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Busting Addiction and Its Myths Episode 8 Season 3

A Trip into Inner Space

This comes as quite a shock, and you would think the shock value alone (if the truth is recognized for what it is) would bring a light into the darkened room and keep it on, but the myth that a family member can do anything at all about their loved one's using dies hard. If she doesn't find the help she needs, the room will grow very dark indeed.

There is plenty of denial to go around, not just by the addict. The family has its own shame to deal with, not yet understanding that there is no shame in having a disorder and trying to cope with it in a constructive way.

It's when we make the turn away from focusing on the addict to "taking care of yourself" that the healing can start. Only then. Mothers feel understandably guilty that they are turning their attention toward themselves and feel as if they are "abandoning" their son. This is a difficult time for mom.

She might grasp the intellectual truth that there is nothing in her power to change her boy, but it is a heart-breaking emotional effort to shift the focus of

her efforts, nonetheless. She is faced with smashing a cherished illusion and the need to begin to accept a totally foreign idea that the answers are within her, for herself and for no one else.

We come now to the need for mom to look at her own space. There is her inner space and as a corollary, there is her outer space. Let's start with the latter.

The concept of space in the context of recovery, is what exists outside of ourselves and how we relate to the reality around us. One way this shows up in a healthy way is that we "see" the boundaries of others, and we clearly express that we expect others to respect ours. I like to think of this concept as swimming in your own lane. We are in the same pool, and we do not cross the lanes of others and expect others not to cross over and violate our own.

Most people in an addictive relationship, moms and wives, dads and husbands, are so used to crossing boundaries in the attempt to control the addict's using that they do not even recognize that they are doing it, and do not understand that their behaviour is fundamentally unhealthy and built on a faulty premise. That is, that nothing we try to do to change our addicts' behaviour will have any long-term effect on his using short of an intervention.

The perceptions of things that exist and happen outside of us, outer space- our beloved addict and his behaviour, our family and social relationships, our jobs – are directly affected by our own internal dynamics, by what I call our inner space. The space in our heads. This is where we need to look.

One the very first things one notices about family members in addictive, unhealthy situations such as living with an addict or alcoholic is how much head noise they endure, day in and day out. The addict lives in mom's head rent-free 24/7. The best she can do to free herself is to get completely immersed in something other than her obsession; often her job offers a distraction from her anxieties, or she may decide to start drinking just to numb her feelings – this is not an uncommon way to escape reality. Becoming a workaholic or an alcoholic are ways to avoid what is happening in mom's outer space.

What is she to do?

One life-changing moment that I experienced when I consulted a psychiatrist friend over my reactions to my own daughter's crazy addiction to cocaine in a city 1000 miles away, in Austin Texas, is the answer to a question I asked of him at the end of the hour. I asked him: "John, how am I doing with this? What's next?"

His answer has guided me to this very day: "Bruno, you're doing OK. Your Al Anon training is showing up in that you are not flying down there to find and rescue her, and you are at least going to work and getting in your fitness and your sleep. But you are certainly obsessed with your kid otherwise. And miserable much of the time". I answered: "Yes, you are seeing things clearly.

But now what?"

This is what has stuck with me to this day: "Bruno, do not let your daughter's disease steal your money or your peace of mind".

I changed my thinking from that moment on. The voice of a trusted friend and authority was what I needed to change my attitude from taking things personally to taking the right actions in order to protect my money and save my sanity.

That gave me the permission I needed to travel to Texas and confront my daughter so that I could liberate myself - or better yet have my higher power liberate me - from the effects of the disease. I said: "No more rent, no more car, no more spending money. You are on your own. Go get help, but either way, I won't pay another dime enabling your habit. You are a big girl. Get a job. Stop pretending you're going to school and needing money for this or that".

It turned out that she checked herself into a rehab about three weeks later. I think I had her hit her personal bottom sooner than she might have otherwise had I continued to finance her personal adventures.

So that was a beginning in taking my mind off my kid, to let my higher power take care of her, and start to take much better care of myself. I got honest with myself and started to address my own resentments, my fears, my personal assets, and shortcomings, and started to envision a joyful future for myself.

I attended Al Anon meetings, and still do. I was in a position after a few years to be of service to others who were in the same boat that I had been in.

I took up the practice of daily meditation which helped me immensely to quiet the head noise and bring calm to my inner space, so that I could have an unobstructed view of the space outside; outer space no longer represented a threat.

Best of all, I am now able to be fully present for whatever happens. I can give you my undivided attention, honouring the moments that we spend together, instead of judging or labelling you in some unfair way. I believe in my heart today that we are all God's children and you can accept my love or not. That's up to you.

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