

## The Twelve Traditions of Marijuana Anonymous

### TRADITION ONE

*Our common welfare should come first;  
personal recovery depends on MA unity.*

The MA society consists of groups of recovering addicts and others with a desire to stop using marijuana. We are people who share similar experiences and feelings. The concept of unity, and all that it stands for, helps preserve the fellowship.

Unity should not be confused with uniformity. Unity stems from our common purpose to stay clean and sober and to help others recover, not from uniform standards imposed on the group by a few well-meaning members. A group that has unity from the hearts of its members allows each addict to carry the message of recovery in their own unique way.

However, even though the individual members are important to the group, experience shows us that they learn to conform to the spiritual principles of the program in order to recover. Our lives depend on living by spiritual principles; this is what the unity of the program offers. It wasn't until we came to MA and accepted these spiritual principles that recovery became possible. This program did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

We cannot keep the gifts the program has given us unless we give them away to others. We share our experiences and learn from each other. None of us can

survive, and the fellowship cannot endure, unless we carry the message of recovery. We have found that those who keep coming back to the fellowship have a better chance of staying clean and sober. Those who stop coming to meetings face a rough and lonely road.

We are often called upon to make personal sacrifices to preserve the fellowship. The group must survive, or the individuals may not. Our personal recovery and the growth of MA are contingent upon maintaining an atmosphere of recovery in our meetings. After all, we all have the same goals — to stop our self-destructive behavior and to stay clean and sober. We become willing to help our group deal constructively with conflict. As group members, we strive to work out difficulties openly, honestly, and fairly, and we seek to promote the common welfare of all members rather than a personal agenda. Each of us takes into consideration the effect our actions might have on newcomers.

Ideally, members are concerned with the preservation of individual meetings, meetings with the preservation of the district, and districts with the preservation of MA as a whole. Thus, we safeguard our unity by electing a representative to serve at the district level. The local areas then elect delegates to World Services so that the group conscience everywhere can be unified. Unity prevails, as God's will works through our members.

This is not to suggest that we always agree on everything. After all, whenever people get together there are bound to be differences of opinion. However, we can disagree without being disagreeable. In this way, we have often seen members who vehemently disagree pull together to reach out to a newcomer seeking help. We have learned to set aside our differences for the common good.

## TRADITION TWO

*For our group purpose  
there is but one ultimate authority,  
a loving God whose expression  
may come through in our group conscience.  
Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.*

One purpose of the Twelve Traditions is to protect ourselves from ourselves. Tradition Two is an excellent example of this. As addicts, we are by nature self-centered and strong-willed. In MA it is easy to become a “big fish in a little pond.” However, one person or vocal minority cannot possibly run the fellowship. Controlling attitudes and behavior can easily drive away newcomers and old-timers alike

The sole authority in MA is a loving God as may be expressed in our group conscience. In Step Three, individuals make a decision to put their wills and their lives in God’s care. In Tradition Two the group permits God to be its ultimate authority as well. When we put God in charge by praying for God’s will and the power to carry it out, God can operate through our group conscience.

Nobody runs MA; there are no dictators, masters, or bosses. Instead we have secretaries, treasurers, and representatives. These are positions of service. No one member or outspoken minority is allowed to control MA. At times, each of us may have to accept a group conscience that is contrary to our own desire.

Experience has shown us that the conscience of the group, when properly informed, is much wiser than any one leader. Beware of any group that becomes known as

“so-and-so’s” group. With this in mind, there should be almost complete agreement among the members in order to carry a group conscience on any vote. If nearly complete agreement cannot be achieved, it may be a good idea to table the matter for further study.

We must also remember the second part of Tradition Two: our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern. In MA, authority flows from the individual members through elected representatives and on through World Services, not vice-versa. World Services benefits the individual members by serving the MA community. As trusted servants, these individuals make decisions on how to better serve MA, not on how to better govern it. In this way, leadership by selfless service has been shown to work where control and manipulation have failed. We can best maintain MA’s integrity by letting a group conscience, guided by a loving God, prevail.

