



Since we are now in a "Group Conscience Process" in Area 57 – here are some notes from a talk by Ottis D. (Edmond, Feb. 2005)

Informed Group Conscience

A.A. is a spiritual movement and as Tradition 2 states clearly: Our sole authority is a loving God as He may express Himself in the group conscience. **BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS AN INFORMED GROUP CONSCIENCE?** How does an informed group conscience differ from a group opinion or a majority vote, or a business meeting? The group conscience strives for unanimity (the state of being unanimous) through group enlightenment, spirituality and adherence to our Steps, Traditions and Concepts. What is the best way to get there?

The group conscience is the collective conscience of the group membership and this represents substantial unanimity on one issue before definitive action is taken. This is achieved by the group members through the sharing of full information, individual points of view, and the practice of A.A.'s principles. To be fully informed requires a willingness to listen to minority opinions with an open mind.

On sensitive issues, the group works slowly, discouraging formal motions until a clear sense of its collective view emerges. Placing principles before personalities, the membership is wary of dominant opinions. Its voice is heard when a well-informed group arrives at a decision. The result rests on more than a "yes" or "no" count, precisely because it is the spiritual expression of the group conscience.

The term "**informed group conscience**" implies that pertinent information has been studied and all views have been heard before the group votes.

The difference between a group conscience and a majority vote, or group opinion, is that one or more of the elements described above is missing.

There are two ways to arrive at a group conscience. 1) The competitive way lets the person with the loudest voice to push his idea across, take a vote and come up with a "majority decision". This is NOT an informed group conscience. 2) Group members should come together in mutual trust to arrive at a group decision, not one individual's personal triumph.

One suggested way is for the GSR to make an announcement that two weeks from tonight, or a month, there will be a group conscience meeting on a given subject. The GSR will read, explain and give out copies of the subject you'll be asked to go home and talk about it, think about it, and pray about it - and you'll vote at the group conscience meeting on the appointed night.

A cooperative and informed group conscience calls for facts or presentation on both sides of a question. The meeting should NOT be - thrown open for general discussion. This would allow the more vocal members to set the debate. It is suggested that the Chairman call on every member in turn, allowing 2-3 minutes for each to speak. No member should speak a second time until all have had their turn. This gives even the quietest person an equal chance. The Chairperson expresses his opinion only after all the others have spoken.

It is important that the minority voice always be heard; but it should be remembered that while the minority sometimes is right, it is just as often wrong. Unless the minority voice is decidedly persuasive or logical, it should be considered in its proper light - as a minority voice. To permit the minority always to influence the majority is to permit the tail to wag the dog.

The group conscience - as expressed in **Tradition 2** - is a powerful spiritual concept that makes it possible for people of different backgrounds and temperaments to rise above personal ambitions and unite in our common purpose: to stay sober and extend the hand of A.A. to the alcoholic who still suffers.

The group conscience will - in the end - prove a far more infallible guide for group affairs than the decision of any individual member, however good or wise he may be. We don't need to depend overmuch on inspired leaders. Because our active leadership is truly rotating, we enjoy a democracy rarely possible anywhere else. So, we of A.A. are certain that there is but one ultimate authority, "a loving GOD as He may express himself in our group conscience".

