

## PREPARING FOR THE THIRD CONCEPT OF SERVICE

(Read pp16-19 of the “Twelve Concepts of World Service”)

### **THE THIRD CONCEPT OF SERVICE**

**We serve by acting on our conscience through our “Right of Decision”  
and we trust others when they exercise their ‘Right of Decision.’**

In preparing for the study of the third concept of, the “Right of Decision,” let us examine the following questions:

1. Am I acting in any area of my life that is contrary to my own conscience?
2. Am I mistrustful of the decisions of others in authority over me?
3. Am I demanding that anyone else act contrary to their conscience in order to please me?

“UNITY INSURES RECOVERY THROUGH SERVICE”  
MEETING OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

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Homework: Writing Inventory on the Third Concept of Service  
By Dennis F.

The principle behind the third concept of service is that we serve by acting on our conscience through our “Right of Decision.”

We also trust others when they exercise their “Right of Decision.”

This concept says that as a trusted servant I am expected to serve by acting on my conscience. I am not simply a messenger. I do not neglect consulting others though. I first exercised my “Right of Decision” in the third step when I decided to turn my will and my life over to the care of God. I now exercise it by choosing to pray for direction in all areas of my life: personal relationships, work, and other areas.

When I act in accord with my conscience I am a peace.

The reading points out the importance of A.A. groups respecting the right of its trusted servants to act on their conscience:

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**As a traditional means of creating and maintaining a clearly defined working relation between the groups, the Conference, the A.A. General Service board and its several service corporations, staffs, committees, and executives, and of thus insuring their effective leadership, it is here suggested that we endow each of these elements of world service with a traditional “Right of Decision.”**

Within the framework of their general responsibilities, whether these be defined by charter, by resolution, or by customer, it should be the traditional right of all world service boards, committees, and executives to decide which problems they will dispose of themselves and upon which matters they will report, consult, or ask specific directions. We ought to trust our world servants with these discretions, because otherwise no effective leadership can be possible. Let us consider in detail, therefore, why the need for a “right of decision” in our leadership is imperative, and let us examine how this principle can be applied practically in all levels of our structure of world service.

Knowing that theirs is the final authority, the groups are sometimes tempted to instruct their delegates exactly how to vote upon certain matters in the conference. Because they hold the ultimate authority, there is no doubt that the A.A. groups have the right

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to do this. If they insist, they can give directives to their delegates on any and all A.A. matters.

But good management seldom means the full exercise of a stated set of ultimate rights. For example, were the groups to carry their instruction of delegates to extremes, then we would be proceeding on the false theory that group opinion in most world service matters would somehow be much superior to Conference opinion. Practically speaking, this could almost never be the case. There would be very few questions indeed that “instructed” delegates could better settle than Conference acting on the spot with full facts and debate to guide it. Of course, it is understood that complete reporting of Conference actions is always desirable. So is full consultation with committee members and general service representatives. Nevertheless, the “instructed” delegate who cannot act on his own conscience in a final Conference vote is not a “trusted servant” at all; he is just a messenger.

Bill further poses the delicate question of how to relate ultimate authority and delegated responsibility and gives us this insightful answer:

Some traditional and practical principle has to be devised which at all levels will continuously balance the right relation between ultimate authority and delegated responsibility. How, then, are we going to accomplish this?

The right A.A. solution for this problem is found, however, in the latter part of Tradition Two, which provides for “trusted servants.” This really means that we ought to trust our responsible leaders to decide, within the understood framework of their duties, how they will interpret and apply their own authority and responsibility to each particular problem or situation as it arises. This sort of leadership discretion should be the essence of “The Right of Decision,” and I am certain that we need not have the slightest fear of granting this indispensable privilege at nearly every level of world service.

There will always be plenty of ultimate authority to correct inefficiency, ineffectiveness or abuse. If the Conference does not function well, the groups can send in better delegates. If the trustees get badly out of line, the Conference can censure them, or even reorganize them. If the Headquarters’ services go sour, the trustees can elect better directors and hire better help. These remedies are ample and direct. But for so long as our world services function reasonably well – and there should always be charity for occasional mistakes – then “trust” must be our watchword, otherwise we shall wind up leaderless.

The other aspect of the concept mentioned in the reading is how I apply the principle of the “Right of Decision” to others. In the last paragraph of the reading Bill says that “Our entire A.A. program rests squarely on the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust A.A., and we trust each other.”

I need to see that I release others with love to their own decision especially when I disagree with them. I now see you as a trusted servant so I trust your right to act in accord with your conscience.

This “Right of Decision” should never be made an excuse for failure to render proper reports of all significant actions taken; it ought never be used as a reason for constantly exceeding a clearly defined authority, nor as an excuse for persistently failing to consult those who are entitled to be consulted before an important decision or action is taken.

