

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

Dear Loners

January 2021

Bronwen shares her experience, strength and hope .

How angry are you right now? When last were you REALLY REALLY ANGRY! Like smoke pouring out of your ears, and tearing things apart and shouting and screaming anger? How have you managed your anger?

I ask these questions at the start of the festive season because it's a difficult time for families of alcoholics.....just as difficult as it is for the alcoholics themselves. The overwhelming pressure of commercial advertising, social pressures, status seeking. Is my present to you going to be good enough, expensive enough, will I be judged for what I give you? And how about what you give me? Will it be thoughtful enough, generous enough? Do you care enough to get me what I would love to have? And the food! Will I cook the best Christmas dinner? How will we manage the alcohol-loaded mince pies, Christmas cake, Christmas pudding...the sherry, the hot toddies, the port after lunch? It gives me cold shivers, just the thought of it.

I did find the answer. I became Buddhist and married a Jew. Not doing Christmas was an unexpected bonus. But by then I had discovered that Christmas made me angry. When I came into Al-Anon there were a whole lot of other things that made me angry, but I only became aware of them or able to talk about them after a few years in the program.

The breakthrough for me came when the sweetest member of our group, the kindest, most thoughtful person, had a huge angry outburst against her alcoholic and her mother, a raging torrent which ended in tears, because often, hurt lies underneath the anger. Hurt... fear... or maybe both?

You know the saying "Hurt people hurt people"? When I heard that I recognized a deep truth. I felt a great deal of pain the way my second husband treated many people I loved... I fought back against it in every way I could, but in the end I just had to grit my teeth and actually chose them over him, no matter how badly they had behaved....because he had hurt all of us. I was angry. The anger came out every time I talked to him. It was in my voice, in my words, in my look, in my body language. It distressed our daughter so much that she chose to go to a distant university as soon as she finished school and didn't ever want to come back to live in Joburg. I didn't really acknowledge my anger even when she pointed it out to me. "Mom please don't talk to daddy like that".

In Al-Anon I started learning to let go of things I felt responsible for.... That was **not** my responsibility. I was not in charge of my husband's drinking or bad behaviour. I was not in charge of the ways my family behaved either. I was not in charge of making any of them happy. That thing "I am responsible for my own happiness" is huge. It also meant, as I told my husband, that HE was also responsible for **his own happiness**. I explained that he didn't need to give up his fun things if I didn't want to do them. He COULD DO THEM! AND enjoy them...and likewise for me. It was a breakthrough in our marriage. It also took away a lot of the hidden anger and resentment. We both got to do things that made us happy, and relaxed and mellow. We both didn't need to be so angry.

So, what have I learned about anger in the last 12 years in Al-Anon?

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1. **It's okay to cry.** Sometimes we cry in anger, and it turns into the underlying grief. That is good. It's a start of our awareness, which can blossom into acceptance and action.
2. **Anger is a human emotion,** and women are not encouraged to express it. Just as men are not encouraged to express hurt and sadness and weakness. That's not fair but it is changing.
3. **In Al-Anon we can express our anger,** and it helps to have a great sponsor who understands. It also helps that we each only have a limited amount of time to share at each meeting, otherwise people's anger, when it bursts out can stop anyone else from speaking. I have seen angry people go on for a very long time when that door is finally opened. Which it needs to be. There are guidelines in Al-Anon for how we share in meetings. This is helpful.
4. **Beating a pillow didn't really help me.** Doing the first 5 steps of the program with a sponsor and a loving Higher Power DID HELP. HUGELY.
5. **Learning about boundaries,** how to set them, how to respect other people's... all helped me tremendously to deal with my anger. It often handled the actual root cause!
6. **Step 9** does not require us to immediately make amends to people we have been angry with. We're allowed a special category for people we may never be able to make amends to. This is good. As we grow we can relook at those names. I have forgiven dead people, even though I didn't make amends for my part before they died. I'm okay with that. Next lifetime maybe...
7. **Anger is not the truth.** Anger is a feeling and feelings are not facts. We can get more facts.
8. **It helps to identify my anger, examine it, and treat it kindly.** "Oh, hello anger, my little anger, there you are. What will make you feel better?" Often it's ice cream. This also helps for fear and grief.
9. **I don't need to beat myself up for being angry.** I'm not God. I'm human and deserve love and kindness, not being beaten up, even by myself.
10. **Other people don't deserve my anger directed at them either.** It's the Al-Anon way. We are all equal. Anger need not be directed at me. It need not be directed at you. There are no musts in Al-Anon, but this is one of those 'obedience to the unenforceable' things.
11. **It helps me to feel my body,** notice what is happening in my body **when I am angry.** I feel my heart pounding. I see myself getting red in the face. I see myself staring hard and fiercely at the person or thing I'm angry at. I feel the desire to break things. I feel the desire to say cruel hurtful words. I feel the desire to destroy.
12. **It helps me to remove myself** from other people and **do something else.** I sometimes go for a long walk (not a drive. I'm not safe on the road when I'm angry. Neither is my husband). Since lockdown, I can dig in the garden. Marvelous. I wonder if that's why my Higher Power encouraged me to grow veggies. Digging is hugely therapeutic.
13. **It helps to meditate when I'm angry.** (You know. Step Eleven. Prayer and Meditation). In that step I am encouraged to listen to what my Higher Power thinks of the whole thing. I don't even have to ask. I just have to put the topic or person on an escalator up to God (or to the Universe which is my personal Higher Power). Or put the offender into a God Box. A good place to keep things under a lid. Maybe put a brick on top of it as well. An energy purer and more powerful than me will have better tools to sort the matter out.
14. **It helps to use a slogan.** The ones that help me when I'm angry are: 'Do the next right thing' (usually, shut up Bronwen). Or 'How important is it?' ('Not serious like a train smash' as a friend of mine used to say.) Or if it is **hugely important,** 'One day at a time'. (One minute. I will meditate on this one more minute then it's OUT of my mind. Out OUT OUT!)

That's enough. There are so many ways to deal with anger. None of us has to wallow in it or talk it up and make it bigger than it is. None of us has to pretend it never happens. None of us have to be less angry and happier than anyone else. None of us has to be MORE angry or LESS happy than anyone else. None of us has to do anything at all about our anger. We can maybe just let it be and love ourselves through it and

remember that we are all valuable and worthwhile just as we are, anger and all. It's okay to be feeling stuff. We have tools. As we grow, we see the causes of our anger, and being with people who love and care for us, and treat us with calm kindness and affection, we realise we are worth it. That's why we work it.... Because we're worth it. Thank you so much for letting me share.

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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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