

January 1990

'The Power of a Pronoun'

From Hermosa Beach, Calif.:

I'd like to respond to the article, "The Power of a Pronoun" in the September Grapevine. I am a woman with almost six months sobriety and am having a terrible time dealing with the blatant sexism of the Big Book. It is just not written to me! Reading about a woman who also felt this way was a great relief to me.

My sobriety is going through a very shaky period now. I don't really feel "the Fellowship" as everyone else seems to, and in my isolation I find that even the Big Book somehow looks right past me, because I am a woman. One night I was reading in desperation, trying to ignore the he's and him's, when I came upon this alienating passage: "To us, the Realm of the Spirit is broad, roomy, all inclusive; never exclusive or forbidding to those who earnestly seek. It is open, we believe, to all men." I put down the book, and somehow made it through that night, but I have not had the heart to pick it up in earnest since that moment.

I don't think I am being too sensitive. If that passage read, "It is open, we believe, to all women," wouldn't you men feel erased, ignored, hurt? I am glad to know other women also chafe at the exclusivity of the Big Book and guiltily pencil ourselves in when no one is looking. I hope I can

find some way around this painful problem, make it to my six months and then beyond. But to do that I must find some way to make the Big Book my own and come to terms with the fact that the Big Book was not written for a woman alcoholic. I hope I can do all that, but I keep thinking, why should I have to? *M. E.*

From Cloverdale, Calif.:

Regarding the article, "The Power of a Pronoun," on changing the gender from "he" to "she" in the Big Book, I felt a little perturbed.

The first time I visited San Quentin prison with our AA group, I prayed for God to give me a message to share with the street-hardened men incarcerated there.

I was a quiet little housewife-and-mother type drunk, though at the time I was having some serious job and marital problems. I was making the trip as much for my sake as to carry the message. I wondered what we could share that would be meaningful to each other, we who were so far apart in every area of our lives.

Of course, I found what we always do — our feelings were the same. The black, male, armed thug and the middle class, white housewife both recognized the depths to which our alcoholism had taken us and we were each seeking the tools to help us rise from those depths.

When I came into Alcoholics Anonymous August 10, 1949, I was one of the very few women on the program in our area, If I had worried about

the sexist issue at that time, I'm sure I wouldn't have just celebrated my 40th anniversary.

The problem of identifying with men in the program has never arisen in my life. I have never stopped benefiting from studying Christian, Buddhist, Judaic, etc., teachings because of their pervasive use of the masculine gender.

I use the personal pronoun for ease of expressing myself but most of the women I know who have been successfully working the program from thirty days on up feel much the way I do.

I believe it is only in nitpicking and stressing of differences rather than similarities that we tend to slide away from the principles of the program. *M. G.*

From Fairbanks, Alaska:

I was so happy to read the article "The Power of a Pronoun" in the September Grapevine. In our area, we recently took a group conscience about writing the Big Book in gender neutral terms. All of the groups except two really dug in their heels and said, "No." They were afraid that changing the pronouns would somehow alter the substance of the message. Their argument was, "If it works, don't fix it." But if that philosophy were adhered to, then we should still be flying around in rickety old bi-planes. After all, they worked too, so why fix or improve them?

I don't really think there is anything wrong with progress and I would certainly call reaching out to millions of women alcoholics a pro-

gressive and worthy venture. It is important to note, however, that going to gender neutral terms is not simply to actually clarify the substance of the text. For example: If we truly mean "God as we understand Him," then we must be rid of the inherent contradiction in that statement. It is the personal responsibility of each member of AA to define a higher power. In labeling God, "Him," we diminish that cherished ideal. *ANONYMOUS*