

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

Dear Loners

May 2021

FINDING OUR TRUE SELVES

Asking ourselves WHO we are, WHERE we are and HOW we are.... And WHAT we want to do about it

I have been hearing a lot recently about kids on social media... how some are driven to suicide after verbal and even physical attacks by their peers. Living in an alcoholic home can be scary too. The question came up in one of the Alateen groups... this fear of high school... the bullying and bad-mouthing that can happen... and the fear of being at home too. It is not fun or healthy to be the odd one out. It's scary when one is threatened or teased or physically harmed.

I don't often think about school, but I do know that there are kinds of people I don't trust, both from school and from being a young woman. And this lack of trust and fear of others has affected me in ways I didn't even realise. But I have started to heal. Is there a recipe to repair the damage? Yes! But it only works in a space that is safe and where one feels truly accepted, just as one is. I found it in Buddhism, then, as well, in Al-Anon.

Sometimes it's not even words, it's actions that can hurt. I remember my first husband who would spend hours on the phone talking to some or other woman, often right in front of me, certainly within hearing distance. I remember how inferior I felt, how 'less than', how useless and worthless. Have you been in love with someone who doesn't love you back? Yesterday, I suddenly realised that there are some questions we can ask ourselves to help heal the damage done in hurtful relationships where our sense of self has been damaged.

In Al-Anon I can now ask these questions, fearlessly. WHO am I? WHERE am I? and HOW am I?... And WHAT do I want to do about it?

Well, I got part of the answer in Step Four. This month, the 4th month, many groups have talked about the 'scary' step... the Fourth Step. "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves". And then, right after that, Step Five which says, "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

Those two phrases, coming after each other, used to pour dread into my heart. To me, they sounded very blameful, a lot like the way my first husband used to talk to me. Or NOT talk to me. It seemed to come out of his pores, this judgement, this pointing out of all the things that were wrong with me.

Then, in the middle of the night last night, I realised that if something is SEARCHING AND FEARLESS, it means that I can be **brave!** I can look at things that **are fearful and hidden**. That's what the step meant to me when I first came in. But by the time I got to Step Four, I had the support of my group and my sponsor, so I did feel brave, and could begin to look at things that I had hidden from myself in the past, whether or not they were scary. I could begin to get real.

In Al-Anon, I don't have to put myself down as some religious practices seem to expect. In Al-Anon, I can choose a Higher Power that is not authoritarian. Al-Anon invites me to choose a kindly Higher Power. I love

this idea that I have a Higher Power who does not judge me cruelly or mercilessly, as my first husband may have done, does not reject me, and does not punish me.

So, in that case, do I need to be **afraid** of this act that is searching and fearless? **NO! I can be like the toddler I once was**, so eager and happy to experience everything. **Toddlers are searching and fearless**. If you've ever been with a young child, you will notice their insatiable curiosity. They want to explore everything, learn about everything! Young creatures are like that. Completely fearless. So for me, doing the fourth step became a lot like being a toddler again, innocent, fearless, and very eager to learn.

So, being my curious self, what should I be asking myself? That brings me back to my thought that woke me up in the middle of the night... I need to re-discover WHO I am, WHERE I am, HOW I am.... And WHAT do I want to do about it?

That's what Step Four is all about. Re-discovering myself. Am I really the way I imagined myself? I think back to the way I described myself. Rudely outspoken. Charming when necessary. Bitchy when needed. Standing alone. Not needing friends. Knowing how to make things happen, getting people to do what I needed them to do. Mostly. And surviving, even if I didn't get what I wanted. Not being a victim.

When doing the fourth step, and seeing all these characteristics I labelled myself with, I gradually started to see that most of this was behaviour that I **had to do, in order to survive**. It wasn't necessarily behaviour that made me feel happy or fulfilled. In fact often, those qualities did not bring me affection, kindness or love. That behaviour brought me work, pay, independence. But it also brought loneliness and isolation.

