

Traditions Workshop – Greg P. (introduced by Jeff B.) – 1998 circa – Atlanta, GA

Intro quote re: Traditions “violations” attributed to Greg by Jeff

‘Well, you know, the Traditions aren’t “laws” to be broken; they are *spiritual principles* to live up to and the punishment in not following them is that you’re not getting all that you can get.’

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My name’s Greg; I’m an addict. Good, we’re growing – Thank you, glad to be home here for a while. I used to live in here, Lois and I used to live here about what seven or eight years ago or so now and it’s nice to be back in Atlanta (although I’m glad I don’t have to drive in this traffic anymore!). Is it still the “war zone”? That’s what I heard.

Anyway, I like to talk about the Traditions, ‘cause they’re real special to me. There was a man who was my sponsor for many, many years who stressed that the Traditions were just as important as the Steps for the group, and for the individual. One of the things that I’ve come to and share about at times is the idea that we read in all of our meetings. Very simply, we say it and say it, but a lot of times we don’t think it – and that is that our program is a set of principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives.

“Our program is a set of principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives.” And you know what; there are principles throughout our writings that are simple. I don’t believe that statement just refers to the Twelve Steps. Certainly, we have this other little saying we do that there are three things that are indispensable: honesty, open-mindedness and the willingness to try – I guess you could build a case for those in the Twelve Steps. But I have a hard time tagging one principle with any one given Step or Tradition.

I put together a whole big list of things or what I thought were either spiritual principles or key concepts or whatever and the first thing on the list alphabetically was “Abstinence” – because you know, it comes early in the alphabet – “A” is the first letter in the alphabet not because it’s anything more important, but because that’s the key that unlocks all our doors “Abstinence”. And I started thinking about it, okay, if Abstinence is a principle, where does it fit in the Steps or the Traditions? The more I thought about it, the more I was going “well, where *doesn’t* it fit?” I’d think about the First Step and admitting powerlessness over our addiction and yeah there’s an implication of abstinence there. I started thinking about the Traditions I talk about; NA, as such, ought never be organized, abstaining from organization, we have no opinion on outside issues, yeah, we abstain from outside opinions, we decline outside contributions, yeah, we abstain from outside contributions.

Yeah, Abstinence, the simple principle runs throughout and it even says so in the Twelfth Tradition. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions; it runs throughout, it’s the spiritual foundation. I think it even goes beyond the traditions. There is a lot of anonymity in the rest of our program too; the ability to become a part of, to let go of our differences, to let go of those things that separate us from each other – the practice of

Anonymity. So this idea of having a workshop that focuses on “applying these Traditions in our daily living” – or whatever the title of it is, that’s close enough - makes more and more sense.

Now there was a time when I would have done a workshop and said “you can’t work the Traditions the same way you work the Steps”. And I still believe that’s true. I mean, I think about our home life and you know, the only requirement for membership in my family is not a desire to stop using. My family that lives in our home is like me and my wife and our kids. And you know, just because you have a desire to stop using doesn’t mean that you’re a blood relative; so obviously I have to apply that a little differently. So how do I look at that? How do I think about that? Well, I think about that in terms that what that Tradition is teaching me as a person and as an NA member is that I have to live a life that is open to others. I have to let people into my life. I need to open up where I live – me, my spirit, my home, my center – and let other people in and not live in isolation and not *live* separate. And that way, I can practice that principle that’s expressed in the Tradition in my daily living without getting caught in that mind game of “well, it doesn’t fit, it does fit, it doesn’t fit”.

You know, one of the things that I’ve really been struck by in the last few years is learning about all this stuff is all well and good, but that isn’t living the program. I mean we can *learn* about the Traditions, we can *learn* about these words. You can look every word up in the dictionary and I think that okay, I believe in writing and looking words up. I really think that’s a good positive tool; but you know what, if you don’t apply that stuff in the way you live, knowledge is not going to do you much good without application. It’s kind of like one of the realizations I’ve had and wrote down very recently is *being on a quest for spiritual knowledge is missing the point because spirituality is not an intellectual exercise*. Knowledge is not a substitute for surrender. And I’ve said that for years – there is no substitute for surrender. And I strongly believe that. And we go to inordinate lengths to avoid surrender. We spend years, anything, anything but getting out of the way, and just living by principles that we didn’t figure out and maybe don’t completely understand. And that is something that has really become a theme of my recovery in the last few years is trying to get away from that intellectual basis for recovery. Because I was compelled to understand, I was compelled to try and find just the right words so everything made sense. And, you know, it’s more about *non*-sense than it is about sense. Recovery doesn’t make sense; it’s not an intellectual exercise.

