

1. Greetings

2. I will go quickly through the slide presentation for the Tradition starting with a summary of Bill's essay (from the 12 & 12). Don't worry... if I go too fast, it will be available on my website at www.onwhatslenderthreads.com. My objective will be to hit the highpoints, so that we have plenty of time for discussion.

3. Discussions and questions. Everyone is invited to share anything that they have learned about that Tradition. I get so much knowledge from participants!

Disclaimers about this workshop

On What Slender Threads: A.A.'s Twelve Traditions from a Historical Perspective. No need to purchase the book.

Audios and slides are posted on www.onwhatslenderthreads.com under “Workshop Resources”

Made possible by General Service Office literature, published research of historians, and wonderful friends in A.A. world-wide.

Any inferences in this study are strictly my own and in no way reflect the opinion of Alcoholics Anonymous

In keeping with the Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions, I try to avoid using the last names of any alcoholics including Bill W. and Dr. Bob.

“Outline the program of action, explaining how you made a self-appraisal, how you straightened out your past and why you are now endeavoring to be helpful to him. It is important for him to realize that your attempt to pass this on to him plays a vital part in your own recovery. Actually, he may be helping you more than you are helping him. **Make it plain that he is under no obligation to you, that you hope only that he will try to help other alcoholics when he escapes his own difficulties.”**

Alcoholics Anonymous p. 94



We explored Traditions 1 and 2

Unity and our Common Welfare rely on how we **live and work together as groups... to carry the message!**

Decisions are **made by the group** through its **group conscience** which is an expression of the **group's Higher Power.**

Our leaders serve to carry out the wishes of the group. They are but **trusted servants!**

Traditions 3 – 12 are a result of the anvils of experience! They ensured that the Trustees and the Conference could not alter those lessons that were essential to A.A.'s Unity.

Bill could only hope that individual groups would follow

Let's read Tradition 3

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking

The Original Point (Long Form): *Our A.A. experience has taught us that: Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation*

A.A. General Service Office.. 1952. *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. 1991. New York City: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 139, 189

Tradition 3 – Bill’s Essay pp. 139 – 145

For A.A. is really saying to every serious drinker, “You are an A.A. member **if *you say so***. You can declare yourself in; **nobody can keep you out.** ...

So you’re an A.A. member the minute **you declare yourself.**

In our early time, nothing seemed so fragile, so easily breakable as an A.A. group. . . . most of those who did join us were like flickering candles in a windstorm. Time after time, their uncertain flames blew out and couldn’t be relighted. Our unspoken, constant thought was “**Which of us may be the next?**”

At that time, . . . Every A.A. group had many membership rules. **Everybody was scared witless . . . We built a fine-mesh fence right around A.A.**

Tradition 3 – Bill’s Essay pp. 139 – 145

We were grim because we felt our **lives and homes were threatened**, and that was no laughing matter.

Intolerant, you say? ... After all, **isn’t fear the true basis of intolerance?**
Yes, we were intolerant.

How could we guess that all those fears were to prove groundless?

Could we then foresee that troublesome people were to become our principal teachers of **patience and tolerance?**

Could any then imagine a society which would **include** every conceivable kind of character, and cut across every barrier of **race, creed, politics, and language** with ease?

Tradition 3 – Bill's Essay pp. 139 – 145

Why did we leave it to **each newcomer to decide** himself whether he was an alcoholic and whether he should join us?

Why did we dare to say, contrary to the experience of society and government everywhere, that we would **neither punish** nor **deprive** any A.A. of membership, that we must never **compel anyone to pay** anything, **believe** anything, or **conform** to anything?

The answer, now seen in Tradition Three, was simplicity itself.

At last experience taught us that to take away any alcoholic's chance was sometimes to **pronounce his death sentence**, and **often to condemn him to endless misery**.

Tradition 3 – Bill’s Essay pp. 139 – 145

Who dared to be judge, jury, and executioner of his own sick brother?

[A newcomer who was] the victim of another addiction even worse stigmatized than alcoholism, ...

At first the elders **could look only at the objections.**

Shouldn’t we sacrifice this one for the sake of the many?

What we are really **afraid of ... is our reputation.**

What would the Master do?”

Tradition 3 – Bill’s Essay pp. 139 – 145

Ed was an atheist. ... A.A. could get along better without its “God nonsense.”