## TRADITION THREE

*The only requirement for membership  
is a desire to stop using marijuana.*

Tradition Three states that a person is a member if *they* say they have a desire to stop using marijuana. No matter who you are, where you came from, or what you did, you cannot be denied membership in Marijuana Anonymous. To make any requirement for membership other than a desire to stop using marijuana could mean that some addicts would be denied the gifts the program has to offer.

For many addicts, MA is their last hope for a life free from the insanity of active addiction. We do not want to create any barriers between ourselves and the addict who still suffers. We are not willing to pronounce a death sentence on any of our struggling brothers and sisters just because they may not fit the mold of what we think our group members should be like.

The fact that there are no requirements other than a desire to stop using marijuana is a strength of MA. After all, we learn from each other's experiences; the more diverse our groups become, the more experiences we have to draw from. We accept young people, senior citizens, criminals, people with mental or physical challenges, and people from all religions, nationalities, races, and different walks of life. No one is excluded from MA.

Tradition Three also means that a person does not have to stop using marijuana before joining the fellowship. The ability to maintain abstinence has no bearing on their

qualification to be a member of Marijuana Anonymous. All who have a desire to stop using marijuana are welcome.

Groups can require a person to be free from all mind-altering substances (including alcohol) for some purposes, such as receiving sobriety chips or speaking at meetings. But membership in MA may not be restricted by any one group. In fact, a person may smoke a joint every night before coming to a meeting and still be able to declare himself or herself a member of MA, so long as they have the desire to stop using marijuana.

Members do not have to prove their desire to stop using marijuana; they only have to express this desire. In fact, the desire to stop using marijuana does not even have to be an honest one. Any desire is sufficient, but some desire is necessary.

We all know people who could benefit from the principles MA has to offer. Many people we know could use a program of recovery in their lives. Sadly, those who need us do not always have the desire to stop using marijuana and never find their way into these rooms. We can bring our addicted friends and loved ones to a meeting if they are willing, but we cannot force them to embrace our way of life. Membership is a personal decision. This decision must be made in the heart of each individual addict.

Because of the freedom of Tradition Three, many newcomers feel immediately that they are trusted, wanted, and loved. We therefore open our doors to any addict who has the simple desire to stop using marijuana, hoping that they can find what we have found in MA.

## TRADITION FOUR

*Each group should be autonomous  
except in matters affecting other groups  
or MA as a whole.*

Tradition Four is a specific application of the general principles outlined in Traditions One and Two. Tradition Four states that every group has the right of self-government undertaken without outside control. Every group can manage itself exactly as it pleases, except where MA as a whole is affected. This means that MA has the courage and faith to allow each group to make its own decisions. In essence, each group is its own individual entity, relying on the group conscience as guided by a loving God to direct its actions.

Groups have a right to make their own mistakes. There are only two boundaries that any group must not cross: 1) A group must not do anything that would affect other groups or MA as a whole; and 2) A group cannot affiliate itself with anything or anybody else. In all other respects the groups have complete autonomy.

The group may make any decisions or adopt any format it likes. No district service committee should challenge this privilege even though a group may act in complete opposition to the district's desires. In other words, every group has the right to set its own course.

Healthy trial and error, guided by spiritual principles, often results in a newer and better way to do things. In many cases, allowing groups liberty and freedom helps keep MA from being stuck in the rut of practices and customs that have become obsolete.

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A group should consult with other groups, the district service committee, or World Services if there is any question that their actions may affect another group or MA as a whole. Each group should take special care that its actions fall within the bounds of our traditions, and that they do not dictate or force anything upon other groups. The purpose of autonomy is to give each group the freedom to establish an atmosphere of recovery that will best serve its members, and to fulfill the primary purpose stated in Tradition Five.

