receive guidance while arguing?
7. What is meant by "our separateness is our mutual strength?"
8. How important are the "little things" in a relationship?
9. What is meant by "allowing your loved one the dignity to fail?"
10. What is meant by "our best relationship is one where 'dependence is mutual, the independence is equal, and the obligation is reciprocal'"?
11. Must you agree with your partner on basic beliefs and principles in order to have a healthy relationship?
12. Do you take responsibility for your own needs - spiritual, emotional and physical, or are you so busy taking care of another, you short change yourself on these needs?
13. Are you helping your partner or contributing to 'making someone a cripple' spiritually, emotionally or physically?
14. Do you allow your grown children to be adults or do you continue to accept the consequences for their mistakes by fixing their problems, getting them out of trouble, continuing to assume their financial responsibilities, etc?
15. Are you in the relationship because you feel needed or because you feel loved? Do you love them because you need them or do you need them because you love them?

Tradition VII

Every group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

Each partner is responsible for his/her own growth - spiritually, emotionally, and physically. We need to know as individuals that if the relationship should end through any type situation (mutual agreement, divorce, death, abandonment, etc.) that each partner could continue to function and be a whole person and survive without the other.

In a relationship it is important that both members can be independent spiritually, emotionally and physically. It is easy for the member bringing in the finances or the greater amount of finances to control through the purse strings which can become ropes to bind the other partner. Resentments fear and other problems occur from this type attitude and action. The non-earning or lesser-earning member may even lose his/her identity or the earning member may begin to feel his/her only purpose is to be a paycheck in their relationship.

Being self-supporting is impossible when one of the partners is the Higher Power for the other partner. The same is true when one is overly dependent on the other for emotional well being - having to have someone in your life for you to feel okay about yourself - or when one does not develop any marketable skills to fall back upon if necessary, isn't healthy.

When we are dependent upon someone else for our well being, we are vulnerable prey for sick relationships. This is especially demonstrated in the person who cannot feel whole without a love partner in his life all the time. Because of this sick exaggerated need, the person fails to find a lasting relationship and thus goes from person to person trying to find themselves and some security through someone else. People are put here to enhance our lives - not to be our lives.

When each partner of the relationship understands that he/she is responsible for their own survival and progress, a greater spiritual strength flows into each partner and thus the relationship is made doubly strong; each partner doing his/her part without asking or expecting the other to do it for him/her. Each partner is responsible for his/her own emotional growth because no one has the ability to do this for another and in trying to do so show their own personal immaturity. You can't give what you don't have.

If you are not responsible for yourself, you cannot be an equal in your relationships. You then become a potential victim for the managers and controllers of the world. You place yourself in a position of great vulnerability and you will be hurt.

Tradition VII
Ask Yourself Honestly

1. Do you try to manage and control through the purse strings allowing another only what you deem is necessary or what you want them to have? How does this make you feel?
2. Are you controlled by the bread-winner or tied up by the purse strings? How does this make you feel?
3. Is your partner your Higher Power? Do you look for your partner to set the tone for your feelings, attitudes and actions?
4. How much do you ask or expect others to fill your emotional needs?
5. Do you deceive yourself by thinking how unselfish and giving you are when in reality you are giving only when you can do it on your own terms? (Remember - giving is a position of control whereas receiving is a position of powerlessness.)
6. Do you think because something is good for you personally that it is good for our relationship, partner and everyone around you?
7. Do you have a God of your own understanding or do you depend upon your partner's beliefs and spirituality?
8. Do you take responsibility for your own physical needs (health, diet, exercise, teeth, etc.)?
9. Do you have any marketable skills (even though you may not currently be working)? What are they?
10. Do you take responsibility for your own feelings and not blaming others for feeling as you do?
11. Do you allow another to be responsible for you or are you self-supporting spiritually, emotionally, and physically?
12. When you're uncomfortable with something you're doing, does this always indicate that you are out of God's will for your life?
13. Could you take care of yourself financially if you had to today?
14. What one thing determines the degree of healthy independence a person truly has?
15. Does your partner enhance your life without being your life? Do you enhance your partner's life without being your partner's life?

