

Ahimsa and Alcohol, Drugs, Tobacco

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ALCOHOL FOR BETTER HEALTH?

There has been substantial recent publicity about studies indicating that alcoholic beverages may lower the heart-attack risk, through raising the HDL ("good cholesterol") in the bloodstream, and/or reducing the overall cholesterol level. This has led to theories that a daily drink or two might lead to better health and greater longevity; it was joyous news for some who habitually look to modern medical miracles to save us from the consequences of our own unwise habits and indulgent lifestyles.

Sometimes researchers see what they want to see; and the studies themselves have come under fire. The Physicians Committee For Responsible Medicine has noted that "One problem is that people sometimes don't report accurately about how much they drink, so that those who said they don't drink at all may, in fact, drink two or more drinks a day. It has also been suggested that people who drink alcohol use more aspirin to treat alcohol-related headaches. Aspirin helps to prevent blood clotting and therefore reduces risk of heart attack. So it is difficult to know whether the reduced heart disease risk is due to the alcohol or the aspirin.

"The disadvantages of drinking far outweigh the advantages especially when you consider that many healthful and effective approaches to reducing heart disease are available. For women, even very moderate drinking is linked to increased risk of breast cancer. Alcohol is also linked to cancer of the esophagus. Alcohol is also toxic to the liver and to brain cells. And for many people, it is a highly addictive substance.

"The best approach to reducing heart disease risk is to avoid foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol, to exercise, and to manage stress."

John McDougall, M.D., says that "Serious alcoholics have lower blood cholesterol levels because alcohol makes up a good part of their diet. Alcohol is low-fat and contains no cholesterol.

"My hard-core alcoholic patients had the cleanest arteries - often baby clean - entirely free of atherosclerosis. However, they died from cirrhosis of the liver, hemorrhagic strokes, malnutrition, accidents and suicides; and they were often heavy smokers [see later in this article for more on this link of alcohol and tobacco -ed.] and as a result suffered higher rates of lung cancer and emphysema. Smoking also curbs the appetite and may result in lower cholesterol levels, by eating less cholesterol-laden foods."

In the view of Dean Ornish, M.D., "Since cholesterol is made in the liver, disease of the liver will decrease cholesterol production (e.g. cancer of the liver or hepatic cirrhosis). Alcohol dependence, besides causing liver disease, often leads to chronic malnutrition and low cholesterol levels."

In the case of wine, at least some of the claimed beneficial effect may be in the grape itself. A recent study shows that some types of unfermented grape juice contain a natural substance called resveratrol that lowers

cholesterol levels.

That will be comforting for those who still believe in "curing" a symptom by "taking something" rather than removing the causes. But with all the potential mischief in prescribing alcohol for cholesterol reduction, it should be noted that the question generally becomes something of a non-problem personally for those on a natural vegan (totally non-animal) regimen, who have removed the main contributing causes and maintain their serum cholesterol well below the danger level.

Another factor in atherosclerosis and heart attacks has now been found to be excessive iron. For decades meat has been promoted not only for the ruinously excessive protein it provides but for the iron that "is absorbed more readily than that in plant foods." It is now being realized that while it is not difficult to obtain enough iron from natural vegan foods, if people have overly high iron levels the body will decrease further absorption from this food. However, we do not seem to have the ability to block picking up harmful excesses from meat. Regrettably, alcohol also seems to affect this regulating ability, causing harmfully excessive iron levels in heavy drinkers.

"JUST A MINOR ANNOYANCE"

It has taken medical research a generation to catch up to what I learned the hard way so long ago, that even second-hand smoke is far more than a "mere annoyance". In my own case, as a non-smoking youth I used to regularly play a wind instrument in a small dance band. (As I recall, in my last year I made about as much in that part-time playing as in my regular full-time job.) The blowing was good for the lungs, the indoor smog wasn't. I was usually able to stand the smoke; but one New Year's Eve I had to play in an especially thick atmosphere and was incapacitated for a couple of weeks after, trying to get my breath. I decided the "minor annoyance" (the tobacco lobby's term) wasn't worth it, and never played another job. (I recently had a chance meeting with our former piano player whom I hadn't seen in some 35 years, and he mentioned that back then he had to get out of that line for the same reason.)

Years later, as a traveling lecturer, I eventually had to avoid airline and bus travel wherever possible, or risk arriving more as a squeaker than a speaker due to the effects of other people's smoke. Those who say that smoking is a purely personal matter that has nothing to do with ethics or non-smokers' rights, please take note. In the case of tobacco smoke, people have been saturated with news about lung cancer; but the poisonous substances are carried by the bloodstream to every cell of the body.

In the early 1960's in California, my wife and I met Dan and Clover Murphy. (Some years before, as I recall, Dan had been the Vice-Presidential candidate with Dr. John Maxwell heading the ticket for the mainly non-existent "Vegetarian Party".)

Clover had lost a leg, and they got into the prosthetic device business, going into hospitals and fitting artificial limbs on amputees. They told us how people thought that these were all war veterans, but in their experience most of them were afflicted with Buerger's Disease (sometimes termed "Smoker's Disease") with the gradual loss of circulation due to the vasoconstricting effect of the smoking.

They said it was quite the usual thing for a new amputee (at least, in those days) coming to from the anesthetic to ask first for a cigarette; and they were smoking in bed while recuperating or being fitted with the new limb. Those who can see no cause-and-effect relationship may argue that the smoking was just to soothe, a comforting crutch. In fact it makes as much sense as someone wounded in a hunting accident to get around by using a loaded shotgun for a "crutch".

[Even as I write this, the latest news on the smoking front is an EPA report that classes second-hand tobacco smoke as a Class-A carcinogen (right up there with asbestos and radon gas) and accounting for some 3000

deaths per year, quite apart from all the respiratory ailments and other "inconveniences" among the young, old, and in-between forced to share in the smogfest. The tobacco lobby (surprise, surprise!) says the evidence is still "inconclusive", apparently holding stoutly to the theory that poison gas is able to differentiate among its victims according to who is actually holding the cigarette.]

