

Overeaters Anonymous

# 2016 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET Q&A

8/1/2016

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***In my group, there are several people who talk up the Steps, Traditions, and abstinence—but also are very obese. This has been going on for more than twenty years. One of them doesn't ever talk about food. They are all very involved in recovery. Is there anything I can do, besides pray, to change the situation? I believe they are abstinent, but am sure they just eat the wrong foods. It is not my idea of what the program teaches us.***

The best thing we can do—in all things—is to be the best example we can be. Step Three in [The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous](#) states: “In OA, however, there’s no list of foods and measurements or dos and don’ts which defines abstinence” (p. 21). We each define our own abstinence. We each work our program in our own way with the help of a sponsor and a Higher Power. We can pray for others and for our groups, but the results are out of our hands. At times I also like to remind myself of Step One. If I’ve truly accepted that my own life has become unmanageable, I can’t possibly know what’s best for others.

***Has the Board of Trustees and World Service Office been working on a new business plan that shifts OA from its dependence on literature sales? Perhaps we could shift to selling services through technology, rather than paper-based products.***

Yes, the staff and the BOT continue to research cost-effective and profitable ways to publish the OA literature using technology. The [Voices of Recovery Workbook](#) (2012) was the first OA book available via electronic media. Today, all OA books are available through electronic vendors, except workbooks, which are available only through the OA bookstore. We will continue to explore all possibilities, especially as technology advances. It should be noted that our profit margin is much lower with electronic sales, as sales prices are governed by e-book vendors.

***I understand the Board Reference Manual is not generally of interest to the delegates, but does it contain “confidential” information that keeps it from being made available?***

The Board of Trustees is given the responsibility of performing their duties by the members of OA in OA Inc. [Bylaws, Subpart B](#) (Article IX, Section 2). The Board Reference Manual (BRM) is a “living” document that defines the trustees’ duties, responsibilities, and procedures. It is a guideline that helps the trustees perform their duties efficiently. The BRM is based on the OA Bylaws and policies, which are established and revised by the membership at World Service Business Conference (WSBC), where the attending delegates represent the body of OA as a whole. The Trustees cannot amend or rescind the OA bylaws or policies. Only the delegates at WSBC have that authority.

The Board Reference Manual is not confidential. By definition, confidential means secret. At WSBC the Board Meeting is open to all delegates—in 2016, there were several motions presented. These motions were debated, amended, and passed or failed by the trustees. The subsequent results and summaries are now available at [oa.org](http://oa.org) on the [Board of Trustees page](#) under Board Meeting Highlights.

## 2016 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET Q&A

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The BRM Board Committee, as part of their statement of purpose, reviews the BRM for inconsistencies, inaccuracies, and changes made by the BOT motions. This review looks for entries with confusing language, considers amending policies that need further clarification, and checks for policies not in keeping with current practices. This review is then presented in the form of a motion, which the entire BOT discusses and votes on, similar to the motions presented at WSBC. The results of those motions, if adopted, are then updated in the BRM.

***Would it break any OA tradition to get the OA logo as a tattoo? Does the visibility of the tattoo matter?***

Here is in part the Copyright Policy: “All OA literature, including digital media, and the OA logo are protected under US copyright law, and that copyright is owned solely by Overeaters Anonymous, Inc.” The policy doesn’t say anything about personal use, such as a tattoo; it only refers to OA literature.

Regarding the visibility of the tattoo, you are the judge of your own anonymity.

***Is it possible to create tokens to celebrate more than forty years of abstinence, especially since the OA program is going to turn 60?***

Actually, this issue has already been mentioned within the board and will hopefully be discussed at the August Board of Trustees meeting. What must be determined is the project’s feasibility, considering unit cost, sale price, and postage and handling. HOWEVER, there is already a viable solution in the OA bookstore!

The [Recovery Medallion](#) (SKU 480) is a beautiful “nickel-silver medallion with antiqued finish.” “Overeaters Anonymous” is on one side and the Serenity Prayer on the other; there’s also space to engrave length of abstinence or an OA birthday. This coin can be engraved to mark not only forty-five-, fifty-, and fifty-five-year anniversaries, but also anniversaries of those in-between years, such as twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, and so on. Find this lovely medallion at the [oa.org bookstore](#).

