

STEP TWO

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Taking Step One brought us face-to-face with the truth: We were not equal to the task of changing any other human being. We needed more than our human experience and intelligence to solve the problems of living—especially of living with an alcoholic, whether still drinking or not.

The Second Step suggested that we were not alone with those problems if we “came to believe” that help was within our reach. The words “came to believe” meant a gradual awakening to the reality of a Higher Power in our lives. This Step brought us a glimmer of hope as we made our first timid moves toward establishing a working relationship with “a Power greater than ourselves.” We began to perceive that this Power was ready to help us whenever we were ready to accept its guidance.

What could this Power do for us? It “could restore us to sanity.”

This may have come as a shock to those of us who had always imagined it was only the alcoholic who needed to be restored to sanity. The very idea that we might not be sane usually brought heated denial. Whether spouse, parent, child, or friend, many of us came to Al-Anon convinced that all the insanity belonged exclusively to the alcoholic. We were dismayed to learn that we, too, needed to change. Al-Anon’s program was centered on us, the

friends and family who had been trying so hard to make some sense out of living, or having lived, with an alcoholic.

To admit that we were irrational may have required more humility than most of us had. Yet when we finally faced the fact that it was we who must change or live with continued confusion and unhappiness, we found ourselves better able to accept the idea that humility was a vital tool in getting the healing help we needed. This Step foreshadowed the entire spiritual scope of the Al-Anon program.

When we looked closely at ourselves and recalled what we were apt to say and do in various situations, we discovered that our behavior was often distorted by anger, frustration, and fear. That is why many of us reacted to the alcoholic in irrational, hysterical ways. In other words, our actions had not been sane. It would have been only natural for us to think of self-justifying ways to defend what we did, but we learned that our actions were indefensible.

Our irrational behavior took many forms. What about the husband who left young children with a drinking wife and worried himself sick over what could happen while he was away at work? Or the wife who was so scared of her violent husband that she did nothing to protect herself or her children from his unpredictable behavior? Or anyone who allowed a child to get into an automobile with a drinking parent at the wheel?

Consider also those of us who did everything we could to protect alcoholic loved ones from the consequences of drinking. We hid the addiction from relatives and friends, lied to employers, pleaded with judges, and even tried to carry the drinker to a comfortable bed so he or she wouldn't have to face having passed out on the floor the night before! Some of us were so confused, we thought drinking with the alcoholic would leave that much less for them to drink!

Sometimes actions of this kind were motivated by good intentions. More often they were fueled by rage and disappointment. There was almost always an underlying idea that something just might make the alcoholic stop drinking. All we had to do, we imagined, was to figure what that “something” was. Even that attitude was far from sane, we learned. Upon reflection, we had to decide whether our thoughts, words, and actions were those of well-balanced, reasonable people. If we realized they were not, then we looked for help—the kind of spiritual help to be found in Al-Anon.

Once we learned to see our situation as it really was, we understood why it was necessary for us to turn to a Power greater than ourselves. At that point in our Al-Anon experience, it might have been too soon to expect total trust in a Higher Power, especially since we thought we were self-reliant. We might have rejected the idea of a Power greater than ourselves, or once believed in God, but never maintained spiritual contact. We might have thought of this Higher Power only as a punishing God. Those of us brought up in a religious faith may have prayed for something to change the drinker into a normal, responsible human being.

At first some of us could only admit we were powerless to control the events of our lives. With the help and support of Al-Anon, trust in a “Power greater than ourselves” often came in time. That meant being allied to an unfailing source of security and comfort.

Though we may have had setbacks and disappointments, we learned to see these as stages in our growth and as opportunities to learn something we needed to know. They gave us a new perspective and prepared us for solutions we couldn’t have foreseen. With calm poise, we accepted disappointments, often unrelated to alcoholism, and saved wear and tear on our nerves. This also demonstrated our confidence that things would ultimately work out

as they were meant to be. This was by no means weak resignation, but intelligent recognition of the fact that life held experiences for us—some welcome, some not—but all of them offering insights.

As newcomers deep in despair, we may have come to Al-Anon already determined to make a radical change in our lives, such as court action, separation, or divorce. Other Al-Anon members who had been at this crossroad shared their experiences and pointed out that there might be other options available. As Al-Anon members, we never advised each other to take or not to take action. This was especially true for newcomers, who had not yet absorbed enough Al-Anon ideas to know they had other choices. We found that if we gave a member advice about what action to take, we were making unwarranted judgments and decisions that affected the lives of others. We could, however, share our own experiences and offer a measure of objectivity. Our detachment often led others to make reasoned decisions, rather than emotional ones. In helping ourselves, we helped others to be restored to sanity. Then they were better able to make their own decisions.

Thinking It Over

If I declare that “I came to believe,” it means my thinking is already moving forward from Step One, in which I admitted I was powerless.

I have come to believe there is a way for me to bring order into my confused life. These Steps will help me as I move on from one to the next.

Now in Step Two, I am acknowledging there is a Power greater than I am. I know that my human will and wisdom are limited.

There is so much I do not know about myself or others—even those who are close to me. There are things I may never know.

If my words and actions are prompted only by my own impulses, some of which may be negative, they can have troublesome consequences for me. When I have at last realized that my problems are too big to solve by myself, then comes the bright, reassuring thought that I need not be alone with them, if I am willing to accept help from a Higher Power.

A Step Two Story

For my first three years in Al-Anon, I had trouble with the Second Step. In spite of disclaimers in our literature and from members of the groups I attended, it seemed to me there was an effort to make me believe in a narrow, religious interpretation of these Steps. I had not lost my belief in a Power greater than myself, but I came from a background of generations of dissenters from orthodoxy. I wondered if to become a good Al-Anon member, it was necessary for me to believe in a God. Most of the time I kept my mouth shut, but I did a lot of troubled thinking about the theological implications of the Second Step. At a meeting, a longtime member said what I needed to hear to make me comfortable with the Steps in Al-Anon that mention a Higher Power or “*God as we understood Him.*”

“Why worry about interpretations?” she said. “I have come to believe that Al-Anon puts me in touch with the help I need to live a saner and more peaceful life. Why trouble myself in trying to define the power that I know is there? We ‘came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.’ Let’s keep it simple. The Steps are not commandments. They are a set of principles that can bring about a spiritual awakening. They describe

shared experiences. As long as I share in these experiences, I don't need to let words or interpretations get in my way."

Because it is so important for me to find my own way, I have also tried to respect other people's beliefs or doubts. I simply share my own strengths without trying to impose my beliefs on others. We are all equals, but we are not all the same.