ALCOHOL AND DISEASES

If a cigarette makes a poor crutch, a bottle is no better. As with tobacco-smoke poisons, alcohol circulates via the bloodstream to every cell of the body, not just one or two organs. Thus, while the liver comes in for the lion's share of attention, it is by no means the only part of the body harmed by alcohol. While the giggle-water is pouring "down the hatch", it is in contact with mouth and throat, while undiluted by food or stomach fluids: alcohol is held responsible for 75% of the esophageal cancers in the U.S.A. Additionally, about 75% of oral cancer is attributed to either smoking or drinking.

Even without swallowing, there may be significant risk: in one study, long-time users of mouth-washes with high alcohol contents (25% or more), showed a risk of oral cancer 90% higher in women and 60% higher in men. The link is said to be not yet conclusive, but "cause for concern".

Agatha Thrash, M.D., writes that "Alcohol injures every cell it touches. It is classed as a poison by physicians and pharmacologists and is known to interfere with the enzyme system of the cells. As far as your body is concerned, you would be about as reasonable to take arsenic, cyanide, or strychnine as to take alcohol. (Check it out in a nice large dictionary: "inebriated" means being drunk from intoxication; and "intoxicate" of course quite literally means "to poison".)

"...Alcohol directly damages all cells, but the loss of brain cells is especially of considerable concern. Learning, in those who drink, is more difficult. [Students, take note.] Injured brain cells are unable to form the protein material needed for the complex 'memory' structures. Memory is further decreased because alcohol interferes with dream time. It is during dreaming that material is stored away in the memory.

"The nerves are injured by alcohol, making them less able to respond to stimuli. Every pathologist knows that when he opens the cranium of a chronic alcoholic, he must be prepared to step aside so as not to be splashed by the large quantity of fluid that has replaced the substance of the brain lost by alcohol damage. Some health authorities estimate that each time an alcoholic becomes drunk he loses about 10 thousand brain cells. Since we have many billion brain cells, many years of drinking may pass before the results of this loss become observable."

"Using alcohol causes an increase in all kinds of diseases of the digestive tract, ranging from esophagitis, gastritis, and peptic ulcer, to colon disease and cancer of the rectum." Clearly, it is bad enough even AFTER dilution..

"JUST ONE CAN'T HURT"

It is commonly argued that it is only alcohol "abuse" that is harmful; that drinking "in moderation" somehow makes real sense, and many sincere people are ensnared with this seemingly reasonable rationale. But Dr. Thrash continues: "There is a great increase in liver malfunction, even if one drinks 'only socially'. Not only is there an increase in cirrhosis, the classic end-stage of liver damage from alcohol, but many of the ordinary functions of the liver are altered such as blood clotting, production of antibodies, and the preparation of raw products for the formation of a variety of essential hormones and chemicals for the body.

"The heart is specifically injured by alcohol. 'Beer drinker's heart' is a common term among physicians.

Sophisticated tests can show definite signs of heart muscle injury by a single ounce of 90- proof whiskey. The myth that light social drinking is innocuous has been laid to rest. Many tissues are singled out for injury by alcohol. Not only is the heart muscle damaged, but so are skeletal muscles. Muscular strength gradually decreases among those who drink alcohol. Even bone weight is reduced by habitual drinking. By X-ray, an alcoholic may appear to be a decade or two older than others his age, because of loss of bone density.

"The pancreas is also specifically damaged, making diabetes, reactive hypoglycemia, pancreatitis, and other diseases of the pancreas more common among drinkers. Pancreatitis rarely occurs except in those who drink."

Vernon W. Foster, M.D., says, "As an intern, I was impressed with what we found during autopsies of severe alcoholics. Some brains were only half the size of normal brains, and the cortical convolutions, so essential to brain function, were almost skin- smooth." This would be after many years; however, he notes that "Even a small amount of alcohol destroys brain cells."

If it were only a matter of losing those 10,000 brain cells with each binge (perhaps an optimistically conservative figure, in light of Dr. Foster's statements) out of billions, one might argue that we have plenty left anyway. It has been claimed that we only use about 10% of all our brain cells, and judging from widespread human behavior, one would suppose this to be an overly generous estimate in many cases.

But note that Dr. Thrash stated that "Alcohol INJURES every cell it touches... directly DAMAGES all cells..." (our emphasis). And Dr. Foster stressed not just the quantity wiped out but the poor quality of what remained, even as Dr. Thrash noted the learning and memory difficulties in drinkers, from not only actual cell loss but cellular injury.

In several years of running computers, I became painfully aware that it does not take a loss of any great percentage of memory bits or electronic pathways to seriously hamper effective functioning, to corrupt or lose data, and render the entire system unreliable. A very few little glitches can bring the whole computer operation to a screeching halt or "crash".

While in some respects the human body is much more marvelous, self-repairing and forgiving than a computer, brain cells that die are not replaced; and one can still have five, six, or more times the number of brain cells one supposedly uses in a lifetime, yet experience great difficulty in functioning as a rational, intelligent and ethical human being.

If you are from the planet Krypton, and think you can do o.k. with half the brain cells you once had and those that are left in bad shape, let me show you a nice V-6 with three pistons missing, broken spark plugs and no replacements available. If you can act normally in that condition, you have my respect; for my part, I need all the brain- power I can get.

Smoking two packs a day is twice as bad as smoking one pack, but that does not mean that one pack a day is good for you. Similarly, one drink may be half as harmful as two, but at no level of consumption can alcohol be regarded as completely harmless (or even having only temporary effects), let alone being necessary to human well-being.

In certain circumstances, "moderate" drinking can be even worse than "excessive" drinking. It is the fellow who has "only had a couple" (not the one who can barely stand up) that is feeling his oats (or rye) and thinks he can "lick any man in the place".

Dr. Foster again: "Even the most naive recognize that alcohol alters consciousness. In so doing it robs a person of judgment and self-control. Small doses of alcohol alter the reaction time of your nerves. Moderate drinkers can become unsafe divers, possibly more so than the drunk driver. The drunk driver often slows down and creeps along. The moderate drinker believes his perception is sharpened and his reaction time is

intact. He feels self-confident. This illusion may cause him to drive faster and be less cautious. One or two drinks is all it takes to make the difference between safe driving and an accident, perhaps the difference between life and death."

Or as my nephew Ryan put it, "Absolutely right! The guy passed out in the corner couldn't even FIND his car; it's the guy with just a drink or two who's feeling great, and gets in his sports car and thinks he's Mario Andretti!"

