

MEMORANDUM

TO: Conference Members
FROM: Executive Director
DATE: October 16, 2008
RE: Question regarding use of the A.A. "big book" at Al-Anon meetings

The WSO was asked at the 2006 WSC to send a copy of questions it receives from Conference members and our responses to all Conference members so that they can share leadership by responding to recurring questions in their Areas. The WSO believes that the following questions and our responses might be one of those topics.

Questions: Why can't the A.A. "big book," *Alcoholics Anonymous*, be studied at Al-Anon meetings? What Traditions is use of the "big book" inconsistent with and why? Why is the actual source material that Al-Anon was developed from being put aside? The "big book" is the authority on alcoholism; why would we keep it from our membership?

Answer: Although Al-Anon's roots are based in A.A., the A.A. "big book" is not and never has been Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature (CAL). In the very early days of Al-Anon, A.A. materials were used at meetings because we had very little material of our own. When our cofounder Lois W. wrote *The Al-Anon Family Groups* (B-5) in 1955 with the help of other pioneers and the support of her husband Bill, she intended it as *our* big book. Bill had not allowed her to write any part of the A.A. big book—even the chapters to the wife or the family—because his book was from the perspective and experience of alcoholics.

"Conference Approved Literature" came about from discussions held at Al-Anon's very first World Service Conference in 1961. The first few Conferences developed a process to give conceptual approval for the development of Al-Anon literature, and it was the will of the Conference to recommend exclusive use of CAL in Al-Anon meetings. Although the Conference grandfathered in several existing Al-Anon pieces, in keeping with Traditions One, Three, Five, and Six, the A.A. big book was not among them.

The exclusive use of CAL in Al-Anon meetings supports Al-Anon's First Tradition: that personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity. Al-Anon's Third Tradition states that as a group we have no other affiliation. According to our Fifth Tradition, our one purpose is to help families of alcoholics. Our Sixth Tradition states we are a separate entity that should always cooperate with A.A.

As it states on page 94 of the *2006-2009 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*, "It is well to remember that all A.A. literature is written for and from the viewpoint of alcoholics and is not Al-Anon/Alateen Conference Approved Literature. Reliance on opinions expressed in A.A. and other outside publications can distort the Al-Anon approach, particularly for the newcomer."

The big book *is* the authority on alcoholism *from the perspective and experience of the alcoholic*. It does not reflect the perspective or experience of the families and friends of alcoholics. It was not the original source for the Al-Anon program. The original source of the Al-Anon program was the shared experiences of families and friends of alcoholics and their application of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

Of course, as part of their personal recovery, Al-Anon members are always free to read any materials they choose outside of an Al-Anon meeting. Many find reading A.A. materials helpful in understanding the disease of alcoholism, but since time is so limited it is important to stick with Al-Anon materials in Al-Anon meetings. Those wishing to receive help in understanding the A.A. focus can usually find an open A.A. meeting.

For further information, see the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* (P-24/27), *Why Conference Approved Literature* (P-35), and *Al-Anon Spoken Here* (P-53).