

## TRADITION TWO

**For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority -- a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.**

We frequently say that Nicotine Anonymous is a "We" program. Clearly, many nicotine addicts who believed themselves hopeless have found recovery through the fellowship of Nicotine Anonymous. Although they admitted they were powerless over nicotine on their own, they somehow came to experience miraculous relief from the obsession to use nicotine through the power of a loving God (as they understood that power) acting through the group.

Reinforcing the idea that Nicotine Anonymous is a "We" program, Tradition Two reminds us that final authority in matters affecting Nicotine Anonymous groups never resides with any one individual, but with the group itself through its group conscience. What, exactly, does the term "group conscience" mean?

At the most basic level, it means an issue that requires action is brought to a Nicotine Anonymous group for discussion. The course of action to be taken is then determined by a vote of the group's members. The use of the word "conscience," implies that there is a moral imperative to group votes. In fact, there is.

Underlying all the other Traditions, Tradition Five says, "Each group has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to the nicotine addict who still suffers." Each member, then, when participating in a group conscience, should consider whether or not their vote helps the group fulfill its primary purpose. This means members put personal preferences aside and vote with this higher purpose in mind. When this happens -- when members put aside their own agendas and act for the common good -- we believe a loving Higher Power's will is truly made evident through our group conscience.

Since we acknowledge that a Higher Power expresses itself through our group conscience, does that mean decisions made by a group should never be changed? No, this is not necessarily the case. For example, when our fellowship was first formed, the earliest members decided we should be known as "Smokers

Anonymous." At the time, the name was entirely appropriate because the early members were all smokers. Years later, however, it became clear that our Higher Power no longer desired us to be known as "Smokers Anonymous." This became evident when it was brought to our attention that the name, "Smokers Anonymous" was already legally registered by a doctor who operated a program that had nothing to do with a Twelve Step process of recovery.

This presented a real problem to our fledgling organization. The doctor was willing to license the name to us for a substantial annual licensing fee. The fellowship could not afford to pay such a fee. The dilemma was brought to the Fifth Annual Smokers Anonymous World Services Conference, held in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1990. According to the Bylaws of our fellowship, the annual World Services Conference serves as "the collective conscience of the fellowship of Nicotine Anonymous [then Smokers Anonymous] as a whole."

A member present at this pivotal debate in our fellowship's history described the process as "the most dramatic evidence of the guiding hand of our collective Higher Power at work that I have ever seen." That discussion had started from a nearly unanimous collective position to "fight the good fight" to keep the full name "Smokers Anonymous." The idea was that any program called "Anonymous," as applied to recovery from addiction, should be reserved for the exclusive use of bona fide 12-step programs.

Within a couple of hours, the nearly unanimous collective position had shifted 180 degrees from a combative determination to keep the term "Smokers" to the acceptance of the term "Nicotine." It was something like "of course we are inclusive and our recovery process is about gaining and maintaining freedom from a drug, not a delivery system." That member described the awesome shift, under the guidance of a loving collective Higher Power "like the tide coming in." The rising tide inevitably swept participants in the discussion to the conclusion that it was time to accept the natural evolution of our fellowship into the more inclusive Nicotine Anonymous.

Changing the name of our fellowship is an example of group conscience operating at the fellowship-wide level. However, group conscience occurs at several different levels throughout Nicotine Anonymous. Group conscience is also expressed at weekly Nicotine Anonymous meetings, at monthly intergroup meetings, and at periodic meetings of the officers of the World

Service Office (WSO) of Nicotine Anonymous. There are also many occasions when special committees are formed for conference or retreat planning, revising the Bylaws of Nicotine Anonymous, proposing new or revised literature, and so on. Although these committees may have a chairperson coordinating the efforts of the committee, they use group conscience to reach accord within the committee.

At the group level, members utilize group conscience to determine a wide variety of items. For example, groups need officers -- members who are willing to serve in positions such as secretary, chairperson, or treasurer. Many groups hold periodic business meetings for the purpose of electing officers and determining other business items. These include how long our officers will serve, how long members are required to be abstinent to be eligible for office, whether or not the group will serve coffee at meetings, and how much the group can afford to donate to their local Intergroup, to Nicotine Anonymous as a whole and to Nicotine Anonymous World services. There are many other group related items that are decided by group conscience.

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