Our entire A.A. program rests squarely upon the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust A.A., and we trust each other. Therefore, we cannot do less than trust our leaders in

service. The “Right of Decision” that we offer them is not only the practical means by which they may act and lead effectively, but it is also the symbol of our implicit confidence.

End of Reading

## COMMENTARY

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This concept centers around one word, “trust”. The last paragraph of the reading on the third concept (“Twelve Concepts for World Service,” p.19) states this principle:

Our entire A.A. program rests squarely upon the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust A.A., and we trust each other. Therefore, we cannot do less than trust our leaders in service. The “Right of Decision” that we offer them is not only the practical means by which they may act and lead effectively, but it is also the symbol of our implicit confidence.

God has the ultimate authority for my life and he “trusts” me by delegating to me certain responsibilities to carry out. He loves me so much that he shares his freedom with me. He gives me free will through my “Right of Decision.” He does not treat me like an errand person. He wants me to act on my conscience.

I am then to “trust” you as you act on your conscience with your “Right of Decision.”

In its most basic form, my “Right of Decision” is really my “Right to Pray.” It is not a 50/50 relationship between God and myself. It is 99% God and 1% me. I do not take credit for my efforts since God supplies the power I need to make efforts. He is also in charge of the results.

The 1% that I do is to decide to pray. This is the choice I have in life: to pray or not to pray. The question is: will I pray for help or not when my defects, my old ideas, present themselves in sobriety.

When I feel a defect coming over me, - such as loneliness, depression, lust, greed, the only way out is for me to pray. If I choose not to pray, then that defect will overcome me as it always has. But if I choose to pray, God will remove it then and there. That’s the meaning of applying the sixth and seventh steps to my life: I now have a choice if I decide to pray. I am not at the mercy of my defects.

The same meaning applies to step one. After the first step, I have a choice whether I will drink or not drink if I pray for sobriety when the desire to drink comes over me. Before step one I did not have the choice whether I would

drink or not. I had an obsession to drink and I was going to drink whether I wanted to or not.

The first time I used my “Right of Decision” in the program was when I got sober. I was in the middle of a drunk and I had about six glasses of wine (I was a blackout drinker who always finished drunks) and I exercised my right to decide to pray as drunk as I was. I said, “Father, if there is a God, could you make me sober?” That was the last drink I had. God had given me the opportunity to pray and I exercised my “Right of Decision.”

God will always hear me if I will turn to him in prayer. My problems are caused by my refusal to pray since I arrogantly assume I can handle whatever situation I am in without divine guidance. This is a good description of the basis of my pride.

My pride nearly killed me. When I was in danger of dying from my alcoholism, it was my right to decide to pray for help that saved me. This is the foundation of the third concept in my life: I have a daily “Right of Decision” to be sober or not thanks to the miracle of the first step in my life. I have a similar “Right of Decision” in the sixth and seventh steps over my defects of character.

The third step, third tradition and the third concept are interrelated. I have the right to make the third step decision: I turn my will and my life over to the loving care of God through my “Right of Decision” to place sobriety first in my life.

I have the right to come to him in prayer and turn it all over to him and tell him that the only desire that I have is the desire to stay sober and serve him. I have the right to make this decision daily. I have the right to start all over again right now and turn over areas of my life that I’ve taken control of today. This is the “Right of Decision.” I can turn it all over to God. I always have this right and God will never make me the victim of my obsessions and deny me this right. He gives me this right in the third step, in the third tradition, and in the third concept of serving.

The other aspect of the third concept of service is the trust I need to have in you concerning your “Right of Decision.”

I not only have the right to act the way my conscience tells me to act, but I also need to respect your right to decide to act in accord with your conscience.

God trusts me so he delegates certain responsibilities to me in life to carry out. He gives me certain talents. He expects me to make decisions so that I can be of service. He does the same with you. I need to respect your “Right of

Decision” because it is God given. I especially need to respect your right to decide when it conflicts with my views.

The third step, tradition and concept of service tells me to respect your right to turn your will and your life over to God by not trying to control you. The equivalent principle in Al-Anon is “release with love.”

In working with others, I need to respect the alcoholic’s right to drink. I do not force my way of life on you. You have your own Higher Power and you will come to sobriety at the right time just as I did. I am living a program of attraction and not promotion when I respect your “Right of Decision.”

I don’t demand that you understand God the way the I understand God, or that you understand the steps or the traditions or the concepts the way that I understand them. You have your own understanding and God gives you that understanding. I respect that in you.

I especially need to respect the “Right of Decision” of those in my life who are close to me and those who are placed over me.

When I disagree with loved ones I need to give up my old idea of insisting that they act contrary to their conscience in order to please me. Instead I now try to respect their “Right of Decision.”

Instead of rebelling at authority I need to respect it as God given. People could not exercise authority over me unless God gave it to them or permitted it.”