Tradition VIII

Al-Anon Twelfth Step work should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

The spiritual principle of this Tradition is "You've received a free gift, so give freely. Expressing God's love is a free gift. People many times get their self worth from a particular job, chore, title, position of responsibility, etc. that they have and when they don't meet the expectations of their partners or themselves, their self worth is diminished.

For those of us raised in the 50's, our role models were often what we saw on the movie or television screens and stories which usually ended, "and they lived happily ever after." And the tragedy was - we believed in it. We believed in the fantasy-type relations sip. Or perhaps we saw "Leave it to Beaver" or "Father Knows Best" as an example of the typical married family and wondered what had happened to our lives as they failed to meet up to our expectations and follow these "scripts." We spent endless hours trying to analyze when we went wrong, not realizing that we had unrealistic expectations of ourselves, and our partners.

When entering a relationship we generally have ideas and expectations of our partner in each area of the relationship. More often than not, however, we fail to communicate to our partner what these things are that we expect of them or what we are willing to do ourselves as well as what we will not do. If we are not careful, we can also get into a "I did this, thus you should do that" attitude or we start justifying and rationalizing our participation or lack of participation in the relationship. This is giving with a price tag - not giving for free.

Giving can also be done seemingly with the best of motives at the time, only to find out at a later date when feelings of resentment or hurt arise when we are denied a favor - "and after all I've done for you." "How could they not do this small thing for me?" And in the guise of self-pity - the score keeping comes out again.

Keeping score in a relationship is dangerous as it is a judgmental attitude (playing God). What you give in a relationship, you get back - it is a spiritual principle. What you sow you reap - what goes 'round, comes 'round. Keep in mind that a principle is a rule that works every time. Many times one looks to receive freely from the person they gave freely too - this is not necessarily the case. What you give freely will be returned, but from someone else or somewhere other than where it began. Never limit God's ability to return these things to you - be open to them, don't expect - it's a tall order, but it will work.

When one is living by the principles of the *Twelve Steps* and has a good relationship with a Higher Power, a sense of serenity and peace with your fellowman helps to remove self-centeredness which is the biggest barrier in relationships. This being in touch with God makes freedom easily practiced. Freedom is not just something we want to have, but something we must give to others. Too many times we have taken hostages or been taken hostage in a relationship. If our spirits are to fly, they must be free!

Tradition VIII
Ask Yourself Honestly

1. Does your identity and feelings of self worth depend upon your participation in a relationship?
2. Who or what was your role model for a healthy relationship? Was it realistic or valid?
3. Do you have a healthy balance in your relationships?
4. Why is your relationship with a Higher Power important to the practice of this tradition?
5. Can you give freely without expecting anything in return?
6. Does your sense of security come from someone else or being with someone else?
7. Do you ever ask God to allow you to see your partner as He sees him/her?
8. How does realizing your own freedom help you to give to others freely?
9. How does standing in one's own shadow affect us and others?
10. Are you consistent about practicing the program principles in your relationships?
11. Do you charge your partner a price for being in the relationship with you? What is it? How expensive is your love and companionship?
12. What is grudging compliance and why is it unhealthy in relationships?
13. Do you need the approval of someone else to validate you as a person?
14. Why is "what you sow, you will reap" important?
15. Do you take hostages in your relationships? Do you feel that the other person belongs to you? Are you possessive of your loved ones?

Tradition IX

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

Acceptance and freedom provide the best atmosphere for all members of the family or relationship to live in. For a healthy relationship or marriage the members must be united and willing to work toward the greater good for the relationship.

Growth, however, is not accomplished as a unit, but individually by each member of the relationship or family at his/her own pace. It is important to operate on a set of principles as suggested by our ***Twelve Steps*** and ***Twelve Traditions***.