ALCOHOL AND NUTRITION

Alcohol is the ultimate junk-food. Dr. Foster writes: "There are no vitamins, very few minerals, no protein, no fat and no carbohydrates in even a barrel of alcohol. Mixed drinks and malt liquor contain sugar, but this is of little benefit except for converting it into fat and producing the proverbial 'beer belly'. Sugar actually tends to compound the toxic (poisonous) effect of alcohol.

"Protein malnutrition and multiple vitamin deficiencies are normal in alcoholics. This could be partly responsible for the liver and brain damage which are the inevitable result of chronic drinking. Diseases like beriberi (lack of vitamin B1) and scurvy (lack of vitamin C) and pellagra (niacin deficiency) are often seen in alcoholics.

"Deficiencies in vitamins, minerals, and nutrients interfere with the body's ability to fight off infection. Add to this the destruction of the white blood cells and the other disruptions of the immune system, and we have the answer to why a larger proportion of alcoholics die of pneumonia and other infections than of those who abstain. Even social drinkers tend to suffer more infections than abstainers.

"I can't compel anyone to quit drinking alcohol. That is a decision we all must make for ourselves. But let us not deceive ourselves into thinking alcohol is good for us. It is not. It is a poison!"

Time magazine has cited an A.M.A. Journal report that the familiar "beer belly" is not only due to the calories, but also because alcohol keeps the body from properly burning fat. Although it makes carbohydrates burn faster, alcohol can slow fat metabolism by over 30%.

ALCOHOL AND ADDITIVES

The Center For Science In The Public Interest has drawn attention to many brands of cream sherry, fruit brandy, and whiskey, containing urethane, a potent carcinogen apparently formed during the fermentation process. Government tests showed that 5 out of 25 samples of whiskey exceeded the limit of 125 parts per billion (ppb) of urethane, which was the goal agreed to by the liquor industry in 1987, in what CSPI Executive Director Michael Jacobson calls "toothless. . . sweetheart deals" with the FDA. Ironically, the CSPI newsletter item was titled "Bad Booze", leaving the unwary to hope there might be another type.

As for actual additives, about 30 years ago I was invited to visit a large modern brewery in Milwaukee, and even back then there was little about the stuff that was left to old Mother Nature. Leafing through some of the trade magazines in the waiting room, it was clear that every attribute of the beer was carefully controlled by adding chemicals.

Some years ago, CSPI compiled a list of well over a hundred additives permissible in various alcoholic beverages, though not required to be declared on the label. These include such goodies as enzymes to convert starch into sugar; clarifying, chill-proofing, foam stabilizing and anti-gushing agents; antioxidant; anti-microbial preservative; artificial colors; plus of course natural and artificial flavors.

Strictly from a vegan standpoint some are obviously animal, some are suspect, and some can be made either from animal or other sources.

The additives include fish glue, pepsin (stomach extract), peptone (product of pepsin acting on albumin), lactic acid, lactose, glycerin, and gelatin for beer and/or ale.

Wines fare no better, with gelatin, casein, potassium salt of casein, milk powder (nonfat dry milk), egg white or albumin from egg white, isinglass (sturgeon's bladder), lactic acid, and malo-lactic bacteria.

Distilled spirits are said to contain the least of additives, including caramel (burnt sugar), unspecified flavorings, etc. Not all brands contain all permissible additives, of course, and there are some small makers of "organic" brews or wines that might not use any. Those who wish to are free to make local inquiries for themselves, for the sake of their veganism. With hundreds of wine-making firms in a single California valley (for example), the author would not have the resources to locate specific brands of poison that might be less objectionable in regard to animal matter, even assuming we had no reservations about it from a standpoint of harmlessness and simple human ethics.

ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND ADVERTISING

Of all the dubious claims put forth by the pushers of alcohol and tobacco, there are two that seem the most patently absurd. The first is the citing of enormous figures representing taxes paid by the firms, payrolls met, prosperity shared around. What these actually represent is billions of dollars that cannot be spent on food, clothing, schools for the individuals and families of those snared by the habits; thousands of farmers wasting and ruining vast tracts of land without ever growing a pound of food; workers and firms that depend and prey on the weakness of their customers; and they do not include the misery, sickness, despair, and all the billions of bucks that must be spent to try to pick up the pieces of broken health, families and lives wrecked by these products.

The second item is the notion that advertising is not really designed to make more addicts, but "only to increase the market share" of the specific firm. This might be swallowed by a few people with but feeble reasoning power and a fairly short memory.

In point of fact, one of the most successful advertising blitzkriegs in history was waged over a generation ago, when an ad genius used photos and endorsements of high-society ladies to persuade American women to take up the use of a product that had previously been used mainly by men, and by women of less than impeccable repute. The goal was to double the potential market by gaining acceptance of the idea of this product's use. The effort was a great success, still cited as a textbook example in ad-agency circles. The product, of course, was cigarettes.

(A footnote regarding the sincerity of such endorsements: it was recently noted that about that time a famous aviatrix - a role model who had blazed new trails for women in her chosen field - regretted that her agent had sold her endorsement of cigarettes: she was in fact a non-smoker.)

Later on, during World War II, the ads featured brave young lads in uniform smoking. At present it is alleged that one of the tobacco giants has cynically used a cute cartoon animal in "one of the most egregious examples in recent history of tobacco advertising aimed at children". It is claimed that in the three years following the introduction of this cuddly cool character, sales of this brand to children under 18 zoomed from \$6 million to \$476 million.

Worse yet, an A.M.A. Journal report claimed that the logo could be identified by only 2/3 of adults but 90% of 3-to-6-year-olds. Just trying to increase their pre-school market share?

According to the Associated Press, Dr. Joseph R. DiFranza of the University Of Massachusetts Medical School (Worcester) has charged that a tobacco industry campaign to discourage children from smoking actually encourages youngsters to smoke by thinking of cigarettes as "forbidden fruit".

This researcher claims that scientific studies of this method show that children exposed to this sort of format are "more likely to smoke, to use alcohol and to use drugs than children who do not receive any education at all".

In another study, Dr. DiFranza said a tobacco campaign involved distributing signs and literature stressing that it is illegal to sell tobacco to children. He claims that 88% of non-participating stores were selling cigarettes illegally to children. And of those public-spirited stores participating in the campaign, 86% were found to be ALSO selling cigarettes illegally to the kids.

