

*Anonymity***'The Spiritual Substance'***A presentation to the 1981
General Service Conference*

THE FIRST sentence of the chapter on the Twelfth Tradition in the "Twelve and Twelve" says, "The spiritual substance of anonymity is sacrifice." The placing of principles before my personality is the sacrifice I believe I am asked to make.

When I attended my first AA meeting, no one asked me where I lived, what I did for a living — they didn't even ask my last name. I had been told all of my young life to choose my friends carefully, and yet

these people were showing concern for me, loving me without knowing anything about me except that I had a big drinking problem. They were friends. I didn't choose them carefully — they just were. I was anonymous and so were they. That spontaneous gift of love given freely is something I hope I never forget.

Later, when my gratitude for being sober put aside my fear of the stigma of being an alcoholic, opportunities came along for me to explain

what had been happening to me in AA. That was good, but if microphones or cameras had been handy when I was a relative newcomer, I'm not too sure I wouldn't have used them. Being the center of attention gave me a nice, warm feeling. (It reminded me of something else I had

*"We are asked to
give up things
like fear, pride,
and anger"*

formerly used to feel warm.)

At this period, the Traditions were pointed out to me. It was time to think about my reasons for doing what I was doing. My understanding of the spiritual meaning of anonymity was beginning to form, although I didn't know it.

I have used those two common experiences because they are to me the basic reasons for anonymity — "the spiritual substance" it is all about, the giving without thinking of return, the getting off center stage for the welfare of others. Wanting to do that is the ultimate goal.

The Twelfth Tradition states: "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities." We are asked in all of our Traditions to sacrifice our per-

sonal desires and ambitions for the benefit of AA as a whole. Each of us, as an individual, is asked to do this — not a committee, nor the AA General Service Office, nor the AA General Service Conference.

We are asked to give up things like fear, pride, and anger, to avoid controversies, so that we can work together more effectively. We are asked to let others express their opinions and to realize that these opinions are worthy of consideration. We are asked not to judge others. We are asked to trust one another — to mind our own business. We are asked to let *others* tell us if we are doing something worthwhile. All of this, for this alcoholic, takes a lot of self-discipline but may help me cultivate some humility. If the process is painful — as the experiences of our pioneers often were as they became aware of the need for principles to guide us toward unity — the reward is worth it. The reward is our continued ability to carry the message.

If it seems necessary for me to say how many times I have been asked to speak recently, to comment on how many people I sponsor, or to remark that I am the sponsor of someone who is successful in the program — if I do not put enough trust in someone else's ability to take over my service responsibility — if a service project is successful, and I make sure it is known that it was originally my idea, no matter who accomplished it — I am not placing principles before my personality. I am in the way of

real unity. I am hindering my own growth, my group's growth, and thus AA's growth.

What I must remember is that if something I say is helpful to someone, the important thing is the help — not that I said it. If the job is accomplished, that's important — not that I did it.

I believe that each one of us has much to give. Using our common sense, we know we need one another. I also believe that if we give freely without regard to prestige or recognition, the God-given talents we each have will enable our Fellowship to grow.

None of the thoughts I have presented are new; I have just expressed them in my own way. However, I believe the words "ever reminding us" in the Twelfth Tradition are there for our good.

In "Why Alcoholics Anonymous Is Anonymous," published in the Grapevine in 1955, Bill W. said, "We take these attitudes not at all because we claim special virtue or wisdom; we do these things because hard experience has told us that we must — if AA is to survive in the distraught world of today. We also give up rights and make sacrifices because we ought to — and better yet, because we want to. AA is a power greater than any of us; it must go on living, or else uncounted thousands of our kind will surely die. This we know."

The word sacrifice sounds somewhat unpleasant when I first see or hear it, but the reward it brings in this case is really joyous if each of us who love our Fellowship gains more spiritual maturity.

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