

June 1979

Service Is the Reason

FROM THE very beginning, Alcoholics Anonymous wasted no time nor effort in trying to determine the why of alcoholism or what causes the phenomenon. We were simply advised to accept the fact of our illness and get on with the recovery program.

Not too many days gone by, I found myself thinking, "Why me?" It was not the old "Why me?" prompted by self-pity, but the realization that of all the people who were still suffering, somehow I was given sobriety. With an absolutely honest appraisal, I could in no way understand why I had been selected to enjoy the blessings of our sober life when people all around were still in the darkness of alcoholism.

I found the answer in the very Steps of recovery I was encouraged to take, in the order they were written. The prayer in the Third Step in the Big Book held the key: "Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help..." Perhaps there *was* a reason. Just maybe, a purpose could be found right here.

A memorable keynote address
to a past
General Service Conference
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Soon, I was engulfed with the problems of defects and inventory. The purpose faded for a while, until I carefully read Step Seven. I believe I was at the time in desperate need to determine what was meant by humility and to just what degree one could humbly measure one's progress in that area. In those days, too, we argued a lot about *how* God was going to remove those defects, and we worried a lot while discussing the "very serious" difference between defects and shortcomings.

There were those words in the prayer mentioned in the Big Book discussion of Step Six: "my usefulness to You and my fellows." The reason for my very existence must be to serve. Later on, that was clearly defined: "Our real purpose is to fit ourselves to be of maximum service to God and the people about us."

Service to God and my fellows is the reason I am given sobriety, and there is *no other reason*. If I fail to serve, my purpose in life will be unfulfilled, and no doubt life itself will be taken away.

Long ago, I stopped praying for sobriety, because perhaps my Maker might think, "If he does not know what he has got, why, I might as well take it back." Sooner or later, all our prayers might change from "What can You give to me?" to "What have You got for me to do?" How best can I serve?

I have always felt that if Recovery has taken place, Unity and Service must follow — completing the Three Legacies left to us by AA's co-founders. However, if Recovery is to be available in the group, Unity and Service must be part of that group. So which really comes first?

Yet, for some unexplained reason, the word service is not well received in our Fellowship. Put on a service meeting, and the attendance is sparse. I wonder how many people would attend if a Regional Forum was called a "regional service meeting"? People talk about "getting involved in service." Service is looked upon in many places as something separate and to be endured only by a few.

I believe deeply in the recovery miracle of our program. I have experienced that recovery in my life. I believe we have a great obligation to tell all people that we have a program of recovery that works. In

many places, I shock our own members by saying I have recovered. I am no longer sick. I can no longer use the illness of alcoholism as an excuse for anything. There is a catch, however. If I fail to use my recovery in service to others, I will become sick again. So service becomes not only the reason for recovery, but the only way there is to maintain our recovery.

When I look back on how our society outside of our Fellowship treated the alcoholic at the time of my coming to AA, I can see some progress. In all honesty, however, I don't believe we are making much progress in developing new treatment methods that will greatly reduce the numbers who suffer so tragically and do not reach us. More than ever, we have a tremendous responsibility to carry our message. More than ever, we have to realize that it is we who have to care.

Look, if you will, at the attitude in society today. Example: Recently, tremendous strides were announced in the treatment of heart disease. This breakthrough was so great that death from recurrent heart attacks could be reduced by fifty percent. This news did not even rate a cover story. *Newsweek* carried a feature story that week on "Sex on Television." More and more, we respond only to what is happening to *us*. So let's not expect that even in the face of our current epidemic of alcoholism, there is going to be a great public outcry. The recovery of

millions of alcoholics depends upon us. That is an obligation, a responsibility that is mind-boggling.

Alcoholics Anonymous is truly a "beacon light of hope for mankind." If each member works through the group—through recovery to service—we cannot number the lives that can be touched. Few human beings will ever enjoy the privilege that is ours.

At first, I did not even know we *had a Third Legacy*. Then I became aware that the people who were active in serving the Fellowship were the very people I thought of when I heard the words "If you want what we have..." Their example and that of countless others have led me in my journey with this great Fellowship. People like Bern Smith [one of AA's early nonalcoholic trustees] believed in giving their all. Remember Bern saying, "When they put me on the

scrap heap of life, I want to be all used up."

Many times, my sponsor and I have been criticized by our mutual friends outside AA for doing what we do: nearly every weekend away from home and family; hours on end spent in airports. We discuss this, and every time we do, we come up with the same answer. We see what happens to people who do "retire," and we always say we had best keep doing what we are doing. You know, we haven't had to drink for a total of forty-six years between us.

No one will ever be able to say it any better than, nor, in fact, nearly as well as our co-founder Bill. He summed it up when he wrote: "God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick."

M. C., Winnipeg, Man.