

## A N O T H E R L O O K.

There are probably as many definitions of addiction as there are theories or ways of thinking based on both research and personal experience. It is not surprising that there are many areas of honest disagreement in the definitions that we hear. Some seem to fit the observed and known facts for some groups better than for others. If we can accept this as a fact, then perhaps another viewpoint ought to be examined in the hope that we can discover a way more basic to all addictions and more valid in establishing communication among all of us.

If we can find greater agreement on what 'ADDICTION IS NOT' then perhaps what it is may appear with greater clarity. Maybe we can agree on some prime points.

### 1. ADDICTION IS NOT FREEDOM.

The very nature of our disorder and its observed symptoms points up this fact. We addicts value personal freedom highly, perhaps because we want it so much and experience it so seldom in the progress of our illness. Even in periods of abstinence freedom is curtailed. We are never quite sure if any action is based in a conscious desire for continued sobriety or an unconscious wish to return to using. We seek to manipulate people and conditions and control all our actions, we thus destroy spontaneity an integral mark of freedom. We fail to realize that need for control springs from fear of losing control. Fear, based in part on past failures and disappointments in solving life's difficulties, prevents us from making meaningful choices; choices which if acted upon would remove the very fear which blocks us.

### 2. ADDICTION IS NOT PERSONAL GROWTH.

The monotonous, imitative, ritualistic, compulsive and obsessive routines of active addiction render us incapable of responsive or meaningful thought and action. Personal growth is creative effort and purposeful behavior. It presupposes choice, change and the capacity to face life on its own terms.

### 3. ADDICTION IS NOT GOODWILL.

Addiction insulates us from people, places and things outside of our own world of getting, using and finding ways and means to continue the process. Hostile, resentful, self-centered and self-concerned we cut off all outside interests as our illness progresses. We live in fear and suspicion of the very people we have to depend on for our needs. This touches every area of our lives and anything not completely familiar becomes alien and dangerous. Our world shrinks and isolation is its goal. This might well be the true nature of our disorder.

All that has been said in 1 to 3 above can be summed up in .....

### 4. ADDICTION IS NOT A WAY OF LIFE.

The sick, self-seeking, self-centered and self-enclosed world of addiction hardly qualifies as a way of life; at best perhaps a way to survive for awhile. Even in this limited existence it is a way of despair, destruction and death.

Any real and expanding way of life or true lifestyle seems to demand the very things missing in addiction; FREEDOM; GOODWILL, PERSONAL GROWTH, CREATIVE ACTION.

With Freedom, life is a meaningful, changing and advancing process. It looks forward with a reasonable expectancy to a better and richer realization of our needs and desires.

Goodwill is an action that includes others besides ourselves. A way that considers others as important in their own lives as we are in ours. It is hard to tell whether goodwill is the key to empathy or vice-versa. If we accept empathy as the capacity to see ourselves in others knowingly, without losing our own identity;

*then we recognize a awareness* in both and if we have accepted ourselves how can we reject another. Affection comes from seeing similarities, intolerance from seeing differences that we will not accept. A principal benefit of goodwill is peace of mind.

In personal growth we use both freedom and goodwill in cooperation with others. We realize we cannot live alone; that personal is also interpersonal. To find better balance we examine personal, social and spiritual values as well as material values; maturity seems to demand this kind of evaluation.

Self-creative action is not a mysterious or hidden procedure altho' it is an inside job in rebuilding or re-integrating our disordered and fractured personalities. Often it means simply to listen to those hunches and intuitive feelings that we think would benefit us or others and act on them spontaneously. Here is where many basic personal principles of action become apparent. We are then able to make decisions based in principles that have real value to ourselves. As we become more self-reliant and gain in self-respect we know that we are neither inferior nor superior to anyone; our real value lies in being ourselves. Self-hood is a daily practice without end, a growing process of constant change and an awareness of self-extension and worth in humility.