The Traditions – you know, I could come here and go through the Traditions and probably tell you a lot of what’s written in our literature about them, because you know, I worked in all those committees that developed the literature on the Traditions at one time or another. And there’s a lot of good stuff there. You know, if you want a lot of information about the Traditions, read **It Works, How And Why**. There’s a lot of good information about the Traditions there and it’s a wonderful book. It is a *wonderful* book and it is much better than I had expected it was going to be. But if you want the information, but the feeling, but the spirit of it ...! I used to say that the Traditions were rules and then I said they were guidelines, and you know, I don’t know that spiritual principles are either rules or guidelines. You know, what’s a spiritual principle? It’s a

basic fundamental truth. It doesn't care whether you believe in it or not. In our **Basic Text**, it says that the Traditions are nonnegotiable. That doesn't mean that the interpretation is nonnegotiable, God, we sit around and "negotiate" them to death. Unfortunately, that is sometimes true! What are some nonnegotiables? Spiritual principles are nonnegotiable; they are basic truths that always work, that always are valid regardless of space and time and circumstance.

Honesty is a basic spiritual principle; it always works regardless what we think, regardless how it seems in the short run. Surrender is a basic spiritual truth – that principle always works. Anonymity is a basic spiritual truth – the principle always works. Unity is a basic spiritual truth. Autonomy is a basic spiritual principle. And these things always work. We don't have to figure them out or debate them or negotiate them. If we ignore them, they don't work in our lives; kind of like God, we ignore God, then our ability to tap into a power greater than ourselves is greatly decreased. Yeah, spirituality and God works whether we want it or not a lot of times. I believe in divine intervention but the real power lies in surrender. The real power is when I can tie in to those things. The *real* power of the principles of the Traditions is when I can make them my own. The *real* power of principle is in surrender and in living my life.

So what are these things called the Traditions then? Well, it's about a way to approach our interactions – with each other, with society, with our families, with our bosses, with the people that work for us, with the guy driving the bus, with the police officer on the street, with the school teacher, with the guy we hire to fix our roof regardless of how we want to cuss him out because he's three days late. (I don't mean to offend any roofers.) But our Traditions are a way of living just as the Steps are a way of living and they are a way of living in our interactions. "Our common welfare should come first, personal recovery depends on NA unity" – how do you live that? You can read about what it means, look up the words but how do you live that? How do you live the idea of "common welfare comes first"? How do you live the idea of "unity"? Well, I mean, one of the first things we have to learn how to do to even begin to suspect there's anything going on in "common welfare" is to start being concerned about others, and maybe thinking about something besides ourselves all the time, and how good or bad it feels.

You know, I read an article one time that was entitled "Addiction, the analgesic experience, the pain-killing experience" and we are so focused on how good or bad it is; "if it feels good, then do it", right? Or if it feels bad, don't do it? If it burns when you put your hand on the stove, don't put your hand on the stove. It makes sense, it's a part of our (I would say "tradition" but) "oral tradition". That's a very important statement. You know, I've seen people that when they heard that said, go "Oh, I get it, sometimes I just don't do it". Yeah, you got it, and that's great, and that's important but understanding – it's the living, it's the living, it's the living. The first thing the Traditions present is the idea of "you know, we need to stop thinking about ourselves all the time". And there are all sorts of things that tie into it. You know, the First Step (and now this is going to sound weird) is a "service step" because what is service all about? It's acting in the "common welfare", it is about providing support, assistance and help, things for others as if we were practicing devotion to God, as if we were making it a prayer.

Service – “our common welfare should come first” – working towards the common welfare is service. But I can bring service in and run it in all over; service is another one of those spiritual principles, it’s always true. “Personal recovery depends on NA unity” – that’s what got me introduced to these Traditions.

The new readings on the Traditions – from the back – if any of you have a copy of the thing that was called “*The Grey Form*” which was the rough draft of the Traditions chapter for the basic text, it was a rough draft for the basic text; if you have access to a copy of that, I would like to encourage you to read the first half of that introductory piece that was edited out because there is some neat stuff there too. What we see in our basic text and what we have in that reading is actually the second half of a little bit longer piece. The entire piece never made it to the basic text. And if you have access to a copy of “*The Grey Form*”, and for those of you who are online, it can be downloaded off the internet. Read some of that stuff, there’s some neat stuff in there. A lot of it was written right here, a lot of that stuff was written right here in Georgia.

