

WHY WE WERE CHOSEN

GOD IN HIS WISDOM selected this group of men and women to be the purveyors of His goodness. He went not to the proud, the mighty, the famous, or the brilliant; He went to the humble, the sick, the unfortunate. He went straight to the drunkard, the so-called weakling in this world. Well might He have said to us:

"Unto your weak and feeble hands, I have entrusted a power beyond estimate. To you has been given that which has been denied the most learned of your fellows. Not to scientists nor statesmen, not to wives or mothers, not even to my priests or ministers have I given this gift of healing other alcoholics which I entrust to you.

It must be used unselfishly for it carries with it grave responsibility; sometimes the difference between life and death. No day can be too long; no demands upon your time can be too urgent; no case too pitiful; no task too hard; no effort too great. It must be used with tolerance, for I have restricted its application to no race, no creed, and no denomination. Personal criticism you must expect; lack of appreciation will be common; ridicule will be your lot; your motives will be misjudged. You must be prepared for adversity, for what men call adversity is the ladder you must use to ascend the rungs toward spiritual perfection. And, remember, in the exercise of this power, I shall not exact of you beyond your capabilities.

You are not selected because of exceptional talents. Be careful always, if success attends your efforts, not to ascribe to personal superiority that to which you lay claim only by virtue of My Gift. If I had wanted eloquent men, there would have been many anxious for the assignment, for talk is the easiest used of all the talents with which I have endowed mankind. If I had wanted scholarly men, the world is filled with better qualified men than you who would be available.

You were selected because you have been the outcasts of the world and your long experience as drunkards has made or should make you humbly alert to the cries of distress that come from the lonely hearts of alcoholics everywhere.

Keep ever in mind the admission you made on the day of your profession in AA - that you are powerless and that it was only with your willingness to turn your life and will into My keeping that relief came to you."

Author: The text is from a prepared talk by AA member John T. of Chicago, a Circuit Court Judge (later an Illinois Appellate Court Judge) at the Chicago Group's fourth anniversary on October 5, 1943.

Full Text of Talk:

Address by Judge John T.

4th Anniversary of the Chicago Group

October 5, 1943

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"Tonight marks the fourth anniversary of the founding of the Chicago Group. In some respects the

word "anniversary" is not a satisfactory term to describe this occasion for it carries the implication that a goal, a congratulatory period, a resting point on a journey has been reached. The program which we have entered upon really has no terminus, for it involves a continuous striving for improvement. Congratulatory periods tend to smugness, resting periods to retrogression. This program is not to be measured in years. It is timeless in every sense except day to day, or even more precisely, now!

The history of alcoholic addiction is marked by an unwillingness or inability to live in the present. For it the morbid past has an unholy attraction and the uncertain future is filled with vague forebodings. The hope of the Alcoholic, the real tangible hope of the Alcoholic is in the present, now is the acceptable time, the past is beyond recall -- the future is as uncertain as life itself. Only the now is ours.

As I look about me tonight I see many new faces. Some are here present for the first time, some who have been here before, and having failed in their quest of sobriety have returned. To such of you the knowledge that some of us have been dry since the beginning of this group four years ago may incline to feelings of strangeness or timidity, and you should feel neither strange nor timid with us who share a common infirmity. To you but a few days or a few weeks removed from the misery

and remorse of a recent spree, four years of sobriety may seem an eternity but there is no such thing as seniority in a timeless program. We, who thru the Grace of God have stayed dry, are at the most, but twenty-four hours in the vanguard.

True, we have the advantage of a better understanding of our problem. Day upon day, day after day, our sobriety has resulted in the formation of new habits which makes the matter of staying so a less fearsome ordeal than it was in the beginning. We have had the advantage of association with other Alcoholics which has taken us from our old haunts and tended to remove, in a measure, the occasions of alcoholic suggestion. We older ones in our daily attempts to live according to the twelve steps of our program have made start, at least, toward eradicating disconcerting personality defects. But, important as all these considerations are, the great step, toward our regeneration was accomplished in that moment when we admitted we were powerless over alcohol and made a decision to turn our will, and lives over to God, as we understood Him. That act of resignation was an act of the then present moment, and that Source is as available to you now as it was to us then. The days pass quickly by and time seems unimportant. A little while ago there was Earl, then there were two and now there are hundreds. This group is not a result of mass production, this pro-gram cannot be sold. It can be lived a practiced and it is in the power of example that its first attraction lies. Each of us presents the unselfish act, or series of acts, of some other one or ones. We were reached individually by other men like ourselves, who maybe for the first time in their lives had performed an unselfish act.

