

**Self-Support:
Where Money and
Spirituality Mix
in A.A. South Africa**

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS ® is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

- The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

- A.A. is not allied with any sect denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.

- Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix

The A.A. groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members.

We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholics Anonymous is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals, or other outside agencies; that acceptance of large gifts from any source, or of contributions carrying any obligation whatever, is unwise.

Then, too, we view with much concern those AA treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated AA purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.

—Tradition Seven (long form)

Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix

“The first time I had to talk about finances at a district meeting when I was my area’s treasurer, a fellow in the back of the room yelled out: ‘Why in the world are you always talking about money when this is a spiritual program?’ The guy threw me and I didn’t know how to answer him.”

From its earliest beginnings, A.A. has always incurred expenses — whether it be the cost of a pot of coffee or the price of a place to meet in the early days, these costs were often absorbed by individual A.A.s or non-alcoholic friends who offered their parlors and living rooms for A.A.s to meet in. However, as A.A. outgrew the generosity of these early friends and members, the Fellowship’s need for income became more and more apparent.

Bill W., A.A.’s co-founder, and some of the early A.A. members initially felt the only way for the Fellowship to survive was to solicit financial support from philanthropic institutions or individuals outside A.A. These “high rollers” could then supply the funds the Fellowship would need to carry out the vital Twelfth Step work the early A.A.s envisioned — to bankroll the army of paid missionaries, the chain of A.A. hospitals, and the library of books they were certain to write.

One potential A.A. patron, however, when approached by the pioneering members for money, instead helped to lay the groundwork for AA’s Tradition of self-support “I am afraid that money will spoil this thing,” said John D. Rockefeller Jr., while at the same time endorsing the work of the fledgling Fellowship.

This marked a turning point in A.A. history and, as the reality of Mr. Rockefeller's statement sank in and A.A. members began to see the truth in the old cliché, "Who pays the piper calls the tune", the seed of the Seventh Tradition took root.

"We cannot skimp"

With the realization that A.A. must steer clear of outside contributions in order to maintain its autonomy and independence came the understanding that the money necessary for A.A.'s survival would have to come from individual A.A. members and groups. As Bill W. put it in 1957, "Our spiritual way of life is safe for future generations if, as a Society, we resist the temptation to receive money from the outside world. But this leaves us with a responsibility — one that every member ought to understand. We cannot skimp when the treasurer of our group passes the hat. Our groups, our areas, and A.A. as a whole will not function unless our services are sufficient and their bills are paid.

"When we meet and defeat the temptation to take large gifts, we are only being prudent. But when we are generous with the hat we give a token that we are grateful for our blessings and evidence that we are eager to share what we have found with all those who still suffer." (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 221)

Where Money and Spirituality Mix

“Self-support begins with me, because I am part of us — the group. We pay our rent and utility bills, buy coffee, snacks and AA literature. We support our central office, our area committee, and our General Service Office. If it were not for those entities, many new people would never discover the miracles of A.A.”

Twelfth Step work is the lifeblood of Alcoholics Anonymous — carrying the message to the next suffering alcoholic. Without it, the Fellowship would wither and die. Yet, even at its simplest level this vital contact between one alcoholic and another involves an investment of time and money.

“Let’s begin with my own sponsor, Ebby,” writes Bill W., in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. “When Ebby heard how serious my drinking was, he resolved to visit me. He was in New York; I was in Brooklyn. His resolve was not enough; he had to take action and he had to spend money.

“He called me on the phone and then got into the subway; total cost ten cents. At the level of the telephone booth and subway turnstile, spirituality and money began to mix. One without the other would have amounted to nothing at all.

“Right then and there, Ebby established the principle that A.A. in action calls for the sacrifice of much time and a little money.”

Footing the bill

“Now, where do A.A.’s services — worldwide, area, local — fit into our scheme of things?” asked Bill W. in an October 1967 article in the *A.A. Grapevine*. “Why should we provide these functions with money?”

According to Bill, “The answer is simple enough. Every single A.A. service is designed to make more and better Twelfth Step work possible, whether it be a group meeting place, a central or intergroup office ... or the world service Headquarters ...

“Though not costly, these service agencies are absolutely essential to our continued expansion — to our survival as a Fellowship. Their costs are a collective obligation that rests squarely upon all of us. Our support of services actually amounts to a recognition on our part that A.A. must every-where function in full strength — and that, under our Tradition of self-support, *we are all going to foot the bill.*”

How can groups participate?

To help support AA’s essential services, the General Service Conference suggests that individual groups, through an informed group conscience, adopt a specific contribution plan tailored to meet the group’s financial situation.

Once the basic group expenses have been taken care of (rent, refreshments, A.A. literature, local meeting lists, General Service Representative (G.S.R.) travel expenses to attend service functions), and a “prudent reserve” has been set aside to cover any emergency contingencies that might arise, the group may decide to further carry the message by sending money to the following A.A. service entities.

