nature and require, if you will, a virtually pastoral approach in counseling, whether from a pastor, an alcoholism counselor, or a doctor. Now religious concepts are difficult to grasp in a secular culture, especially by those trained to offer care and counsel by means of secular methods. These concepts are particularly difficult to put into practice, because they require surrender of the needy self to a saving God. Obviously, millions of alcoholic Americans resist such surrender. No one is ever prepared for such an experience. But powerlessness over alcohol or a similar drug simply forces the necessity upon the addict whether he likes it or not.

Personally, I know how difficult the admission of powerlessness is and how brutally complicated the surrender of self to God can become—even when the need seems obvious. I remain convinced, however, on the basis of my own experience and my experiences with hundreds of other alcoholics, that I was helplessly ill with addiction, physically, emotionally and spiritually, that I had to admit to that helplessness, and that I needed help from powers and a Power higher than myself. I am, furthermore, convinced on the basis of my previous loss of control over drugs, and through my contact with recovering alcoholics, that I must remain free from alcohol and similar drugs in order to prevent a return to abusive and compulsive consumption of mood-altering chemicals. Once a person has learned in the depths of his soul the effects of a mood-altering (especially an euphoria-inducing) drug, he never forgets those effects. No matter how long he may control his consumption upon return to those drugs after abstinence, he will eventually, because of false self-confidence or stress, begin to abuse and lose control over his drugs once again.

I have yet to meet one doctor, one alcoholism counselor, one alcoholism program director, one nurse, one pastor, one chaplain, one alcoholic, who has successfully helped an addicted person back to controlled use of his drug. I have met and know literally hundreds of alcoholics who have tried controlled drinking and have failed. Whether abstinence, admission of powerlessness, or reliance on a Power higher than self is attractive to alcoholics or not, those factors remain vital in all successful programs for treatment of addiction. This means, undoubtedly, that the majority of alcoholics in this country will not seek help because the helping process puts so much demand on the alcoholic. But until an actual program—not merely a research project based on questionable samplings of those supplying versions of their own “controlled” drinking—for the cultivation of controlled drinking appears, we must remain committed to abstinence, to the disease concept, and to spiritual dynamics as necessary dimensions in a productive recovery process.

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