

The Alcoholic

Early one Saturday morning, even before the birds began to sing, my telephone rang, startling me. I knew it had to be some sort of an emergency, so I picked it up immediately.

The call was from Calcutta, and it turned out to be Devi, wife of the late Dr. Chaudari, Dr. Chaudari had been a pillar of strength during my stay in Calcutta. It was he who introduced me to Mother Teresa, to whom I gave my voluntary services. Devi sounded depressed, and she complained about her son, Anup. The young man, unfortunately, had not been able to recover from the shock of his father's death, and he had picked up the habit of drowning his sorrows in alcohol. Devi said she was unable to control him, and she begged me for my help.

She believed that if she sent Anup to America his problem would be solved. I promised to think about her son's condition and said I would call her in a few days. I decided that I must help Anup. I knew that he had received his education in Houston, Texas. He was married and had a child, so it appeared that things were settled for him. Secretly, however, he was a very troubled man who drank heavily. His wife, Lakshmi, was quickly losing her patience because of his continual use of alcohol.

Eventually, the couple decided that a new start was the only way to solve Anup's problem. They sold everything they owned and returned to India to be nearer to their families.

Anup got a good job in India, but unfortunately things did not work out as they had planned. Anup returned to his drinking habits and eventually had to sell his house to pay debts. His wife finally divorced him and retained custody of his only son, Ravi. The two of them moved to the United States. Anup had lost his job, his wife, and his son. This plunged him into an even deeper depression.

The day after I received Devi's phone call from Calcutta I called Lakshmi, who was living in San Diego. Her replies to my questions about a possible reconciliation were negative. I had the feeling that she had totally given up on him, as she said that only a miracle could change him.

I took it upon myself to help Anup. I called his mother and strongly suggested that she enroll her son in an Alcoholics Anonymous program. A few months later she called me and said that Anup was sober. She asked me whether I could help him get a new start in the United States.

Shortly afterward, to my surprise, Anup's sister, Deepali, who lives in Sydney, Australia, gave me a call. She told me glowing things about her brother, who, she said, had gotten over his drinking habit. A few weeks later I received a letter from Anup stating that he would be arriving in Los Angeles and asking me to pick him up at the airport.

On the day of Anup's arrival I drove to Los Angeles International Airport and waited for him at the gate. I stood there until the last person got off the plane, but I

didn't see him. I spoke to the airline agent at the desk and he confirmed that Anup had indeed been on the flight and had arrived safely in Los Angeles. I returned to the Vihara, but felt very concerned about what might have happened to him. Two days later Anup showed up at the temple while I was away and demanded that the monks pay the taxi fare, which was \$250. The monks paid the taxi driver because they knew Anup was the abbott's friend.

When I arrived I was relieved to see Anup. Later, after talking to him, I realized that he was drunk. "Forgive me, Bhante, but I drink because of my wife, Lakshmi, won't let me see my only son." He put his head in his hands and began to weep, causing me to feel great pity for him.

I decided that under the circumstances, the best thing would be for him to stay at the temple. The next day, when he had sobered up, I told him that if he wanted my help, he had no choice but to enter an Alcoholics Anonymous program. He reluctantly agreed.

About an hour later I checked him into a rehabilitation center in the Crenshaw area for a thirty-day detox program. I told Anup to cooperate with the medical personnel and to do his best to overcome his addiction. I also told him that I would be back every two or three days to see how he was.

Much to my surprise, later that evening he somehow found his way back to the temple.

"What are you doing back here so soon, Anup? I told you to stay there for thirty days!" I exclaimed. "I can't help it, Bhante. I started feeling sick, and I wanted to see my son." He broke down in tears and started crying uncontrollably. "I told you, Anup, that the only way Lakshmi will allow you to see your son again is if you are completely free of alcohol. Does the bottle mean more to you than your only son? Don't you have any feeling for your family?"

"I am just a weak man, Bhante. I don't think I can be free of this problem."