## TRADITION FIVE

*Each group has but one primary purpose,  
to carry its message to the marijuana addict  
who still suffers.*

The existence of MA depends on the preservation of Tradition Five. The therapeutic value of one addict helping another is without parallel, because only another addict can identify with and offer recovery to a newcomer by sharing experience, strength, and hope. Tradition Five also teaches us that we cannot keep our own recovery unless we give it away. Our own lives and sanity are in jeopardy if we don't help those who are still sick.

In MA we are not interested in making a profit, selling some "get well quick" scheme, or educating anyone about the horrors of addiction. We are only interested in helping ourselves and the addict who still suffers. Once a newcomer realizes that we have no ulterior motive, they begin to trust the members of the fellowship, and the process of recovery can begin.

In MA we create an atmosphere to best serve our primary purpose: to carry the message to the marijuana addict who still suffers. In carrying the message to newcomers, we should not get carried away with controlling their behavior. If we try to control the newcomer, we dilute the message of recovery. Putting requirements on newcomers is also a violation of Tradition Three: "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using marijuana."

When many of us came into MA we were met with love and acceptance by our fellow addicts. We found a

place where we belonged-now we offer the same sense of belonging to other newcomers. The newcomer is the most important person in our fellowship. Sometimes when we go to a meeting we know everyone and get caught up in the laughter and fun. We have all made good friends and wouldn't trade that warmth for any price. But we must not forget to welcome the newcomer or out-of-town visitor who is sitting alone.

MA is not a social organization. Getting together for activities such as dancing, swimming, bowling, hiking, or playing golf is fine as long as we do not place these special interests before our primary purpose of carrying the message of recovery. Therefore, it is a good idea to couple a social function with some type of recovery-oriented event such as a speaker meeting or workshop.

Our fellowship will always be safe if our main interest in attending MA meetings is to recover from addiction and help others recover as well. In this way MA will maintain an atmosphere of recovery where addicts can get together to share experience, strength, and hope. That is what we are looking for when we go to a meeting. Drugalogues, talks that glorify drug use, may be interesting, but they tend to carry the mess rather than the message. How we got into MA and stayed here by practicing the Twelve Steps is the real message of recovery. Our message is one of hope and promise that any addict can stop using marijuana, lose the obsession and desire to do so, and find a new way of life by following spiritual principles one day at a time.

Our primary purpose is to carry our message to the marijuana addict who still suffers. What we share at a

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meeting can either contribute to this effort or detract from it. The choice is ours.

## TRADITION SIX

*MA groups ought never endorse, finance, or lend the MA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*

Tradition Six means that no hospital, recovery house, or other outside entity should use MA's name. Nor should the fellowship give or lend money and become concerned with the success of an outside enterprise. MA discourages the use of its logo and literature on products made and sold by private individuals, companies, or organizations.

The purpose of Tradition Six is to protect the MA name from being corrupted by outside influences, money, property, or prestige. If we endorse, finance or lend the MA name to outside enterprises we run the risk of being labeled with the ideology of whatever outside group we have endorsed.

The more we mind our own business the less we alienate people, and the greater our attraction becomes. MA may cooperate with anyone, but such cooperation should never reach the point of affiliation or endorsement. MA should not get caught up in the political or religious quarrels associated with such affiliations or endorsements.

Likewise, we do not endorse other Twelve Step fellowships. It is true of course that we share the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and work in a spirit of cooperation with each other. However, we are entirely independent. The use of literature, speakers, or

announcements from other fellowships at our meetings may constitute an implied endorsement of an outside enterprise.

Tradition Six is only concerned with the organization and fellowship of MA, not with the behavior of individual members. This means that our individual members may volunteer their time or donate to hospitals, recovery houses, schools, or other charitable organizations. It should be clear, however, that the donation is strictly personal, and not from MA.

