

## Real Traditions Questions From Our Members

F.W.S. Newsletter, April 2008

The Conference Steps and Traditions Committee (CSTC) would like to offer the beginnings of a discussion to tease out some of the Traditions issues that come about in our fellowship. These questions were submitted during a Traditions Study at the 2007 Annual Business Meeting. Time did not allow the facilitators to answer all the questions, so the CSTC has done some brainstorming in response to these questions. Feel free to use the following in a Traditions study if you wish and continue the discussion.

### Traditions Question #1

**A member of my group suggested that an S.L.A.A. committee conduct a study on the effectiveness of S.L.A.A. for sex addicts that could be used to support recovering addicts in court (or solicit some research in this area). Is this supported by the traditions?**

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[T]his suggestion conflicts with our primary purpose which is to help the addicts who wish to stop acting on their self-defined addictive behavior. *Tradition 5: Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the sex and love addict who still suffers.*

It also conflicts with the tradition that there are no professionals in S.L.A.A. who do research and treat this addiction.

*Tradition 8: S.L.A.A. should remain forever nonprofessional, ...*

In order to "help" an addict in court we would have to defend a position and have an opinion that is outside the 12 Step Recovery Fellowship and would certainly court controversy.

*Tradition 10: S.L.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues; hence the S.L.A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.*

When a member goes to court and identifies himself as a member of this fellowship, they are giving up their anonymity. S.L.A.A. may then be judged by how well that person recovers and the person could be thought of as a representative for S.L.A.A.. This is not helpful to S.L.A.A. or the person. This would make such research, if it existed, unusable without violation of the traditions.

*Tradition 11: ..... We need guard with special care the anonymity of all fellow S.L.A.A. members.*

I don't think that our traditions say that research can't be done. However, how what research is conducted and how it is used might pose more tradition-related issues.

Alternate approaches to consider:

I would think that composing a letter which stated honestly the difficulty of recovery, but the outstanding results for those who DO come to work our program or that of other "S" groups, and providing a handout for those in a given area to reach meetings might be a reasonable form of outreach.

The idea of an outreach tool such as the one on *For the Professional* could be a great and valuable tool for judges and probation officers alike.

What do you think?

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### **Tradition Question #2**

**We introduce ourselves in ways that divide rather than unite. [For example, I am a ...relationship addict.... a sex and love addict... an anorexic, etc.] [Doesn't this violate the traditions, especially Tradition 1, regarding unity?]**

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Regarding the introductions, I see no conflict, since we all have our different manifestations of the disease. In most meetings which I have attended, most of the members introduce themselves with the more general, "I'm a Sex and Love Addict." My personal feeling is that our unity comes from our desire to recover together, regardless of which manifestation of the disease we may have. We all have a commonality in our feelings and thought process which render the differences of manifestation irrelevant.

When individuals introduce themselves, they are identifying their own sense of primary pattern of addiction, OR their identification with the body of the Fellowship in general. For an individual to say "I am anorexic..." or any other variation is not a threat to unity, because we already know that our patterns of addiction can vary, and the individual is speaking only about themselves. Any individual can identify themselves, or not, in any way they care to; they are speaking only for themselves. To say to someone else, "unless you identify yourself as a sex and love addict (in those exact words) you are not really a part of this fellowship," THAT would be divisive.

Our willingness to stop acting out in our own personal bottom line addictive behavior on a daily basis...this is what I think unites us.

I think this is a Tradition 4 issue. (Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or S.L.A.A. as a whole.) I think that each group can set its own requirements about who can attend and how they introduce themselves. Unity comes from acceptance. Divisiveness comes from leaders wanting to put people out of the fellowship as a whole. Unity comes from flexibility. Divisiveness comes from attempting to control. Each group determines for itself who can attend that particular group.

Tradition 2 states that our leaders are servants and that they do not govern. Acceptable styles of introduction are a local group conscience decision, not a leadership decision. Each group makes its own decision about that group's acceptable styles of introductions.

Because a person is speaking for themselves, I see no problem in "unity" over differences in how we introduce ourselves. We all agree that our bottom lines are individual. Our unity is in our commitment to the 12 Steps of recovery, to a common desire to stop acting out on whatever our own addictive patterns are. It is no threat to unity that my pattern differs from yours, and however I describe my person addictive pattern, I share with all those in the Fellowship the common desire to stop acting out on whatever it is. After all, we aren't saying "we are all (relationship addicts, sex addicts, anorexics, etc.), we are saying *I am a* .....addict.

Unity does not actually mean uniformity. The spiritual structure of our program is to allow people to identify themselves as what they are. To require them to introduce themselves in a way they really don't identify with is problematic.

What do you think?

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### **Traditions Question #3**

**It says in the appendix of the lovely Al-anon book *Paths to Recovery*: "The steps help me love myself, the traditions help me love others, and the concepts help me love the world I'm in." Is S.L.A.A. also based on the 12 Concepts of AA? If yes, why? if no, why not?**

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I would draw the inquirer to the statement found at the opening of the Preamble, on page 125 of the Basic Text, which states that "Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous is a Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition-oriented fellowship based on the model pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous." Having heard the statements found in the preamble, which I have heard hundreds of times at meetings, let me know that at my very first meeting that we in S.L.A.A. would follow the very same principles as do those of our friends in AA.