He browbeat everybody, and everybody expected that he’d soon get drunk—for at the time, you see, A.A. was on the pious side.

.. Distressingly enough, Ed proceeded to stay sober.

The elders led Ed aside. They said firmly, “You can’t talk like this around here. You’ll have to quit it or get out.”

With great sarcasm Ed came back at them. . . . **“The only requirement for A.A. membership is [an honest] desire to stop drinking.”**

Tradition 3 – Bill’s Essay pp. 139 – 145

“When, oh when,” groaned members to one another, “will that guy get drunk?”

Quite a while later, Ed got a sales job which took him out of town....
The news came in.

In those days, we’d go anywhere on a Twelfth Step job, no matter how unpromising. But this time nobody stirred.

Ed stole by night into an A.A. member’s house . . . They quickly sensed that he was quite in earnest.

Tradition 3 – Bill’s Essay pp. 139 – 145

“They have deserted me. I have been deserted by my own kind. This is the end ...nothing is left.”

As he tossed on his bed, his hand brushed the bureau near by, touching a book. Opening the book, he read. It was a Gideon Bible.

Ed never confided any more of what he saw and felt in that hotel room. It was the year 1938 He hasn’t had a drink since.

What if we had actually succeeded in throwing Ed out for blasphemy? **What would have happened to him and all the others he later helped?**

We don't want
you here!



The Fellowship quickly outgrew meetings in homes

First edition in “Bill’s Story” “there are eighty of us and our families. We meet frequently at our different homes, . . .” with 40 to 80 people in attendance.

First edition, Second Printing “there are five hundred of us and our families.” With 50 to 200 persons at their meetings.

No mention of homes!

Third Printing in June 1942 “one thousand of us and our families.”

“An alcoholic in his cups is an unlovely creature. Our struggles with them are variously strenuous, comic, and tragic. One poor chap committed suicide in my home . . . ” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 16)

T. Henry and Clarace Williams in Akron – Oxford Group

Dr. Bob confessed his problems with alcohol

Henrietta Seiberling and others prayed and prayed

The rum-hound from New York

Spin off: Akron Squad separated from Oxford Group

“Had 74 Wednesday in my little house, but shall get a hall **SOON.**” (*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, 218)



A training program for newcomers

Cleveland may have had the earliest “beginners” meeting in 1941

June 1943 North-West Group of Detroit required prospects to attend four sessions of beginners meetings with the following themes: “(1) Admission (2) Spiritual (3) Restitution and Inventory (4) Working and Message

Back to Basics and Beginners meetings are the best meetings to find newcomers!



A universal and welcoming Fellowship?

Bill painted a rosy picture of A.A.'s open-door policy in (1957) *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (p. 102).

“Since that early time literally all kinds of people have found their way into Alcoholics Anonymous. Our inclusiveness is now very broad indeed.”

“That’s how universal A.A. is today.”

Was A.A. a truly universal and welcoming Fellowship?

Bill's essay: First Bill addressed A.A.'s early fears (reasonable) and its membership rules (not so reasonable)

“Keep it simple!” principle

One is about people who are different from the norm.

The other is about people who are unconventional in their beliefs.

Oddly, his answer to the first is **an all-encompassing acceptance of people who are different.**

While the second story implied **conformity to the beliefs of the norm.**

The “flying blind” period’s first test case – the atheist

“As he tossed on his bed, his hand brushed the bureau near by, touching a book. Opening the book, he read. It was a Gideon Bible. Ed never confided any more of what he saw and felt in that hotel room. It was the year 1938. He hasn’t had a drink since.” (12&12, 145)

“For a long time the only Higher Power I could concede was the power of the group, but this was far more than I had ever recognized before, and it was at least a beginning. It was also an ending, for never since June 16, 1938, have I had to walk alone.” (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, 229)

“I found myself in the middle of a brand-new group. When I started to tell the boys how we did it in New York and all about the spiritual part of the program, I found they would not believe me unless I was practicing what I preached.” *(Alcoholics Anonymous, 230)*

“Then I found that as I gave in to this spiritual or personality change, I was getting a little more serenity. In telling newcomers how to change their lives and attitudes, all of a sudden I found I was doing a little changing myself.” *(Alcoholics Anonymous, 230)*



The “flying
blind” period’s
second test case
– alcoholic
women

Lil in Akron

Remember this is the era of
“Rules” in A.A.