Also, MA groups can meet in these locations so long as they do not affiliate themselves with the institution. A group that meets at a particular facility should not use the name of that facility in the name of the group because it implies affiliation. For example, a group that meets at St. —'s hospital should not be called the St. —'s group or meeting.

We must also not forget the problems associated with money, property, and prestige. Yes, money can do lots of good, but it also causes a lot of unnecessary problems. If we are too concerned about money, we may concentrate less on our primary purpose. MA's existence is not wholly dependent on raising money or becoming wealthy. The purpose of Tradition Six is to truly separate the spiritual from the material.

## TRADITION SEVEN

*Every MA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.*

Tradition Seven means that we take care of ourselves. As addicts, we were takers — a burden on everyone. Now that we are clean and sober, we are grateful givers. Since Tradition Six admonishes us not to endorse, finance, or lend the MA name to outside enterprises, it only makes sense that we do not accept outside contributions either.

One purpose of Tradition Seven is to keep MA from getting rich. If we were to accept outside contributions there might be continuous conflicts about how to handle our money. Again, as stated in Tradition Six, this could lead us away from our primary purpose of carrying the message to the marijuana addict who still suffers. We must not let the material needs of MA get in the way of our spiritual pursuits. After all, MA in action calls for contribution of much time and little money.

By staying financially independent, we do not have to become obliged to any outside sources or contributors. We remain unaffected by outside financial influences because we do not depend on their contributions. This is why it is important that we support ourselves and pay rent to facilities we use for our meetings even though the rent may be nominal.

Acceptance of any gift or contribution from an outside source that may carry with it an obligation by the fellowship is truly unwise and defeats the spirit of Tradition

Seven. By paying our own way, we remain free; we have earned the privilege of making our own decisions.

Our Seventh Tradition money goes to paying group expenses such as rent, coffee, literature, chips, and refreshments. As groups get larger and begin collecting more than they need to cover these basic expenses, they usually place a small amount aside for emergencies (called a “prudent reserve”) and then start sending any excess funds to the local service committee. These funds are used to carry the message of recovery, helping with expenditures such as local newsletters, public information mailings, local hotlines, and post office fees.

Similarly, local service committees usually send any monies above their prudent reserve to World Services to further carry the MA message by typesetting literature, sending out meeting starter kits, maintaining our web site, and preserving MA unity between the districts. The money is also used to pay for the annual World Service Conference, as well as the business expenses incurred by the trustees in operating MA throughout the year.

A group is not self-supporting until it pays its own expenses and contributes its fair share to the larger society. The group not only supports itself but MA as a whole. That is what is meant by “fully” self-supporting, since there would be no groups without the fellowship. A group that does not raise enough money during meetings may raise it by having fund-raisers or events. We all have to pull together, and by doing so we learn that we are truly part of something greater than ourselves.

## TRADITION EIGHT

*Marijuana Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers*

Tradition Eight seeks to insure that MA is not associated with making money from people trying to recover from marijuana addiction. Our members do not get paid for doing Twelfth Step work. The Twelve Steps cannot be sold. We stay nonprofessional so that money and spirituality are kept separate. If we were to charge for recovery, our message would be compromised.

Our program is simply based on one addict helping another. We do not employ doctors, psychiatrists, or other professionals. We are simply addicts of equal status, freely helping each other. This is not to say that individual members cannot carry the MA message in their professions. It would be absurd to think that a doctor, counselor, or clergyman who is also an MA member could not suggest the MA program to a patient or client whom they perceive, in their professional opinion, to have a marijuana problem. Members in these lines of work are not selling the Twelve Steps. There is absolutely nothing wrong with MA making people better at their jobs. In fact, the special knowledge acquired through their own bitter experiences often makes them more effective in their professional lives.