But anyway, practicing that first Tradition, living that first Tradition – that’s the first thing that comes to my mind, starting to think and be concerned and living the common good, being a part of it. Of course, that ties into anonymity, doesn’t it? See, it’s so hard to separate these things. You know, “we’re going to talk about the first Tradition” – I don’t know that you *can* because all the principles overlap. There’s a thing in the basic text that has one of my favorite lines, it says that “true spiritual principles are never in conflict”. And it’s about the reality that if spiritual principles are truly spiritual principles, they truly always apply and the source of spiritual principles is some kind of spiritual force or being or whatever you want to believe in, then God is never in contradiction, so how could spiritual principles be in contradiction. So it becomes tougher and tougher to separate this stuff out.

“For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority, a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.” How do you live that? Do we take a vote every time we want to have dinner? A group of dope fiends get together and you know, God help us if we want to go to a movie – I’m lucky, I live in a little town where there are only two shows. You know, it only takes a certain amount of time to discuss the options. Boy, you come to a place like Atlanta and you go to a theater and they got eight movies at that one and there’s another one down the street with another eight, you’re in trouble, particularly if you got a car full of dope fiends. It’s as bad as picking restaurants; I mean how many of you went out to dinner last night and spent an hour trying to figure out which restaurant you were going to eat at and what you wanted to eat. I do it all the time, we do it; it’s crazy isn’t it? How we do that. “Group conscience” – What is “group conscience”? Everybody thinks it’s that compromise. And I would like to propose an idea to you guys that may be a little different; that conscience doesn’t have anything to do with *a vote*. You know one of the things that happened after I got clean was I started getting a conscience, it didn’t have anything to do with a vote. It had to do with me realizing that I had some *morals* and starting to feel uncomfortable for violating them. So I would like to propose the idea that perhaps the conscience of the group has more to do with the *morality* of the group than it has to do with a vote, any vote that’s taken. Now I

don't think our representatives carry a conscience. This is heresy. I don't think it's possible to *take* a group conscience and take it to the area. Sorry, can't be done as far as I'm concerned. What you can do, you can get a consensus of a group, and you can get a vote of a group that hopefully is arrived at by people using morals as the basis of their decisions, principles as the basis of their decisions in the group setting. And take that consensus, that decision, that vote of the group and pass on the information. But conscience only exists in the present; it's like one of these God things, it's like a principle. It exists now; you can't carry it from place to place. It's like mercury – you know, you start to try to put your finger on it and it goes whoosh. You know, you try to define it: Con-Science – tough to define by scientific method. It's not scientific. It's not concrete like that. It's malleable, it's like quicksilver. It moves, it changes as our understanding of spiritual principles and morality grows and changes. Probably the most obvious of our change in morality... **[Break in talk due to outside disturbance]**

Conscience – Awareness of principle, living by principle, awareness of morality – so part of group conscience has to be the idea of instead of having popularity contests, we need to start thinking of things in terms of principle, about what's best for the group. Remember the First Tradition (“Common welfare...”). As far as “ultimate authority” goes, I don't know too many people who struggle with that except those who are so caught up with power and prestige and addiction. Most of us come to realize that ultimately everything is in God's hands and I believe that this Fellowship is in God's hands. The bottom line for me in many things that occur in my life is (and I hope I don't offend anybody by saying it this way, but this is the way I feel it) – this God shit that everybody's talking about had better be for real or I'm fucked. Because you know what, if there is no God, I *know* that I don't have the power to make my life turn out. So you know, it comes down to a choice of either believing or not believing and I recognize that not believing is a dead-end. And I might be a fool for believing but it's the only shot I got. It's the *only* shot I got, because personal power fails me absolutely.