The AP report noted the tobacco people's response that DiFranza had distorted the intent because he wanted to put their industry out of business. Apparently, they will be the last people on Earth who still can't think of a single legitimate reason why anyone (if not everyone) truly concerned with public health, might want to see the tobacco industry reduced to its last gasp.

Lately, we have seen a rash of this civic-minded "anti-abuse" propaganda, with the legal recreational-drug firms posing as the great friends of parents and family, with much subtle and smooth talk about being responsible and really wanting to help curb youthful drinking/smoking, and it doesn't take a degree in psychology to get an impression like this:

"Now, kids, you should know that smoking/drinking is only FOR ADULTS, to show how MATURE THEY ARE in doing this GROWN-UP thing in a nice ADULT, MATURE, GROWN-UP RESPONSIBLE way. So get all the facts (from us), and then when the time comes (oh, many, many long years from now, of agonizing waiting), you will be well equipped to make this momentous RITE- OF-PASSAGE DECISION FOR YOURSELF in a MATURE, INTELLIGENT, RESPONSIBLE MANNER".

Then, presumably, it will be up to you to decide whether to join the ranks of he-men and glamorous women enjoying the fruits of the good life, or to remain an insufferable, indecisive, parent-harassed, acne-ridden little dork for the rest of your miserable life. The choice is all gloriously YOURS.

This is somewhat like the old tale of the teacher who had to go to the principal's office for a few minutes. She had brought in a dish of beans for some agricultural experiment, so before she left the room she warned the youngsters: "Now, you mustn't ever, under any circumstances, stick beans up your nose!" Naturally, when she returned she found every single child busily satisfying its curiosity by trying to stuff the legumes up the old proboscis. And there isn't even much peer pressure in the outside world to snort beans, or huge billboards depicting nasal bean-stuffing as glamorous and grown-up.

A standard advertising ploy for alcohol and tobacco is set in a never-never land of fun-loving and energetic (even athletic) young men and lovely young ladies. There are no yellow-stained fingers and teeth, no foul stinking breath when they kiss, no shortness of breath or dry hacking coughs, no getting tipsy and throwing up their lunch, no hangovers, and never a frantic call to 911 in the hope the ambulance will arrive in time to rush a bronzed Aphrodite or Adonis to the hospital after an alcohol-induced accident.

Be wary of this drug-oriented advertising, in whatever form it may take. Teach your children to recognize the deceptions it involves, and teach them the truth about these drugs, that the reality is quite the opposite of the image put out by the clever ad agencies who know all the psychological tricks to earn their fifteen per cent. For that commission, they will "sell refrigerators to Eskimos" or cheerfully take horse manure and portray it as rose petals.

DRINKING, SMOKING, AND HOLLYWOOD

For many years, the tobacco and alcohol industries seemed to be enjoying a free p.r. ride from the Hollywood trend-setting crowd. Back in the golden era of the '30s and '40s, it seemed as if one couldn't play the part of a suave and debonair leading man (or later, to some extent, a glamorous leading lady) without a cigarette in one hand and a cocktail or shot glass in the other.

We do not say that EVERY film portrayed smoking and drinking as linked with glamour and virility, but a hit movie playing against type with a clear anti-drinking message (such as *The Lost Weekend*, with Ray Milland; 1945) stood out like the Matterhorn on a Kansas prairie. Much more often, dunking and smoking (to say nothing of wenching; another hallmark of the James Bond syndrome) were standard props of the larger-than-life role models projected by Hollywood.

Drinking and inebriation were also occasionally played for laughs. Who could ever forget the hilarious scene in *"Teacher's Pet"* where Gig Young and Clark Gable are vying for the attentions of Doris Day, and trying to drink each other under the table? Young confides that he has some quirk whereby he can drink all he wants and *"It doesn't bother me a bit."* *"Yeah?"* gurgles Gable, *"Well it doesn't bither me a bot either!"*

But an intoxicated leading man in never-never land remains nonetheless winning, charming and endearing. The make-believe hero was not inclined to throw up or wet his pants, any more than he could be caught coughing after lighting up and inhaling.

But over the decades, so many of the top box-office draws dropped dead from lung cancer or drank themselves to an early grave; perhaps it spurred a new wave of Hollywood health consciousness. Maybe it was just part of the new national trend, starting with the Surgeon General's report on smoking some 30 years ago. Anyway, cigarettes are no longer such a wide-spread film prop; and we look forward to the day when most TV and big-screen role-models will pour their drinks from a bottle of distilled water or fresh fruit juice. This latter reform has not yet materialized; and by contrast to the decline in on-screen puffing, drinking seems alive and flourishing in fantasy-land. Let's examine a typical line of dialogue: The hero is just told by a trainer that he will "have to lay off the sauce" while getting in shape for a do-or-die world-class mountain climb. But the retort makes it clear that such restrictions are not for real men: "On your best day, I can out-climb you, and out-drink you!" This specific plum (or lemon) squashed into our ears a couple of nights ago in a TV airing of a film almost old enough to vote, but it is by no means dated. Just replace out-climb with out-fight/run/ride/ /shoot/talk/act/pilot/drive/schuss/think/throw/play, or any other positive he-man verb; and such a stereotypical line might be found in any number of action movies of half a century ago (and later, TV dramas) up to the present day.

ALCOHOL AND THE UNBORN

For alcohol's disastrous effects on humans who have not yet been born, we may cite a well-documented article by Ethel R. Nelson, M.D., which seems typical of current medical view. From this we see that as many as 5 babies in each 1000 will be born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. This may include such abnormalities as dysfunctions of the central nervous system often including mental retardation, deficiency of body growth (due to prenatal damage to their ability to grow new body cells), defects of facial structures, other major and minor malformations (such as heart defects, kidney and urinary tract malformations, club feet, and extra fingers or toes), and speech impairment. Such children may be born exhibiting hyperactivity and irritability as signs of actual alcohol withdrawal, but these symptoms remain as major problems.

All this is of course from the alcohol drinking of the mother, and considerable research has proven that alcohol rapidly travels via the placenta and umbilical cord to provide a concentration of alcohol in the baby's

blood roughly as high as that in the mother's.

