

October 1979

A presentation to a past  
General Service Conference  
Copyright © AA World Services, Inc.

## Anonymity

*"Anonymity at the general  
public level. . . our chief  
protection against  
ourselves"*

OUR FELLOWSHIP is alive and well today because a vast majority of AA members and groups have been willing to voluntarily comply with the Twelve Traditions. And if the Fellowship is to be here tomorrow and thereafter, it will be for the same reason. For this reason, it is important that we always be diligent in our attempt to keep our actions within the framework so wisely established by our predecessors.

It appears to be doubtful that, when the Traditions were adopted, much consideration was given to the possibility that the wording of the Eleventh and Twelfth Traditions might be interpreted to prohibit breaking personal anonymity at the private level. The main considera-

tion appears to have been the need for anonymity at the public level.

It is true that in many areas members are identified in AA meetings, open and closed, by first name only. This is, of course, a matter of personal or group choice. I find nothing in any Conference-approved literature to indicate that this is necessary or desirable, nor do I find any prohibition against using full names in communications within AA.

It is important to keep in mind the distinction between breaking anonymity and breaking the anonymity Tradition, and the difference between saying, "I am a recovered alcoholic" and saying, "I am a recovered alcoholic and a member of Alcoholics Anonymous." Regarding personal anonymity, we need to consider, not only what is required by the Traditions, but also what is allowed by the Traditions.

I believe the Traditions require that I do not cause or allow my full name to be used, together with the fact that I am a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, at the media level,

which I believe includes any type of publication or communication system designed to be available to the general public. Allowing that to happen is breaking the anonymity Tradition.

The Traditions allow, but do not require, me to break my anonymity when and if I desire at any other level. The only restraint on this is that it is necessary to stay within the *spirit* of the Traditions, which should lead us, in each case where there is a question, to consider our motive. In other words, is the motive in line with our policy of attraction and the purpose of carrying the message of AA, or is the motive tainted with personal gain or designed to bolster an already monumental ego?

It is also necessary that our motive for maintaining personal anonymity at the private level be examined. Is our motive avoidance of the stigma of alcoholism, or maybe a slight reservation as to whether we will, in fact, maintain sobriety?

Is it possible to carry this message to alcoholics when we maintain strict personal anonymity at the private level?

It is my feeling that where personal harm is unlikely to result, members of Alcoholics Anonymous who have maintained sobriety for substantial lengths of time have an obligation to let the fact be known, on a one-to-one basis, that it is possible for an alcoholic to maintain sobriety and fill a responsible posi-

tion in society. I firmly believe this is a necessary part of carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous.

This is particularly true in our individual relationships with the medical and legal professions, the court systems, social agencies, and others that come in contact with still-suffering alcoholics and may consider referring such individuals to AA. All too often, these people have knowledge only of the "slippers" and sliders who are never quite able to make the program. Their enthusiasm for AA cannot help but be enhanced by personal knowledge of alcoholics who have recovered.

In my effort to state the difference between anonymity at the public level and at the private level, there is no way that I can improve upon the statement made by Bill W. in a January 1955 Grapevine article, reprinted in the pamphlet "AA Tradition—How It Developed" and in Appendix B of *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*: "This is why we see anonymity at the general public level as our chief protection against ourselves, the guardian of all our Traditions, and the greatest symbol of self-sacrifice that we know. Of course, no AA need be anonymous to family, friends, or neighbors. Disclosure there is usually right and good. Nor is there any special danger when we speak at group or semipublic AA meetings, provided press reports reveal first names only."

R. A., Kansas City, Mo.