***What does the Board of Trustees/World Service Business Conference think about breaking Traditions in the meetings at WSBC? Examples occur when members mention specific religions and/or food organizations.***

Since we are all guardians of the Traditions we hope things like this would not happen. Yet, since we are all human, at times there might be a slip of the tongue along these lines. Hopefully, we as members will watch what we share. This is true at the WSBC as well as during other forms of OA service. The Board of Trustees and World Service Business Conference cannot govern, yet more and more we hope we each can learn to honor these vital spiritual principles of our OA Traditions. May we each do our part.

## 2016 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET Q&A

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### ***Should “How to request a written ballot” be included in the Standing Rules?***

I cannot answer this question because the decision to add this information would be up to the entire World Service Business Conference. I can, however, suggest this: If you feel strongly that something should be added to the Standing Rules, bring forward a motion for it at the beginning of next year’s Conference. The Standing Rules are amendable only by the Conference body, but anyone may bring forward a motion to change the rules.

### ***A member in my region went looking for literature on anorexia and bulimia on the OA website. Is there any in print? Where can it be found? Online?***

Great question. I double-checked with a friend who has recently started a meeting for anorexics and bulimics in my area. She also happens to be the Intergroup Literature person. My friend recommends the [“Focus on Anorexia and Bulimia Packet”](#) at [bookstore.oa.org](#) (SKU 725). She also says there are many stories of recovery by people who suffered from anorexia and bulimia in the new [Overeaters Anonymous, Third Edition](#) (SKU 980). *Overeaters Anonymous, Third Edition* is also available as an [audiobook](#), an e-book in Kindle and Nook formats, and a [downloadable MP3 file](#). The packets are only available as paper packets.

### ***I understand the role that the Reference Subcommittee plays in consolidating and clarifying motions and amendments. I believe their voting and recommending how to vote makes members of this committee “VIPs” instead of equal members. Can you please explain this discrepancy that I see with Traditions?***

I believe you are referring to Tradition Twelve; this section I believe explains that there is no discrepancy.

“When we keep the twelfth tradition, no one person or group of people is ever given special status in OA. Our leaders have no special honors; they’re simply our trusted servants” ([The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous](#), p. 202).

In the case of the Reference Subcommittee, its members have been given a job to do by the members at the World Service Business Conference. According to *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised* (pp. 633-640), it is recommended that a conference the size of the WSBC have such a committee, to assist the members of the conference by reviewing the motions and reporting on their discussion. This helps the rest of the delegates by ensuring that motions are worded in the most effective way (without taking time to do it during the business meeting). Once the

## 2016 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET Q&A

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Reference Subcommittee has completed their review of a motion it is appropriate for the committee to report their recommendation to the delegates.

Information on the Reference Subcommittee is found in the OA Inc. [Bylaws, Subpart B](#) (Article XI, Section 2), which state:

- a) “The Reference Subcommittee shall be composed of the Bylaws Committee delegate chair and representative of the Board of Trustees who shall be the co-chairs; and the representatives selected from each region and the virtual service boards to serve on the Bylaws Committee.”
- b) “The Reference Subcommittee shall meet at times designated on the Conference schedule or agenda, and other times as required by the Conference. The Reference Subcommittee will meet on the day prior to the conclusion of scheduled new business to consider emergency new business.”
- d) “The Reference Subcommittee shall further operate according to guidelines developed by the Bylaws Committee and approved by the Board of Trustees.”

This shows that the members of the subcommittee come from throughout the world; they represent the fellowship at large. They meet up to six times during the two-day business session portion of the conference week. The Reference Subcommittee meetings are open to all delegates who wish to observe how the committee works.

