

Understanding the Alcoholic Delusion

If I Thought, it Would Help

By Rick R.

To those who are normal drinkers, understanding the compulsion of alcoholic drinking is baffling. In the past many people in the recover movement also had a difficult time understanding it. Professionals who treat alcoholics well-meaning as they are, often focus on the symptoms of the problem and not enough on the root causes of the disease. They often measure the success rate based on the length of time a person abstains from alcohol. At first blush, this seems to be working. In those days many alcoholics were introduced to the very expensive Rehab Support environment at the time and was somewhat intrigued, and often willing to play along for a while if it means getting the wife/boss/judge off his back. When they completed that process, they were often handed the book Alcoholics Anonymous and suggested that they attend AA meetings.

Things go ok for a while, but if he still wants a drink, what often happens is, the pink cloud goes away. He starts to find fault with the process and starts to point out why he is different. Being sober for a month or two he then declares that **he can stay sober on his own**. His family does not have a good defense for the crafty alcoholic's argument. He goes home, back to work, and everything goes well for a while. Very seldom does a man get to that stage and stays sober for any length of time **on his willpower alone**.

Soon starts the heart-breaking disappointments, the deceptions, the lies, the denial, the closet drinking, and the blaming of others for his problems. The family and loved ones try everything to convince him to stop drinking, but the lure of the bottle is too strong, and he fails again and again. After years of tears and agonizing over what she can do, his wife is finally faced with the reality that it is never going to get better. She musters up the strength to pack her things and leave him knowing that she will be misunderstood, and sometimes vilified by **his** family. The pain for her has been unbearable. Her prospects for the future are uncertain, but she knows that she cannot go back to what they had. There is no reprieve. She is gone.

WHY? Asks the normal person, would anybody put the bottle before his wife, his children, and everything in his life. Well, the alcoholics who have recovered from this malady, and have been restored to a somewhat normal life, often understands how the practicing alcoholic could do such a thing in the face of everything he has to lose, mainly because they have been through the same, or similar ordeals to some degree or another. They also know that, until this man has reached his bottom, it is unlikely that anything will get in the way of his drinking. The delusion (FAULTY PERCEPTION) is still there. The pain of failure and the loss of everything are often the lengths to which some alcoholics will go before that final **WAKE-UP CALL** brings him to his

knees. For the first time in his life, he is faced with the reality that he has HAD IT ALL WRONG, and if he does not do something about it, he may waste the only life he has, or worse, he may end up institutionalized or even dead. He must reach a point of **desperation** significant enough to be willing to ask for help. He must become teachable. Then, and only then, is he able to see the possibility of living a normal life and having a chance to be at peace with himself.

The world has a hard time of trying to explain why some people can drink and never have a problem with it, when others start drinking and progressively spin out of control. There is no simple answer to these questions as there are many complicated facets to the disease of alcoholism and they claim that twelve percent or so, of the men in America that drink become Alcoholics... I do, however, have simple analogy that may help to explain the true nature of this malady to both the normal drinker and to the alcoholic. For lack of a better reference point, we can use a person's emotional state as a barometer.

On a scale of 1 to 10 the normal person awakens each morning at an emotional level of 8 while the alcoholic awakens at a level of 2. Neither knows the emotional level of the other. The normal one does not understand why the other one is so silent, depressed, disgruntled, unhappy, etc. Everything seems fine to him. What is the problem? The alcoholic, on the other hand (being at a 2) cannot understand why a normal guy is so up-beat, after all, the world is a cold and hostile place to him. There are wars, the economy, sickness, not much to look forward to. What's the use? He feels he is looking up out of A deep pit.

They both go down to the corner bar, sit down and order drinks. The alcoholic takes a drink, and his emotional level goes immediately from a 2 to a 9, and halfway through his second drink, everything is right with the world. He feels he is as good as anybody. His inhibitions are gone, his shame and guilt are gone, and for the first time in his life he is at peace with himself. He feels normal. Wanting to build on that feeling, he continues to drink and ends up drunk that evening. He wakes up the next morning at an emotional level of 1. He is back in the pit only deeper.

He remembers the first few drinks he had had the day before and the relief that it gave him. He goes back to the bar, takes a drink, and goes right back to an emotional level of 9, and halfway through his second drink, everything is right with the world again. He feels that drinking is the answer to all his problems. In reality, when the alcoholic is halfway through his 2nd drink, his perception of the world around him is close to normal and if he could maintain that state, things would be fine, but then we have another problem, TOLERANCE, which I will address later.