Put alcoholic women with the
wives!

Women who were “so bad” could
not be admitted at all!

Rules had the effect of propelling
alcoholics to their deaths.

If alcoholics' wives posed barriers, “the men could be just as bad and often acted in ways that did nothing to alleviate their wives' fears.” (Schaberg, p. 348)

Sylvia K. from Chicago “The Keys of the Kingdom”

“Sylvia was summarily escorted to the train station by several members and she left for the Windy City, much to the relief of Dr. Bob and all of the A.A. wives in Ohio.” (Schaberg, p. 349)

Sadly, she relapsed on the way back to Chicago. The solution to the “Sylvia” problem could have resulted in her death.

The “sex problem”

It was Dr. Bob’s wife, Anne, who brought him around to accepting women in meetings.

Why not? What difference does it make? They’re just as drunk as the men are.

Florence R., “A Feminine Victory”

“To my lot falls the rather doubtful distinction of being the only ‘lady’ alcoholic in our particular section.”



Did the Fellowship forget “A Vision for You?”

No one is too discredited or has sunk too low to be welcomed cordially—if he means business. Social distinctions, petty rivalries and jealousies—these are laughed out of countenance. Being wrecked in the same vessel, being restored and united under one God, with hearts and minds attuned to the welfare of others, the things which matter so much to some people no longer signify much to them. How could they? (Big Book, 161)

How could they, indeed! Unfortunately, they could and they did.



Bill's frustration with race and the Third Tradition

Bill invited two black alcoholics to a New York area meeting

Would those who protested including the two men in the meeting at least agree that they had a right to A.A. just the same as everyone else?

“that Negroes should be invited to attend open or closed meetings *as visitors* (emphasis added).”

Silent observers . . .

Early 1945 St. Louis and Chicago started the earliest black groups followed closely by Washington, D.C.'s black group founded by Jim S., whose story, “Jim's Story,” is in in the Second, Third, and Fourth Editions of the Big Book. (Heroes of Early Black A.A.)

“Along with you, I feel very deeply about this race business. . .

All men should have an equal opportunity to recover from alcoholism – that is the shining ideal. . . .

But, unhappily, my own experience suggests that it may not be achieved in our lifetimes. . . .”

It falls grievously short of our ideal – but practically speaking, what can be done about it? I don’t know – I’m still looking hard for the answer.” (‘Pass It On,’ 316)

Bill seized every opportunity he could to avoid the ‘silent observer’ option.