Dr. Nelson concludes with the warning that "ALCOHOL IS A POISON. Maternal abuse of alcohol during pregnancy appears to be the most frequent known toxic cause of mental deficiency in the Western world!" Most physicians currently advise expectant mothers not to drink at all. But with the notorious failure of birth-control methods to live up to the promise of "complete separation of sex and procreation" some doctors go much further and now advise ALL sexually active women of child-bearing age to completely abstain from alcohol, as the worst damage may already have been done before they even learn they are pregnant.

ALCOHOL IN THE KITCHEN

Although toxins that inflict severe damage on the very young MAY be less hazardous to older people, we should at least be very suspicious and wary of them. But in the case of alcohol, with the variety of damage it is known to cause in the adult as well as the gross abnormality in the unborn, who could be so silly as to suppose it would be harmless to the immature bodies of children?

This is one reason why we are often dismayed to see otherwise wholesome family cookbooks include alcoholic substances in recipes for treats especially enjoyed by children. We wonder what a conscientious parent would think of us if we told them to throw a slug of 80 or 100-proof whiskey into a fruit shake or a smoothie for a child. Yet this is commonly done, in effect, by using ordinary vanilla extract, which has a 40 to 50% alcohol content, the same as the whiskey.

Many people also take (and give their children) over-the-counter cough, flu, or cold medicines with a 1-1/2 to 19% alcohol content. The alcohol hasn't the brains to figure whether it's supposed to be in liquor to poison them, or in medicine (or dessert) to "help" them. Aside from any physical harm, it's the same old phony message sent, that "a little bit can't hurt" or may somehow even be good for you.

Please do not get the impression that the author is a know-it-all, rolling rocks down on benighted humanity. On every subtle point of better living habits, there was a time when every one of us was as ignorant as millions of others still are. It is only out of compassion and a sense of duty to help and not to hurt anyone, that we try to share each new crumb of knowledge that comes our way.

It was not so long ago that we learned to our surprise of alcoholic ingredients remaining in food even after cooking. But an experiment at Washington State University (Pullman), quoted by CSPI, showed that widely varying percentages of the alcohol remained. In a sauce where liqueur was added after removing the pot from the heat, not surprisingly 95% of the alcohol remained. But there was still 15% of the original amount in a pot roast after 2-1/2 hours in the oven. Three other dishes showed 40%, 45%, and 75% of the original alcohol. Researchers were surprised that in Cherries Jubilee the brandy was allowed to burn till the flame went out, but the dish was still spiked with 75% of the original alcohol content.

The American Dietetic Association's Journal has been cited saying that foods cooked with alcohol retain anywhere from 4% to 85% of the alcohol. We haven't seen their article and don't know if it came from the same study or a different source.

As the boiling point of alcohol is lower than that of water, one assumes it would simply vanish at oven temperature. But things are not always as they appear. Few foods seem dryer to eat than plain ordinary bread. It is hard to believe that 38-40% of its weight is still water, after all that baking. You can freeze it hard as a rock.

But in a smoothie or other unheated dessert with vanilla (or almond, etc.) alcohol-solvent extract as an ingredient you are adding the booze straight, without any benefit of boiling off even a part of it. This is also

true of some commercial desserts such as frozen mock ice-creams (including some vegan ones; we checked). While many people may be aware that "vanillin" is a deceptive term for a synthetic imitation, real vanilla listed as such in a packaged dessert (cookies, mock ice cream) may have been poured out of a bottle, and the solvent/preservative (2/5 to 1/2 of that bottle's contents) need not even be listed as an ingredient of the finished product. And some people are still under the impression that such loose labeling regulations are designed to inform and protect the public, rather than mask the deceptions so profitably practiced by many manufacturers.

Fortunately for those who enjoy the flavor of vanilla but want to avoid alcohol altogether, water-extraction (steeping, soaking) at home is simple and easy (see The Vegan Kitchen, from American Vegan Society). Also, some brands of vanilla extract are appearing in health-food stores, with vegetable glycerin or soy-lecithin as the solvent or medium.

GATEWAY DRUGS

It used to be held that the use of one type of drug almost invariably led to use of harder drugs, with the earlier drugs being dropped. This stepping-stone theory" was largely discredited as experience over many years replaced this with a concept of "Gateway Drugs".

There is a growing weight of clear evidence that many people do PROGRESS from one drug to another, although this is not invariable; the majority of people who start at each stage do not go on to the next. But people don't generally discontinue one drug habit when they start another; they simply add the new one to the drugs they are already using.

Alcohol and tobacco are the earliest drugs in this progression, the "gate" through which most users of illicit drugs pass. A vast majority of users of illegal drugs begin drugs with cigarettes and alcohol; and rarely will people who never smoke abuse alcohol or use illicit drugs.

Of tobacco and alcohol, tobacco is much more addictive: nearly 90% of smokers are said to be nicotine addicts, but only 10-15% of alcohol drinkers qualify as alcoholics.

Those who propagandize for "legalizing" harder drugs may well ponder the comparisons of the record of legalized vs. illegal drugs. Over 60 times as many people are killed by tobacco and alcohol than are killed by opiates, cocaine, and marijuana combined. And the leading killer of young people in the U.S.A. is alcohol.

This does not mean these drugs are more dangerous than illegal ones, but they are certainly easier to find, especially within the home, or (with cigarettes) in a vending machine with a very effective sign on it saying children mustn't, under any circumstances, buy these adult items and stuff smoke up their nose.

The number of teenagers who are "current" drinkers (underage, to be sure) is nearly five times that of marijuana users; twice as many smoke cigarettes (again, illegal for them but readily available "for adults only") as those who smoke pot. Today's children typically begin lighting up at age 11-1/2; those who drink are first introduced to alcohol (often by a member of their own family) at an average age of 12.8 years, meaning of course that many start even younger than that.

And seeing the dismal record of truth-in-advertising for the legal recreational drugs, it doesn't take a genius to imagine the siren songs the ad-writers would be using to gull the young and immature into still more of these addictive and ruinous habits?

MEAT, ALCOHOL AND TEMPERANCE

A researcher at Loma Linda University fed a typical American teenager's diet to rats, and fed a lacto-vegetarian diet to other rats. The rats were all given free access to plain water and to 10%-alcohol in water. By switching diets, he found that the diet was directly related to a craving for alcohol. The rats were up to five or six times as likely to choose the alcohol solution when the typical teen diet was fed, as when the vegetarian diet was given. "The desire for alcohol could, as it were, be turned on or off depending on the diet fed."

