

The Evils of Alcoholism - Part 3

Drinking alcohol is causing major issues with some individuals in our communities, the individuals involved think that they are having fun while drinking and have an illusion that they are doing well in life, not realizing that they are ruining their futures and resulting in negative impacts on people around them and their families. Not many people realize the living hell that is created when you have an alcoholic in the family, everyone around them has to suffer and endure the alcoholic person and it will negatively impact the future of every single person in the house.

Family members living in the presence of an alcoholic will have broken dreams, broken futures and broken homes, they will never excel academically or in sports or in business or any other venture, because there is the presence of negative energies around the individual involved.

Domestic Violence remains ever present in homes that have an alcoholic present and life becomes a 'living hell' for everyone living in the house with entire the entire family bearing the brunt of domestic violence, something else that is never discussed anywhere is that an alcoholic smells badly to a non-drinking person, imagine what spouses have to endure when their husbands have been drinking and they have to smell him lying next to him in bed all night and then the morning after.

A. Back from the Pits of Addiction - How I reclaimed my life with some help

I am different, I was born over 60 years ago in a small town in India. My father was a senior government official on a transferable job. I lived in reasonably comfortable homes in different cities and towns , with a retinue of servants and other perks.

For as long as I can remember, I felt I was a special person – sort of different to 'normal' people in a superior kind of way. I managed to get through school without really working hard, even getting a gold medal in high school.

During teens and later, I always had the best-looking girls in town as girlfriends. The girls liked me, their mothers trusted me – I was that sort of guy!

I even had my share of fame – I was a successful member of the theatre community. I wrote, directed, produced and acted in several plays. All this reinforced my belief that I was different in a unique way – I could get away with anything.

I started occasionally smoking and drinking in school. Still, my real journey in addiction began when I went to Delhi University for graduation in 1973.

At that time, New Delhi and most of north India was part of the worldwide wave of 'hippies' – the fag end of 'make love, not war' movement. Vietnam war and WOODSTOCK were just over, and the young were seeking some higher meaning. Alcohol and drugs were rampant.

Several 'godmen' were propagating their beliefs – BHAGWAN RAJNEESH, Balyagoeshwar, MAHARISHI of BEATLES fame. Even Harvard professors like TIMOTHY LEARY AND RICHARD ALPERT and JOHN C LILY were experimenting and encouraging people to “turn on, tune in, drop out” by popping LSD and. BABA RAMDASS wrote some mind-boggling books based on his experiences with a Himalayan guru and CARLOS CASTANEDA about the teachings of a Mexican shaman. I absorbed this alternative reality that further made me believe I was a person with a “higher” consciousness. The lifestyle entailed a carefree, unstructured attitude spiked with a variety of drugs.

Living a double life

I started living a double life. While maintaining a veneer of social compliance, I was becoming dependent on alcohol and drugs. Of course, I didn't realize that, believing that such a lifestyle is the “real” way to live a full life.

After graduation, I didn't pursue further studies and started working in the advertising industry. At that time, it was vastly different. Alcohol was an accepted part of the lifestyle of the advertising world; even smoking weed was okay with the creative units.

I worked in various advertising agencies and drifted in the working world.

I would often resign from a job when I sensed I was going to be fired!

My father, at times, helped me in landing jobs. Yet, I was always resentful of his straight thinking and lifestyle – you know the old-fashioned principles of education, hard work, honesty!

As it was becoming harder to get by with drugs in the workplace and alcohol was more acceptable, my drinking increase in leaps and bounds.

Then came marriage. My wife believed she could reform me with love and care (sounds familiar?). Still, her herculean efforts failed before the all-powerful alcohol. By now, we had a daughter, who was insecure in this world and scared of her father. My wife filed for divorce. At that time, I felt it strange that my parents were supporting my wife and not their son.

I can now understand the long-drawn trauma my parents were going through. In due course, a senior Al-anon member advised the about detachment which entailed withdrawing support.

Recovery

I finally agreed to seek help, not for any recovery (because I didn't believe I had a problem), but more to manipulate and regain control over my family!

I enrolled in an ONLINE RECOVERY program at HOPE TRUST. My therapist helped me in exploring my irrational thinking patterns and misplaced belief systems. I became open-minded to fresh inputs and experienced personal growth, which had been stunted due to my addictive behaviours.

The therapy team also worked with my wife, daughter and parents. Slowly, hesitatingly, the relationships started to heal. I got re-married to her after a gap of several years, and we had a son who is a gift of sobriety.

Now I realize that I have been 'different' and special all my life – I cannot drink like regular folks. Small issues that normal folks can deal with easily are often so difficult for me. My mind is mostly my worst enemy. I have had so many unresolved emotions accumulated over the years, and my attitudes are often unreasonable.

I began the journey of recovery through the 12 Steps of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS with the help of my therapist and sponsor.

“Progress, not perfection” is so apt when I try to define my life in sobriety. Every day, I move ahead toward a more humble, open-minded and tolerant self. I do have setbacks, but the process is slow, but sure. The progress has brought immense joy and rewards – for me, my family and many people who have crossed my path.