Our fellowship does hire special workers to do jobs that volunteers could not or would not do. These people are not hired to do Twelfth Step work, but are needed to make Twelfth Step work possible. Thus, we may have an office

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manager to help do administrative work and coordinate MA business. A clubhouse may hire a custodian or caretaker. These people are paid for the services they perform for MA, not for Twelve Step work. On the other hand, trusted servants of the society are not considered "special workers" and should therefore never be compensated. They can be reimbursed for their expenses, but their services are donated.

## TRADITION NINE

*MA, as such, ought never be organized,  
but we may create service boards or committees  
directly responsible to those they serve.*

At first glance Tradition Nine appears to be in contradiction with itself. On the one hand, it says MA ought never be organized. On the other hand, it says we can create service boards or committees. MA is not like other organizations because we have no rules or regulations, no fees or dues. We do, however, have spiritual principles suggested in our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

We do not enforce these traditions as if they were rules. We do not expel or banish members for nonconformity. We do not order newcomers to do anything. The advice of a more experienced member to a newcomer is a suggestion, not a command. Addicts must not be dictated to, either individually or collectively. The Twelve Traditions are suggestions for behavior of the group, just as the Twelve Steps are suggestions for recovery of the individual.

However, we have learned that unless each member follows to the best of their ability the spiritual principles expressed in our Twelve Steps of recovery, their progress can be difficult. This difficulty is not a penalty inflicted by people of authority in MA, but the result of personal disobedience to spiritual principles.

This concept also applies to our groups. Our groups follow spiritual principles so that we may be guided by a loving God whose expression may come through in our group conscience. We do not have any governing authority,

but we do have informal rotating service committees. These committees serve the fellowship but do not govern. They are very limited in their authority and often selflessly handle the group's chores. They make the arrangements by which the group functions. These committees do not give spiritual advice, do not judge conduct, and do not issue orders. The committee members can be voted out at the next election. They are servants, not governors.

There is a big difference between vested authority and the spirit of service we find on our service committees at the district and world service level. In fact, the Articles of Incorporation for World Services, Inc. states that the purpose of World Services is to serve the society of MA, not to govern. The trustees are merely caretakers of World Services.

Tradition Nine defines true fellowship: a group without organization, guided by a loving God, and driven only by the spirit of service.

## TRADITION TEN

*Marijuana Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the MA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.*

Tradition Ten means that MA does not take sides on any issues in our troubled world. This is to assure that we will not be divided by a controversial issue that does not directly affect MA as a whole. Anything that can disrupt our unity, and interfere with our primary purpose of carrying the message to the marijuana addict who still suffers, should be avoided.

Similar to Tradition Seven, in which we avoid pressure from outside sources by not accepting contributions, Tradition Ten protects our fellowship by preventing us from taking “official” positions on outside issues. If we take sides on any issue we run the risk of alienating marijuana addicts whose views oppose the side we have chosen to support. Doing this may keep marijuana addicts from coming to us for help.

Tradition Ten does not mean that individual members should back away from their own personal convictions or from acting as they see fit — but MA as a whole does not enter into any public controversies. Thus, if individual members decide to be active on a public issue, they should take caution that they maintain their anonymity, and use special care in making sure that the public knows that the individual member is acting solely as an individual and does not represent MA as a whole.

## TRADITION ELEVEN

*Our public relations policy is based  
on attraction rather than promotion;  
we need always maintain personal anonymity  
at the level of press, radio, t.v., film,  
and other public media.  
We need guard with special care  
the anonymity of all fellow MA members.*

Tradition Eleven permits us to publicize our fellowship. Many marijuana addicts find our meetings because of our public relations policy. Public service announcements are often heard on local radio stations. Newspapers describe our fellowship in their self-help sections. We are listed in phone books and public directories. We provide free literature to doctors, hospitals, jails, and schools. These are but a few ways that MA publicizes its existence.

If we did not publicize we would be relatively unknown, and those who need us might never find us unless they happened to know someone in the fellowship. However, our public relations policy is limited to what we have to offer — a successful way of living a marijuana-free life. Our attraction is that our program works.