- **The local district**, which communicates directly with the groups, providing the district group conscience for the area assemblies, and serving as a link between the area delegates and the G.S.R.s.
- **The area committee**, which coordinates vital A.A. activities over a broad geographic area; sends a delegate to the annual General Service Conference; holds area assemblies to determine the needs of the Fellowship; and provides information at all levels of service.
- **The local intergroup or central office**, which may provide phone service for Twelfth Step calls and other inquiries; coordination of group activities; A.A. literature sales; institutions work; public information and cooperation with the professional community activities.
- **A.A.’s General Service Office**, which functions as a storehouse of A.A. information, communicating with members and groups around the world; publishes A.A.’s literature; and supplies information and experience to professionals and others interested in A.A.

Whose Job Is It?

“The paradox of A.A. is that financial independence and the support of our Fellowship by alcoholics and alcoholics alone not only enhances A.A.’s importance to each of us, but stimulates our engagement in our own recovery ... A.A. is ‘our thing’, from our group’s treasury to the balance sheets at the General Service Office.”

Money has never been a requirement for A.A. membership, and to keep it that way all of A.A.’s trusted servants have an ongoing obligation to inform groups and individuals about the value of self-support and the need for voluntary contributions throughout the Fellowship.

Many groups in reaching an informed group conscience look to their (G.S.R.s) for specific information about A.A. finances, or to their intergroup representatives or group treasurer. Many find that participation in local, area, and regional A.A. service events provides a good source of information about A.A.’s financial needs. And at the General Service Office, A.A.’s financial affairs are an open book, with financial summaries published monthly and a full accounting printed each year in the Annual Financial Statements.

The Bottom Line

“Now that we are sober in AA, the word ‘support’ has to do with sharing, people, self-respect, gratitude, and what we are privileged to give — not take — in material terms.”

While the Fellowship has always faced problems of money, property, and prestige in one form or another, through the wisdom of the Seventh Tradition we have never been diverted from our primary purpose of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers — wherever he or she may be. This is the fundamental work of Alcoholics Anonymous, and to ensure that the hand of A.A. will always remain outstretched, money and spirituality must continue to mix. And for that, we are all responsible.

Some Questions and Answers About A.A.'s Finances

Q What is a “prudent reserve”?

A Any suggested prudent reserve for a group should be dependent on local needs. A suggested prudent reserve for central offices, inter-groups, and area committees could be one to twelve months' operating expenses, depending on local needs.

Q Does the General Service Office have a “prudent reserve”?

A In 2008 A.A. South Africa's Board of Trustees established a prudent reserve whose principal purpose is to provide the financial resources necessary to continue the essential services of G.S.O. for up to six months in the event of an unexpected and substantial reduction in the normal revenues of the organization.

Q Is there a limit on how much an individual can donate to G.S.O.?

A Yes. That limit is published in issues of the AA in SA bulletin, and is 5% of GSO's most recent gross annual receipts. Currently the amount would be R 43,120.00 per annum. Annual changes to this figure can be obtained from G.S.O.

Q Can people leave money to A.A. in their wills?

A Bequests in wills are acceptable only from A.A. members on a one-time basis, and not in perpetuity. Although there is no limit, acceptance of any bequest will be at the AA Board's discretion in accordance with concept 3.

Q Can a group have too much money?

A As stated in the long form of Tradition Seven, “We view with much concern those A.A. treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated A.A. purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.”

Q Who manages G.S.O.'s share of your group contributions?

A The General Service Board's Oversight Committee meets monthly to review and approve G.S.O.'s expenditure. The G.S.O. budget and the audited financial accounts are reviewed and approved at the Annual Delegates Conference.

The A.A. World Services Board meets monthly and maintains direct control of income and expenditures.

The annual General Service Conference reviews finances through its own Finance Committee.

A.A.'s financial affairs are an "open" book. A summary is published in each Monthly Treasurer's Report and a full accounting is in the Final Conference Report. The account books themselves are available at the General Service Office for scrutiny at any time.

Q Who manages the other portions of your group contributions?

A Intergroup or central office funds are generally administered by steering committees composed of representatives of the groups they serve.

Areas and districts generally have volunteer treasurers who administer funds contributed by groups.

Q How can an individual member contribute to G.S.O.?

A On your A.A. birthday: Contribute R 10.00 for each year of sobriety — or as much as you wish to give (up to the limit published in the AA in SA). You may request that your contribution be shown under your group or as anonymous.

Q Are there other kinds of contributions?

A Special contributions: funds realized from rallies, conventions, conferences, dinners, area get-togethers, etc. (no limitations on these contributions.)

Q Do all groups contribute to AA's service entities?

