



Love and Communication: Incorporating the Traditions into Your Relationship



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Words to Inspire and Guide

1. Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone—we find it with another. Thomas Merton
2. When we love, we always strive to become better than we are. When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too. Paulo Coelho
3. True love does have the power to redeem but only if we are ready for redemption. Love saves us only if we want to be saved. bell hooks
4. No doubt, unity is something to be desired, to be striven for, but it cannot be willed by mere declarations. Theodore Bikel
5. You're the strangest person I ever met, she said & I said, You too & we decided we'd know each other a long time. Brain Andreas
6. Normally, when someone we love is turning away from a struggle, we self-protect by also turning away. That's definitely my first response. I think change is more likely to happen if both partners have common language and a shared lens to see problems. Brené Brown
7. People are weird. When we find someone with a weirdness that is compatible with ours, we team up and call it love. Dr. Seuss
8. The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed. Carl Gustav Jung
9. Anyone who is truly concerned for the spiritual growth of another knows, consciously or instinctively, that he or she can significantly foster that growth only through a relationship of constancy. M. Scott Peck
10. True love is not a hide and seek game: in true love, both lovers seek each other. Michael Bassey Johnson
11. When we understand love as the will to nurture our own and another's spiritual growth, it becomes clear that we cannot claim to love if we are hurtful and abusive. bell hooks
12. Love doesn't make the world go round, love is what makes the ride worthwhile. Elizabeth Barrett Browning
13. The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them. Thomas Merton
14. Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence. Erich Fromm
15. Crafting a message that will unify us in fundamental purpose and yet be open to an infinite possibility of solutions is the nature of the challenge before us. James Royce Young
16. Giving generously in romantic relationships, and in all other bonds, means recognizing when the other person needs our attention. Attention is an important resource. bell hooks
17. Love is not love until love's vulnerable. Theodore Roethke
18. In the flush of love's light, we dare be brave. And suddenly we see that love costs all we are, and will ever be. Yet it is only love which sets us free. Maya Angelou
19. In modern life we have become so busy with our daily affairs and thoughts that we have lost this essential art of taking time to converse with our heart. Jack Kornfield
20. When we reveal ourselves to our partner and find that this brings healing rather than harm, we make an important discovery—that intimate relationship can provide a sanctuary from the world of facades, a sacred space where we can be ourselves, as we are...John Welwood
21. Love one another, but make not a bond of love: Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Khalil Gibran
22. The way you see someone is the way you treat them and the way you treat them is who they will become. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
23. All, everything that I understand, I understand only because I love. Leo Tolstoy

24. The ultimate lesson is learning how to love and be loved unconditionally.
Elisabeth Kubler-Ross
25. The essential things in life are seen not with the eyes, but with the heart.
Antoine de Saint-Exupery
26. To live or have loved, that is enough. Ask nothing further. There is no other pearl to be found
in the dark folds of life. Victor Hugo
27. And when Love speaks, the voices of all the gods make heaven drowsy with its harmony.
William Shakespeare
28. Love does not consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same
direction. Antoine de Saint-Exupery
29. Love does not dominate; it cultivates. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
30. Love makes your soul crawl out from its hiding place. Zora Neale Hurston
31. The more you are motivated by love, the more fearless and free your action will be. Dalai Lama
32. We do not judge the people we love. Jean-Paul Sartre
33. The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved; loved for ourselves, or rather,
loved in spite of ourselves. Victor Hugo
34. Intense love does not measure, it just gives. Mother Teresa
35. You don't love someone for their looks, or their clothes, or for their fancy car, but because they
sing a song only you can hear. Oscar Wilde
36. One is loved because one is loved. No reason is needed for loving. Paulo Coelho
37. Love to faults is always blind, always is to joy inclined. Lawless, winged and unconfined, and
breaks all chains from every mind. William Shakespeare
38. Love is the bridge between you and everything. Rumi
39. There are things you do because they feel right & they may make no sense & they may make
no money & it may be the real reason we are here: to love each other & to eat each other's
cooking & say it was good. Brian Andreas
40. I love without knowing how, or when, or from where. I love you simply, without problems or
pride. Pablo Neruda
41. Whenever you're in conflict, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging
your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude. William James
42. One advantage of marriage, it seems to me, is that when you fall out of love with each other, it
keeps you together until you fall in love again. Judith Viorst
43. Every heart sings a song, incomplete, until another heart whispers back. Those who wish to
sing always find a song. At the touch of a lover, everyone becomes a poet. Plato
44. Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone, it has to be made, like bread; remade all the time, made
new. Ursula K. Le Guin
45. There is no remedy for love but to love more. Henry David Thoreau
46. It is not a lack of love, but a lack of friendship that makes unhappy marriages.
Friedrich Nietzsche
47. New love is the brightest, and long love is the greatest, but revived love is the tenderest thing
known on earth. Thomas Hardy
48. Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves. Carl Jung
49. You don't develop courage by being happy in your relationships every day. You develop it by
surviving difficult times and challenging adversity. Epicurus
50. Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within.
James Baldwin
51. What do we live for, if not to make life less difficult for each other? George Eliot
52. There is only one happiness in this life, to love and be loved. George Sand

