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Respecting Money

By Bill

HERE IN THE STATES it is Thanksgiving time. The whole of AA takes its cue from this occasion and we rejoice world-wide in gratitude for the blessings that our fellowship has bestowed upon us. It is traditional, too, that this is the season for taking stock of our progress as a fellowship. We look at our society and ask "How are we doing?"

AA's Twelve Traditions are the measuring rods that we use. "How well are we sticking to the Twelve Traditions" is the prime question of each Thanksgiving week. Every year we see more clearly that adherence to our hard won traditional principles is the basis for our unity and the effective carrying of our message; that indifference, lack of understanding, or rebellion against these principles could result in widespread dissensions and maybe ruin. We keenly realize that the practice of the Twelve Traditions is quite

as vital to the life of AA as a whole as is the practice of the Twelve Steps to the life and sobriety of each member.

The Grapevine has asked me to write about the Traditions in this issue. Accordingly I've selected those which deal with the often misunderstood and sometimes unpopular topic of money—its use and its misuse. About this, our Traditions make two short and simple declarations. In Tradition Seven we read that *Every AA Group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.* Tradition Eight states, *Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.*

These few words pack immense meaning. They are the outcome of the huge controversies and struggles of our pioneering time when we knew that AA would have to come

up with a sound and workable money policy or else face endless ineffectiveness and possible collapse. If ever a matter was taken seriously, it was the question of money.

The money debates of that time veered crazily between two extreme poles of opinion. The conservatives said that AA as such should use no money at all. Meetings would be confined to homes, we could spread our message by word of mouth. There would be no publicity, no literature, no treasurers, no committees, no intergroups and no trustees. There would be no paid workers; hence no army of bureaucrats and therefore no possibility of any government. By refusing to collect money, we'd stay completely out of business. Everything would be done spontaneously, each member following his own conscience. Cried the conservatives, "Lead us not into temptation. Let's keep it just that simple."

At the other extreme we had the radicals, the promoters. They said we had to have vast sums. We must employ press agents; we'd need a great literature. We would have to own chains of hospitals; there would need to be regiments of paid workers of every description, even paid missionaries to carry the message to distant cities and far lands. As we got going there would have to be vast public rallies. Squads of members, riding sound trucks, would criss-cross the country. As

world-famous men and women joined up with us, they would gladly stand on the roof-tops to shout the good word. Thus the AA message, pure and ungarbled, would



whiz around the world quite as fast as did Jules Verne's hero—in just about eighty days! No fantasy was too impossible, no idea too grandiose for the promoters. And where

would they get the money? From the public, of course; the rich would send in millions.

Today we can see that the conservatives would have rotted us by doing nothing. On the other hand, the promoters would have surely ruined us by trying to do everything.

The process of separating the sense from the nonsense was long and painful. We were vastly confused because nobody had any monopoly on good sense. In their prudence the conservatives seemed right when they said that great sums would endanger us. But when fear got the upper hand and they insisted on no money or services whatever, they seemed to be talking arrant foolishness. Their program could lead only to great confusion and a snail's pace growth. It was much the same with the promoters. In their enthusiasms they sometimes urged dangerous schemes. Yet wisdom was often theirs nonetheless.

Slowly, as the hammers of the promoters beat on the stubborn anvils of the conservatives, our two "money" Traditions were fashioned.

At first we made certain concessions to the radicals. We conceded that, though unorganized as a whole, we would nevertheless have to create committees or service boards so that AA could function and carry our message and, at regional and international levels, we would sometimes have to hire a few

full-time workers. This was going to cost money, but never a lot of it, never enough to pose any great problem or future temptation.

This obvious necessity did, however, pose the question of professionalism. There was a wide-spread and justified fear in the early days that AA might be saddled with a class of paid Twelfth Step workers—people who would want salaries or fees for carrying the AA message person to person and face to face. It did not take us long to see that such a development would certainly kill the spirit of our whole undertaking. The Twelfth Step simply couldn't be sold for money.

This great fear of professionalism side-swiped us even when we hired an AA janitor or cook. And it doubly bedeviled us when we finally had to hire a few AA gals to work full-time as area or international secretaries. For a while, they carried the awful stigma of professionalism. They were, we said, making money out of AA. Believe it or not, they were personally avoided by many a fearful and righteous member. Even the committees and boards for whom they worked often regarded them as a sort of necessary but heretical evil. In them we were "mixing the material with the spiritual." To keep these borderline "professionals" in a proper "spiritual condition" we mixed in the smallest amount of money we could; meaning that we paid them the least salaries for which they

could possibly consent to work.

However, the radicals had partially made their point. AA did have to have some paid workers, if only a few. We finally saw that these people were primarily paid for making good and effective Twelfth Step work possible. Today they are not regarded as professionals at all and we try to pay them well. They are among the most dedicated AAs that we know. Hence, Tradition Eight declares, "Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers."

But the conservatives also had their victory when we finally took the decision to build a dike against the inrush of contributions from the world outside. We began to decline all such gifts, large and small. Our service centers would never wax rich from the contributions of AA members. But our well-meaning friends, by gift and bequest, could endow us with huge funds.

Once we began to accept donations of this kind, there would be no end. Though easily able to pay our own small service bills, we would nevertheless begin to accept huge amounts of charity. Worse still, rich AA service boards would embark on all sorts of needless and compromising adventures. A large paid bureaucracy would certainly take shape and the worst fears of the conservatives would be realized.

Respecting gifts and grants, their wisdom had been supremely right. Thus we developed Tradition Seven: *Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.*

Not long after this Tradition was written, AA's Trustees turned down a bequest of \$10,000 at a moment when money was badly needed. It was a time when, by a



considerable margin, the AA groups were failing to support their own world headquarters.

Nevertheless our Trustees promptly plugged that first threatened leak in our newly constructed dike against the temptation to take

money from outside AA. Thereafter AA would pay for its services or do without them. That decision still stirs me. It was one of the great turning points in our history.

To conclude: Our spiritual way of life is safe for future generations if, as a society, we resist the temptation to receive money from the outside world. But this leaves us with a responsibility—one that every member ought to understand. We cannot skimp when the treas-

urer of our group passes the hat. Our groups, our areas, and AA as a whole, will not function unless our services are sufficient and their bills are paid.

When we meet and defeat the temptation to take large gifts, we are only being prudent. But when we are generous with the hat we give a token that we are grateful for our blessings and evidence that we are eager to share what we have found with all those who still suffer.