Here is part of an overview of Reference Subcommittee procedures, which comes from the Board Reference Manual (6.10):

The initial items to come before the Reference Subcommittee shall be determined by the Reference Subcommittee co-chairs using the following selection process (when appropriate, consideration will be given to the order in which the items will appear on the Conference agenda):

- Similar motions.
- Divided or controversial items as determined by results of the agenda questionnaire.
- Confusing or questionable items requiring clarification.
- Items referred from the Conference body or maker of the motion.
- Items referred from the Bylaws Committee.
- Any item automatically sent to the Reference Subcommittee as a result of Conference rules.
- Time permitting, any items of business remaining on the Conference agenda not previously discussed.
- Items referred from the chair of the Board of Trustees.

Reference Subcommittee procedures include voting on recommendations to Conference. Recommendations may include (but are not limited to): “adopt,” “adopt with amendments,” “defeat,” “no recommendation,” or “refer to committee.” Recommendations

## 2016 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET Q&A

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to adopt or defeat may be made in cases where there are no more than two dissenting voters. The Bylaws Committee trustee co-chair informs the Conference of the Reference Subcommittee's recommendations as well as the vote count of each item.

The only member of the Reference Subcommittee who addresses the Conference is the Trustee Cochair, and that is simply to report on the recommendations of the committee. Because they are only performing the task they have been assigned, I believe the members of the Reference Subcommittee are acting as trusted servants, not VIPs.

***I would like to ask about the cycle of addiction. Before considering feelings, should we consider the thoughts that generate feelings that can lead us to obsession and the first compulsive bite?***

Do thoughts inspire emotions or do emotions set off thoughts? Is that first compulsive bite a response to a thought or an emotion or both? I suspect the distinction between these two is small if it exists at all. For myself, I think I feel something before I think about it. I believe you are free to define your own personal cycle of addiction that explains how you experience your disease.

***Please suggest ways to encourage unaffiliated groups to affiliate (other than asking them to!).***

Providing unaffiliated groups with the advantages of affiliation is persuasive. Groups which affiliate with a service body (such as an intergroup, virtual service board, national service board, language service board, or region) have a voice and a vote—their delegates can go to the [World Service Business Conference](#) and participate in the group conscience of OA as a whole. Affiliated groups have the opportunity to bring motions through their service bodies to the WSBC, share their point of view, and make changes within Overeaters Anonymous.

Through teamwork, affiliated groups have a more potent opportunity to carry the message. They have an opportunity to utilize and contribute to the services provided by their service bodies. Benefits include sharing membership and financial resources so members may be more fully served. Examples include sponsor and speaker lists, websites, workshops, newsletters, problem solving, chances to hear ideas that have worked for other groups, and opportunities for fellowship.

Synergy and service are good words to use to describe the reason for affiliation. The sum is greater than each of its parts. Together we can do what we could never do alone.

***What should we do when members responsible for a committee not only deal with their committee but also give opinions and instructions to others (without being asked), under the pretext that they want to help as much as they can? This creates pressure on***

## 2016 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET Q&A

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*other members who do service; they feel controlled and become frightened to do their service.*

Thank you for your question and your willingness to do service. I would refer to [The Twelve Concepts of OA Service](#) (an online version can be found at oa.org on the [Twelve Concepts page](#) under [Guidelines](#)). The principle of Concept Three is Trust. When we are working in our service position, we are trusted to act and lead responsibly. We work within the job description and have the right to decide how to do our jobs. We all have different ways of doing things. Concept Nine (Ability) talks about letting people “grow” into service positions. Concept Ten (Clarity) talks about having clearly defined written job descriptions to avoid misunderstood job responsibilities or multiple people doing the same job. Written job descriptions also help avoid conflict. Tradition Two tells us that our leaders do not govern but that we have one authority, a loving God as expressed in the group conscience.

You may want to talk with these members individually or have a group conscience meeting with the committee about this issue.

***What about members who undertake service and refuse assistance, even when it affects their service? Either service is not done at all or it is done in such a manner that the message is not received by the compulsive overeater who needs help or still suffers. What can other members do about this without becoming controlling?***

Concept Three of the [Twelve Concepts of OA Service](#) reminds us that when “working within their job descriptions, trusted servants have the right to decide how to do their jobs.” Trust is the principle of Concept Three and we are encouraged to trust members to “act and lead responsibly.” This principle of trust in our **trusted** servants is essential to effective leadership.