All this proves, of course, is that if you feed a miserable diet to a bunch of stir-crazy rats, you can wind up with a lot of tipsy rodents. As with most animal experiments, this is not only "inconclusive" but grossly redundant. We are interested in having fewer humans drink, not designing a diet to produce drunken rats; and the information we seek has been well known in reform circles for about a century. It was obtained not via vivisection but in actual practice in the rescue and rehabilitation of countless human victims of alcohol. It was known, advocated, and in many cases used by diet and temperance reformers in England, Scotland, Scandinavia, the United States, and India, including the Booth family of the Salvation Army, Dr. J.H. Kellogg of the Battle Creek Sanatorium, and Mahatma Gandhi. We have in hand a neat little booklet published in England in 1947, that includes a 4-page section of quotations from writers of the previous half-century or more, on the subject of Vegetarianism And Temperance. These excerpts will serve to highlight this important subject:

"A most encouraging high percentage of our inebriate cases have been permanently cured, and if only they could all continue the vegetarian diet on their return to their homes or in the situations found for them, the failures would, I am convinced, be fewer still. ...If parents can be induced to bring up the children on a pure and simple fruit and vegetable diet, and for their sakes to abolish all that is harmful from the home, I think the need for Inebriate Homes and all other apparatus for rescuing the human wrecks will diminish and finally disappear."

- Mrs. Bramwell Booth (The Treatment Of Inebriates)

"It has been truly said that cooks make more drunkards than brewers, wine makers and distillers.

The prohibitionists are prone to make alcohol the scapegoat of all evils, but they will never achieve any permanent success with their one-sided efforts without removing the real cause....

"True temperance reform must go hand in hand with diet reform. A simple and frugal diet combined with regular exercise in the open air will gradually purify the system from waste poisons and, to a large degree, lessen the craving for alcoholic beverages and gradually do away with the desire for them altogether."

- Otto Carque (The Key To Rational Dietetics)

"On the whole, the habit of eating more meat leads to greater consumption of alcohol, and vice versa. Where much fruit is eaten, there is scarcely any desire for alcoholic drinks."

- Dr. David Katz (University Of Manchester)

"...In general, all highly spiced 'made dishes' tend to produce an abnormal thirst which requires something stronger than water to satisfy. Irritating condiments, such as pepper, mustard, vinegar, certain sauces, and the like have previously been mentioned as injurious to the digestive organs; they are also obnoxious as creators of the alcoholic thirst. The free use of flesh meats is probably a still more common cause of the craving for alcohol. The extractive poisons contained in the flesh of animals are in the nature of stimulants, and their introduction into the system produces effects which are analogous to those of drug stimulants. There is at first a feeling of strength and well-being followed by a reaction. No doubt the free use of condiments of various kinds in connection with most meat dishes, intensifies this stimulating effect, which, however, is inherent in

all flesh foods entirely apart from their accompaniments."

- Dr. A.B. Olsen

"Experience teaches with certainty that a total abstention from meat is accompanied by a diminished desire for the other stimulants, and a comparatively speedy restitution of the nourishing instincts, and the natural regulation of nutriment. Vegetarian diet, therefore, possesses a great advantage with regard to the treatment of chronic alcoholism."

- Dr. Michael Larsen (The Medical Treatment of Inebriates)

It appears that the most insidious "gateway drug" of all, arguably contributing to the untimely demise of more Americans than tobacco and alcohol and all the illicit drugs put together (and then giving a great big nudge in that direction as well), is neither smoked nor drunk, but taken with the knife and fork.

Whether seen in this light as contributing cause and effect or simply as two mischievous "birds of a feather flocking together", we find a clear warning about meat and alcohol even in Biblical times; whatever one's religious persuasion, the advice seems as valid today as it was then:

"Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not among wine-bibbers, among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags."

- Proverbs 23:19-21.

From our own discussions in recent times with practitioners of the modern Natural Hygiene movement, detoxification by extensive fasting under professional supervision and rebuilding with a simple, natural and non-stimulating non-animal diet, can be even quicker and more effective than the change in diet alone. Their successful experience has included the returning to health of patients afflicted with addictions to tobacco, caffeine, alcohol, and the range of "hard" drugs. First, of course, one has to WANT to stop.

ALCOHOL AND SUDDEN DEATH

Traffic accidents are the greatest single cause of death for people between the ages of 5 and 32, and almost half of these accidents are alcohol-related. In 1990 alone, 22 thousand people were killed in alcohol-related traffic incidents.

One study of teenage suicides found that 46% of them had been drinking before taking their lives.

Some 20 years ago, it was found that alcohol was the culprit in an increasing number of deaths due to choking: a piece of food [most commonly a chunk of meat, by the way] becomes lodged in the larynx, at the top of the windpipe, and presto! one has a "cafe coronary" and HOPES some alert Good Samaritan nearby will administer the celebrated Heimlich maneuver.

A study in Broward County, Florida (North of Miami) showed that in 88% of such deaths, the victim was under the influence of....guess what? Due to the anesthetic action and the loss of judgment, the person cannot tell the size of the piece of food in the mouth and when it can safely be swallowed. With increasing alcohol content of the blood, motor functions (such as swallowing or walking) become partly paralyzed.

"A person is in danger when his sensations, judgment, and motor functions are not operating properly. You don't have to be driving a car to fear for your life. Death sits down at a dinner table, too, when a person has

had too much alcohol."

There is an even more bizarre type of drinking accident that we first heard of perhaps 30 years ago. As we recollect, one of the famous musicians of the big-band era had "one too many" and went to bed to sleep it off. Presumably lying on his back, he had enough reaction vitality left to throw up, but not enough to wake up and spit it out; he presumably inhaled some of it and strangled. In any case, he made a fast swap of his horn for a harp.

We do not know how common sudden tragedies of that kind are, how much of human talent, hopes and dreams, and life are lost thereby; but they are certainly easily avoidable. Not by pushing "moderate drinking" but by knowing that alcohol dulls the judgment that should alert one to stop, at the very time when that judgment is most crucially needed. Just stop before you start. There is no such thing as a drink #3, or #4 (let alone a fifth), if there is no first one. It really is as simple as that.