For this, I am forever grateful to Hope Trust and Alcoholics Anonymous.

B. ALCOHOLISM: THE MYTH AND THE REALITY

There are so many perspectives and beliefs when it comes to addiction: some true, some false. Separating myth from reality is not an easy task. Myth is, in fact, a reality for many people; to suggest that another reality exists is to turn their world upside down.

But if the truth about alcoholism is ever to be understood, the myths must be attacked and destroyed. Only facts can destroy myths. And here are the facts:

Myth: Alcohol is predominantly a sedative or depressant drug.

Reality: Alcohol's pharmacological effects change with the amount drunk. In small quantities, alcohol is a stimulant. In large doses, alcohol acts as a sedative. In all amounts, however, alcohol provides a rich and potent source of calories and energy.

Myth: Alcohol has the same chemical and physiological effect on everyone who drinks.

Reality: Alcohol, like every other food we take into our bodies, affects different people differently.

Myth: Alcohol is an addictive drug, and anyone who drinks long and hard enough will become addicted.

Reality: Alcohol is a selectively addictive drug; it is addictive for only a minority of its users, namely alcoholics. Most people can occasionally drink, daily, even heavily, without becoming addicted to alcohol. Others (alcoholics) will become addicted no matter how much they drink.

Myth: Alcohol is harmful and poisonous to the alcoholic

Reality: Alcohol is a normalizing agent and the best medicine for the pain it creates, giving the alcoholic energy, stimulation, and relief from the pain of withdrawal. Its harmful and poisonous aftereffects are most evident when the alcoholic stops drinking.

Myth: Alcohol addiction is often psychological.

Reality: Alcohol addiction is primarily physiological. Alcoholics become addicted because their bodies are physiologically incapable of processing alcohol normally.

Myth: People become alcoholics because they have psychological or emotional problems, which they try to relieve by drinking (the Devdas syndrome).

Reality: Alcoholics have the same psychological and emotional problems as everyone else before they start drinking. These problems are aggravated, however, by their addiction to alcohol or drugs. Alcoholism undermines and weakens the alcoholic's ability to cope with the normal problems of living. Furthermore, the alcoholic's emotions become inflamed both when he drinks excessively and when he stops drinking. Thus, when he is drinking and when he is abstinent, he will feel angry, fearful and depressed in excessive degrees.

Myth: All sorts of social problems – marriage problems, a death in the family, job stress, 'wrong company' – may cause alcoholism.

Reality: As with psychological and emotional problems, alcoholics experience all the social pressures everyone else does, but the disease undermines their ability to cope, and the problems get worse. Alcoholics have a genetic and biochemical predisposition and will likely be attracted to such situations and people who also indulge in addictive behaviours.

Myth: When the alcoholic is drinking, he reveals his true personality.

Reality: Alcohol's effect on the brain causes severe psychological and emotional distortions of the normal personality. Sobriety reveals the alcoholic's true character.

Myth: The fact that alcoholics often continue to be depressed, anxious, irritable, and unhappy after they stop drinking is evidence that psychological problems cause their disease.

Reality: Alcoholics who continue to be depressed, anxious, irritable and unhappy after they stop drinking suffer from a phenomenon called the “post-acute withdrawal syndrome.” The physical damage caused by years of excessive drinking has not been completely reversed; they are, in fact, still sick and in need of more effective therapy.

Myth: If people could only drink responsibly, they would not become alcoholics.

Reality: Many responsible drinkers become alcoholics. Then, because it is the nature of the disease (not the person), they begin to drink irresponsibly.

Myth: An alcoholic has to want help to be helped.

Reality: Most drinking alcoholics do not want to be helped. They are sick, unable to think rationally, and incapable of giving up alcohol by themselves. Most recovered alcoholics were forced into treatment against their will. Self-motivation usually occurs during treatment, not before.

Myth: Some alcoholics can learn to drink normally and can continue to drink with no ill effects as they limit the amount.

Reality: Alcoholics can never safely return to drinking because drinking in any amount will sooner or later reactivate their addiction.

Myth: Craving for alcohol can be offset by eating high sugar foods.

Reality: Foods with a high sugar content will increase the alcoholic’s depression, irritability, and tension and intensify their desire for a drink to relieve these symptoms.

Myth: if alcoholics eat three balanced meals a day, their nutritional problems will eventually correct themselves.

Reality: Alcoholics’ nutritional needs are only partially met by a balanced diet. They also need vitamin and mineral supplements to correct any deficiencies and to maintain healthy balances.

Myth: Tranquilizers and sedatives are sometimes helpful in treating alcoholics.

Reality: Tranquilizers and sedatives are useful only during the acute withdrawal period. Beyond that, these substitute drugs are destructive and, in many cases, deadly for alcoholics. Many alcoholics start to mix these with alcohol or switch to these drugs as a substitution addiction.