

Living with an Alcoholic –Struggles of the Family The role of Al-Anon in Recovery

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Alcoholism is a growing problem in our community and one that can be helped with the right education, support and treatment. In the previous issues of Tiranga broad range of alcohol related problems in our community were discussed. The focus of the articles so far has been on the individual with drinking problem. As we all know, when one person in the family has drinking problem it affects the entire family – spouse and children. Alcoholism is often considered a family disease. It also erodes relationships with friends, coworkers and others. So, it makes sense that we address what the families can do when it comes to dealing with an alcoholic individual in the family. Anyone who has experience living with an alcoholic will know how the families are devastated. Families are at a loss what to do and how to help. Some follow the cycle of same unsuccessful strategies. Others give up and relationships are destroyed. Al-Anon offers another option.

Al-Anon is a support group for the families of alcoholics. Now,

you will wonder how can families' attending a support group will help the alcoholic. Families tend to focus on the alcoholic individual. This program helps the families of alcoholics recover from the effects of loved one's drinking. Just as AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) is for the alcoholic when they choose to get help, Al-Anon is for the families of the drinkers.

After years of living with an alcoholic, families become demoralized, discouraged and are plagued by feelings of despair and hopelessness. They may even blame their own karma and are convinced that they are destined to suffer.

The shame and embarrassment of living with an alcoholic keeps the families from sharing about their plight with friends and relatives. They suffer in isolation. Sharing eases the burden of suffering. Al-Anon offers an opportunity to the families to share their experiences with others confidentially and without being judged. Often, this is the first opportunity for families to share their frustrations and pain.

Often families are reluctant to attend Al-Anon because of lack of understanding about these meetings. In our culture, because of our up-

bringing, the concept of going outside of home for help and talking to strangers about our personal problems is considered a taboo. But alcoholism is a crippling and devastating disease at many levels, and one does not need to suffer alone. Lack of awareness of Al-Anon meetings, and not knowing where to find one and nervousness about not knowing what to expect are other barriers to attending the meetings.

The attendance at these meetings is free. There essentially is no requirement to become a member of Al-Anon. Those who attend the meetings are referred to as "members." Al-Anon meetings are held in virtually every town in this country. You can find one by calling 1-888-4AL-ANON (1-888-425-2666) or by visiting al-anon.org. Although no appointment is necessary it might be helpful to call ahead to learn about the details e.g. directions, or if there are other questions about the meeting. People may find beginner meetings (marked by a "B") a good way to start.

A family member can attend an Al-Anon meeting even when loved one is still drinking and is unwilling to embrace recovery. Meeting will

still be of value to the family. It is encouraging to see a rise in the number of South Asians attending the Al-Anon meetings in the Central Jersey area.



Al-Anon, like AA, follows a 12-Step concept of recovery. These steps are nothing more than guidelines that have served to help with the recovery. The first step encourages individuals to accept the powerlessness over alcohol, which has made lives unmanageable. Another step is a belief that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. Each member is free to define the power in an own deeply personal manner. There is no affiliation with or discussion of any specific faith or religion at the meetings. The concept is similar to teachings of surrender in many faiths. After all, don't we often bow down in surrender when we visit a temple, gurudwara or a mosque?

Alcoholism affects people from all walks of life and people of all ethnic backgrounds and faiths. Those closest to the alcoholic individuals suffer the most. Families react to the behaviors of the alcoholics. The lives of families are consumed by the impact of behaviors of the alcoholic individuals. The families focus on every-

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thing that alcoholic does i.e. how much does he drink, where does he or she get the alcohol, worries of drinking and driving and so on. Families try to control the alcoholic's drinking, often unsuccessfully. Families take on the blame and guilt that really belongs to the drinker. Al-Anon meetings helps to kindle hope in the members who have lived so long with hopelessness and despair. Members also learn that they did not CAUSE alcoholism and they cannot CURE it. Al-Anon helps find ways to COPE with it more effectively. It teaches how the actions and

the reactions of the families help or not help with the recovery of the alcoholic in the family.

So, if you are or someone you know is living with an alcoholic, take the first step of attending the Al-Anon meetings, even if it is difficult to understand how it will help. Let hope replace your hopelessness and despair. Write to us at info@samhin.org if you have any questions.

SAMHIN, South Asian Mental Health Initiative & Network, is a non-profit organization that strives to address the mental health needs of the South Asians.





South Asian Alcoholics Anonymous
The First Presbyterian Church of Iselin

1295 Oak Tree Road
Iselin, NJ 08830
Note: Entrance on Middlesex Avenue

AA Meetings (FREE) Every Thursday
8:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

"AA Meetings for anyone with drinking problem and a desire to quit."