On the other hand, ours is a “we” program and none among us can do it alone. One of the ways we practice the principle of humility is by accepting help from our fellow members. As you point out, refusing to accept help when it is needed can be a disservice to others.

But ours is also a program of rigorous honesty—therefore I suggest you first consider praying about your own judgment to be sure you are not seeing in this person a reflection of your own character defects. Often, because of causes and conditions in my own life, I project onto others attitudes not their own.

If after prayer and reflection your conscience is clear and your motives sincere, you may wish to consider Tradition One and the principle of Unity (which helps us examine how we can relate to and work with others for the good of OA as a whole). You may wish to offer assistance with a very specific task to get the working relationship started. If it is a task that seems like drudgery, all the better!

The [OA Handbook for Members, Groups, and Service Bodies](#) can also be very helpful in dealing with service-related issues. It reminds us that “No problem has to lead to serious trouble for any group, since OA experience shows that goodwill, honesty, selflessness, and a spirit of love and service will prevail if we make an honest effort to “place principles before personalities” (Tradition Twelve)” (p. 29).

## 2016 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET Q&A

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### ***Can we do a blog, like the one in Japan, in the U.S.?***

OA has blogs written by trustees who post through their region websites. They state the trustee's first name, or say "Region Trustee" instead of a name, and do not include personal information. There are other blogs out there too, posted by individual OA members. I have not seen the Japanese blog, and without a link to view it, I cannot comment on its substance.

### ***As we are all trusted servants of the Traditions, what is the proper procedure when we see a breach of Tradition Eleven on the Internet? I'm talking specifically of blogs, when people say they are in OA and mention their names and/or other people's names. Do we mention it to our trustee, call the WSO, or tell the offender ourselves?***

As an OA member it is my responsibility to speak up gently for the protection of all our Traditions. In this case, I think I would email the person separately and gently ask if he or she has considered what happens when a blogger with a real name and a picture identifies as an OA member: a break of Tradition Eleven. I would include my region trustee in the email. I could suggest that bloggers say, "a Twelve Step group" without actually saying which one. Using a generic term frees people to talk about their experiences without breaking anonymity.

Probably bloggers have not thought of talking about OA in such a way. It could be that some bloggers believe Tradition 11 does not apply to them. If they persist, and especially if they are using the OA logo or sharing pictures and full names of others, it would be important to pass the information on to your trustee and World Service Office. I try to remember that when I see Tradition breaks I tend to overreact and come across to others as a bit fanatical. So I try to do it gently; people are more open when I proceed that way.

### ***What can we do with members who have such disruptive behavior that they frighten other members into leaving the group? These members have no sponsors and refuse to cooperate—what can we do when everything we tried has not worked?***

Unfortunately this sort of situation crops up on occasion. Members don't get well instantly.

Although having a sponsor is very helpful in these situations, having a sponsor is not required for membership in OA. Tradition Three tells us, "Nobody is expelled from OA for not working the steps, not getting a sponsor, not respecting the traditions, or not adopting the tools and practices many of us employ" ([\*The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous\*](#), p. 130).

## 2016 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET Q&A

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It appears that two Traditions (One and Three) contradict each other here. In some cases, we may need to choose which has priority. Ideally we might be able to find some way we can honor both Traditions at the same time. Tradition One tells us that the survival of the group has to come first, because without the meeting other members will lose the opportunity to recover. Tradition Three tells us to welcome everyone who wants to stop eating compulsively. All members can work the program as they choose—but this does not come at the expense of the OA group.

The first consideration is the good of the Fellowship and its survival. While each member has the freedom to work the program as he or she chooses, that freedom may not come at the expense of the OA group. If a member's actions are disruptive or dangerous, the OA group needs to protect itself. If it doesn't, the meeting may fold, and everyone will lose the opportunity for recovery.