“The only requirement for membership is the desire”... - we talked about that one, didn't we? Opening our lives, getting honest with people, you know, first step honesty, right? Basically there are a couple of types of honesty. The easy one is “cash register honesty”; don't lie, cheat or steal. The tough one is getting real with people, 'cause we're dope fiends, we're addicts and we carry this thing “that if you ever knew what I was like way down deep inside, there'd be no way you could accept me”. Right? Is anybody here who does not have that thing going on inside them? Okay, so we all agree on that! It's called substantial unanimity or something like that! What do they call it? I like to have fun too! But anyway, we got this thing going on inside of ourselves that makes it real tough to open up and let anybody in to get really honest about who and what we really are with each other and become open to each other. You know, I think this Third Tradition is about getting open to each other, opening our lives to each other, getting real with each other. And you know, it's not just each other. Isn't it scary to think of our day-to-day living being based on a principle of openness? Isn't it scary to think about what it would be like to be honest in our dealings with others? Even when you get pulled over by the police? For driving too fast? And you know you want to tell them “uh, my speedometer said 65”. You know you want to tell them that! And you know you're doing 75 at least!

And yeah, that's normal for us. But what if honesty always worked? What if being open to let other people in our lives always worked? What if that was a principle? What do we do when we don't practice that principle? What if letting people into our lives – the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using – what if that was a real principle? What if that worked 100% of the time – that principle? What do we get if we don't practice it – a big hole in our program? You know, one of the things about that statement I said when I started out with “our program is a set of principles written so simply that we could follow them in our daily lives”. It's kind of like a set of chess pieces; anybody ever seen a pretty set of chess pieces, nice carved chess pieces? If there's one missing, it's not a set and you can't play chess. You can have pretty chess pieces, you can move them around, and we can kind of make up a game similar to chess, but you ain't gonna play chess without a set of pieces. And you're not going to get all the benefits of recovery *without* a set of principles and as someone who has tried desperately to ignore certain principles in this thing we call Narcotics Anonymous, I can vouch for the fact that if you ain't playing with a full deck, you ain't playing with a full deck! It's tough, it's tough – it's tough to get the goodies without playing with all the pieces, without the *set*. It didn't say a series of principles, it didn't say our program is a number of principles, it didn't say our program is spiritual principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives. It said it is a *set* of principles. I think it is beneficial for any of us to do some tenth step work on that, to really take another “continuing to take inventory” and look at how we're doing with principles and see which ones we've left out of our set. Which ones are missing in our set? Is that something like a “searching, fearless moral inventory”? These things are so confusing; they all say the same thing, don't they? And they all describe a process and they all fit together. “Our program is a set of principles” – you can't play without the whole set. Oh, God, isn't it strange?

Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole. Now I'm just throwing out some perhaps controversial, perhaps thought-provoking ideas about the Traditions. I'm not, like I said before, if you want to learn about the Traditions, read **It Works How and Why**, read the **Basic Text**, you know, read about them. Look up the words in a dictionary. I'm trying to give you a little bit of a feeling and maybe challenge you to think about it a wee bit, because I think that's what we're about in this type of setting. You've got the information, half of you; we're talking about “singing to the choir” anyway. The other half are probably desperate and maybe another half is pissed off because someone is beating them up with the Traditions and they want to find out what this is *really* all about, and probably there are two or three other halves floating around here. The sum is greater than the whole of its parts or something like that. But anyway, the fourth Tradition talks about autonomy – each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or NA as a whole. And people look at autonomy as “license”, I mean that's the big excuse, isn't it, group autonomy? “Oh we're autonomous.” But what autonomy means to me is being free of limiting factors. What being autonomous means to me is that each of us in our groups has the right and ability to pursue recovery, to fulfill the primary purpose of carrying the message to the addict who still suffers. Each group has the latitude in the way they approach this thing called recovery and you know, I see this idea of autonomy and

sometimes I'm concerned because I don't think we have as much autonomy as we used to. There is a fad in the fellowship sweeping the fellowship right now that if you're not writing the steps a certain way, you're not doing it right. *There is a fad* – and this is going to be dunhh – there is a fad in the fellowship right now that if you're not writing the steps, you're not doing it right! There have been recent fads that if you don't know the **Basic Text** intimately, you're not doing it right. And I got clean before any of that shit existed! Okay? And I'm still clean, and you know what, I might not be doing it right, but so far, so good. And you know, we're so concerned about doing it right, aren't we huh? My experience has shown me that there comes a point in time when I have to turn over my recovery. My experience has shown me that I had to get to a point where I had to realize that I couldn't *fix* myself even with NA. So what's this "doing it right shit"? Suit me if I did it right, I could fix me with NA and I wouldn't have to surrender. I could be in control of my recovery. *Huh, if I did it right, I could be in control of my recovery!* Isn't that a contradiction in terms? Sorry! I hope I've made someone in here very uncomfortable with that last little set of remarks, because you know, that's one of the hardest lessons we have to learn is that we can't fix ourselves even with NA.