In a healthy relationship there must exist some mutually agreed upon guidelines of acceptable conduct for the members of the relationship. If the conduct of a member is unacceptable or contrary to the established guidelines, it would indicate that he/she is not exhibiting a desire to make the relationship work. This being the case for an indefinite prolonged period of time then the other member(s) are not required to keep giving freely and continuing the relationship (dependent upon their own desires and guidance from their Higher Power). An example of this would be where a member is physically abusive or where behavior is totally disruptive to the family or relationship's unity. This is not saying the relationship or its members are failures. It is just acknowledging the reality of the status of the relationship. The reality of this kind of relationship is: it is not working and it is highly unlikely it will work, if the unacceptable conduct is continued. Obviously, under these conditions no one is receiving and sharing the benefits of the relationship.

Knowing yourself - what you have to give, are willing to give and how flexible you can be - is very important in determining your mutually agreed upon guidelines for acceptable conduct. Communication is very important so that all understand exactly and precisely what the guidelines are and the consequences for non-adherence to the guidelines. Many times we discover another member is not adhering to the mutually agreed upon guidelines. The sooner we recognize and act upon this information, (instead of hoping it will go away if we wait and say nothing) the better, because that eliminates the "denial" of the situation and we are dealing with the reality of our relationship.

What we do in a relationship must not be done for money, power or personal recognition - it is done for our own spiritual growth. In a healthy relationship no one may give orders or expect obedience. The various responsibilities are handled by the partners or members by the use of spiritual principles and logical procedures agreed upon by all involved - this is an opportunity to serve in the relationship.

Tradition IX
Ask Yourself Honestly

1. Who decides who does what in the day to day business of the relationship?
2. Why are acceptance and freedom so vital to Tradition IX?
3. Do you accept that, as individuals, we are always at different levels of growth in the relationship?
4. Are guidelines for conduct of members in a relationship necessary?
5. How are these guidelines established?
6. What is acceptable and unacceptable for you as a person in a relationship?
7. Are you flexible in your relationship?
8. How important is the awareness of your own abilities as well as your own limitations in a relationship?
9. What do you do when your partner's actions are repeatedly unacceptable to you?
10. What is meant by "Love cannot exist for long without a dimension of justice?"
11. Are you a "peace at any price" person? Doesn't this get to be expensive at times?
12. Do you feel your responsibilities to your relationship are being met or do you need improvement in this area?
13. How important is communication to the practice of this Tradition?
14. What functions or duties do you have in which you serve in the relationship?
15. What do you do when the relationship is "just not working?"

Tradition X

The Al-Anon Family Groups have no opinion on outside issues; hence our name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

Heated controversy is very dangerous to a relationship. Controversy is usually fired up by some form of fear. Some of the by-products of heated controversy are power-driven anger, resentment, closed-mindedness, breaks in general communication and even damaged or destroyed relationships.

Some people make a pact "not to let the sun go down on anger" or "not to go to bed mad at one another." This, however, is sometimes a futile gesture when heated controversy takes place between partners. In an argument no one wins. Rarely does one change another's mind with heated argument. Both sides "dig in" regarding their own ideas and opinions. Occasionally, in order to end the war, one partner will "supposedly give in" just to end the controversy, but deep inside he/she hangs onto his/her feelings and ideas and then resents himself/herself for having been dishonest in expressing his/her feelings and actions just to end the argument. This is likened to submission where temporarily one submits to a situation, but lurking in the back of the mind is the thought, "there will come a day when I'll win," and no peace of mind exists.

A possible remedy for this situation is to find areas of agreement rather than dissention. If there seems to be no area of agreement, perhaps if you back off, think, and pray and meditate, maybe your Higher Power can reveal some areas of agreement or even an entirely new slant to the situation neither has seen before. Many times there is no right or wrong - just a difference in thoughts or opinions. We must allow each other the right to have those differences as well as the right to be right and the right to be wrong. It is equally as important to allow ourselves to have dissimilar feelings and thoughts regarding the same situation, opinions, actions, etc. and both to be okay.