***What should we do when a sponsor is gay, keeps it secret, and supports members of the same sex? (It has been noted that this person had entered into sexual relationships with members of the Fellowship.)***

The sponsor-sponsee relationship is one based on trust; many of us never trusted anyone until we found a sponsor. According to [A Guide for Sponsors](#), "We do not recommend a sponsor-sponsee relationship between people who are—or could be—sexually attracted to each other." (p. 11)

I would start by treating this situation like one with a disruptive member. I would ask the person in question's sponsor to speak with him or her. If the person does not have a sponsor, I would ask an experienced member from the same home group, someone the person respects, to initiate a one-on-one discussion. Doing this face-to-face would be preferable, but if it seemed too threatening, I would consider a phone call.

If this failed, I would have a meeting after the meeting, two-on-one, with the person to discuss appropriate behavior toward sponsees. If there was still a problem, I would contact the intergroup. A group conscience could be appropriate, bringing members from the intergroup in to help. If this didn't work, I would contact my trustee.

***Please distinguish between an "OA group" and an "OA meeting." Are they distinct? Are the terms synonymous? And how?***

The terms "OA group" and "OA meeting" are often used synonymously.

[The OA Handbook for Members, Groups, and Service Bodies](#) includes this definition:

"Meetings/Groups (used interchangeably): Two or more compulsive eaters gathered together to share their experience, strength, and hope within the framework of the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts of OA Service." (p. 2)

The [OA Bylaws, Subpart B](#) defines OA Groups in Article V. Part of this definition is as follows: (underlining added)

## 2016 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET Q&A

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“A group may be formed by two or more persons meeting together...”

The “[Find a Meeting](#)” page at oa.org states in part:

“To be registered with the WSO, OA meetings must fulfill the definition of an OA group, which means they meet to practice the Twelve Steps and Traditions of OA, welcome all who have the desire to stop eating compulsively, do not require members to practice any actions to remain a member or to share at a meeting, and as a group have no affiliation other than OA.”

A few passages from *The OA Handbook for Members, Groups and Service Bodies* that may help distinguish between a “group” and a “meeting” are as follows:

“Usually a group in a small town has only a few members. What often happens is that the OA members come to a group meeting once a week to share their experience, strength, and hope in working the Twelve Step program.” (p. 10)

“Schedule two meetings a week. Make one the regular meeting and the other a Step-study or some other format, such as literature study or writing.” (p. 10)

“If your group is too isolated to allow for visiting groups and speakers, try for a meeting or two devoted to listening to recorded talks from OA conventions or special events.” (p. 10)

“Devote some meetings to a study of OA books, such as *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*; OA pamphlets; and *Lifeline*, as well as *Alcoholics Anonymous* (Big Book) and other OA-approved AA literature.” (pp. 10-11)

“As soon as a group is established, plan an open meeting for the community...” (p. 11)

“Once a group has been started, it is essential to provide continuity for the meeting. Make sure that at least one person is at the meeting place every week on the day and at the time designated...”

The *Handbook*'s Index has subheadings for both “Groups” and “Meetings.” Under “Meetings,” a subheading for “Meeting Types” leads the reader to specialized meeting types such as “Speaker,” “Newcomers,” and “Special-Focus Meetings.” (pp. 25-26)

The ways that the terms “Groups” and “Meetings” are used seems to indicate that “Group” refers to the people—the OA members. “Meeting” refers to the parameters within which the group operates—“Tuesday, Noon, Big Book Study,” for example. So “Meetings” are registered—time, place, format, etc. “Group” refers to the people who attend the meetings.

***What are Royalty Letters? They're mentioned in the International Publications/Translations Committee Report.***

## 2016 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET Q&A

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Royalties are payments from OA service bodies (SBs) that publish and sell OA literature and materials. This process is normally carried out by SBs that translate and publish our literature in languages other than English. However, some SBs use the English text, apply for License 2 to publish the literature, and then have it printed locally. This normally happens in places where the cost of postage is high (for instance, in international groups), and where large print runs can be an advantage.

