

# Moving beyond grief and practicing acceptance

By Gary D., Maryland

My wife died from alcoholism after I had been in Al-Anon for five years. Going to a lot of meetings, working with my Sponsor, and getting loving support from members of the fellowship helped me through the darkest times leading up to her death and immediately afterwards.

Once I moved beyond my grief and got on with my life, questions of her death still haunted me: “Why did she die?” “Why did this happen to *me*?” “Why couldn’t I save her?” The logical, rational person that I am was perplexed and unsettled by these questions. Would I ever make sense of this part of my life?

Years later, I heard a member at a meeting say, “‘Why?’ is not a spiritual question.” The more I thought about that statement, the more profound it became. I came to realize that there is no real answer to the “Why?” question. If I kept asking why something happened, then I wasn’t practicing acceptance.

In the case of my wife’s alcoholism and subsequent death, I wasn’t applying the First Step—admitting my powerlessness. In fact, I had to acknowledge her powerlessness as well. In addition, I wasn’t accepting

that alcoholism as a disease, if not arrested, can be fatal. Acceptance of life on life’s terms is one of the primary spiritual principles of Al-Anon.

When I assume the “Why me?” pity posture, I allow the victim mentality to take hold. But why not me? Spouses of alcoholics can feel victimized in many ways: marital infidelity, physical abuse, financial ruin, to name just a few.

I have come to believe that my Higher Power never gives me more than I can handle (with His help). My wife’s death was certainly a major challenge for me. However, with the tools of the program, the support of the fellowship, and trust in my Higher Power, I have grown dramatically. I have stopped asking, “Why did this happen?” Instead, I ask the question, “*What* do I need to *learn* from this experience?” There can be many answers to this question. Asking this question helps to keep the focus on me, so that I can continue to change and grow. By taking responsibility for myself, I refuse to be a victim.

I have come to appreciate how much this difficult time of my life has contributed to my spiritual awakening.

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