

## Concept Five - Minority Opinion - Are we listening?

My name is Nancy K. and I am an alcoholic. I am privileged and honored to serve as the Area 29, Panel 54 Delegate from Maryland. My home group is the Elkridge Monday Night Group of Alcoholics Anonymous where I currently serve as the Institution Representative for the group. I'd like to thank Eva for her loving invitation to participate in the Conference by preparing this service presentation on *Concept Five - The Minority Opinion - Are We Listening?*

When I read the topic, my mind immediately focused on our Area committee and assembly meetings as well as other Areas' events and meetings I have attended. I replayed in my mind the various instances I had witnessed Concept Five in action. I could clearly see the chairman, of each meeting running through my mind, ask for the minority opinion after each vote had concluded so my gut reaction to the question was yes - we are listening. Then I had to ask myself what I was listening to. The answer that came back to me was more often than not, silence. I can't tell you the number of times I have sat through a group conscious, district or area meeting with no one saying a word when the minority opinion was called for. After the meeting concluded or during the next smoke break, it was obvious that whatever topic had just been discussed and voted on may or may not have had additional information to be discussed. However, the topic closed and we moved onto the next item of business. I wonder if the silence is because of apathy or fear? My instincts tell me that it's not apathy.

I know that Concept Five provides the vehicle to use if I'm disturbed by an action of my home group, district or area. It is my responsibility to question the decision or action and make my voice heard through the minority opinion that is guaranteed by Concept Five. That being said, the answer of silence began to bother me. Why aren't members speaking up? In the pamphlet *The Twelve Concepts for World Service Illustrated* it states "On an issue of grave importance, the minority has the *duty* of presenting its views. This "Right of Appeal" recognizes that minorities frequently can be right; that even when they are in error they still perform a most valuable service when they compel a thorough-going debate on important issues. The well-heard minority, therefore, is our chief protection against an uninformed, misinformed, hasty or angry majority." I can't help but speculate that at times the "hasty or angry" majority may be silencing the minority. I don't believe that this is done on purpose; I simply believe it is the nature of an alcoholic.

Similar to the obsession I had for alcohol, I can get obsessed with an idea, thought or action. Once in this state, it's my way or the highway. I'll use the Steps, Traditions, or Concepts as my weapon to try and discredit you and keep the majority convinced that I'm right and your wrong. This happens without even realizing it. This repeated behavior will either drive those in the minority away, or keep them silent.

Bill's subtle but effective statement in Concept Nine reminds me "...a fine plan or idea can come from anybody, anywhere." As a trusted servant, it is my responsibility to encourage the minority opinion by voicing my own even when it's uncomfortable or unpopular. I need to show the concepts in action by speaking up and more importantly, if I am in the majority, listening to what is being said by the minority. If I'm listening, my mind is open and I am considering the words being spoken and not thinking of how wrong the other person is because they happen to have a different from mine, their idea is different than how we've done things in the past, they don't have the same vision for the future as I do, or their not conforming to my agenda.

When we take Step Three, we turn or will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him. Through the rest of the steps we begin to trust and build a relationship with this God until we can pray ..."only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out." in Step Eleven. The practice of these steps and the belief in a loving God is evident in Tradition Two by showing us that".... there is but one ultimate authority - a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience." If my mind is open, I am able to hear the words of the loving God you gave me.

How many times have you heard in a meeting the statement, "My God speaks to me through people" or something similar? If this is true, the minority opinion can often times be a loving God expressing himself. It is up to us to ensure we allow others the freedom to express themselves without fear of upsetting the majority. I need to be mindful of the loving God who may be trying to speak to me through the home group member I'm not the fondest of or the GSR/DCM who is going to extend the meeting another half hour, or longer, because they do bother to voice a minority opinion that causes a reconsideration of a motion. It's my responsibility to keep an open mind and listen to the information regardless of the messenger God chooses.

Being in the minority is not a popular place to be. However, it is clear in Bill's writings of his own experiences throughout the years that he spent a large portion of his sobriety in the minority when it came to the development of the Traditions, the Concepts and the service structure for Alcoholics Anonymous. Bill never gave up, as he knew the future of Alcoholics Anonymous depended on all Three Legacies. Without his tireless and sometimes emotionally charged efforts to have his voice heard, I'd hate to think of where we would all be today without that voice.

So now my question is to you, are you listening? Are you really listening for a loving God? The next time you hear the minority opinion and you want to be sure you are really listening, try the same thing the elders did in the story in the Twelve and Twelve in Tradition Three. Ask yourself the same simple question, "What would the master do?"