

## [The Alcohol Trap](#)

Category : [July/August 2001](#)

Published by Anonymous on Jul. 02, 2001

ADDICTION

## The Alcohol Trap

You need the best professional help to help an alcoholic

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The Indian community in America, now just over one million people, has a positive image. Its members are perceived as professional, law-abiding, ambitious and, above all, calm and tranquil. The incidence of criminal and violent behaviors, sex crimes, teenage pregnancy, dependency on welfare and drug addiction has so far been negligible. But this is changing. Reports of Indians driving under the influence of alcohol have become much more common. Reports of domestic and family problems related to alcohol abuse are appearing in the Indian press. Clinical psychologists, social workers and general practitioners are reporting an increase in suicides, occasional homicides, fraudulent behavior, mental breakdowns, depression, poverty and addiction. These growing alcohol-fueled behaviors and pathologies are occurring among a population in which the use of alcohol is traditionally shunned.

Addictions of all sorts have become pervasive throughout the world. The addiction epidemic has crossed caste, ethnic,

socio-economic and cultural barriers. There is a growing trend in India to view alcohol as a symbol of being modern and a requirement for "having a good time." Drinking and driving is "macho," and any suggestion that this is dangerous behavior is laughed off. The direct and indirect costs of addiction are beyond calculation. Addiction impacts health, family, work, legal system and road safety.

In developed countries, the severity of the problem and its destructive nature have been recognized, and these societies are trying to find effective ways to control and treat alcoholism, and to contain the destruction caused by it. In the United States, voluntary organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Al-Anon (families and friends of alcoholics) and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), support the recovery of those who are ready to overcome their addictions.

Currently, the most effective approach to the treatment of alcoholism is found in the wisdom of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), a program based on action and spirituality. If the techniques of Hindu psychology are added to the principles of AA, the combined approach can treat addictions successfully. But AA's success rate ranges only between 30 and 40 percent. Western psychology and medicine have proven to be of little value in the rehabilitation of alcoholics, leaving 60 to 70 percent of alcoholics without any hope.

Non-Western alcoholics resist AA. As a result, they and their families suffer in utter helplessness. With the majority of active alcoholics not being treated effectively, it becomes vital to explore other approaches and cross-cultural methods.

I believe that some of the principles found in the Atharva Veda can be incorporated into a comprehensive alcoholism treatment program, such as the concepts of honest disclosure, penance, making sacrifices and amends, retraining the mind and learning from the past, environmental change (for example, changing the people one associates with, making a pilgrimage, etc.), fasting, silence and reciting a mantra.

In arresting the disease of alcoholism and recovering from its devastation, Indians, as a people, have some characteristics that can work in their favor and some that work against them, such as a tendency to avoid a negative situation by acting weak and overly respectful of authority. Characteristics which contribute to the success of therapy include a strong work ethic, a feeling of responsibility toward family, a concern for future security, a tendency to not drink alone but rather in the company of friends, a highly developed sense of guilt and shame, a lack of complicated psychological disorders, such as manic-depressive disorder, and an aversion to being exposed as an alcoholic or becoming

entangled in the legal system.

Should a family member who is an alcoholic refuse to help himself, then the family must step in carefully. The first important strategy is acceptance, not denial. Accept the alcoholic as you would any person with a disease or a serious problem, as someone urgently in need of help. Accept the fact that the alcoholic cannot help himself and must be treated by a professional. Then do not delay or defer seeking professional help. Magic does not happen to addicts, so don't fantasize that the problem will disappear. Getting professional help may be costly in the short term, but in the long run it will prove to be cheaper than the consequences of untreated addiction, such as charges of driving while under the influence, injuries at work, job loss, and chronic, even fatal illnesses, such as cirrhosis of the liver.

Another important strategy is to not turn the use of alcohol into a power struggle and to not become obsessed with the alcoholic. Typically, concerned family members or friends will throw out or remove all alcohol from the environment and try to reason with the alcoholic by arguing, cursing, threatening and pleading. This accomplishes nothing. Any promises exacted from the alcoholic to stop drinking by using those tactics are empty and will be broken. These approaches will delay

getting help and perpetuate helplessness. Also, do not enable the alcoholic by covering up his irresponsible behavior, such as by calling an employer to make excuses for his absence.

Instead, the family needs to educate itself about the disease of alcoholism and its effects on the alcoholic and on those around him or her. AA and the other organizations have literature available. The family also needs to protect itself. Alcohol, violence against self and others and irresponsible behavior often travel together. Therefore, as a significant other while the alcoholic is still actively drinking, and until he or she is in a treatment program protect your financial and physical well-being and that of your family, and include a plan for a place to stay should threats be made.

Alcoholism is an incurable disease. Remission of the disease and recovery from the emotional, spiritual and physical devastation caused by it are the desired outcomes of all treatment programs. Without strict adherence to certain principles, and long-term discipline, the alcoholic is extremely likely to relapse.

The prescription the recovering alcoholic must follow is a tough one for everybody. It requires diligence and time from the alcoholic and cooperation by family and

friends. When the alcoholic was actively drinking, alcohol drove him or her daily from home, if not always physically, then certainly mentally, emotionally and spiritually. If the alcoholic is to maintain this newfound sobriety, then attendance at AA meetings is imperative. In the beginning, for the first 90 days, attendance at meetings must be daily. You may wonder whether this is a change for the better or whether the alcoholic traded one addiction and obsession for another. Now, it's going to meetings! When it isn't meetings, it's aftercare, which consists of sessions with the therapist or group therapy.

It may seem that the only one benefiting from sobriety is the alcoholic. The family feels neglected, friends are put on hold and household responsibilities may be foregone. Not much different from active alcoholism, you may think. Try to remember that alcoholism is a deadly disease that affects the body, mind and spirit. It is not something that was "caught" a week or month or year ago. The progression of the disease started years ago, worsening over time until alcohol nearly destroyed the alcoholic. Arresting the disease and recovering from it will take the alcoholic the rest of his or her life. Eventually, it will get better.

While the alcoholic is following his or her prescription and program of recovery, family and friends can

participate in their own recovery program, Al-Anon. Modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon is a no-cost recovery program for the family and friends of alcoholics. In Al-Anon meetings, you meet other people who have had the same experiences as you, and in spite of the bad times, they are not just surviving, they are thriving. You don't have to feel alone and isolated when there are so many people willing to share their experiences and to demonstrate that it will get better.

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