Finding Unity Across Borders: Connecting with Members in Asia

From time to time, the Board of Trustees for Al-Anon Family Groups Headquarters, Inc. authorizes Trustees and Staff members of the World Service Office to arrange visits to Al-Anon Service Structures around the world.  The purpose of these visits is to encourage stability and support the growth of Al‑Anon and Alateen worldwide in the countries it supports through ongoing contact and correspondence.

When I learned I would be traveling to Asia with the Director of Programs in November 2024, I was thrilled and honored. I could never have imagined that my recovery journey would bring me to this point.

As the planning began, there were times when I could have found myself distracted by the alcoholics in my life and how I was affected by this family disease. There were moments when my recovery slipped, and I would have sunk back into the depths of despair had I not been able to keep the focus on myself and our mission.

The Asia trip was to include visits to South Korea, Mongolia, China, and India. Preparations included visa applications, fulfilling medical requirements, and, not to be underestimated, a tremendous volume of presentations. Staff at the WSO collectively contributed to the materials needed to educate and expand on the knowledge to support the various countries in growing their structures and Al‑Anon worldwide.

As I contemplate how to describe the experience of this trip, I can hardly find the words. How is it possible to find deep unity with so many in multiple countries, where the differences between us could be perceived as a barrier? Yet no barrier existed. Connecting through the eyes into the heart was a deeply intimate and personal experience that words cannot begin to convey.

Experiencing that unity reinforced my understanding of Al‑Anon’s primary focus: to help families and friends of alcoholics. Barriers created by outside issues need not exist in Al‑Anon.

The deep need to belong lives within all of us. Being part of a family affected by the disease of alcoholism is no different for members in the international structures than it is for me. The deep connection made with another Al‑Anon member is a significant part of our recovery anytime it occurs. Sharing that depth of connection with members who live in a different country, speak a different language, and are culturally in contrast to my own experiences could only occur because we united as Al‑Anon members.

The November 19 reading in [*A Little Time for Myself*(B-34)](https://al-anon.org/for-members/members-resources/literature/feature-publications/a-little-time-for-myself/), which came, fittingly, during our travels, says, “When I focus on the differences between myself and others, I feel isolated. When I look at what we have in common, I can appreciate the feeling of unity.”

A resounding example of this unity was hearing the Serenity Prayer spoken in multiple languages. I have participated in many discussions about what “prayer” to use when opening or closing a meeting. I do not speak Korean, Mongolian, Chinese, or Hindi; however, when I heard the Serenity Prayer spoken in any of those languages, whether in a small room with a board and volunteers or with 200 people in a large venue, there was no mistaking that I was listening to the Serenity Prayer. It was a profoundly spiritual and emotional experience that will remain with me.

With each stop, we better understood that experiencing and participating in local traditions was of paramount importance to the members. This included wearing traditional clothing and enjoying fellowship. While this stretched our comfort zones, the love and pleasure these experiences brought helped forge the bond between us and underscored how important fellowship is to our recovery. One unplanned moment that brought joy and a sense of belonging was when we connected a few members from Mongolia with members in India over a video call. Exclamations of “They are just like us!” resounded from both countries.

The Asia trip included several historic milestones. In South Korea, 100 members attended an all-day event. The visit to Mongolia was the first from the WSO; Al‑Anon meetings there only began 12 years ago. The virtual business and recovery meetings with China were the first ever to be held with over 200 members attending. And India held its first all-electronic meeting with members from all over the country.

Our first stop was South Korea, where the board had organized an assortment of activities. Meeting in the office premises was a proud and emotional moment for all as we saw the Conference Approved Literature translated into Korean stacked around the room, heard the phone ringing, and listened to the personal shares and history of the established General Service Office (GSO). Members had worked diligently to translate our presentations into Korean and produced an incredible workbook that all attendees received.

Next stop was Mongolia, a young structure with which the WSO has only been meeting for the last two years. They are still in the process of translating the[*Service Manual*](https://al-anon.org/for-members/members-resources/manuals-and-guidelines/service-manual/), other service tools, and Conference Approved Literature (CAL). So little is available to them, yet the program presented to members—including many who were attending an Al‑Anon meeting for the first time—was well organized. The willingness of members to serve, and their dedication to recovery, was evident in abundance.

Travel restrictions to China necessitated a pivot to [online meetings](https://meetings.al-anon.org/electronic-meeting-page/), which presented unique challenges and certainly supported our slogan “Together We Can Make It”! Many of us take for granted how easily we can join an electronic meeting at any hour of the day, but Chinese members are restricted in the electronic platforms they can access. It “took a village” to bring WSO Staff, Volunteers, members, and interpreters in China together, using multiple electronic platforms, for a presentation sharing personal experience, strength, and hope on the [Twelve Steps](https://al-anon.org/for-members/the-legacies/the-twelve-steps/). For all who participated, it was absolutely wonderful, and although most of us could only express our feelings through emojis, the love and appreciation were evident even through the electronic waves! For many Al‑Anon members in China it was memorable to have the opportunity to connect with our worldwide fellowship.

The established GSO of India, our final stop, serves a vast area, and Delegates and members traveled many, many hours on trains to attend the meetings held during the visit. Seeing the Serenity Prayer displayed in India’s multiple languages was powerful. The emotional impact on my heart reminded me how we can be connected despite differences in language. I was also humbled to hear how members consider their fellows who are not able to support themselves financially and have a desperate need for CAL, as well as many who do not read or write yet desire to hear about the literature from others to support their recovery.

Members from all the countries visited, whether in person or electronically, shared enormous gratitude, expressing how their understanding grew and how they were inspired toward greater service.

Although the physical journey of traveling for three weeks to multiple countries was tiring, the emotional journey of recovery that I was privileged to witness fills me abundantly and reminds me why we “Keep Coming Back,” why we do service beyond the group, and why we unite in Al‑Anon’s “one purpose.”

When we speak of Al‑Anon as a worldwide fellowship, we can do this knowing that no matter where we are in the world, who we are, or what community we belong to outside of Al‑Anon, when we come together in unity, there are no barriers; we connect intimately and our recovery soars.

*By Tracey S., International Services Manager*

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