The seventh step talks about humbly asking Him to remove our shortcomings. The eleventh step is a petition for power and knowledge, spiritual direction, not personal power, not intellectual knowledge – spiritual direction. It's not about "doing it right", it's not about me fixing me or me fixing *you*. It's about surrendering to principle. It's about taking the Traditions and at some point in the time going "oh fuck it, I'll just live this way!" And you know, we do that on different levels. Most of us have come to a point early in our recovery or at some point where we're going "I'm going to try it for real, one time". Right? "I don't know if this is going to work, I don't know if I'm really going to stay clean, I might be miserable, but you know what – I'm going to try this, one time, for real and see what happens." "What have I got to lose?" And we realize they don't have anything to lose and we come to terms with that thing in the third paragraph of "**We Do Recover**" – when at the end of the road, when we find that we can no longer function as human beings, either with or without drugs – okay, "I'm going to try this for real one time"; because I can't function as a human being either with or without drugs. And I don't have any choices left. I don't have any more brilliant ideas about how to do it. That happened for me around five years. I ran out of brilliant ideas about how to fix Greg. Now I found some more pretty quick and I engaged in them to the best of my abilities. And I continue to do that! Every once in a while I stumble across a bright idea and boy; I run it to the ground! Autonomy – now how did we get so far away from autonomy? We sure went off on that little tangent!

Okay – autonomy – the ability to practice principles, the ability to fulfill our primary purpose; which is what is talked about in the fifth Tradition. Primary purpose – is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Unfortunately, we've abdicated our primary purpose to the fellowship. How many of your groups are focused on carrying the message to the addict who still suffers – or do we let treatment centers and subcommittees and special workers and those crazy service people worry about that stuff? Huh? Yeah, we have abdicated our primary purpose – you know, the addict who still suffers. Here's another controversial little bit. I suffer sometimes but I don't think

that tradition is written about me. Because I got the message, I just ignore it or get distracted. I know most of the time that I'm screwing up when I'm screwing up and I just choose a little more self-violation, most of the time. I very rarely get stuck out there in some addictive trap and go, "huh, now how did I get here". I know how I got there – I decided to manage and control my life again and I did what I wanted to do in spite of what my morals said and in spite of what the program taught, in spite of spiritual principles. That's how I got there with my ass in a wringer! It wasn't because I didn't know and most of us know pretty quick, I mean there aren't a lot of secrets in NA, you know. So I believe that in that fifth Tradition where it says that "the addict who still suffers" – we're talking first and foremost about the newcomer. I think with each other we need to remind each other of the message and the message is the way we live. The message is hope, the message is freedom, and the message is you know, that if you work the steps you can have a spiritual awakening. The message is that you can live and enjoy life without the use of drugs. The message is – the message is – the message is... what is the message? It's okay to be clean, it's okay to be human, and it's okay to live. It's okay to be free – that's the message. It's all a message. Who needs to hear that? The hopeless, the people who are as desperate and as hopeless as we were when we decided to try it for real, just one time, and shortly there before or before then. Sometimes that happens after we're around a while; sometimes it happens a long time before we get here. So that controversial little bit is, you know, I'm not into going "I'm the addict who still suffers, therefore our meetings should be group therapy" – I'm sorry, that's *not* what I was taught. It's not what I was taught. I wasn't taught that meetings are first and foremost for those who are already there, to share their problems and we have a wonderful format. Discussion meetings are great. A lot of times you can sit in discussion meetings for long times and never share what's really going on with you. You can get theoretical about these topics, and I like them because I *love* to play that game. But there is no substitute for surrender and sooner or later I have to let go of that. I think topic discussion meetings are very, very important but if that's all we got and it is the predominant format here in the south, it becomes group therapy and it's more about providing therapy for our members than it is reaching to the newcomer or the addict who still suffers. Heresy also – a healthy NA community has a variety of meeting options, a variety of formats. If you're in a community right now and there's only one format, start another meeting with a different format; *it doesn't matter what kind it is*. There are all kinds of formats. Instead of having a topic discussion meeting, have an open podium meeting, it's called a participation meeting. Have a speaker meeting. Have a combination meeting. Try something different, you know, try something different; a newcomer's meeting. There are all kinds of formats you can get into. If you're in a community that only has one type of meeting and in this part of the country, chances are if you are in that community, that's a topic discussion meeting or a (what is it) problem discussion meeting with "anyone here have a problem they'd like to hear discussed tonight?" Group therapy – I mean, I used to do that for a living! Some of the other people in this room I recognize also did that for a living! ***But it's not NA!*** Not NA! Anyway, enough on that high horse now.