As far as I remember, S.L.A.A. is based on the 12 Steps and 12 traditions of AA. So the simple answer is no, S.L.A.A. is not based on the 12 concepts of AA. It would be an interesting topic for future ABMs to make a set of concepts, etc., however. The reason why not may very well be that no one had asked the question or made the motion and if so, the asker is to be thanked.

My thoughts are that the spirit of S.L.A.A. and most of its members support the idea of including the Concepts to help us love the world we are in. The Concepts are part of AA. AA has a pamphlet about them. S.L.A.A. is based on the model of AA. I believe that eventually S.L.A.A. will have conference-approved literature about the Concepts.

We have not adopted nor adapted the 12 concepts for our use yet. However, exploring this possibility has been a part of the agenda of the Board Governance and Nominating Committee this year and the whole board has just approved putting together a task force to hammer out what that would look like -- What would we want to adopt? What would we want to modify/change/adapt? How would this effect our current bylaws, etc.

S.L.A.A. has not adopted the 12 concepts listed in Al Anon's *Paths to Recovery*. That would be an interesting discussion to have at an annual business meeting. To me, the concepts are a guideline for how to be responsible and accountable, and how to stay on my side of the street. The concepts give a further layer of recovery for people who are on a spiritual journey. Perhaps as S.L.A.A. grows and becomes more mature, we will adopt the concepts also and try to apply them in our relationships. For now, they are rarely discussed in S.L.A.A. meetings or service work that I have done.

I assume S.L.A.A. will eventually adopt the Concepts of AA. I would reword the lovely representation of the reasons for these 3 "12" principle lists. I would say that in S.L.A.A., the Steps show us how to treat ourselves and others close to us lovingly; the traditions keep our relationships among ourselves in the Fellowship loving, and that the Concepts keep our relationship with the world loving as well.

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## Tradition Question #4

**How can the 3rd tradition be best applied when behaviors undertaken in a meeting are disruptive to many in the meeting?**

**Tradition 3: The only requirement for S.L.A.A. membership is a desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction. Any two or more persons gathered together for mutual aid in recovering from sex and love addiction may call themselves an S.L.A.A. group, provided that as a group they have no other affiliation.**

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There is a large variety of options. Tradition 4 states that each group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or S.L.A.A. as a whole. Some options include having a business meeting or a series of business meetings to design a meeting format to be read at every meeting that would address the problems. An ad hoc or temporary committee could be formed to work on the format.

There are sample formats on the F.W.S. website which might provide ideas.

Another possible option would be to assign one or two people to a service position to talk with the S.L.A.A. members who behave disruptively.

You could also contact the Conference Diversity Committee (CDC) and/or the new Leadership Mentoring Subcommittee (LMS) of the Conference Charter Committee (CCC) for suggestions. You can reach these through the F.W.S. Office.

I have been to a number of meetings where there have been disruptive attendees. I have always been impressed by how effectively the other attendees have dealt with these situations. Our tradition has been to maintain our individual sobriety by keeping the spotlight on our own addiction, not judging others, or needing to confront others. We are a program of attraction; so when we model sober behavior, the disruptive member either follows suit or tires of meetings. Whenever this issue comes to the Intergroup level, the group conscience has consistently been that there are no S.L.A.A. police whose duty it is to control others or require a specific standard.

This is a very difficult and touchy subject with which to deal. A disruptive member has to be handled gently to avoid more disruption. I have been in many meetings where a sentence is added to the script to the effect that if you feel that what another is sharing is inappropriate, please signify by raising your hand or quietly leaving the room for a few minutes. Others have added a sentence to the effect of "Please avoid discussions of religion or other divisive subjects." I have been in meetings when a person seemed to almost be acting out as they shared, or began to give a religious testimony. In these cases, someone actually had to take the floor from the speaker, stating that this was inappropriate for a meeting. (A group

conscience was held immediately following such an incident.) A good way to deal with this to avoid the escalation of such behavior has already been expressed, that is for a couple of more experienced members to speak with the offending person privately and let them know that the behavior is unacceptable, since it is disrupting the meeting. If the offending person will then either adjust their behavior or will look for another meeting to attend. I would be impossible to ban a member from a meeting in light of the requirements stated within the Third Tradition. In all cases the group conscience must deal with the problem and act accordingly.

I have a difficult time tying the question of disruptive behavior to Tradition 3 unless a group is trying to block the attendance of some members. If that is the case, Tradition 2 comes to mind.. "Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern." Although the chair of the meeting is expected to keep the meeting flowing and in a spiritual place, I don't think the chair of a meeting should be expected to police others, especially to the extent of asking them to leave.

The rest of Tradition 2 seems appropriate as well: "For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority--a loving God as this Power may be expressed through our group conscience..." If members' behavior is affecting the meeting, I feel a group conscience is needed, and hopefully the group will be open to discovering their Higher Power's will for them.

Tradition 12 also reminds us to "place principles before personalities."

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