

DEVELOPING AN AWARENESS

At six months I had begun to speak at different meetings. Pretty soon my halo was killing me. My ermine (white fur) cloak was smothering me. I used to look down and wonder what the other little people did for a living. I didn't walk in, I swept in. All that I'd accomplished in six months was sobriety. I was as dry as dust, and just about as useless. One night we went into the Club and Jack said, "Bill, we're short a speaker, will you say a few words tonight?" "Of course!" The meeting started, and I didn't see Jack any more. They called on the first speaker – and it wasn't me, and they called the second speaker, and the third speaker – and the meeting was over! I had brought my harp to the party, but I didn't get to play!

That taught me the most important lesson I have ever learned in my entire life. That is that A.A. doesn't need me, but I need A.A. Very desperately, very sincerely, very humbly. Not all at once, because you can't get it all at once, just a little bit at a time. They told me, "You've got to get out and work a little; you've got to give." They told me that giving was living, and that living was loving, and loving was God. And you don't have to worry about God, because He's sitting right in front of your eyes.

You get just a little sobriety, and you get just a little humility. Not much, just a little. Not the humility of sackcloth and ashes, but the humility of a man who's glad he's alive and can serve. You get just a little tolerance, not too much, but just enough to sit and listen to the other guy.

Somewhere along the line, if you've forgotten how to pray, you learn a little about that too. I divorced myself from the Church when I was twenty-one. I got to thinking about that, and I spoke to Father McNulty about it. "Don't worry, Bill," he said, "you'll develop an awareness of God."

We had a basement apartment, and it faced right on the sidewalk, and outside our bedroom window there was a little bush about so high. One morning I awoke, and there was a little sparrow taking a bath on this little bush. The weight of this tiny creature's body caused the branch to rise and fall. Isn't that a wonderful thing to see? An awareness of God, yes! You're aware of the sunset, you're aware of the blades of grass, you're aware of food cooking on the stove.

You delight in walking down the street, and you see someone you know, and the first thing that enters your mind is, "What is there good about that guy that I know?" You find that big people discuss ideas, average people discuss things, and little people – they just talk about other people. And you realize that if you put this all together, you get a little humility, a little tolerance, a little honesty, a little sincerity, a little prayer – and a lot of A.A.

-From the Second Edition Big Book story "There's Nothing the Matter with Me!" page 507 & 508