When you realize how much better you can enjoy life (to say nothing of working to help others) maintaining health and vitality to a ripe "old" age, instead of snoring off a stupor or waking up with a hangover, alcohol becomes not merely pointless but repulsive; it has no attraction whatsoever.

In youthful days as a sober bandsman, I had plenty of opportunity to observe people in various states of fluidity, from moderately mellow to miserably stoned; I can't recall ever seeing any IMPROVEMENT in anyone's disposition, coherence, singing or playing ability, or any other worthy attribute that might entice one to drink. It was once my privilege (and once was quite enough for a lifetime) to sit up for a few hours of the night with a friend, a "moderate drinker" who had suffered some reverse in his social life and figured the genie in the bottle would make things right: in a weak moment he was tempted to drink his troubles away.

I saw how this intelligent, sensitive and eminently rational friend was temporarily reduced to piteous babbling; and I could have done nicely without this further evidence that a bottle of booze makes a lousy crutch. Next day he felt even less able to face the world than before, and the problem had not perceptibly shrunk for all its having been pickled in alcohol. Real help might come from others, from within or above, but never by the pint.

RECREATIONAL RUSSIAN ROULETTE

It was noted before that about 90% of smokers are considered addicted, whereas "only" 10 to 15% of regular drinkers are confirmed alcoholics. But far more people drink than smoke, so it is arguable whether Tweedledum or Tweedledee should be considered a more serious public health problem. Actually, more Americans die of tobacco-related diseases than any other avoidable cause. Poor diet and the sedentary life are ranked #2 at present, though this might overtake smoking as #1 as more becomes known about the diet/disease connection. Alcohol ranks a distant #3 in known fatalities. Tobacco is blamed for nearly four times as many deaths as alcohol. But the prudent adult learns to simply avoid the general vicinity of lighted cigarettes, whenever possible. Alcohol is obviously implicated in behavioral changes while "under the influence", often contributing to violence against one's family, friends, or even strangers; and the mayhem and death suddenly inflicted on the innocent in alcohol-related auto accidents, for example, gives such incidents the kind of horror usually associated with random terrorism. Regarding becoming addicted, it is clear that the odds are stacked against the smoker, but how about the drinker? Let us suppose we have ten barrels in a row, and ask ten volunteers to sit, one in each barrel. Now we say we will drop all of the barrels into the river and let 9 of them go over Niagara Falls. The other 1 (selected by chance), we will pull out after letting it bang around a while, and hope the occupant hasn't suffocated or been bruised too badly anyway. Wouldn't you like to volunteer? Suppose we give you better odds: we will only allow 5 barrels to take the plunge? It gives you a 50/50 chance; that's fair enough, isn't it? All right, we'll really give you a break (a poor choice of words, under the circumstances): we will only have 1 or 2 barrels go over the falls, so now the odds

are very much in your favor, aren't they? Why doesn't that make you happy, and eager to volunteer?

As with actual Russian Roulette (played with a six-shot revolver and a single bullet), there are no winners of anything they didn't have when they started. Just so with smokers and drinkers alike: whether they become addicted or not there are no winners, only losers in varying degrees. And there is no way of predicting who will become addicted; nor is it even necessary to be an alcoholic to suffer severe physical and mental deterioration, or to have "one too many" at any time and cause a tragedy that blights or ends the life of oneself or others. Dr. Foster again: "As a physician I know firsthand that alcohol presents many problems. I have patched up too many accident victims where alcohol was the major contributor. I have watched too many patients die because of the terror and crime it produces. I have seen too many broken homes caused by alcohol use."

Lorrie Knutsen writes, "Moderate and social drinking is the school in which individuals are trained for a lifetime of alcoholic disaster. Is it worth it?" "Do As I Say, Not As I Do". Dr. Schweitzer believed that "Example is not the best teacher; it is the only teacher!" Of course he also taught through his writings and lectures, so we may take this to be an exaggeration to make a point: if our example is contrary to what we profess, people (especially, most tragically, the young and impressionable) will certainly pick up on the discrepancy and follow what they suppose to be the path of least resistance and most immediate "fun". Time and again it has been shown that the children of smokers and drinkers are far more likely to start smoking and drinking. We cannot expect them to respect the purity and natural well-being of their bodies, and to resist tremendous peer- pressure, if we show by our example that we really don't believe what we try to teach them. In lecturing in schools and colleges in the 1960's and later, how often we heard that "you adults have your tobacco and liquor; marijuana [or whatever else was popular at the moment] is no different." Of course I was able to answer that sincerely and effectively; but considering the absolutely miserable example so many parents and other role-models were setting for them, one could readily understand their confusion and eagerness to prove that they, too, were now mature enough to stuff a bean or two up the beak.

We will not have a generation of drug-less, non-smoking, alcohol-free children at least until we have a generation of parents and other adults who show in word and deed that they really care, mean what they say, and practice what they preach. But individual families are the primary source of education and example in the right way to go, so that their children generally will be well equipped and backed up to resist any temptations or pro-drug propaganda.

There is no iron-clad guarantee, of course, and people of all ages are individuals with their own minds; but young people without the good home example and training are just set up as easy pickings for so many pitfalls in the outside world.

ALCOHOL AND POVERTY

There are so many people today homeless through economic and other problems; we are well aware that not all this misery is alcohol- linked. But when approached by a beggar for "a buck for a cup of coffee" or some lunch, it is not uncommon to stand back from a breath like an unlit blowtorch. And one wonders which came first, the poverty or the alcohol? And what are the chances for a habitual boozier to break the alcohol/ misery cycle? For what job will he be suited, if he (or she, for that matter) will not stop drinking? Accurate work in an office? Fine steady-handed assembly work in a factory? Driving a delivery truck? Are you kidding?

Nor are only the impoverished financially crippled by alcohol; and this is true not only in wealthy nations. Recently a national magazine had an article ("Scraping By") about a working-class family in Russia with three pay-checks totaling 7500 rubles a month.

Times are tough. Their budget is: 3930 rubles for food, 1750 for 5 bottles of vodka, and 1820 for rent,

transportation, utilities, stockings & makeup, movies, and miscellaneous. As you can see, "Not a kopeck is left by month's end for saving." It might be supposed that living in an economy where one must stand in line for hours for the simplest consumer goods, might "drive one to drink"; and we certainly sympathize with their difficulties."

