

Loners' Letter *Gauteng & Districts*

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

29 May 2023

Dear Loners

This month a male member of Al-Anon, who chooses to remain anonymous, shares how his ten years in Al-Anon and working the Twelve Steps have helped him to transform his life.

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I suffered for many years with severe anxiety and panic attacks. To cope with life, I relied upon doctors, therapists and medication. Close to a nervous breakdown in 2013 my brother, who is in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), asked me to try the Twelve Step program and Al-Anon fellowship, and so my journey to a new life began.

There were many alcoholics on my mother's side of the family and she suffered badly at the hands of her alcoholic parents. So much so, that she never drank alcohol in her 88-year life. But my mother, I'd say was a "dry-drunk" and had all the character flaws of the "ISM" of the disease. (**I Sabotage Myself, I Separate Myself.**) Full of constant worry and negativity, she instilled in her seven sons values of perfectionism; the need to be the best in order to be accepted and loved by society.

The Twelve Step Program and our fellowship saved me from that dark, dark place. I'm always amazed and humbled by the simplicity of the Twelve Steps. My AA brother notes that he once challenged a speaker, saying how dare you say it's an "easy" program. The reply was: "Sorry, I said '*simple*', you heard the word '*easy*'."

The introduction to our Twelve Steps states: "Study of these Steps is *essential* to progress in the Al-Anon program". Not optional or advised. Being a studious person, I like this and have come to understand that my daily spiritual well-being is based upon the effort I make in a given day to follow these principles in all my affairs. It's a *simple* philosophy, but not *easy* at times.

I also love hearing sayings such as: "There's no magic wand to heal our broken spirit, but there's a magic word, *action*". Another one, I like is: "Lighthouses don't go looking for ships". I interpret these sayings as meaning; if I want to be saved and guided by the light of Al-Anon, then I need to do the work. I like this visualisation.

In my early days, an old Al-Anon magazine gave me hope too; "God gave me Al-Anon to mend my broken spirit". And ten years on, my life has changed beyond my wildest dreams.

For me, I have "come to believe", that there are two Higher Powers operating in my life today. An external power, greater than me, shines brightly from which I draw spiritual uplifting energy. For physical health, I may go to a gym or swim, cycle or walk. But, to keep my spiritual battery "charged", I use the following tools as my spiritual gymnasium: attending

meetings, being in a group, reading daily literature, sponsorship, service, prayer and meditation.

I also believe that I have an inner Higher Power and that is my conscience guiding me through my day. As part of my daily routine, I go on my knees as soon as I get out of bed and I say the Serenity Prayer and another prayer to anchor me ready for the day. To help me, I also visualise information from the Al-Anon book, *Blueprint for Progress* (P-91). Specifically, the two-and-a-half pages detailing a “Character Checklist”, which I see as the gold standard of God’s will.

On one side of the page are 42 characteristic traits offering **Good Orderly Direction**: to be kind, respectful, honest, humble... to name but a few. On the other side of the page is the opposite of those good traits, which were more applicable to me in my pre-Al-Anon days.

Today I need my Al-Anon tools more than ever. Active alcoholism has recently brought chaos to our family with my wife’s son and brother’s progressive drinking and addiction. They are succumbing to the disease that both their fathers died from. My wife suffered for 22 years with her previous husband’s alcoholism, he died at age 46, but she does not want Al-Anon and I am powerless over that decision.

At our last group meeting I saw the pamphlet *Alcoholism, a Merry Go-Round Named Denial* (P-03) and remembered how it helped me many years ago. One particular sentence in the pamphlet jumped off the page: “It is not true that an alcoholic cannot be helped until he wants help. It is true that there is almost no chance that the alcoholic will stop drinking as long as other people remove all the painful consequences for them.” The alcoholic has to feel the pain enough to want to change.

I’m grateful that Tradition Four allows me to share a short extract from outside literature, which helped me: “God has provided us with the perfect means to eliminate self-will. It is suffering. Pain is the only instrument sharp enough to prune away the excess of our wayward will.”

I understand now that my suffering was the sharp tool needed for me to try something new that has saved so many broken spirits and I will be forever grateful for our wonderful, world-wide Al-Anon fellowship.

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Thank you anonymous for sharing how joining Al-Anon has helped you and for explaining how you work the program on a daily basis. You are being an Al-Anon lighthouse by sharing your experience, strength and hope with our readers.

Best wishes

Clare

P.S. If you would like to send a share for possible publication, please forward your contribution to [alanontvl@absamail.co.za](mailto:alanontvl@absamail.co.za) with the subject “Loners’ Letter Submission”.

Al-Anon is a self-supporting organisation – we rely on financial contributions from our members to keep our offices open and our meetings going. Thank you to everyone who contributes.

### **Tradition Seven**

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