I really didn't know what to do with Anup. I suddenly thought about one of our members, named Dede, who lived not far from the temple in the Wilshire district. Dede is a female Theravada Buddhist who also practices Reiki and other healing arts combined with hypnosis and meditation techniques. I called her on the phone and asked her to please come right over.

The three of us gathered in the Shrine Room, and Dede listened intently to Anup's sad story. She also was moved by his pathetic condition and then hypnotized him and gave him posthypnotic suggestions that would support him in abstaining from alcohol. After he came out of the hypnotic state, Dede counseled him and

gave him positive affirmations that he could use when he felt himself succumbing to his desires. In the evening Anup joined us in meditation. After a few minutes he let out a shriek, saying that there was a snake crawling around the meditation hall. He ran over to the monk who was presiding over the meditation and said, "Can't you see the cobra? He's going to bite you!" When the monk remained silent in meditation, Anup shouted, "Okay, you stupid monk, I don't care if you die!" and then he ran out of the room. Anup's outburst and sudden departure left the rest of us a bit shaken, but we knew that he was hallucinating. Dede and I kept

shaved or changed clothes in about four days, so he looked absolutely terrible. I gave him some vitamins to take, telling him that he would get even sicker without some sort of nourishment, but he refused to take them. "Has my aunt been here to see me? My mother used to try to poison me with pills like those. I'm sure my mother sent poison to my aunt to give to me. She wants me to die!"

I was simply flabbergasted and told him that he shouldn't say such outrageous things against his own mother and her sister. "You can take the pills or not, Anup," I told him, "because if you die, you will only have yourself to blame."

powers of the monks. "Last night this huge tree was only a seedling. Look at it now! These monks have blessed it and made it grow in only one night!"

No one could get him to stop demonstrating and carrying on in such an unseemly manner in front of our temple. Finally, someone called the police. I realized that nothing could help Anup but a detoxification program in the hospital. While I was driving him to the hospital at USC, Anup kept telling me that he wanted me to take him to the police station.

He said, "I want to file a formal complaint against those people. I am especially going to press charges against that white devil

me." Once again he put his head in his hands and wept, but this time it was for a different reason.

"Anup, of course I forgive you, and you can stay here at the temple until you find employment. However, I am not the person you should be asking to forgive you. You need to seek the forgiveness of Lakshmi, Ravi, and your mother. You must make an attempt to put things right with them, if it's not too late. Now that you seem to be on the road to recovery, I will tell you what the Buddha had to say about the dangers of liquor."

I explained to Anup that in the Sigalovada Sutta, there are six kinds of dangers related to alcohol addiction. They are:

Loss of wealth. It was easy for me to explain this, as Anup had lost a fortune, which was his family inheritance. He had also lost his house, career, wife, and only child. Increase in quarrels. Quarrels led to domestic violence in Anup's life. He even tried to involve me, a monk, in quarrels using verbal abuse. Alcoholics often abuse their own children, many of whom repeat the cycle and abuse their children.

Ill health. Alcohol affects both the physical and mental health of a person. In extreme cases, such as Anup's, alcoholics may experience psychotic symptoms, including hallucinations, as they attempt to withdraw from alcohol. Alcoholism may result in loss of memory and permanent damage to brain cells and the central nervous system. It can also damage the muscles of the heart and eventually cause heart failure.

Loss of reputation. After a while, an alcoholic loses credibility with friends and associates, and eventually the reputation of one who is not to be trusted. Indecent exposure. Alcoholics are often not aware of their actions. Sometimes they will say things and expose themselves in other inappropiate ways, which causes embarrassment to the observers.