Tradition Eleven means that while we may publicize our principles and our work, we do not make public the identities of our individual members. That is what “we need always maintain personal anonymity” means. This tradition reminds us that personal ambition has no place in MA. There is no room for self-praise at the public level. Anonymity insures us that no one member becomes bigger than MA.

Tradition Eleven also insures that MA does not become filled with irresponsible promoters using their personal stories to boost MA or themselves. We cannot afford to rationalize that the public use of our names could show how courageous we have become in the face of disaster, even though our personal stories might make great news stories.

If we break our personal anonymity in the public media, we run the risk of violating one of our other traditions. In the event that a member of our fellowship breaks anonymity and also supports an outside cause, it would be easy for someone to associate the name of MA with an outside enterprise or a controversial issue. The anonymity clause in Tradition Eleven insures that MA is not publicly identified with any individual and keeps individual members from being viewed as spokespersons for the fellowship.

We also have the responsibility to protect each other's personal anonymity. We do not exploit the names of our members who are well known in the public eye.

The anonymity discussed in Tradition Eleven only applies to our public relations policy. In other words, if we make ourselves available to the public as fellowship members, we should only use our first names, and never show our faces on public media. However, within the fellowship it is perfectly acceptable to use our last names. This way the members in our group can find us if they need our help.

## TRADITION TWELVE

*Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.*

The word anonymity means namelessness and the principle behind the word is selflessness. The purpose of anonymity is to ensure that the spirit of the many prevails over the selfishness and self-will of the individual. Anonymity prevents anyone from becoming known as the spokesperson or leader of MA. There is no room for rationalizing that we are doing MA a great service by breaking our anonymity.

Humility expressed by anonymity is the greatest protection our fellowship has. The spirit of anonymity means that we give up any desire we have for personal recognition. We have learned that the price of spirituality and serenity is self-sacrifice.

As individuals, we had to change our behavior and give up our old ideas in order to recover. We had to sacrifice marijuana. We had to let go of our "ISMs" — *I, Self, and Me*. We had to learn humility and give up pride. Then we gave time and energy to carry the message of recovery to other marijuana addicts.

Groups must also make sacrifices to survive, just as individuals do. The Twelve Traditions are a list of the sacrifices we make in order to preserve the unity of the society. We have to keep in mind that 100% anonymity is as vital to the life of MA as being 100% clean is to the life of the individual member.

Anonymity is not intended to keep us from identifying ourselves publicly as marijuana addicts, provided we are guided by the Eleventh Tradition. Nor is it intended to prevent us from avoiding the stigma that may be associated with that label. We have learned that there is nothing shameful about being addicts who accept our disease honestly and continue to take positive action towards recovery.

In fact, many people find their way to our program because they are attracted to the positive changes they have witnessed in their friends who are members of MA. These people learn of us through conversations with members. Some meetings are even open to people who are not addicted to marijuana so they can see what MA is all about.

Within the fellowship, anonymity is also necessary; we must take special care to remember the adage, "What is said here stays here." When we allow discussion outside of the meetings about another member's intimate secrets, trust will be lost because that story is being circulated throughout the community.

Discussing identities and the contents of stories outside meeting rooms is gossip. By engaging in gossip we turn our focus away from the principles of the program and instead focus on the personalities involved. This derails our quest for serenity. What we receive from stories are not the specific details of each other's history but the experience, strength, and hope each of us has gained from our separate journeys in recovery.

We cannot afford to alienate members. When someone comes to Marijuana Anonymous they are often attracted by the word "Anonymous." Knowing anonymity

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will be respected helps the newcomer make a commitment to recovery.

Putting principles before personalities means that we listen to God's will for us and do what is right no matter who is involved. We practice the spiritual principles of honesty, humility, compassion, tolerance, and patience with everyone, whether we like them or not. Anonymity in action makes it impossible for personalities to come before principles because our spiritual foundation becomes more important than our individual egos.