

Alternate Delegate 2010 Fall Assembly Report

Why is Al-Anon Anonymous? I've sometimes heard long time members say, "I don't care who knows I'm in Al-Anon." While this is fine for an individual, I don't believe it's an example I'd like to set for other members of the group.

There are several reasons for Anonymity. I'd like to look at two of them.

First is anonymity inside the fellowship. Recently my county was host to a Hollywood film crew. One evening I missed one of my regular meetings. I was informed that one of the crew had been in the meeting and had been recognized by several of the members. Even though I am a member of that group I should never have heard about this person.

"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions," says the 12th tradition. Its importance is often overlooked. It insures that we are truly a fellowship of equals. No one in an Al-Anon meeting is more important than anyone else. When someone who is well known outside the rooms comes to us for help, we must be sure that we treat that person with the same dignity and care as we would any member. In Al-Anon we do not look "down on" or "up to" people who come to our fellowship for help, no matter who they are. In North Florida, we have it easier than some. I've always wondered how people who are well known in Hollywood or Washington, D.C. could ever receive the help that I did.

It's often hard to treat everyone as our equal, but Anonymity makes it easier. Only by not dividing ourselves into groups by political party, religion or other things, can we continue to function as a true fellowship.

The second reason that anonymity is so important is what can happen outside the rooms. I had a cousin with a drinking problem whose wife would not go to Al-Anon because someone "might see her going to the meetings." Our daily reader One Day At A Time in Al-Anon has a very blunt example of the corrosive effect gossip can have on a group.(p66. See also pages 18 and 230 in the ODAT) We often tell newcomers that if they meet another member in public, a nod is all that's called for. Mention of meeting or program in public can cause not only embarrassment to the other member but also actual harm if they are accompanied by someone such as a friend or co-worker who doesn't understand alcoholism.

Recently the media covered a family tragedy in the area. I was listening to a news broadcaster interviewing a prominent physiatrist, looking for answers. The broadcaster mentioned a report that some of family members had been to an Al-Anon meeting prior to the tragedy. I found that not only attendance but content of the meeting had been openly discussed by the media.

While we might want to "punish" an individual who would speak outside the meetings, we're reminded that "Al-Anon ... is a fellowship of equals, held together in close union by something called 'obedience to the unenforceable.'" (p305, ODAT) In other words, in Al-Anon we have not authority over others no matter how they act. And even though we know that a breach to the media could harm innocent parties, the greater damage can be in preventing people, like my cousin's wife, from seeking the help that Al-Anon can give.

I'm an Alateen group sponsor. I recently ask the members of an Alateen meeting if they knew what the word anonymity meant. None of them did. That question lead to some good discussion. Maybe it's time that we all dust off the Traditions and take a good hard look at tradition numbers one, eleven and twelve. It's especially important for us to make sure that all new comers understand the need for Anonymity.