The rate for royalties payable to WSO is 10% of revenues from sales.

It had become apparent that not all SBs were aware that royalties are due; thus it was decided to contact the service bodies by letter as a reminder. Reminder letters are now sent out by WSO prior to WSBC and royalties are tracked in detail.

It is hoped that the letters will encourage payment of royalties due to OA Inc.

***A lot of people in OA these days have had, or are planning to have, some type of weight-loss surgery. Is this considered an “outside issue?” If it is, as a Leader or Moderator, how should I explain the necessity of not mentioning this procedure in meetings?***

Surgeries, like medications, are outside issues. We have no opinion on these and so we do not discuss them in OA meetings—that is, we make no mention of who, what, or where. However, if we are sharing as part of our experience (not strength and hope) and just mention it fleetingly, then that would probably be acceptable—just as we share we tried different diets.

The experience of others helps us to see the wider picture—diversity—of our disease. The strength and hope of others helps us to see the solution to our disease.

***Can the present tense instead of the past tense be used in the Steps? For instance, “We admitted we were powerless over food—that our lives had become unmanageable” would be “We admit we are powerless over food—that our lives are unmanageable.” The tense change would not change the meaning of the Steps.***

At OA’s founding, members requested AA’s permission to modify its Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions for use in OA. AA graciously granted that request, permitting OA to change “alcohol” to “food” and “alcoholic” to “compulsive overeater.” The OA Steps, Traditions, and Concepts are protected by OA copyright and OA bylaws. The Steps may be amended per OA Inc. [Bylaws, Subpart B](#) (Article XIV, Section 1). A motion to amend the Steps may be submitted by any registered service body, trustee, the Region Chairs Committee, or the Conference Bylaws Committee.

Concept Two of the [Twelve Concepts](#) states “The OA groups have delegated to the World Service Business Conference the active maintenance of our world services; thus, the World Service Business Conference is the voice, authority, and effective conscience of OA as a whole.”

## 2016 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET Q&A

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However: If I insist upon changing the wording of OA literature to suit myself, then I am displaying the same selfishness and self-will that landed me in OA in the first place! As one trustee wrote, “From my vantage point and experience, there is a tendency to mold the OA program of recovery to the molds of individual members and their ways of doing things. I am reminded if my way worked, I would not be in OA or need to be. Obviously, my way did not work. So I am quite willing to work on changing me, which is a challenge, and not try to revamp OA to suit me.”

### ***What are the consequences of copyright infringement?***

If OA’s copyright is infringed we have the right and responsibility to inform the party of our copyright and insist by friendly request (or a cease and desist order from our attorney) that the infringement stop. There are other legal avenues to pursue if the party does not comply. Similarly, if OA infringes another’s copyright, then they have every right to ask OA to cease and desist and to pursue legal action. There is a more important aspect of this issue. We, as OA, are bound by other criteria besides the law. We are bound by the Principles of the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts—such as Honesty, Integrity, Unity, Trust, Responsibility, Conscience, and Humility. A full list may be found on the [Program Principles page](#) under [Working the Program](#) at oa.org. These are our guides in how we conduct our business and our lives.

### ***Do we infringe copyright by rewording the Steps in present tense?***

If the “we” refers to a meeting, intergroup, or region that changes the wording of the Steps, then that body is not only infringing copyright, but also not honoring the principles of our program. Tradition One incorporates the principle of Unity. “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon OA unity.” Tradition Four represents the principle of Autonomy: “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.” This is a “we” program; I am not alone anymore.

### ***When an autonomous meeting uses the Twelve Steps in present tense, is this affecting other groups or OA as a whole?***

Yes. That meeting is not honoring the OA Bylaws or the Traditions. There is a process in the [OA Bylaws Subpart B](#) (Article XIV, section 1) by which the Steps or Traditions could be amended. The meeting is not autonomous in this matter. Again, Tradition One states: “Our common welfare should come first; **personal recovery depends upon OA unity.**” Tradition Four reminds us that “Each group should be autonomous **except** in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.”