A No. Contributions are strictly voluntary and some groups simply cannot afford additional contributions after covering their basic needs. Additionally, there are groups who, for whatever reasons, choose not to be a part of the self-support network. These groups, nevertheless, will receive basic services from the district, area, and intergroup if they wish, and are welcome to register with G.S.O, where they will receive the same basic services as other groups. In 2009 and 2010, the percentage of all registered groups who contributed to G.S.O. was 55.5% and 54.7 respectively.

Q What do contributions to G.S.O. cover?

A Of each rand contributed, 33 cents goes to cover Group Services (this includes the G.S.O. office, literature distribution, audit fee, etc.); 1 cents goes toward public information activity; 2 cents toward cooperation with the professional community activity; 2 cents to treatment facilities activities; 1 cents toward correctional facilities services; 2 cents Loners/new groups ; 15 cents for the General Service Conference; 5 cents for World Service Delegates; 3 cents for Archives; 7 cents to support the activities of the General Service Board; 11 cents for the National helpline, website and database ; 18 cents for translations and publications

Q How much does it cost, per group, for G.S.O. to supply basic services?

A At the end of 2010, the annual cost of services per group was R 519.76, while the average contribution per group was R 113.46. The shortfall between these two figures is made up from income from A.A. publications, income from convention, and other contributions.

Q My group doesn't have a lot of money. Is it better not to send anything at all until we can afford to make a sizeable contribution?

A In the spirit of participation, no contribution toward carrying the message can be too small. Bill W. spoke about our collective obligation' to support A.A. services, and if everyone waited until they had a 'sizeable' amount, it's more than likely that A.A.'s bills would go unpaid.

Q Doesn't all A.A. money go into one pot? In other words, when our group contributes to central office (intergroup), isn't our money distributed to the area, district and G.S.O., as well?

A No. Each A.A. entity — group, district, area, central office and G.S.O. — provides a specific service and is autonomous. Each is separate from the other.

Examples of Group Contributions to A.A. Service Entities

70% to area or district office
30% to G.S.O.

Q Where should I send contributions?

A For contributions to G.S.O. please make electronic funds transfers to :

Alcoholics Anonymous South Africa NPC
Standard Bank Norwood Branch code 001405
Current account number 201641062

Cheques should be payable to Alcoholics Anonymous South Africa NPC and sent to:

General Service Office
P.O. Box 2770
Alberton 1450 Gauteng

For contributions to other AA service entities, contact your district committee, area committee, and local intergroup/central office.

A.A PUBLICATIONS

BOOKS:

AA Around the World
AA Comes of Age
Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book)
Alcoholics Anonymous (Large Print)
Alcoholics Anonymous (S/C Portable)
Alcoholics Anonymous (Pocket)
Alkoholiste Anoniem
A Rabbit Walks into a Bar
As Bill Sees It
Beginners Book
Best of Bill (Hard Cover)
Came to Believe
Daily Reflections
Dr Bob & The Good Old Timers
Emotional Sobriety
Experience, Strength & Hope
Home Group
I am Responsible
Inmate to Inmate
In Our Own Words
Language of the Heart (Hardcover)
Language of the Heart (Softcover)
Living Sober
Pass It On
Portugese Big Book
Spiritual Awakening
Thank You For Sharing
Twaalf Stappe
Twelve Steps and Traditions (H/C)
Twelve Steps and Traditions (Gift Edition)
Twelve Steps and Traditions (Large)
Twelve Steps and Traditions (Softcover)
Twelve Steps and Traditions (Pocket)
Voices of Long Term Sobriety
Xhosa Big Book
Zulu Big Book

PAMPHLETS:

AA and the Armed Services
AA as a Resource for Medics
AA for the Woman
AA Gay / Lesbian Alcoholic
AA Group, The
AA in Correctional Facilities
AA in the Treatment Facilities
AA in the Community
AA Member, Medication, Drugs
AA's Legacy of Service
AA Traditions and How they Developed
A Brief Guide to AA
A Member's Eye View of AA
A Newcomer Asks
Bridging the Gap
Circles of Love and Service
Co-founders of AA, The
Do You Think You're Different
Frequently Asked Questions
GSR: The Most Important Job
How AA Members Co-operate
If You Are a Professional
Inside AA
Is AA for Me?
Is AA for You?
Is There An Alcoholic In The Workplace?
Is There An Alcoholic In Your Life?
It Happened to Alice
Jack Alexander Article
Let's Be Friendly With Our Friends
Memo to Inmate Alcoholic
Message to Correctional Facilities
Problems Other Than Alcohol
Questions and Answers on Sponsorship
Speaking at Non-Alcoholic Meetings
The Clergy Asks About AA
This is AA
Three Talks to Medics
Time to Start Living / Older Alcoholic
Too Young?
Twelve Concepts - illustrated
Twelve Steps - illustrated
Twelve Traditions - illustrated
Understanding Anonymity
What Happened to Joe?
Young People and AA

I am responsible ...
when anyone, anywhere, reaches out
for help, I want the hand of A.A.
always to be there.
And for that, I'm responsible.