It is even more important that I respect God’s “Right of Decision” in my life. My relationship with you is a reflection of my relationship with God. If I truly have trusted God with my will and my life because I wish to stay sober then I will trust others with decisions that affect me since I trust God to care for me.

But if I am distrustful of others in my intimate and work relationships then I am really saying I don’t trust God to care for me emotionally and financially. If I’m angry at you, I’m angry at God. If I’m lonely, I am not one with God.

God has the right to do whatever he wishes with me and with my relationships to people and money. When I am secretly angry with God, I become depressed. I blame him for my difficulties instead of praising him for my challenges that I may grow spiritually and thus stay sober. Since I am using my “Right of Decision” to turn my will and my life over to his care, I am giving him the right to use me in whatever way he wishes to carry the message.

God has the right to do anything with my life that he wishes because he is God and I am not.

My third concept of service prayer is, “Father, may I have a trusting attitude in your loving ‘Right of Decision’ when life is difficult for me. Thank you for giving me the right to come to you in prayer to run my life for me.”

As we prepare to meditate, let us review the “Homework” suggestions for the third concept: am I acting in any area of life that is contrary to my own conscience? Are there any areas that I am trying to manage myself that should be surrendered to God?

Am I at one with myself in my relationship to God and AA? Is my conscience at rest in my intimate love relationships? Am I at peace with myself in my work area and related talents?

Do I need to exercise my “Right of Decision” to surrender loneliness, lust, or financial insecurity?

The other aspect of the third concept is my respect of others to act in accord with their own consciences. Am I demanding that anyone else act contrary to their own conscience in order to please me?

The third concept leads me to respect the “Right of Decision”, is for me to learn to disagree without being disagreeable, to release differences with love, to state the truth as I understand it in a loving way. When others disagree with me, do I still love them? Sometimes the most loving I can be is to simply be polite.

Let us pause to see if we are respecting the “Right of Decision” in others in A.A., our relationships, and at work. Am I mistrustful of the decisions of others in authority over me?

As we see where we need to change, let us exercise our “right to decide to pray” in our meditation and surrender ourselves to God to be changed that we may give greater love in our service relationship with each other.

*(Pause for three minutes for meditation.)*

Working a step, tradition, or concept to me means that I am willing to take written inventory and allow it to surrender something within me. The third concept suggests to me that I surrender any part of my life that is not in full conformity to my conscience.

My “Right of Decision” is my right to decide to pray that I may be one with God’s will. Let us write inventory on any area where we are not totally surrendered and need to exercise our “Right of Decision” to change.

HOMework: WRITING INVENTORY – PART ONE  
(My “Right of Decision”)

- 1) GOD and A.A.: Am I at one with myself in my relationship to God and A.A.? Do I have a sobriety based on trust because I work the program or do I have a faithful sobriety?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: Sometimes thoughts from the past come to me saying that I will drink again.
- b) What did I do wrong? I accept old ideas.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Trust him through exercising my “Right of Decision” to work the program of A.A.

- 2) HOME: Is my conscience at rest in my intimate love relationships? Do I need to make some decisions to bring my home life into conformity with God’s will for me?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I complain if my routine is changed.
- b) What did I do wrong? I am slow to accept and adjust to unexpected changes.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to trust God’s “Right of Decision” to run my schedule as he sees fit.

- 3) WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Am I at peace with myself in my work?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I think God expects me to be more productive in my business area than I have been recently and to make some decisions that will probably be unpopular.
- b) What did I do wrong? I dread what is expected of me.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Surrender my fear and comfort and plunge myself wholeheartedly into God’s work plans for me and exercise my “Right of Decision.”

HOMWORK: WRITING INVENTORY – PART TWO  
(Your “Right of Decision”)

- 4) GOD and A.A: Do I respect your “Right of Decision” to differ with me in AA?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I sometimes withdraw if someone doesn't agree with me.
- b) What did I do wrong? I interpret disagreement as rejection.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to stay involved and accept disagreement lovingly since you are exercising your “Right of Decision.”

- 5) HOME: Do I trust my mate and others at home to make their decisions as they understand God or do I feel I need to improve and regulate your life? Do I release with love or am I still a controller?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I don't always accept decisions at home that I disagree with.
- b) What did I do wrong? I don't show mutual trust in my relationships.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to respect my mate's “Right of Decision” and release with love.

- 6) WORK AND OTHER TALENTS (arts, sports, etc.): Do I respect the right of others to disagree with me? Do I love them as much after they disagree with me as I did before they disagreed with me?

INVENTORY EXAMPLE - (Try to condense to three sentences.)

- a) The Story: I disagree with the opinion of a business associate.
- b) What did I do wrong? I get negative and judgmental about him because he disagrees with me.
- c) What would God have me do instead next time? Pray to respect his “Right of Decision” but still follow my conscience without being negative toward him.