Sometimes a Fourth Step Inventory of the situation will reveal what feelings were involved in the controversy and which of our defects of character were at play. What were our motives? It always takes two fools to argue. Two wise men will not argue. One wise man will not argue with a fool. Thus, it takes two fools to argue. Ask yourself, "how important is it to take a stand on this issue?" "Will it leave a lasting effect on my life?" If not, perhaps it would be best not to continue the stand in this situation. Remember, you may not win on an issue, but you will save your serenity and dignity and you will not be damaging the relationship.

Prayer on the situation does not always change the situation, but it will change you and your attitude toward the situation. When a Higher Power is in charge of your life, it's highly unlikely His will for you will be to argue and quarrel with another of His kids. God does not bring chaos or confusion - God brings love and love is stronger than fear or anger. Bringing God into the situation helps defuse the situation.

Always remember to use courtesy. Our ODAT states that a quiet composed response to an enraged attack can "take the wind out of the sails of the attacker like so much magic." What can one possibly lose by trying it? At least it will add to one's own dignity and stature to say nothing to regret later. We are free to disagree with one another but we try to do so without angry disputes. We can learn to disagree agreeably. We always need to concentrate on our common bond and not our opposite views. We once again go back to "the greatest good for the greatest number" or UNITY.

Tradition X
Ask Yourself Honestly

1. Do you often have heated controversy in your relationships?
2. How can feelings change the whole nature of a discussion throwing it into heated controversy?
3. How do heated controversies affect you physically, emotionally and spiritually?
4. What do you do when you feel you're being cornered because of your ideas or opinions on a subject?
5. Do you need for your partner to see and feel the same as you on issues?
6. Can you accept that you may be wrong in a situation?
7. Do you use courtesy as a principle in your conduct?
8. Can you allow someone the right to disagree with your ideas without feeling rejected or without being defensive?
9. How important are the majority of things you quarrel about? Do you blow their importance out of proportion?
10. Do you hold grudges and carry arguments over from day to day or week to week while still trying to convince your partner to your idea?
11. Have you ever tried writing down your argument and reading it aloud before submitting it to your partner?
12. Does your relationship carry the scars or repeated heated controversy and struggles for control and power?
13. How important is it for you to be right?
14. How did you overcome the damage done to your relationship by the heated controversies?
15. Do you use Steps 9 and 10 to try to heal the damage done by you to your relationships?

Tradition XI

Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, and TV. We need guard with special care the anonymity of all AA members.

In this Tradition we accept another person as they are and then go about learning to be the person we are trying to become by living the way we would want someone else living with us to live (putting both the Golden and Silver Rules into practice within the relationships. *Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Silver Rule: Don't do for others what they need to do for themselves.*)

By living our own lives and philosophies, one day at a time, quietly and serenely, putting our principles into practice, we are more apt to attract someone to our way of living than if we constantly call attention to the fact that he/she is not living the way we think he/she should. Walking the walk is far more effective than just talking the talk. Being a living example of our new way of life and its tools for healthy relationships is much more attractive than having someone try to "preach" to you about how to live.

When we first encounter this new idea in the application of the *Traditions* to our relationships and some experience is gained, it is not unusual for us to want to share this new found way of life with others, especially those closest to us. And, as we promote our program, we are dismayed to find that our loved ones usually want no part of recovery for themselves. (In fact they are even offended that we have suggested they need improvement.) This leaves us with feelings of rejection and bewilderment. Some of us will regroup and try to find out just the "right angle to present our case" and begin an all out campaign to convert them to our new way of life. Some, however, will learn from this experience and thus gain wisdom. We cannot "fix" anyone but ourselves. However, it has happened that as we become saner and begin to practice the principles of the program in our day to day lives, we will begin to attract these same people to us and our new way of living. One cannot give another recovery, wisdom or serenity or the desire to change. We can only share the benefit of our own experience, when asked. The rest is up to our partners and a Higher Power.