Into our regeneration went no thought of individual profit on the part of our sponsors, or greed or gain. We are the products of the most refined charity that men can bestow upon one another. The recognition on the part of others of our true dignity as men and their willingness to do unto us as they would have themselves done unto.

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The thing that has happened in the short life of this group is difficult of comprehension. Jack Alexander, the brilliant author of the Saturday Evening Post article, says that only through the medium of fiction can it be adequately depicted. Let us try to appraise it by an imaginary meeting. Let us assume that four years ago tonight a group of the most learned medical men in the city of Chicago were gathered together to discuss each of our alcoholic case histories. As they reviewed them carefully, one by one, all followed an identical pattern. There were those who for years drank as much as two quarts of whiskey a day. There were others who drank daily for years to the point of intoxication, and others who would go months without so much as a glass of beer. There were those who had voluntarily subjected themselves repeatedly to numerous so-called "cures"; some who voluntarily had themselves committed to psychopathic institutions and insane asylums; others who had experienced no more severe distress than an agonizing case of jitters. But all were the same in this respect: that, having started to drink, we had no self-control that would indicate a stopping point.

The records before this imaginary group of eminent scientists proved we were alcoholics, many chronic, some acute! They showed long and unsuccessful hospitalizations, psychopathic commitments and psychiatric investigations all without a single successful result. The pronouncement of that august Tribunal of physicians was that most of the cases were beyond the reach of science, and that the remainder soon would be. After they had made this solemn pronouncement, let us assume that a shadowy figure appeared and in an unearthly voice said: "Notwithstanding the findings of this distinguished group, in four short years these hundreds of cases that you have pronounced incurable shall, with the help of God, be made whole." Around that room would be exchanged scornful and doubtful glances and these unbelieving medical men would say as did Thomas of old: "When we see we shall believe." Yet each of us here present tonight is living proof that the prophecy of the imaginary voice has been fulfilled; without the drama of the miracle but just as certainly and just as attributable to the God of whom the imaginary voice spoke. The thing which has happened in the Chicago group, which is happening all over the country, has come about so gradually and through such material mediums as to pass unrecognized; even by us, for the moral miracle it really is. Instead of suspending the natural law by direct intervention, God in His wisdom has selected a group of men to be the purveyors of His goodness. In selecting them through whom to bring about this phenomenon He went not to the proud, the mighty, the famous or the brilliant. He went to the humble, to the sick, to the unfortunate - he went to the drunkard, the so-called weakling of the world. Well might He have said to us: Into your weak and feeble hands I

have entrusted a Power beyond estimate. To you has been given that which has been denied the most learned of your fellows. Not to scientists or statesmen, not to wives or mothers, not even to my priests and ministers have I given this gift of healing other alcoholics, which I entrust to you. It must be used unselfishly. It carries with it grave responsibility. No day can be too long, no demands upon your time can be too urgent, no case too pitiable, no task too hard, no effort too great. It must be used with Tolerance for I have restricted its application to no race, no creed and no denomination. Personal criticism you must expect, lack of appreciation will be common, ridicule will be your lot, your motives will be misjudged. Success will not always attend your efforts in your work with other alcoholics. You must be prepared for adversity, for what men call adversity is the ladder you must use to ascend the rungs toward Spiritual perfection, and remember in the exercise of this power I shall not exact of you beyond your capabilities.

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You are not selected because of exceptional talents and be careful always if success attends your

efforts, not to ascribe to personal superiority, that to which you can lay claim only by virtue of My gift. If I had wanted learned men to accomplish this mission the power would have been entrusted to the physician and scientist. If I had wanted eloquent men there would have been many anxious for the assignment, for talk is the easiest used of all talents with which I have endowed mankind. If I had wanted scholarly men the world is filled with better qualified than you who would have been available. You were selected because you have been the outcasts of the world and your long experience as a drunkard has made, or should make you humbly alert to the cries of distress that comes from the lonely hearts of alcoholics everywhere. Keep ever in mind the admission that you made on the day of your profession into A.A., namely that you are powerless and that it was only with your willingness to turn your life and will into My keeping, that relief came to you.