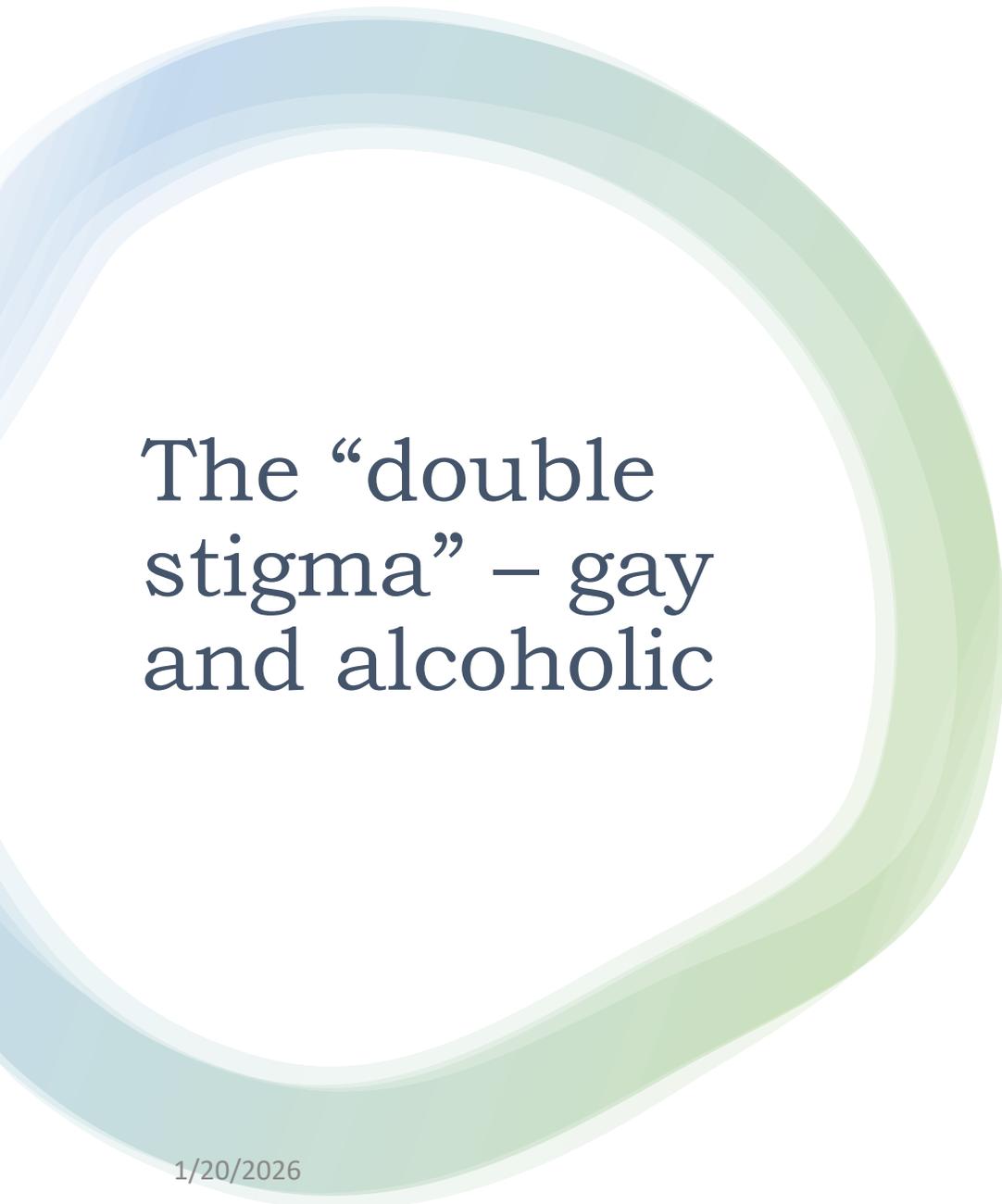
“Now,” said Bill, “did you say he was a drunk?”

“Oh yes,” Barry replied. “There’s no question about that. He’s certainly a drunk.”

“Well, I think that’s all we can ask,” said Bill.

The group welcomed the man. Even though they never saw him again,

Barry said this moment in A.A. created a precedent for the Third Tradition.



The “double stigma” – gay and alcoholic

The newcomer with an affliction even more stigmatized than alcoholism!

What would the Master do?

*Could any then imagine a society which would include every conceivable kind of character, and cut across every barrier of race, creed, politics, and language **with ease?*** (12 & 12, p. 141)

1973 and 1974 – Our Conference struggled with the idea of listing Gay meetings in GSO’s World Directory!



A worthy alcoholic?

All people who have a desire to stop drinking are worthy including chronic relapsers, young people, people who drank only a little, homeless, and people with other issues.

Acceptance! Do not judge anyone else's desire to stop drinking!

Not just acceptance! Appreciation for all who enter!

“Our A.A. door stands wide open, and if he passes through it and commences to do anything at all about his problem, he is considered a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. He signs nothing, agrees to nothing, promises nothing. We demand nothing. He joins us on his own say-so.”

“Nowadays, in most groups, he doesn’t even have to admit he is an alcoholic. He can join A.A. on the mere suspicion that he may be one, that he may already show the fatal symptoms of our malady.”

A.A. Tradition: How it Developed, 13.

“If a member persists in coming to meetings drunk he may be led outside; we may ask someone to take him away. But in most groups he can come back next day, if sober.”

