

Connecting – we are men who choose another to walk with—shoulder to shoulder

By Steve Conroy

Steve Conroy is a Wisdom Elder from Northern California.

For Illuman men, connecting is one of the five touchstones we want to advocate as being a necessary component in all aspects of our work, from the Journey of Illumination to our Chapter events like the MROP or Firmings, and from how we meet communally to our one-on-one relationships. We want the five touchstones to permeate all aspects of our communities.

One of the touchstones is connecting. Truly connecting should be one of our highest goals. As such, we need to know what is meant by connecting. There are many nuances to connecting, but the purest sense of connecting is the joining. To be really connected is almost as if two separate entities become one—much like a marriage.

Of course this kind of connecting between men could be very uncomfortable. Most of us do not want to be that intimate with another man. It's a risk and implies doing the even riskier thing of loving another man. But connecting, and even loving, does not always mean there has to be a marriage. That kind of love and intimacy can and does exist outside of matrimony. A good example is the relationship between King David and Saul's son Jonathan. When they met, "There was an immediate bond between them, for Jonathan loved David."

Likewise, just as it would be hard to imagine being married to multiple partners, the ability to truly connect with another seems, by nature, to exclude. Most of us simply are not able to be that open with everyone and, in fact, it may be just one or two people that we truly feel connected to. Finding those people and maintaining those relationships are paramount when furthering the spiritual journey but, just like with many marriages, there are failed attempts to connect so we need to be discerning in our search.

A good starting point could be with a group of people. In AA, alcoholics are told to find a sponsor. Connecting with a sponsor is vital to maintaining sobriety. Newcomers are asked to look for a sponsor from within the local AA group, someone who demonstrates qualities that the newcomer would want in himself. Being part of the group and knowing there is this "other" out there gives alcoholics safe space and support to make healthy choices.

Ultimately our goal is to find these one-on-one relationships with someone who will truly listen to us—and to whom we will truly listen. Sakej Henderson says, “to truly listen is to risk being changed forever.” We are on a spiritual journey and we need someone who will be there, maybe not from start to finish, but someone who walks with us a significant way. So, like any man attempting to climb a high mountain, a good way to ensure success is to get yourself a good Guide (an Elder or a Mentor) who has been there before and knows the way. Some of us may need more than just a guide, possibly a Sherpa (Spiritual Director or Therapist) who can help carry some of the load when things get too heavy. Sometimes good guides are hard to find, but there is another man who wants to venture up the mountain with you. You decide together that you will start out, trying to find the way as a duo (Soul Brother).

It seems we all must undertake this journey, whether we want to or not. For many of us the journey has been hard, with lots of struggles and suffering along the way. But the mountain top will not come to us and usually, when we get to one peak, we see there is another. The journey never ends. Thankfully we do not have to venture out alone.

Helpful Resources:

- Bill Wilson, *The Big Book Alcoholics Anonymous*
- Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*
- Thomas Dubay S.M., *Seeking Spiritual Direction: How to Grow the Divine Life Within*