Impairment of intelligence. When one is under the influence of alcohol, one is sometimes unable to define right from wrong and cannot make sensible decisions. One often makes a fool of oneself in society. After I finished explaining these teachings of the Buddha to Anup, an Indian parable occurred to me that I felt I should share with him. It goes like this: Once there was an ascetic meditating in the forest of India. A woman approached him carrying a baby goat, a knife, and a gourd containing liquor. She told the ascetic that he had three options, which were

- To kill the goat, roast it, and eat with her
- To have a sexual relationship with her
- To drink alcohol with her

Then she told the ascetic that if he didn't select one of these options she would kill him and then kill herself. The ascetic was in a quandary because all three options were against his principles. He presumed that the lesser evil would be alcohol. Therefore, he drank with her, got intoxicated, killed and enjoyed the goat, and had a relationship with her.

I further explained to Anup how over twenty-five hundred years ago, the Buddha had preached to all Buddhists to abstain from alcohol. These messages helped to convince Anup that he should use his will power to his fullest extent, that he must be determined to develop the right effort to embark on his new, sober life and make amends for his past. Finally, I quoted the Buddha's words in Dhammapadam:

He who by good deeds covers the evil he has done, illumines this world like the moon freed from clouds.

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Painful Consequences



calm and didn't try to stop him. Later, I called him to come down to the dining room where there was food left over from lunchtime. When he sat down to the table I noticed that his hands were shaking so badly that he was unable to hold a fork, and he complained that he had no appetite. By this time he hadn't

"Okay, Bhante, because you are a monk I trust you," and then he swallowed the tablets. Afterward he got up from the table and went back upstairs without another word. At midnight I heard a thundering knock on my door. I asked who it was, and Anup answered. I opened the door and he screamed at me, "I know you are poisoning me, just like my mother. Why does everyone want to poison me?" he kept asking over and over again.

Exasperated, I told him to get back to his room. He turned around and walked back down the hall muttering to himself, but by this time I was too upset to sleep.

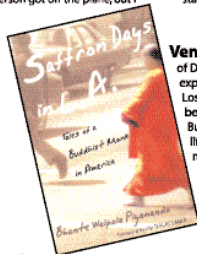
About an hour later I checked his room and saw that he wasn't there. I looked all over the temple for him, but he was nowhere to be found. In the early hours of the morning I heard a huge ruckus coming from outside on the sidewalk in front of the temple. I looked out the window and saw that it was Anup demonstrating, walking back and forth outside the fence, right on Crenshaw Boulevard. He was shouting at the top of his voice, asking passersby in their cars to help the Alcoholics Anonymous program. "Please give money to AA, they need your money!" He was also saying things about the

lady, Dede. Every time I tried to go into a bar last night she was standing in the doorway laughing at me and taunting me. She kept me from going inside and getting a drink!" He was obviously referring to a posthypnotic suggestion planted by Dede the evening before. Apparently it had worked! I used a bit of psychology myself and asked him, "Why aren't you filing an action against your mother? She's the one you said had poisoned you."

He laughed out at me like a tiger, screaming, "What kind of monk are you? How dare you tell a son to go up against his own mother and press police charges?" I was amazed that even in his state of alcoholic dementia he could still defend his mother with such great respect. Once we got to the hospital, he adamantly told the admitting nurse that I had poisoned him. The hospital authorities questioned me, but never seriously thought I was guilty of any crime, given Anup's obvious deranged mental condition.

A few weeks passed, and one day Anup returned to the temple to see me. I was very pleased to see that he was a sober man.

"I am sorry, Bhante, for all the trouble I caused you. Please forgive



Ven. Walpola Piyananda Thera, Founder and Viharahipati of Dhamma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles, California shares his experience of life in America in his maiden literary work *Saffron Days in Los Angeles*, which we are privileged to serialise every Saturday beginning today. With calm and compassion characteristic of a Buddha putra he dispassionately unravels the trials and travails of the life of a Buddhist monk in an alien country captivating the hearts and minds of the reader. The stories in the collection reveal the complex, contradictory, joyous, painful, intriguing and inspiring aspects of human condition and the power of true compassion. This story is about the harmful effects of alcohol.

Saffron Days in L.A.

Tales of a Buddhist Monk in America

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