What's the sixth Tradition? Power and prestige – son of a gun! Where does that come from – Notice how these all fit together? Huh? "...Lest problems of money, property



and prestige divert us from our primary purpose” – huh, “ought never endorse, finance or lend the NA name to any related facility or outside enterprise lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.” God, that’s a lot of words to describe *stay on task!* Plan the work and work the plan; you know, give up, show up for life and do the next right thing and don’t get distracted by all the bullshit. You know, and if it’s about money, property and prestige, sex, rock and roll, whatever – my whole life and thinking is centered in something; the getting and using and finding ways and means to get more regardless of what that is – that’s addiction. It’s about not getting caught in those traps. So the way I practice that sixth Tradition is by trying to keep my life simple and not engaging in a lot of shit. Now I belong to other organizations besides Narcotics Anonymous. I’m part of the Smokey Mountains Mineral and Gem Society and the PTA. Their meetings are just as chaotic as ours! Except they don’t happen as often and they don’t imprint on our lives quite as heavily. And you know what, the gem and mineral club has field trips! We went on one a few weeks ago and sat there in the cold, digging rocks out of the thing. And they are fun! But we try to keep our lives simple and free from all these entanglements, free from letting people use all this, all this stuff. And to me that is maybe the most basic – living that principle of the sixth Tradition in my life. It’s living a simple, straightforward life. You know, if it’s complicated, it’s not spiritual. God is not complicated; God is the simplest thing no one can conceive of. God is ultimate simplicity. If you had that much power, you wouldn’t have to be complicated either. It’d be complicated so we could dazzle them with bullshit. If we weren’t powerless, we wouldn’t have to, you know, depend upon all this shit, we really wouldn’t.

“...To be fully self-supporting, through our own contributions” – “Fully self-supported through our own contributions” – you know, maybe living that for me at first is to stop being a leech on society; a physical, emotional and spiritual leech. Stop being a physical, emotional and spiritual vampire with other people, with our families, with society. Stand on our own feet and be real people. Act as if we knew what the hell it meant to be a person. And if we’re not sure, copy someone who seems to be doing okay and hope like hell they ain’t screwing up and you got the whole picture! At the simplest, the application of the seventh Tradition for me is that. It’s standing up and being a real person in my own right; Lois and I standing up and being a married couple in our own right and Lois and I and Clay and Lori standing up and being a family in our own right and caring about each other, and keeping it simple. Not trying to complicate the shit out of it with all this stuff. Yeah, seventh Tradition – and not look at all these outside things. Does it make sense? And when I can think of it in that way if you want some of the understanding about the seventh Tradition that you can read about it, one of the things that really unlocked my door on that was something was the idea that the seventh Tradition, like most things in our program, exists on several levels. And I like that physical, mental and spiritual in talking about a lot of things because there is physical, mental and spiritual aspects of almost everything we’re talking about. And if I start thinking about this idea of being self-supporting as being physical, mental and spiritual, well then “we’re going to pass the seventh Tradition”... How many of you hear that in your meetings – all the time? You *can’t pass* the seventh Tradition, you pass a basket. The seventh Tradition is *why* we pass the basket; to help facilitate us being financially self-supporting, being self-supporting on a physical level. But you start talking about

emotional or mental self-support; you're talking about being committed to a group, being part of a group, becoming a home-group member – *committed* to the group, because supporting, *showing up*, is another physical aspect. And then spiritual is loving the group and caring, having empathy for the members and getting to know people and getting honest and opening up with each other and really letting this group of people into our lives. You know, I could do an hour on the seventh Tradition, approaching it that way! Because these basic principles are so universal; they are so underlying and so intertwined. So if you want to start understanding about it, you know, stop focusing on the word and open up. That's if you want to understand the Traditions, that's my biggest suggestion.

