

TRADITION FOUR: Each group should remain autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or CoDA as a whole.

4. Each partner should be autonomous except in matters affecting the other partner, the family, or society as a whole.

Each partner should be autonomous except in matters affecting the other partner, other members, (e.g. children or parents) the relationship or society as a whole. This Tradition allows each of us to be true to ourselves, so long as we do not negatively affect our relationships by doing so. Autonomous means self-governing, and also “not subject to control from the outside.” In order to be autonomous, we must first realize that we are God’s kids – not just someone’s child, mother, father, brother, sister, wife, husband, employer, employee, etc. When we ask God what we should do, one day at a time, and then go about trying to do God’s Will, rather than looking to a partner or family member as our higher power or for direction, then we do not endanger our relationships. And yet, in matters that will affect our families, significant others, or society, we must not think of ourselves as completely independent individuals, but as interdependent members of a group, considering the common welfare. What does this mean in practical terms? Another way to say this is that we must have the ability to become unselfish, considering how our attitudes and behaviors affect each other. The question we must ask ourselves about any given matter becomes, ‘How does this affect us?’ rather than ‘How does this affect me?’

This tradition gives our relationships freedom – complete freedom in all essential matters. Each person is free to choose their own way of functioning, yet this freedom still carries the responsibility of preserving the unity of the relationship as a whole. This is the ultimate test of any action we take: ‘How will this affect the unity of my relationship as a whole?’

Personal Examples:

Each person is autonomous, except in matters affecting the relationship as a whole:
I didn’t get to decide the date of our wedding on my own, according to my needs and desires only. My husband and I came to an agreement, really a group conscience, that took into consideration both of our needs and made the decision based on what worked best for us as a couple.

Our “coupledom” is autonomous, except in matters affecting our larger family and society as a whole: My husband and I have been discussing the possibility of trying to become pregnant. Because I am well over 40, the higher risk of having a Down’s Syndrome baby is something we have to consider. We are both in our mid-forties, and after doing the math, the question of who would be responsible to care for our adult retarded child – younger siblings? the state? – when we die has become part of the consideration in deciding whether or not we would terminate a pregnancy if tests revealed Down’s Syndrome. There are no easy answers in that situation, but the long-

term impact of our choices upon society and our family is something we are giving serious consideration.

CHECKLIST FOR TRADITION FOUR:

- Do I feel like there are only certain ways to do things? And are they my ways?
Do I insist on things being done in those ways?
- Do I always think about how or if my decisions will affect my partner? My family? Society? And if so, do I communicate with my partner (or others being affected) and come to agreement?
- Am I willing to go to any lengths – his, her, their lengths, not mine – to protect the integrity of the relationship?
- Am I careful to avoid injuring my partner or others mentally, emotionally, physically, or spiritually?
- How do I deal with my partner’s (or another’s) anger regarding something I’ve done through my autonomy? Am I defensive? Do I try to subdue him/ her with still greater anger? Do I point out previous “mistakes” they have made? Do I try to punish him/her in any way? Do I keep score?
- Do I keep my communications open and clear?