

# Tradition Five- Our Primary Purpose

## The Message That We Carry

By Rick

Sometimes I am uncomfortable with all the different definitions that I have heard concerning the topic of what *our primary purpose* is. I can sit in a meeting and hear all kinds of different experiences that members have described, thinking that they are carrying the message of alcoholics anonymous to the new member. We have the big book, and the Twelve and Twelve, as our primary texts, that have the message that we are supposed to be carrying to the new comers, but I see it misrepresented by well meaning people that think we are supposed to convince a person not to take a drink. I cringe when I hear someone say "I just don't pick up today," and that it's all about the alcohol. It hasn't always been this way. This attitude has only surfaced in the past 35 years. I sometimes think that it's almost sacrilegious to point out these things, but I do it sometimes when someone's chance of sobriety hangs in the balance. On page 31 in the big book, right after it explains "all of the methods we have tried," it goes on to say, "We do not like to pronounce any individual as alcoholic, but you can quickly diagnose yourself. Step over to the nearest bar and try some controlled drinking. Try to drink and stop abruptly. Try it more than once. It will not take long to decide if you are honest with yourself about it. It may be worth a bad case of jitters if you get the full knowledge of your condition." The second example of this approach is on page 23 in the 12&12 and it says it this way: "To the doubter we could say, "Perhaps you're not an alcoholic after all. Why don't you try some more controlled drinking, bearing in mind meanwhile what we have told you about alcoholism." This attitude brought immediate and practical results. It was then discovered that when one alcoholic had planted in the mind of another the true nature of his malady, that person could never be the same again. Following every spree, he would say to himself. "Maybe those A.A.'s were right. .... After a few of such experiences, often years before the onset of extreme difficulties, he would return to us convinced. He had hit bottom as truly as any of us. *John Barleycorn himself had become our best advocate.*" Now, to be clear, I have never suggested that anyone go over to a bar and drink, but when I refer him to that page in the big book, he understands that he is the only one that can make the decision to stop drinking, and that I will help him to understand his problem but, I do not turn into his (parent) protector. I know that a person can get excited, and want to rescue a practicing alcoholic, but if that person understood the message in those two examples, they would be more effective by trying to plant in the mind of their subject, the true nature of this malady. He can get past the alcohol and get on with the rebuilding of his life, supported by the principles that the book suggests. I have one more example that reinforces this approach and disclaims the effort to protect the alcoholic from drinking. On the bottom page 100 to page 103 of the big book it is explained this way: "In our belief, any scheme of combating alcoholism which proposes to shield a sick man from temptation is doomed to failure. If the alcoholic tries to shield himself, he may succeed for a time, but he usually ends up

with a bigger explosion than ever. We have tried these methods. These attempts to do the impossible have always failed.” On the same page it suggests that “if he still has an alcoholic mind you could put him on the Greenland Ice Cap and even there an Eskimo might turn with a bottle of scotch and ruin everything”. Again, I don’t want to suggest that anyone send anybody to a bar to test this way of thinking. But, I do want to suggest that our primary purpose is to stay sober and to help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety, and I know that in the past 35 years, or so, A.A. has been flooded with people from the REHAB facilities and protecting them from a drink is the purpose of rehab, but when they arrive in A.A. it shouldn’t change what we know works long term. I must be careful not to let my own ambition cloud my judgment on this important issue. I know that this misconception will be with us for a while, but I also know that the Big Book, and the 12&12 will not change, and I also know that we all grow up a little in the program and as we do, we patiently realize that the Big Book and 12&12 are wise beyond our comprehension. Understanding the message in those excerpts is the more unselfish and mature way to help the alcoholic who suffers. We are not snake oil sales clerks. We can’t give away something we haven’t got. Reading these pages to a newcomer would be a good way to explain the true nature of his malady.