Eighth Tradition – Professionals, I thought that was it. You know, the standard thing on that is it has to do with professionalism and the therapeutic value of one addict helping another and service and empathy are almost contradictory in terms. A professional is someone who has special experiences and skills that gets paid or compensated for providing a special service. And that's not NA. Our "compensation" is our lives. One of the neatest things I've heard somebody say lately about Narcotics Anonymous is that "we take turns saving each other's lives". That's neat! That's not a professional thing! That's not professionalism! NA and professionalism are almost polar extremes, because this is about us getting together and doing together what we can't do alone. "In desperation, we sought help from each other in Narcotics Anonymous." All these methods having failed for us and it used to be a lot stronger, up until '85. It used to say "***medicine, religion and psychiatry seemed to have no answers for us that we could use***". ***It didn't say they weren't "sufficient"***. I was at a meeting last week and we forgot the booklet, so we were doing the steps and the readings by memory. And I spent fifteen years prior to the revision of the white booklet, and so for fifteen years I went with the old readings. And I swear to God, last Tuesday night I went right on into the old readings. People looked at me, and I went "sorry"! But that's where I come from! I fall into those things and it's not that the new readings aren't better, because they really are better written. But you know, you surrender to Narcotics Anonymous, you fall in love with this program and you carry that with you. At least, I carry it with me. Professionalism – you know, it's not about professionalism. I mean, how do I practice that in my life? Well, the most obvious thing that occurs to me is that one of the biggest stumbling blocks I have is thinking I'm an expert in anything, it's thinking that I'm a professional at this, that I can take care of it. If I do it just right, everything will work out the way I have it planned and designed. "***Move over God, I can handle this one! My turn, please, please, please!***" Living that principle, you know, is the same in the second and third step, in the first, second and third steps as it is in the eighth Tradition. Same principle, same basic principles – one of our problems is we're throwing words at these principles and words are not real adequate. That's why we have to describe the same principles over and over again in so many different ways. It's that it's really tough to get a feel for these.

Ninth Tradition talks about creating service boards and committees directly responsible to those they serve. And I could go for an hour on that one too! ***Please remember*** the phrase "directly responsible to those they serve" and if you're on a service board or committee, you'd better be looking at who you're serving. And that's a problem in

Narcotics Anonymous today and I know that's a controversial opinion too. The ninth Tradition talks about us creating service boards and committees directly responsible to those they serve. I designed the service structure and at the most basic, the purpose of the service structure is to violate the Traditions. Now I said that, part of that was for shock value, that's an oversimplification! Please don't take that literally! What I'm trying to get at is the idea – there're some things we have to do for our fellowship that would distract us in our little meetings and groups from our primary purpose – the work of carrying the message to the addict who still suffers. There are things that are required even at the group level that would distract us from the therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel; that would distract us from a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience; that would distract us from empathy, that healing power. You could read it over and over and over again – what makes NA special. There are a lot of things that come up that would distract us from our primary purpose. The reason we have a service structure is to do those things so we don't have to get caught in those traps, so we don't have to. You know, the service structure can be organized so our recovery meetings don't have to be. Our service centers can employ special workers so we don't have to be professionals. So, on that level, that outrageous statement I made: “the purpose of the service structure is to violate the Traditions” – is to do those things for the groups that they can't do in strict adherence and strict recognition of the Traditions; to do those things for our groups which they can't do and maintain the integrity of their spiritual focus. The purpose of the service structure is to do those things that our groups cannot do and maintain the integrity of the spiritual purpose of Narcotics Anonymous. So, I cleaned it up a little bit. Please don't go out of here and say “you should have heard what this guy said about the Traditions, he said about the service structure...” And I've said that before but you know, there is a grain of truth there. I think sometimes by saying things outrageously, we start thinking about them.

Tenth Tradition – no opinion on outside issues, hence the NA name ought never be drawn into public controversy. How do I practice that, I mean, I'm not supposed to have an opinion about outside issues? This is going to sound really, really weird. *There ain't nothing separate from any of us.* I know that's a sort of quasi-spiritual/religious statement, but you know what – I believe that we are all brothers and sisters by virtue of God. I believe we're all in this together, I believe that I can't make it without you. I believe that I can't make it through life without other people. So, in that sense, I ain't going to set myself up for public controversy. I'm not going to engage in a lot of that stuff. I have personal opinions, I have personal beliefs. I have political beliefs, I have musical preferences. I have all kinds of stuff. But I don't have a right to impose them on other parts of me, on other people. ***I don't have a right to lay my shit on you.*** And part of that having no opinion on outside issues is my responsibility not to force you in to a position or situation to get into my shit. You know, that's a two-way principle sort of thing, that's a two-way Tradition. They're all kind of two-way. What if part of that principle behind that Tradition, what if living that Tradition is not setting people up to take sides? How many of you have been involved in devastating, devastating battles within the fellowship? How many of you have felt hurt by devastating battles within the fellowship? How about when “Mr. and Mrs. NA” break up? And he sponsors your old man and she sponsors you, or vice versa? Huh? How about them times? How about