However, Bill’s most important point of all invokes the “We” part of A.A.’s Traditions: common welfare and A.A. unity:

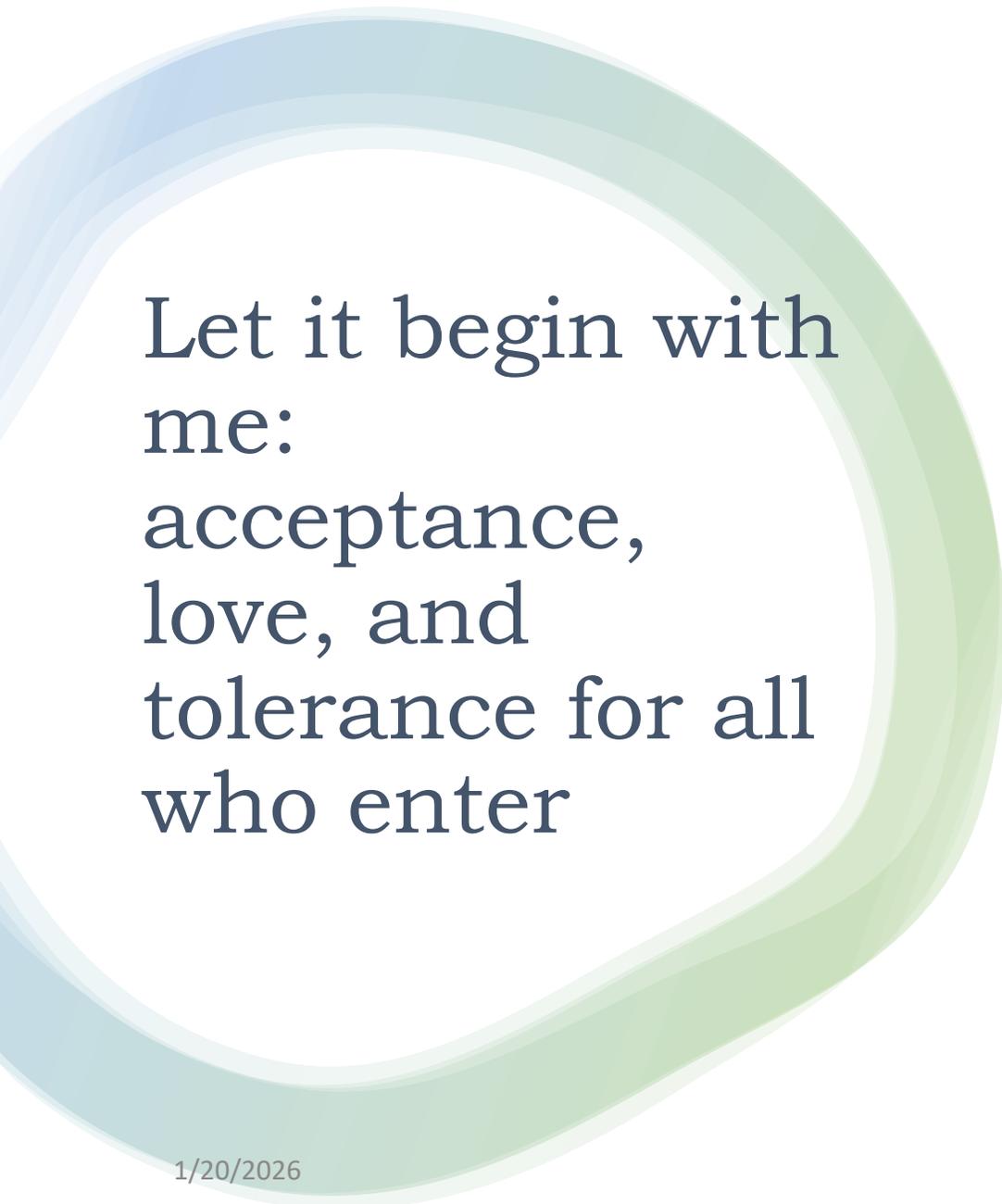
“We do not wish to deny anyone his chance to recover from alcoholism.”

A.A. Tradition: How it Developed, 13 - 14.



How do you become an A.A. group member?

. . . group membership requires no formal application. Just as we are members of A.A. if we say we are, so are we members of a group if we say we are.



Let it begin with
me:
acceptance,
love, and
tolerance for all
who enter

I'll always remember Fred . .
.

Coming up: the Fourth Tradition

When we study the Fourth Tradition, we will learn that Bill was dismayed when he discovered some groups used the autonomy of the group as an excuse to keep struggling alcoholics out.

Quite the opposite, the Fourth Tradition was intended to reach as many alcoholics as possible.

Would you like a weekly reminder?
Put your email in the chat and I'll
add you to the list.

Comments and questions?

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