

*Experience, strength and hope from Al-Anon members for times when you can't get to an Al-Anon group*

Dear Loners

October 2020

This month Bronwen sent me this share: **Steps Eight, Nine, Ten onwards with 7 Rs that helped me**

We read our Twelve Steps every meeting. It took me months to get my head around them, though the first really sang to me. The reason I was here? I was powerless over alcohol and my life had become unmanageable. That was crystal clear to me. But I also heard things... 'Easy does it'. 'Take your hands off the alcoholic and put them on your own shoulders.' And I heard 'There are no musts in Al-Anon'. I used those to start my healing, plus the help of my sponsor. We need that breathing time sometimes... just to be able to relax and see how things are... just to hear others who have similar issues is comforting. But working the steps is the real magic. This month is the 9<sup>th</sup> month, so I'm talking about Step Nine, making amends.

My first thought was 'it's not my fault, I'm not the one who's drinking'. That's true, but it doesn't mean everything I do is saintly. I can be mean, selfish, inconsiderate, and manipulative. It's okay. We do the best we can with the knowledge we have. We do whatever we can to survive. What the steps promise is more peace, more calm in my life. Maybe even some happiness? The people whose lives were much worse than mine actually seemed much happier than I was. I could do with that. It was enough to keep me coming back.

So I did do the first five steps very quickly and got great relief. Then I took a breather, and sat back and enjoyed the view. That was nice too. No musts, no deadlines. **But gradually I felt the need to do something to make up for what had happened to my boys in their childhood.** Many of you may know my story... of walking out to make space for my husband's girlfriend, and letting go of my three kids. I did the best I could at the time. But the guilt and shame of having left them... that sat with me ever since. The heartbreak. The hopes that were shattered. I really believed that the men in my life would change their minds, would relent, would give me my kids back. But it remained two school holidays a year and two weekends a month. It seemed mean and vicious to me. **BUT I had actually walked out of that door and away from my boys.** I needed to make amends to THEM.

So there was Step Nine. "Made direct amends to THE people (WE HAD HARMED) wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others." I really wanted to do Step Nine for my boys. It was all so hard. It continued to haunt me. Then I realised I had been making amends to my boys for years. Which was good news! I did different things for each of them, and new things come up even now, ways that I can make things better with them. I have also worked Step Nine with my husband, who deserves as much love and care and support as I can

give him. He has stayed sober for ten years, for which I am deeply grateful. I can be a mean and nasty bitch, BUT I can make amends.

There are other people on my Step Eight list. Maybe one day I will get to them and do Step Nine on them. Maybe not. But these days, I try and make amends immediately... by working Step Ten: "continued to take personal inventory and when wrong promptly admitted it." It's so much easier. I realise what I did, I say sorry. I don't have to **agonise**. **Agonising** is **not** one of the 3 A's we use in Al-Anon. The 3 A's are Awareness, Acceptance and Action.

But what I REALLY WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU is what helped me work Step Nine. It's my REPAIR KIT. **The 7 R's for Relationship Repair Kit.**

**1. RECOGNISE** I **recognise** that I need to put this person on my amends list. It's a bit like the first of the 3 A's... **Awareness**. I suddenly (or gradually) **honestly** wake up to the fact that I could have treated that person better, or that I did things that were mean or greedy or downright destructive to them. No matter how they behaved to me, **I always did have the option of not** responding in a knee-jerk reaction. I **recognise** that I did it, that harmful thing, and that I need to make amends if at all possible. In *How Al-Anon Works* it says "Prayer and **self-honesty** are illuminating".

**2. REGRET** This feeling of **remorse and regret** that I could have treated someone better... it's there, it's a feeling of sadness, of the fact that time has passed and I have a better understanding of how my behaviour could have affected them. I also experience this when I use the second of the 3 A's... **acceptance**. I accept that I did something that was not good. I accept it was the way it was and I can't rewrite it. I ALSO feel this sense of great sadness, or even grief and I can cry about it and feel what I need to feel instead of numbing myself and pretending that everything I did was fine when it wasn't. I recognise this feeling of remorse, sadness, loss (of my self-control maybe, loss of my values, loss of my reason) when I look at the way I acted, and it's jolly uncomfortable. But I don't have to sit and stew in it. Ongoing **regret** is unhelpful and even unhealthy. I need to move on and do the next right thing. In fact I **resolve** to do that... So I move on to resolve.

