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Divine Hot Line

From time to time, at closed AA meetings, when someone shares his closeness and contact with the God of his understanding, a person sitting next to me has whispered, "He sounds as if he has a hot line to God!" This remark is usually tinged with sarcasm and disbelief.

Recently, when someone said this to me, I kept thinking about it as I drove home and found myself saying, "I do, indeed, have a hot line to my God, and I would not survive without it."

I came to AA bringing a mixture of philosophy, psychology, logic, science, and theology so confusing as to put me into the category of an agnostic with mental and spiritual indigestion. The God I understood then was a frightening entity, separate and apart from me. I had no regular communication with that entity, nor did I give it much thought or feel any need to make its acquaintance. I was "doing my own thing" long before it became popular to say or do so, and this willfulness was leading me into all kinds of trouble and into alcoholism, with its ultimate consequences of destruction--death or insanity.

In my family, there were a number of ministers, of two denominations, but I had failed dogma, orthodoxy, and creed. Religions had not failed me; it was I who could not conform to them. Yet all along I had been studying, reading, and talking with others, searching for the meaning of life. The eternal mysteries of birth, life, and death persistently plagued me when I was faced with problems. I longed for answers and some meaning to my life.

Not until my disease of alcoholism was full-blown and the crash landing came did I realize for the first time that I was powerless and that those who loved me were powerless to help me. Admitting and accepting this fact, I turned myself over to AA and soon was praying lamely, "Whatever God is helping these people, please help me." With this simple prayer, uttered time and

again, and an almost monotonous repetition of the Serenity Prayer, there entered into my life a presence that had not been there before. This presence came during one of my quiet times, which I disciplined myself to have early each morning before dressing for work. Something loving, gentle, tender, and beautiful came to abide with me. I felt this powerful presence to be God.

I had brought a lot of troubles to AA with me--broken relationships, a lost business, financial problems, a job that was in danger of being lost, no close friends, and no family nearby. Alone in an efficiency apartment, I found myself talking to this God in the same language I am using now. At first, it seemed a little crazy to be talking out loud to this unseen friend. But since I lived alone, there was no one to question my sanity. I poured out my feelings, my fears, my despair, and my disappointment in myself and others. This was an ordinary conversation, not conventional prayer. I was talking to a loving, caring, all-powerful friend, and I was reassured and comforted.

For almost five years, I prayed for specifics. All of these prayers were answered in the right way--yes, no, maybe, wait--but I could not see the rightness of some answers, especially the "no" answers, until I looked at them in retrospect. In time, I understood that if I turned my will and my life over to the God I was making my companion, some of my answers would have to be no for my highest good, and for the highest good of others.

Turning from formal prayer--the "thee and thou" traditional way of praying in my childhood--to conversational prayer was a great freedom for me. I could talk to God in simple, direct, and truthful terms, in everyday language, and the more I practiced this, the more I began to understand the admonition to "practice the presence of God." The thank-yous were audibly or silently expressed many times a day, in gratitude for the unexpected answers, the blessings, and, yes, even the trials that allowed for my growth. There were small prayers for others I might see as I walked or drove along--for people who seemed troubled or ill or handicapped or just plainly joyful.

I stopped giving a list to God when I fully understood Step Eleven's "praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." I could still give thanks for God's love, and pray for sobriety, guidance, protection, healing, and enlightenment; but no longer did I draw a description of what I thought I wanted. My faith in my Higher Power grew so that I trusted God to manage my affairs and became willing to accept his will for me.

As time went on, I felt the need for more. Meditation replaced contemplation in the quiet times I set aside each day. Friends more advanced in this practice taught me how to enter into this, one of man's oldest methods of

worship, for a time of quieting the body and the mind and putting myself in a mood receptive to inspiration, and for a time, at the end of the meditation periods, for offering up prayers for others who were sick or suffering or having trouble getting sober. I prayed for their highest good, not asking for specific results. And I always remembered Bill W.'s suggestion that when guidance seemed to be strong, we check it out with another trusted AA friend. This safeguard is a necessary one to prevent my ego from stepping in and rationalizing something I might want.

A hot line, as I understand it, is an immediate connection for communication. I can use mine anywhere, any time. I do not hear a thunderous voice in response, but if I wait and listen and observe, replies will come, often in many unexpected and surprising ways. Inspiration or answers may come through the words of a friend or a stranger; a sudden insight may come without effort on my part--in something I am reading, in something someone says at a meeting, or in my dream sleep.

In my hot line conversation, one-sided as it seems, I present my problems or concerns, cite my options as I can see them, and then turn them over to God. When I have done this, I try to let the problems go mentally.

There are times when I find conditions and situations so disturbing that I cannot pray about them. All I can say on my hot line is "God help me"; but this is a powerful prayer. That prayer and the prayers of others have brought me through the pain of death of loved ones, the trauma of early retirement on disability, operations, illness in the deep of night when all the world seems to be asleep and far away. But the hot line is always open, always there. It is the greatest source of comfort and security I have--the feeling that my loving Higher Power is always there, ready to comfort, to show the way, to love me without demand.

-- E.P.

Alexandria, Virginia

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