being caught in-between? And one of the sad parts about it is usually the sponsees are all – not always, but oftentimes – sponsees and “grand-sponsees” and “great-grand-sponsees” are more enthusiastic about the conflict than the people. I think that’s something in the nature of revolution, some sociological truth there or something. It’s the followers that are most...something like that! But anyway, think about that. I think part of living that principle is trying to be *aware* of that and not getting caught up in other people’s shit and not inviting people to get caught in, not compromising other people by forcing them to get caught in your shit. And that begins by recognizing your shit. It’s about living life like a loose garment. Someone once, some real important person said that, didn’t they? Yeah, some real important person said that – wearing life like a loose garment and not taking it all too damn serious. That’s why the “s” is on h-a-l-t-s; huh, to remind us of that. Huh, “h-a-l-t-s” in relation to the tenth Tradition, God, that’s weird! These things are inseparable! Maybe that’s what I *really* have to say! Don’t pigeon-hole this shit and deal with it piecemeal! It all hooks together!

“Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion” – anybody ever read the public relations policy? Huh, anybody ever read our public relations policy? Let me know! “It’s based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films” and other forms of media, MTV, and rock and roll, airplanes with messages flying behind them, skywriters, kites, bubblegum wrappers – yeah! No opinion on outside issues, huh? Public relations policy – attraction rather than promotion, huh? Personal anonymity at the level of press, radio – what about all this stuff? What about it? To me, when I look at that Tradition, you know, maybe the thing that pops into my head early on in the thought process that goes with it, has to do with me not being special, has to do with me not setting myself up. It has to do with living a good life. When I’m thinking about applying the principles of this Tradition to my life, part of that is making my life attractive, showing the people that our dreams come true. A year and a half ago, we bought a five acre piece on the top of a hill in northeast Tennessee, trees all around, bones of the earth stone outcrops, looked right up against the mountains – it’s gorgeous, it’s beautiful. For years, I’ve had a dream of a retreat center. As some of you know, I ended up being ripped off for \$100,000 and about lost that. You know what, dreams don’t die, and they don’t have to die. Sometimes I have to surrender that I’m not in control of them. *Always*, I eventually have to surrender that I’m not in control of them. But you know what, they don’t have to die. I’ve had so many dreams come true in Narcotics Anonymous that I don’t have to limit myself on that. And that’s *attractive*! Look at you! Look at you! Look around! Look at you! Attraction rather than promotion – yeah. Something I say when I talk about the steps is something that the man who was my sponsor for many years showed me in a book; it said, “the greatest prayer someone can offer to a God of any kind is the way they live”. That’s a fundamental part of my program today – the greatest prayer someone can offer to a God of any kind is the way they live. How’s your life? Is your life attractive to others? Do people want what you got? Do they want to become you? Do they want to be able to practice principles as good as you do? Or is your life more a measure of perhaps repugnance? Are people repelled by the way you live? “Boy, I’m glad I don’t have to live like that!” If you want to live the eleventh Tradition then I suspect it’s important for you to live a good life and live by spiritual principles and try to make your

life as attractive to others; not to take your stuff but to get to where you are – spiritually attractive to others and not just in these rooms. Live with dignity, live with grace, live with care, live with empathy, live with spiritual principles. “Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts and practice these principles in all our affairs.” “Our program is a set of principles written so simply that we can follow them in our daily lives.” You know, it keeps coming back to the same shit.

“Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.” And applying that for me on a daily basis comes to do with “getting out of the way” and realizing that my life isn’t my business and realizing that we’re not different and separate, you know. And we got to look out for each other, that none of us can make it on our own, mostly me. See when you don’t make it on your own, it don’t hurt me anywhere near as bad, although it hurts, as when I don’t make it on my own. So the first thing I got to remember is I can’t make it without you and I got to let go of all those things and ways that I use to keep you away. I have to practice unity, circle, in order to achieve anonymity I need to practice unity. I need to unify by practicing anonymity, by letting go of the differences; it sets up the possibility for unity. ***By embracing unity, I can find anonymity.***

We got 20 minutes, the podium is open.