**3. RESOLVE** How can I possibly fix something that has already passed? I need some RESOLVE. ). I **resolve** (promise myself) not to feel sorry for myself, I **resolve** to try not to do such a thing again. I **resolve** to learn to behave better. I **resolve** not to expect others to do all the hard work, and to do some myself. This is a huge part of my recovery. My sponsor calls it 'putting on my big girl broeks'.

**4. REVIEW...** So looking at my baddies, HOW do I make things better? As it says in *How Al-Anon Works*, "It often helps to review the situation with an Al-Anon friend or sponsor in order to determine what would be most helpful to us and most appropriate to the situation. Prayer and self-honesty are often illuminating". Also **refraining**. My 5<sup>th</sup> R.

**5. REFRAIN** I can stop myself from doing it again. **Refrain.** As the book says even “Direct amends are not [the right thing] if they will cause further harm.” **REFRAINING** is indeed an interesting action. Or NON-ACTION. I can do it right now by using some of our slogans. “Listen and learn” (when I am about to answer back meanly). “Live and let live.” Huge, when I am about to dive in and take over and do things MY WAY, or they can hit the HIGHWAY... I try to refrain from shouting, giving advice, interrupting. It’s none of my business how other people live their lives. I am not the boss of them. “Let go and let God”. I can ask God to sort them out. I can switch that rather mean thought into the idea of sending them up to their higher power, and actually picture putting them on an escalator to God. Okay, no longer my problem. So doing those things, I have actually managed to **refrain** from causing further harm. Yay! This I see as an ongoing learning experience. I do it daily sometimes. Minute by minute, this refraining. I think ‘swallow the words, Bronwen, sit on your hands Bronwen’, and I **don’t** say the thing I was about to say. I **don’t** do the thing I was about to do. The book says, “Amends might be made by avoiding the harmful behaviour so that we will not hurt anyone else in the same way.”

**6. REMEDIATE OR REPAIR** In Step Nine. I can also make direct amends. *How Al-Anon Works* says, “By making amends we admit we are human like everyone else and cease to set ourselves apart from others. We do not beat ourselves up for having made mistakes, we merely admit that we made them and **do what we can to correct them.**” That’s **REPAIR**. I love those words. Making amends is part of the 3 A’s. It’s **ACTION**. Sometimes it’s impossible to repair the damage. But if I can **remediate**... it may make the awful thing a little bit less awful. **Remediation** for me was, in retrospect, working in the preschool field to help young kids, when I couldn’t care for my own kids. I did that, not knowing I was trying to heal myself. **Remediation** was finding the best way to make sure my boys were not harmed, that they were loved, even if I wasn’t there to love them, that they felt safe, even if I wasn’t there to help them feel safe, that they were protected from abuse, even if I had to call in social services, and that they knew they were mine, even though others had been put in my place. Working with Alateens is repairing and remediating my soul even more.

**7. RELIEF** I can feel a sense of letting go, that I have done the best I can with the knowledge I have, that I have moved on from the hurts of the past, and can focus now on the present and how to ‘do the next right thing’ and ‘sweep my side of the street’. This brings huge **relief**. Huge, huge, huge relief. In fact so big that there is a good chance I may have a spiritual awakening ‘as a result of these steps’. Which is Step 12. This is not something I can force or push or arrange or make happen. It either does happen or it doesn’t. In fact, these days I have these wonderful feelings of relief and calm and peace and safety and love in the strangest places and the strangest times, and it is truly healing. Thank you for letting me share.

We would love to hear from everyone re how you doing. Articles can be sent to the office for consideration. The lockdown has forced many of us to find alternative meetings. We have started a newcomers meeting on a Sunday evening at 17:00. If you would like to attend an online meeting, please contact us through the office or the website. The national website [www.alanon.org.za](http://www.alanon.org.za) has a few

WhatsApp numbers you can call for help or information. Our office is now able to courier literature orders to members. The book 'How Al-Anon works' [B\_22ZA] is on special until the end of October

The loner service essentially keeps in touch with members who are unable to attend meetings. One of the pros of the lockdown is that there are many online mtgs available to all members all over the country. Please contact the office to receive the zoom invitation to attend these meetings.

*Tradition Seven: Every group ought to be self-supporting, declining outside contributions.* Although we are under lockdown our office expenses still need to be paid. If you are able to help our bank details are below.

Many thanks, Stay Safe, Juliet

ABSA Bank, Oakdene, branch code 632 005). Current account no 1118881482.....in the name of **Al-Anon Information Service**. Please put your **name or group as a reference**.

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