Twelve Traditions for Couples: Discoveries*

1) **Our common welfare should come first; our recovery depends upon the unity of our relationship.**

In the AA *12&12*, it is written, “The unity of Alcoholics Anonymous is the most treasured quality our society has. Our lives, the lives of all to come, depend squarely upon it. We stay whole, or A.A. dies. Without unity, the heart of A.A. would cease to beat” (129). We have come to believe that without unity the heart of our relationship would cease to beat. So we had to begin our exploration by answering three questions: What is our common welfare? What is unity? Why does our recovery as a couple depend on our unity? One definition of *welfare* is “the good fortune, health, happiness, prosperity, etc. of a person, group, or organization; well-being.”** One definition of *unity* is “oneness of mind, feeling, etc., as among a number of persons; concord, harmony, or agreement.” So by considering the good fortune, health, and happiness of each other, we are creating harmony and agreement in our relationship. By working together, we discovered tradition one is intrinsic in the rest of the traditions. To begin our writing, we asked ourselves this questions: What am I doing to promote the health, happiness, and fortunes of our relationship, and, in so doing, creating unity between us?

2) **For the purpose of our relationship, there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He expresses Himself in our conscience. Each partner is a trusted servant—neither governs.**

Again we had to ask ourselves two questions: What does it mean to govern? And why don’t we want this in our relationship? One definition of *govern* is “to exercise a directing or restraining influence over; to hold in check; control.” Yuck! Who would want this in a relationship? So it seems to us that the main focus of this tradition is for neither partner to govern, but instead we should mutually serve each other and the relationship. This ties in beautifully with tradition one because by using a group conscience, making a decision through discussion and agreement instead of by the governance of one partner over the other, we are respecting our common welfare and creating unity in the relationship. The AI-Anon *12&12* states, “All group decisions are arrived at through a majority agreement, reached after all elements of a problem have been considered” (93). Likewise, we have come to understand that if our relationship includes a group conscience and consists of service to one another, our relationship will grow.

3) **The basic requirement for a good relationship is a mutual desire to make it work.**

This one seemed obvious and simple at first until we realized each partner may have a different perception of what a working relationship is. The key word in that sentence is “mutual.” Both of us have to agree that we have a desire to make it work and decide together what that means. For this tradition, both readings from the AA and AI-Anon *12&12s* focus on inclusion, and present the concept that excluding anyone from the group is detrimental to the group itself. So we needed to ask this question: Am I allowing my partner in or am I keeping him/her out? The AA *12&12* asks, “Why did we dare say, contrary to the experience of society and government everywhere, that we would neither punish nor deprive any A.A. of membership, that we must never compel anyone to pay anything, believe anything, or conform to anything?” (141). This works for our relationship as well. If we decide the basic requirement for a good relationship is a mutual desire to make it work, and we agree on what that means, we don’t need to force each other to believe in or conform to anything. We need only trust that our partner wants to improve the relationship.

4) **Each partner should be autonomous except in matters affecting the other partner or our relationship as a whole.**

One definition of autonomous is “not subject to control from outside; independent.” So this tradition reminds us we are individuals participating in a relationship; we are not the relationship. It reminds us to take care of ourselves and act independently from our partner in areas that do not affect the relationship. It forces us not to lean on each other for every issue. One question we might ask is “Am I taking care of myself in a way that affects my partner positively?” It also reminds us to meet in the middle and have discussions about those areas that affect us both. It teaches us to give our partner the dignity to run his/her life and not control every area. A therapist once told Ida, “You make up rules where no rules need to be applied.” This tradition curtails that behavior. And the final lesson we can learn from this tradition is stated best in Rule 62 in the AA *12&12*: “Don’t take yourself too damn seriously” (149).