Learning from one's own mistakes is the biggest key to wisdom there is - the wisdom to realize that what you're doing doesn't work, has never worked and will never work and being willing to scrap those plans and find another way from a Higher Power - a way that works, **Good Orderly Directions**.

One has to recognize their own need to change. Forced change rarely works over the long haul. Others preaching on a daily basis does not bring any change. Hard sell just doesn't work either. When one sees something he is attracted to (as opposed to forced upon) he is more likely to want to change. Forced change (promotion) also breeds resentments - even when the change is positive - no one likes to have his freedom of choice removed or to be badgered until he gives in to gain a moment's peace.

Anonymity in a relationship is that ability to do something good and not have to advertise it - a positive attitude; not complaining when things are not just as you'd have them; keeping silent when your partner makes a mistake; saying encouraging things to your loved ones; showing gratitude for small favors, etc. Doing good for good's sake without having to take credit or receive special strokes is a sign of true humility - being happy doing good without expectations of reward or return. However a nice by-product is the spiritual principle "what you sow, you reap." Thus we have a guarantee that we will be given as we give. There is no room in healthy relationships for self-glorification and pride and there is much room for great amounts of gratitude, humility and a willingness to serve others.

Tradition XI
Ask Yourself Honestly

1. Have you been guilty of promotion instead of attraction by your living the program?
2. Are you able to go about your daily living without giving your partner advice or information without instructions on how to use the information?
3. Why can't wisdom or serenity be transferred from one person to another?
4. What usually happens when you are trying to promote something?
5. Can you and do you do good things for your relationship anonymously?
6. What happens when one partner in the relationship is getting noticeably better and the other is not?
7. How important is humility to this tradition?
8. Can you give your partner the right to be wrong?
9. How important is your experience to others?
10. How do you feel and what do you do when someone criticizes the way you are trying to live through recovery?
11. How can your partner's being in touch with reality help you?
12. Which do you give more of to your partner - positive strokes or negative zaps?
13. Can you do good things for yourself without having to brag or mention them to others?
14. How grateful are you today for the relationships in your life?
15. How important is wisdom and how is it gained?

Tradition XII

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

One of our greatest gifts or privileges of Al-Anon is to be of help to another one of God's kids. There is no room in this purpose for ego, pride, arrogance, selfishness, unwillingness, etc. However, there is lots of room for gratitude, humility, willingness, love, forgiveness, understanding, joy, freedom, etc.

We must learn to place principles above personalities and sometimes this is very difficult as it requires great humility. Humility is sometimes defined as "being teachable." Spiritual growth through humility has its roots in the principle of anonymity - the ability to learn from anyone whether we like them or not, whether we believe they're working a program of recovery or not, etc. We should not discount any message just because we don't like the messenger. We should avoid allowing our personal knowledge of someone to interfere with what they say - we are not to judge one another's actions or motives - this is none of our business - this is God's business.

Lessons can be learned from everyone - some will teach us how to be; and others will teach us how not to be. But, as we listen to shared experience and observe and learn from all people, it is much easier to determine what is appropriate for oneself. We have choices to make regarding the quality of our lives; these choices being guided by our Higher Power.

If we will remember that our primary purpose is to express God's love, we will realize the importance of God-consciousness and as we become more aware and conscious of God's qualities, we will in turn desire to live and love by the principles of giving, caring, trusting, sharing, gratitude, honesty and personal integrity or the ability to be true to ourselves.

Practicing these principles is done on a personal level by the application of the *Twelve Steps* as a way of life. Our slogans can also be a set of excellent tools, especially - "Live and Let Live." This is loving for free through acceptance of our partner as a child of God, like ourselves. But we must accept ourselves first as a child of God and then we are more able to see and accept another person and in that acceptance we see that both of us are free to be ourselves and change at our own individual growth pace.