I was surprised when I was welcomed back to Al-Anon... it was amazing to me. I didn't often get invited back to places. My blunt and cruel honesty often hurt people. I was not someone you wanted to mess with, unless you needed to get something done. But in Al-Anon, I started feeling safe for the first time in my life. I could start looking at myself kindly... and **I began to see that people were using me much as I was using them**. I was useful to fight their battles for them. I could say things straight to people's faces. My mom used me a lot to do that for her. Fight her battles. Put people in their place. She would smile sweetly, then tell me behind closed doors how angry she was and how upset, and what she really wanted to happen. Who really wants to do the fighting themselves if someone else will? I fought other people's battles. Because I could. Because I didn't expect to be liked or admired. I just wanted to get the job done.

So, doing Step Four, working through "Blueprint for Progress"[P5] I was indeed brave and tough. I roared through that workbook, answered everything, from cover to cover. Why not? I wasn't scared of what I would find. I already knew that I was the bitch from hell, and that I could survive. I had lost all that mattered to me... my children... and I had been labelled, as women in my culture who walk away from their children... a Jezebel, a mean-hearted bitch, a self-centred cow.

So, in hindsight, I can say that my toddler-like 'fearless searching' helped me find out WHO I really was underneath, and WHERE I was in my life, and HOW I was doing (not very well as it happened, but at least I knew where and how and why), and finally I started to figure out WHAT I WANTED TO DO ABOUT IT. I wanted to work the Al-Anon program. Please don't do the fourth step until you are really comfortable and trust your Higher Power. You also need a sponsor who can truly give you space to be your real self, warts and all. Then you have the team to take you through this truly healing step where you don't need judgement or blame or criticism, you just need clear thinking and lots of love.

Because I have something else to share with you. You don't have to change anything about yourself when you do the fourth step. Because the step itself reminds you who you really are. The problem is that the desire to change myself is actually an act of aggression against myself. Because our hang-ups are also our wealth. Our neurosis and our wisdom are made out of the same material. If I throw out my neurosis I also throw out my wisdom. Someone who is, for example, very angry also has a lot of energy: that energy is what's so exciting

about him or her. That's the reason people love that person. The idea is not to try and get rid of my anger, but to make friends with it, to see it clearly with precision and honesty and also to see it with gentleness. That means whatever my qualities, not judging myself as a bad person, but also not bolstering myself up by saying 'It's good that I'm this way, it's right to be angry all the time.' It's necessary to **not repress** that anger, but also **not to act it out**. It's about **letting it go**. I can see it, recognise it, acknowledge it... 'Oh, that's my anger, it's back again'. I know what I am and what I do. But I let it go. I don't get rid of it, I make friends with it, get to know it completely as part of what makes me who I am, and having experienced it fully, I can own it. **It's me, I can own it, but I can also learn to use it with care and wisdom.**

So, in working the fourth step, and then doing the fifth step with my sponsor and then feeling this incredible sense of relief and release and peace and calm... after in my case a great deal of crying and wailing and sobbing and wishing so much of what happened hadn't happened... I realised that everything that happened has made me who I am now. And it's okay to be me now. I am learning about how my mean-spiritedness is triggered, how my rage is triggered, how my fear is turned on, and how to experience my soft, vulnerable, sensitive side. I am learning how to use all of those ways of being without causing harm, without blaming myself or shaming or giving myself horrible names. I am a child of the universe, doing the best I can, and Steps Four and Five are helping me do it, together with my Al-Anon friends and sponsors and buddies and co-workers in service.

If you would like to, you could also think about **WHO** you are, **WHERE** you are right now, **HOW** you're doing, and **WHAT** you want to do about it. Working Steps Four and Five, being gentle with yourself, seeing what is, letting stuff go and starting anew (by doing 'Just for Today' or 'just for this second') we can find our true, real, honest, plain, ornery, unique selves, and find ourselves loved and appreciated, just the way we are.

Bless you all and Thank you for letting me share.

Thank you Bronwen. There are a few pieces of literature that focus on the Steps. Literature is available from our office or online. All literature will be couriered to you after payment has been received.

Members who receive these letters via post please consider receiving them digitally on your mobile phone via email.

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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