

BONUS — Concept Five — OPTIONAL meditation and writings for conference registrants:

Please read Concept Five in our “12, 12, and 12” book, then spend several minutes meditating on each of the questions below. We suggest answering every question we’ve posed; first in writing, then reading your answers aloud, sharing with a fellow BDAer or two. No long essays are necessary, just a paragraph or two in direct answer to a question. These questions are posed by the author and editors of the workshop materials based on our own experience, strength, and hope and a deep read of Concept Five. Most if not all of the questions below can be applied to our personal and business lives, as well as to our interactions with our fellow DAers.

Concept Five: “The traditional Rights of Appeal and Petition protect the minority opinion and ensure the consideration of personal grievances.”

- 1) Do I consider most people my equal? At home? At work? In DA and BDA?
- 2) At work or in my business, do I have the courage and willingness to respect the opinions of a minority?
- 3) If someone speaks up to suggest that the current course of action may be the wrong one, can I hear them? Will I hear them?
- 4) How deep are my convictions and my commitment to following DA and BDA principles? At home? At work? In service?
- 5) If provided with new information or a new interpretation of previous information, can I change my mind? Even in front of other people?
- 6) If someone disagrees with me or my actions — at home, at work, in service — what would I like them to do about it?

Majority opinions and majority rule are the norm in our Western society today. Everyone in the majority assumes that they are right, and that the minority is wrong. And the minority assumes the same things about the majority, of course. Nothing could be further from the truth. Folks in the majority have all kinds of motives for being there. Some of those motives are just fine. For instance: values, principles, and integrity along a significant series of interconnected thoughts, behaviors, and actions. Some of those motives are not fine: control, bullying, fear, disengagement, laziness, etc. The majority can be trusted only as far as their motives can be recognized as worthwhile.

Folks in the minority are no more one-dimensional. There are just as many minority opinions based on bad motives as good ones. However, if minority opinions are heard and addressed, the negative motives are usually quickly seen, recognized, and stowed away for another day. If minority opinions are not heard and addressed, and the motives are bad ones, resentments often snowball, and group conscience decisions get undermined. This is a much worse outcome than extending the period of debate and discussion. Hearing out the minority opinion keeps both the minority and majority in check and on course with the spiritual principles of our program.

BONUS — Concept Five — OPTIONAL meditation and writings for conference registrants — continued:

As for the specific “Right of Appeal,” it doesn’t mean what most of us think it means. In the US Court system, to “appeal” means to take a lost case to a higher court within the same system. So, when we think of exercising the “Right of Appeal,” we think of “going to the next level.” For instance, we might think we can take an issue from our group to our Intergroup, from our Intergroup to the World Service Conference (WSC), and from the WSC to the General Service Board (GSB). Only the last one is partially true. GSRs and ISRs and whole WSC Committees do have a method of redress if they have problems with their GSB Liaison or with the entire GSB. (See the Debtors Anonymous Manual of Service for details at <https://www.bdahelpfordebtors.org/da-and-bda-service-literature>.)

To exercise the “Right of Appeal” is to exercise the right of the minority opinion to speak up against a decision just made, usually, within the body of the group, Intergroup, committee, etc., who just made it. Yet the minority opinion does not need to speak up immediately. A member can bring their concern that a decision was made too quickly or is simply not in alignment with the group’s wants or needs at a later meeting by making a “Motion to Reconsider.” But it’s all still within the original group; there is no formalized way to escalate concerns to the next level of service. Although a member may reach out to higher levels of service for experience, strength, and hope on a relevant topic.

Similarly, the “Right of Petition” is a real-time request, usually for one member to be treated differently in the moment. The example in our 12, 12, and 12, book is clear:

“Thus if the Chair of a business meeting arbitrarily refuses to recognize a member who wishes to speak, that member may turn to the whole group for relief by exercising the Right of Petition. A similar right exists if the Chair of a meeting improperly attempts to exclude or silence a member.”

So ... this is a “petition” of any member of a meeting or business meeting to be treated fairly and respectfully by the Chair. The next steps are not outlined in our Concept Five text, but in our experience the members present would be called upon, either through formal motion or voiced objections, to either support the petitioning member or to support the Chair. We’ve seen both happen.

For anyone who does want to escalate a concern about DA and BDA, on a global basis, the vehicle is not a local business meeting, it’s the annual submission of “Issues and Concerns” to the GSB as part of preparation for the WSC. Any group or member can submit up to three issues or concerns each year via the form and information available at <https://debtorsanonymous.org/fellowship-services/issues-and-concerns/>. Once received, no later than April 1st of each conference service year, the GSB will delegate each submission to either a GSB Committee or WSC Committee. Sometimes the submissions are addressed during the WSC, sometimes in the months that follow. Either way, for the most part the GSB has done an excellent job of ensuring that DA and BDA members get responses to their issues and concerns over the past many years. Please visit the link above to find out more and to participate in the process.