Another important principle is that of good communication - saying what you see and how you feel about it. Remember: Feelings are not facts!. Feelings are neither right nor wrong - they just are. Facts may be wrong or the way we express them may be wrong, but we have a right to have our own feelings and express them. One way to do this is by saying, "I may be wrong, but this is how I see it." Or, "This is how I feel about it." Avoiding the use of "you always," "you never," or beginning any sentence with the accusatory "you" will enable better lines of communication. No blaming or threat is transferred when we express our own feelings honestly with "I feel ____". We are being responsible for our feelings and the communication of same.

By developing the attitudes, humility, communication, etc. we have discussed in the previous eleven *Traditions*, we can see that the practice of the principles and concepts will not only benefit our marriages, our family and relationships in general, but will also enable us to become God-conscious people who are willing and able to be of maximum service to our God and our fellowman as outlined in the *Seventh Step Prayer*. We will also begin to see that slowly but surely we are being released from the bondage of self and becoming healthy within ourselves and also outside ourselves and in our relationships.

Tradition XII
Ask Yourself Honestly

1. Do you have an immature need for attention (negative or positive) and recognition?
2. Is it necessary to try to justify, rationalize, explain or tell someone that I'm doing what I consider my Higher Power's will?
3. What exactly is meant by the term "God-Consciousness?"
4. What has helped you most in placing principles above personalities?
5. Why is humility a must in practicing this Tradition on any of the *Traditions*?
6. What is meant by "discounting the message because of the messenger?"
7. Why is it necessary to express your feelings to your partner?
8. What are some of the principles you've learned in this study? What principle do you find the most difficult to use?
9. How important are gratitude for and praise of our partner?
10. How can you practice selflessness, when you are told "This is a selfish program?"
11. Do you have personal integrity -- can you be true to your own belief?
12. Are you able to accept your partner as a child of God just the way he/she is and give love unconditionally?
13. How can you express how you feel without putting blame on another for that feeling?
14. Do you "walk the walk" or merely "talk the talk"?
15. Are your relationships healthier today than when you first began to practice these *Traditions* in them?

Traditions as a Guide to Healthy Relationships

You will notice that we have re-worded the *Traditions* while retaining the principles in order to adapt them to relationships. The ideas and principles contained herein have been tested in our homes and in our relationships and found to work – when we work them. We hope they will work for you too.

- 1. Our common welfare comes first. A healthy relationship depends upon unity.*
- 2. For our family or relationship purpose, there is but one authority, a loving God as he expresses Himself in our informed family conscience. Each partner is God's trusted servant - Neither governs.*
- 3. Two or more persons, when gathered together for mutual benefit, may call themselves a relationship. The only basic requirements for a good marriage or relationship is a mutual desire to be in that relationship and willingness to make it work.*
- 4. Each partner should be autonomous except in matters affecting the other partner, the family or relationship, or society as a whole.*
- 5. Each marriage or relationship has but one primary purpose: To Serve as an expression of God's love.*
- 6. A partner ought not be overly supportive spiritually, emotionally or physically to the marriage or relationship, lest problems of ego gratification divert him or her from the primary purpose.*
- 7. Each partner ought to strive to be fully self-supporting: Spiritually, Emotionally and Physically.*
- 8. Our marriage or relationship should remain forever a free giving relationship - One to the other.*
- 9. A family or relationship should be pliable in its organization, but our group conscience may appoint certain persons, responsible to serve various functions.*
- 10. A relationship should avoid heated controversy.*
- 11. Each partner best conveys his or her belief and philosophy by attraction rather than promotion. Anonymity is a valuable asset to the marriage or relationship.*
- 12. Selflessness is a spiritual foundation of our way of life as marriage partners or friends, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities, and the principle is unselfishness.*