Getting back to when the normal drinker takes a drink, his emotional level goes from an 8 to a 9. It is nice but not that big a deal. He has a few more drinks, and then goes home to his family.

He wakes up the next morning at a7 or 8 and goes to work. (No big deal) no guilt, no shame, no excuses, and no compulsion. This is normal.

Professionals in this field explain that, when a young person starts to drink to avoid the stresses of life, often in his teens, he stops developing emotionally, in effect, he does not develop coping skills. Often, childish, sensitive, and grandiose behaviors are symptoms of his inability to cope with daily problems and life issues. He often thinks that he handles these situations better after he has had a few drinks, and that may be true in the early stages, only because his first drinks have removed most of his fear and inhibitions, and as he develops more tolerance for alcohol, he seems to get better at it. (EVERYTHING SEEMS RIGHT WITH THE WORLD)

The progression of the tolerance level of an alcoholic follows a bell curve. He starts out as a sloppy drinker and the longer he drinks the better he handles it. He gets to a point where he can hold his liquor with the best of them. In some cases, he can drink from sunrise and close the bar at 2 am and you could not tell he was drinking unless you could smell the alcohol on his breath. He feels he has finally arrived. He is at the top of the bell curve and that stage lasts only a while.

Soon he cannot remember what happened past midnight, then past ten pm, soon people start telling him what he did last night (NOTHING TO BE PROUD OF) and he is embarrassed by it all. This is called BLACKOUT DRINKING. He may try to curb his drinking but that usually only lasts a short time because waking up in the emotional state of a 1 or a 2 is unbearable by this time and once he takes his first drink (or mind-altering drug) he has little choice about taking a second due to the compulsion.

Then the wheels start to come off the cart when he gets his first D.U.I. He may try to blame it on Bad Timing, Bad Luck, Bad Breaks or even the Cop that pulled him over. He then tries to get on the wagon. This works till the next wedding/funeral/graduation party/or whatever good excuse he can use to have a few drinks and much to his surprise he is pulled over on the way home from the event and receives his 2ND D.U.I.

This type of thing will continue, on a more frequent basis for as long as he is willing to drink. This is the hardest reality to accept. The die is cast. It will only get worse. Never better. He may stop drinking for three or four months and think that, with time, he will regain his tolerance. He drinks again and this time he wakes up in jail having been in an auto accident. He cannot remember anything. His first question is. Did Anyone Get Injured? He is bailed out of jail and the first place he wants to go is to a liquor store to get something to calm his nerves. So, why doesn't he just quit drinking? The answer to that is the key to this compulsion. He believes that he will be confined to a world where he will wake up at a2 every day of his life with no means of escape but that is simply not the case. Until he is desperate enough to surrender to the

alternative, he will have this faulty perception. Most recovered alcoholics live a life far better than they could ever have imagined.

Most practicing alcoholics have “WELL MEANING” Friends and loved ones who often, without knowing it, help to perpetuate the problem by not letting him suffer the consequences of his errant behavior. They bail him out of jail and give him a tongue lashing (parenting). They call his work and report him off sick (after all, the family needs the paycheck to pay the rent) the enabling process can go on for years, but it only postpones the inevitable. When I had to address this issue when my son was isolating and going in the wrong direction in his middle twenties, and I realized that my enabling was a large part of the problem, I had to present it in a way he and anyone else close to him would understand I simply said, “Son, I love you and if I thought this was helping you I would be onboard completely, but I know that it is only perpetuating the problem and I cannot do this and still consider myself a good father. If you think you can do it on your own, my prayers are with you, you’re on your own, pack your bags. Expressing it in that way was my answer, but it may not be right answer for everyone. This was not meant to be advice or a suggestion, but more of a different perspective on how to be a father rather than a parent in his matter.

These are difficult lessons to learn but he will face them in one way or another. Few alcoholics get this thing without going through this type of pain, to one degree or another.

The Twelve Step Programs (AA/NA) are the best hope I know of for long term, positive results. The steps are a process designed to help him resolve those issues that caused him to be at that emotional level of 2. If practiced in the spirit that they are intended to be practiced, He can look forward to a happy and contented future. It is often said that “IT WORKS FOR EVERYONE THAT DOES IT.”

The Alanon program is a wonderful answer for the loved ones of the alcoholic.