But can anyone think of a single item that might beneficially be cut from such a budget, that would provide a warm glow from socking away over 23% of their income each month, far more than the average worker does in any industrialized western nation we know of, certainly including the U.S.A ?

MORE ON ALCOHOL AND HEALTH

Recently, there came to us one more item, this with (among other goodies) such a devastating refutation of the "a little alcohol will help you live longer and better" myth, that we had to, in effect, "save the best for last" on this subject.

This comes from John A. Scharffenberg, M.D., M.PH., who has given excellent dietary/health info at many vegetarian conventions in the past:

"Alcohol is a major factor in going back to smoking. Alcohol affects first the frontal lobes, the judgment center of the brain. Will power and discernment are affected and lighting up a cigarette is more apt to occur.

...Scientific thinking used to condone moderate drinking and even recommended it. This was done because moderate drinking reduced heart attack risk. However, the overall mortality from all causes combined was increased, it was later discovered. So this is not a good reason for recommending the use of alcohol.

"One study showed that moderate drinkers lived longer than total abstainers. Nancy Day Asher received her doctorate degree at Berkeley by investigating this subject. She discovered that mortality rate of reformed drinkers was very high but reformed drinkers were listed as abstainers. When they were added to the lifetime abstaining group it made it appear that to abstain from alcohol increased mortality when in actuality the reformed drinkers waited too late to reform and the alcohol killed them at a very rapid rate.

"Dr. William Castelli, Director of the Framingham Study, states moderate drinking did reduce heart attack risk according to their study. (Personal communication) Dr. T. Hirayama of Japan states the same thing but adds, however, that the overall death rate is higher among the moderate drinkers and therefore alcohol cannot be recommended. (Personal communication - Nairobi International Council For The Prevention Of Alcohol And Drug Abuse meeting.)

"As of 1989, scientific groups have changed their views and now no longer recommend even moderate drinking. The National Academy of Sciences states, 'The committee does not recommend alcohol'."

"The scientific reasons for not recommending even moderate drinking are now clear. Women who drink moderately, that is, 4 drinks a week, have a 50-100% higher risk of breast cancer and 2-1/2 times greater risk of osteoporosis and hip fractures. Alcohol increases the risk of a number of cancers. It tends to increase systolic blood pressure. Even one drink destroys brain cells and some scientists believe a CAT scan can distinguish by brain shrinkage the drinkers from the non-drinkers..."

And an item about what a "good time alcohol can give in the Holiday Season, when drink increases accident and death rates (even more than at other times). During the holidays many people are taken to the hospital with excruciating chest pains, so bad they think they are having a heart attack (which has been described as "feeling like being hit in the chest with a sledge-hammer"). This is due to the action of alcohol on the heart (or heart-regulating) muscles. Emergency-room physicians nickname for the condition: "Holiday Heart".

"IN VINO VERITAS"

"There is truth in wine," so the old saying goes: "one tells the truth when drunk." But which truth? We live at various levels of existence and consciousness; and there are some parts of our inner, more primitive and impulsive side that are held in check by the surface veneer of civilization and the exercise of conscience. In extreme cases, (as in drink-till-you-drop college-frat initiations) death has occurred from a drinking bout. But Nature usually guards best the functions most vitally needed for immediate survival, such as blood circulation and breathing. "The first to come is the last to go": traits most recently acquired (the art and culture; the conscious reasoning; a sense of duty, altruism and compassion; in short, so much of what we like to think makes us so superior to various simpler forms of life) all may go long before one loses all mobility and consciousness, let alone heartbeat and respiration. We are especially concerned to see almost universally in expert views on alcohol, that even small amounts affect the extremely valuable (and vulnerable) parts of the brain involved in judgment, morality, and reason. Anger, hatred, lust, greed, or any emotion reasonably controlled under normal circumstances may find free rein when one is "under the influence". The most brutal forms of violence (formerly restrained) may surface. Don't take my word for it: you can read all about it in your daily paper, or see it on the evening TV news.

That alcohol is a behavior-modifying drug, that inebriated people will do what they would not otherwise do if in full control, can be seen in so many cliches such as "going on a drunken binge/orgy/spree", "spending money like a drunken sailor", etc. Or conversely, strict temperance, if one must be relied on for wise and fair decisions, hence: "sober as a judge".

We will readily recognize the underlying truth in this passage (from the translation of a German novel, allowing for some exaggeration for humor's sake):

"Inspector Kersten of the Gilgenrode constabulary... had long recognized that an alarming increase in criminal activities and acts of violence in particular, occurred during the hours of darkness preceding every Sabbath. Though not exactly low on other days, Gilgenrode's consumption of alcohol rose by more than 100% on Saturdays, which inevitably led to arguments, insults and, ultimately, clashes of a physical nature. Injuries, even severe ones, were not uncommon, but fatalities seldom occurred. The local bone structure was robust and its resilience exceptional."

It is widely and readily understood that alcohol can fuel (but not excuse) violence. We may cite a telling example from an old movie, where a man is shot dead by a woman claiming self-defense from rape. A friend wonders, "Was he the type of man who could do such a thing?" The reply says worlds: "How can you tell what a man will do when he's drunk?"

Indeed, some supposedly sober scruples nowadays seem so fragile, that it doesn't take a gallon of alcohol to tip one over the edge of the ethical abyss. In one poll, 82% of high school girls and 61% of high school boys said it is "'not acceptable' to force sex if the girl is drunk". This means, of course, that 18% of the girls and 39% of the boys find rape "acceptable" if the perpetrator has taken the precaution of suitably doping the victim. Yet some people still think the main symptom of a decline of our civilization is that the Japanese build more small computers or perhaps better cars than we do.

Whether examined in the light of land wastage, a significant role in the misery of poverty, clear harm to health, or assault on conscience and reasoning faculties with the green light given to violence, on every count alcohol indulgence fails to measure up as anything desirable or worthwhile, to say the least. A serious devotee of ethical behavior should easily see the practice as inimical to the higher aspirations of Ahimsa (Sanskrit: non-killing, non-injuring), or doing the least harm and the most good. That is to say, acting as mature and responsible, ethical and moral human beings.

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