

TRADITION FOUR

"Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups, or N.A. as a whole."

The autonomy of our groups is necessary for our survival.

a Dictionary
Webster's defines autonomous as, "having the right or power of self-government", "undertaken or carried on without outside control". This means our groups are self-governing and are not subject to outside control. Every group has had to stand and grow on it's own.

One might ask, "Are we truly autonomous?" What about our service committees, our offices, activities, hotlines, and all the other things that go on in N.A. The answer is that these things are not N.A. They are services we utilize to help us in our recovery and to further the primary purpose of our groups. Narcotics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women, addicts meeting in groups, and using a given set of spiritual principles to find freedom from addiction and a new way to live. All else is not N.A. Those things we mentioned are the result of members caring enough to reach out and offer their help and experience so that our road might be easier. Whether we choose to utilize these services is up to the group.

~~A group constitutes two or more addicts gathered together for the purpose of recovery, using the traditions as guidelines. These groups can be of many types, discussion, stag, gay, etc., as long as their primary purpose is to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. In our literature, it says that we must abide by the Twelve Traditions in order to call ourselves a Narcotics Anonymous group. These traditions are part of a set of spiritual principles of Narcotics Anonymous, and, without them N.A. does not exist.~~

We say that for N.A., autonomy is more than this. For us in Narcotics Anonymous, autonomy is creative freedom. It gives our groups

the freedom to act on their own to establish their atmosphere of recovery, serve their members, and fulfill their primary purpose. It is for these reasons that we guard our autonomy so carefully.

It would seem that we, in our groups, can do whatever we decide regardless of what anyone says. This is partly true. Each group does have complete freedom, except when their actions affect other groups or N.A. as a whole. Like group conscience, autonomy can be a two-edged sword. Group autonomy has been used to try to justify the violation of the traditions. If a contradiction exists, we have slipped away from our principles. If we check to make sure that our actions are clearly within the bounds of our traditions; if we do not dictate to other groups; or force anything upon them; and, if we consider the consequences of our action ahead of time then all will be well.