5) **Our relationship has but one primary purpose—to carry a message of love to each other.**

This also may seem as obvious as Tradition 3. After all, if we are not here to carry a message of love, why are we in the relationship? However, we fall into disrepair when we forget our primary purpose and instead focus on petty issues like finances, household tasks, and measurements (which partner is doing more, giving more, showing more affection, doing something wrong, being more demanding, being more controlling, being more needy, etc.). We asked ourselves these questions: What would happen if all we focused on is love? What if all we did was give and receive love? What if we realized that both the giving and the receiving had nothing to do with our partner and everything to do with our own actions and perceptions? And what if we didn’t judge either the giving or the receiving? The answer is simple: we would have a loving relationship free from argument and discord—one in which we act lovingly toward each other to create a loving relationship. Neither of us has to wait for the other one to extend love. All we have to do is give love and then receive it without judgement. The Al-Anon *12&12* suggests, “The ultimate success of Al-Anon and its members depends on limiting ourselves to one purpose...” (107). Both AA and Al-Anon often refer to this tradition as “singleness of purpose,” a way to achieve the desired goals of avoiding divisiveness and being of maximum service. That works for our relationship as well. This tradition helps us create a relationship which does not dwell on pettiness and imperfections, but, instead, only focuses on love. If it is all about love, then acceptance of each other is easy.

6) **Each partner ought never allow problems of money, property, or prestige to divert him/her from his/her primary purpose.**

First we have to remember our primary purpose—to carry a message of love to each other. This tradition reminds us that it doesn’t matter which partner makes more or owns more or has a higher standing either in the workplace or in society. These areas have nothing to do with our relationship and our primary purpose. They detract from any loving message we may be trying to carry. They create a relationship in which one partner is superior, or thinks he/she is, and one partner is inferior, or thinks he/she is, and sets up a system where one partner is more worthwhile or more deserving than the other. This tradition further helps us avoid divisiveness, focus on carrying a loving message, and be of maximum service to each other.

7) **Each partner ought to be fully self-supporting—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.**

Early in our relationship, we defined self-supporting only in terms of financial responsibility, and even when we both came into program, this was how we viewed this tradition. “We’re both working stiffs,” we liked to say. But when Ida resigned from her teaching position at seven years sober, suddenly she was no longer financially self-supporting. With only a monthly disability check, she felt as if she was no longer contributing to this relationship. No matter what Kelly said, she believed this. At last, we understood that being self-supporting went far beyond financial responsibility and included any physical tasks completed to benefit the relationship. More importantly, we understood that our emotional and spiritual independence also contributed to and served the common welfare of our relationship. Perhaps it is said best in the *Al-Anon 12&12*: “When individual members and individual groups understand that they are responsible for their own survival and progress, a great spiritual strength flows into each part as well as the whole. If I do my part and others do theirs, we do it together, and we don’t need to ask someone else to do it for us” (117). Our common welfare, our unity, and our love for each other are expressed in this tradition.

8) **Each partner should never be anything other than a spouse in the relationship.**

The original AA tradition states, “Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.” So most couple’s versions of this tradition translate it as “Each partner should remain forever nonprofessional, but the relationship may employ special workers.” But this was confusing to us, so we had to ask ourselves these questions: What does it look like if one spouse is acting like a “professional” in the relationship? And how does being “non-professional” relate to our relationship? One definition of a professional is “a person who is expert in his or her work.” So we translated this tradition to mean that neither partner should pretend to be an expert about what is best for the other. In other words, each spouse should not act as doctor, counselor, lawyer, financial advisor or even sponsor to the other spouse. Instead, each partner should only be a spouse dedicated to the primary purpose of the relationship: to carry a message of love to each other.

