

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

Dear Loners

December January 2021

A few thoughts from Bronwen as we enter the New Year

I find great peace and comfort in my garden. The grass and trees don't demand anything of me. They provide shade overhead and softness underfoot. That's a bit like Al-Anon. Al-Anon shades me from the pain in my life until I am ready to take a peek. The trees in my garden are like that. I can stay in the shade until I'm ready for the bright searching light of the sun.

I need the bright light to help me see the truth in my life. In Al-Anon we talk about the 3 A's... Awareness is the first. I need to really SEE how my life is at present. How sane is it? How open and honest? How safe? Am I in the right place right now? Do I need to find a place where there is more sun and less shade thrown at me?

In Al-Anon we discover that denying the things that are going wrong in our lives doesn't really help. Slowly, as I feel safer here, I find there are others with the same problems I have, and they have found answers that work for them. I find out that I can also find answers that will work for me, so gradually I can start to examine my life right now, and let some sun in, and see more clearly what works and what doesn't. Awareness, acceptance, action.... I get aware, I see things the way they are (acceptance) and I can ask or do my own assessment of what options I have. And then I have a choice of acting or not acting.

If I use Al-Anon as a tool, it works just as well as my fork and spade and bags of compost, and wheelbarrow and clippers. In my garden I also use a spade for digging. Not everyone wants to dig around in their past history, or even dig around in their current relationships. I find digging around is something I do a little bit of, every day. It's like a memory of something I did and that I don't feel so good about. Or it's something that was done to me. And it didn't feel right or okay. I look at it, like I look at that plant I pulled out. Does it need to be replanted in another space? Does it need more sun, more compost, and more water? Is that why it is looking so wilted and discouraged? I can plant it somewhere better. Like myself. Maybe I need to plant myself somewhere better.

My daughter the other day suddenly started giving me advice. I am so NOT used to being given advice. In Al-Anon we do not give advice. I found it distressing. She was telling me how I should behave but she didn't know the full story. Her advice felt more like criticism, or even punishment and rejection. I stopped her talking and said, as gently as I could; 'Can we not talk about that anymore?' and I changed the subject. It did change the conversation. She ended our chat a few minutes later and was clearly offended. I thought about it and decided that it was okay to have stopped what was painful to me. It was the right thing for me to do. I just needed to make it right with her, and for a few days we didn't talk while we both calmed down. Then I sent her some pictures of the latest flowers in my garden, and she replied, her usual cheery self. If she gives me unwanted advice again, I will know what to do. Simply change the subject. Or if that doesn't work, think about a kindly way to let her know what she is saying is not taking me to a safe space.

I have other ways of dealing with uncomfortable conversations. If I'm in a safer space I can actually listen. If I'm not, I can just excuse myself. "Oops, something has just popped up on my screen. I have to deal with it now. Can I call you back later or tomorrow?" Or 'The doorbell just went. Can I call you back?'

I have a compost bin that needs turning. Every day I empty new bits and pieces - peels, pips, shells, outer leaves, and I drop that in the compost. It's like sharing in an Al-Anon meeting. Things I am letting go of, sharing with the open ears of others. Things that are not so pretty, things that I need to let go of maybe.

So I go out to my compost bin and drop the bits and pieces in... and then pick up a fork and turn the pile over. In Al-Anon I do something similar. I call my sponsor and chat. I share with her the stuff in my life that is no longer serving me well. And turn it over to her listening ear. And we will sometimes let them lie, and sometimes she will help me turn them over in my mind and reconsider. Did I behave badly in that instance? How could I tackle a similar situation next time? I let the thought sit in my mind a bit, get comfortable with it, and am more ready next time to do the next right thing, or let it go and let God, or practice Easy Does It. Compost is made by turning and then letting lie. After a while it turns into a valuable asset to the garden though it started out with scraps that could have landed in the dustbin but were repurposed instead.

Like me. I could have landed in the dustbin. But I didn't. I am turning the difficult behaviours into useful, supportive ones. In Al-Anon I can learn to act in time to stop the harmful words or mean destructive behaviour, **from myself or others**. When I'm in a safe loving space... like a happy growing, productive garden... I can feel comfortable to be myself, and free to grow.

So, in Al-Anon I can choose what to plant in my mind and let flower in my behaviour. Like a garden, my growth in Al-Anon has been slow and gentle. I don't see the difference at once. Like my bean seeds that seem to take forever to germinate, my progress in Al-Anon is not always instant. And sometimes a seed sprouts in entirely the wrong place....like words from my mouth that work in one place with one person and not in another. Like my garden, the seeds I have planted in myself from Al-Anon only grow if they are fed and watered and cared for. Sometimes the sun is too hot and it burns me. That's life. I can put my sunhat on or move to the shade of my group's kindness. I can call a friend or read some Al-Anon literature, like the garden books and the online info on gardening; it's available at Al-Anon as well. I can buy books, I can search online. There is help available. I have found it here in Al-Anon where I am thriving and growing stronger and braver and so much happier.

Thank you all.

If you would like to attend an online meeting, please go to our websites www.alanongauteng.co.za or www.alanon.org.za to find contact details for online 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.

Stay Safe, Juliet

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