Think not, that because that you have been dry for one year or two years, or ten years, that it is the result of your unaided efforts. The help which has kept you normal will keep you so just as long as you live this program, which I have mapped out for you. Beware of the pride which comes from growth, the power of numbers and of invidious comparisons between yourselves; or of your organization with other organizations whose success depends upon members power, money and position. These material things are no part of your creed. The success of material organizations arises out of the strength of their individual members; the success of yours from a common helplessness. The power of material organizations comes from the pooling of joint assets; yours from the union of mutual liabilities. Appeal for membership in material organizations is based upon a boastful recital of their accomplishments; yours upon the humble admission of weakness; the motto of the successful commercial enterprise is: "He profits most who serves best"; yours: "He serves best who seeks no profit." The wealth of material organizations when they take their inventory is measured by what they have left; yours when you take moral inventory by what you have given.

If these things had been said to us there are those upon whom the injunctions might lie heavy. They might seem austere and difficult commands but this would only be because we have not realized or have forgotten the critical nature of our infirmities. Physical disease requires drastic measures for its cure, in many cases delicate and dangerous surgery. Our conditions when we came into this group was even more serious than that of one who goes to a hospital with a gangrenous limb. For, after all, the limit of his risk is his life while we risked life and in addition things more precious, sanity, honor, self-respect. We cannot expect to reach a problem so deep-seated, that science deemed it unsolvable, with as little effort as is required for the removal of a decayed tooth. It requires the doing of difficult things including self-discipline and above all unswerving obedience to a conscience. It is part of God's therapy that man cooperate; a cooperation requiring high moral courage in the performance of difficult tasks.

The aphorism "Man does not live by bread alone", is more than poetry. It is the utterance of a great philosophical truth. There is a part of man that is animal. That part requires that he have bread, and that in quest thereof he be fitted to take his place in a highly competitive society. He must work, he must play and he must laugh. But there is another part of man which is Spiritual and that part can only be properly developed by the exercises and restraints which conscience dictates. Unless man's

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Spiritual yearnings are developed as well as his physical and mental abilities, he is unbalanced and

incomplete and a prey to those capital enemies of all alcoholics: fear, loneliness, discouragement and futility.

And so as I draw to the end of these remarks, you must think I have forgotten Earl and his anniversary. These things I have said to you have been discussed many times with Earl. Often have I heard him emphasize that no individual is responsible for this group. Earl was the leaven selected by wise and benevolent Providence to germinate this group into being. He used the material entrusted to him with patience, tolerance and understanding but never for one moment has he felt that this group is his personal accomplishment, or that he was more important to its well-being than the most recently arrived alcoholic. The most that he would care to hear me say about him is that he has tried to be a worthy instrumentality to carry out a Divine mandate.

The wise, kindly man may steer us clear of many mistakes but even he makes some. But in spite of mistakes, in spite of errors, even in the absence of leadership such as that with which we have been blessed, this work will continue as long as the alcoholic recognizes his helplessness and decides to confide his destiny to God. In conclusion I would like to read a letter which I received this evening from one of the early members of this group who says about the group and about Earl that which I think, deep in our hearts, all of us feel:

"Dear John:

As I told you the other day before I left, the discussion I listened to briefly in Staley's last Friday infused me with the desire to add my two cents' worth (in this case sixteen cents, air mail, special delivery) to the meeting at which the fourth anniversary of the Chicago group will be observed. There is a strong temptation in all of us, I think, to rhapsodize over the individual net gains in our lives, which we attribute to the blessings that flow from the application of A.A. principles. These individual net gains, measured in the recovery of jobs, in the restoration of happy family life, in the rediscovery of self-respect, are fine in themselves, including as they do some literal miracles, but I rather think that the Chicago group, of which it was my happy privilege to be an early member, represents more than the sum total of all these individual net gains.

As the focal point of the innumerable and necessarily unknown processes of individual spiritual development by the members, the group itself has been the graceful means for many to catch a fleeting but convincing glimpse of the Infinite. That in itself makes the group a profound thing. This, I'm afraid, is a little vague. But the fact that the group has been what it is is not attributable to Providence divorced from the individual, but to sound, tolerant, and loving minds taking care of the details for Providence. I think the application to Earl is too obvious to need further elaboration. If, to save Earl embarrassment, not a word should be uttered about him Tuesday night, the feeling that I have at a Chicago meeting, a feeling I know is widely shared, that Christ is in approving attendance there, - that feeling is eulogy enough.

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