9) **The relationship ought never be organized, meaning one partner should never direct or govern the other, but should instead be responsible for serving the relationship.**

One definition of *organized* is “*having a formal organization or structure, esp. to coordinate or carry out widespread activities.*” This sounds like a rational construct, but not when one partner is doing all the organizing and conducting. In the *AA 12&12* it is written that “Power to direct or govern is the essence of organization everywhere. Yet alcoholics Anonymous is an exception. It does not conform to this pattern” (172-173). So too with the relationship. If one partner is the dictator, not only will this cause resentment, but, we believe the relationship will actually spiritually stagnate. This may sound like an exaggeration; you might say, “No one acts like that, and I’d never allow my partner to rule me in that way.” Perhaps not, but we act like the dictator in subtle ways from not liking how our partner stacks the dishwasher to trying to control the household budget. Anything done by one partner without the agreement of the other can lead to this type of arrogant behavior. In step seven of the *Big Book* it is written that “The difference between a demand and a simple request is plain to anyone” (7). This tradition helps us avoid making demands or taking authoritarian actions, and, instead, promotes communication and compromise by reminding us to make requests and offer suggestions, thus showing respect toward our partner.

10) Each partner ought never allow outside issues to detract from our primary purpose; hence, we should focus on discussion rather than argument.

To understand this tradition more deeply, we had to ask ourselves a question: What is an outside issue? For the harmony of our relationship, we had to consider that this tradition reaches far beyond political and public controversies. It includes any issue outside our relationship and our primary purpose to carry a message of love to each other: friendships, family, employment, and even the past. We do not ask each other to refrain from any of these topics—that would deprive us of opportunities for meaningful communication—but, instead, to discuss rather than argue and to treat each other with respect during these conversations. The Al-Anon *12&12* phrases it well when it says, “Tradition ten goes further than tradition six in confirming, once more, the purpose of all our traditions—to keep ourselves, as a group and a fellowship, clear of anything not related to our program” (127).

11) Each partner best conveys his or her beliefs and philosophies through attraction rather than promotion.

One definition of attraction is “a person or thing that draws, attracts, allures, or entices.” While one definition of promote is “to obtain (something) by cunning or trickery; wangle.” Based on these definitions, it is clear to us that promotion has no part in a loving relationship because it can lead to manipulation, intimidation, and domination. Tradition eleven reminds us to incorporate respect and humility in our dialogues with other, and to accept and welcome our partner’s beliefs and philosophies. It encourages us to model the same loving and compassionate behaviors which we would wish to receive. We don’t need to tell each other what to do, how to do it, or what to believe. We only need to take an attitude of acceptance toward our partner.

12) Selflessness is the spiritual foundation of our relationship, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities, and the principle is unselfishness.

This leads directly back to traditions one and five. In other words, we need focus on our common welfare to create unity in our relationship, and we need to carry a message of love to each other. Tradition twelve helps us accomplish this by asking that we refrain from selfishness. One definition of selfless is “having little or no concern for oneself, esp. with regard to fame, position, money, etc.” So this tradition also leads us back to traditions six and ten, both of which focus on outside issues. It seems to us that the main point of this tradition is to help us avoid discord based on self and instead focus on being of service to each other and the relationship. It asks us to give up some of our personal desires to improve and enhance the relationship. The Al-Anon *12&12* states why these are favored attributes: “There is no room in this important purpose for self-glorification and pride, and much room for gratitude, humility and willingness to serve” (135). All of this benefits our relationship. But before writing our responses on this tradition, we had to ask ourselves these questions: Why is selflessness *the* spiritual foundation of our relationship? How does the realm of the spirit operate in our relationship? One definition of spirit is “a vital principle held to give life to physical organisms.” Our relationship is an organism, and we bring life to it through our devotion to this relationship, our service to each other, and our selfless acts of love and kindness.

*This version of the twelve traditions for couples is based in part on the one we use in our couples group and in part on our own discoveries and rewrites while working the traditions together.

**All definitions are taken from (*Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, Random House).

Format for Traditions Workshop

Introduction:

While creating this workshop for ourselves, we decided immediately we wanted to keep our writing and discussions positive—no self-flagellation, no finger-pointing, no use of words like wrong and bad. We also wanted this workshop to improve our behaviors and reactions to enhance our relationship. With these ideas in mind, we wrote three simple questions that we hoped would lead us into positivity and action.

Assignments:

1. Read each tradition in both the AA and Al-Anon *Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions*.
2. Agree on a day of the week to complete the writing assignment and meet to read each other our responses.
3. Discuss the traditions and our responses respectfully and lovingly.

Questions:

1. How am I succeeding in working this tradition in our relationship?
2. Where can I improve?
3. How is my partner succeeding in working this tradition in our relationship?