



WHAT IS ALCOHOLISM?

"A letter to a patient"

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A disease whose one does not know the cause...
...and that cannot be cured.
When one starts one can no longer stop.
And other people?
To make alcohol reserves.
Why it is so difficult to speak?

A disease whose one does not know the causes...

Nobody knows the causes of this disease. Alcoholic dependence is a universal disease. It exists in all countries of the world, in all races, in all the climates. In spite of researches present and past, nothing explains why certain people can be victims of alcohol while others never encounter difficulties.

Frankly, patients give an account of problems which pushed them to drink and which they think to be at the origin of their disease. Looking at them closely, psychological reasons, worries or festive occasions, loneliness or married life, unemployment or work, are never real reasons, but more often the consequences of alcohol abuse. **"Former drinkers" call these "alibis"**. It is true that everybody, during his life, once went through a bad time. But not everybody turns to alcohol.

One cannot explain why the majority of people, who appreciate these drinks, never become dependent on them, whilst a correct regulation of drinking is not possible for our patients.

and that cannot be cured.

If the origin of the disease is unknown, we are unaware of the reasons why the dependence is always irrevocable. To date, there is no treatment which allows us to control it. One can repair the damage caused by alcohol abuse, one can allow a patient not to have a setback, but the alcohol-dependence itself is not curable. Unfortunately, there is no existing treatment which makes it possible to discover the pleasure of a good wine or to have a drink with a friend. There is no alternative to total and final abstinence. **To establish or to restore a natural consumption of alcoholic drinks is impossible.**

With this disease, the doctor does not have a medication, nor a saving knowledge. Yet one should not despair. Many patients pull through, when they understand the mechanism of the terrible chain-reaction.

When one starts one can no longer stop.

Alcohol is not essential for life; normally it is superfluous. Although it is not a vital food for the human being, has become a fully qualified food, in the inner minds of most people.

Each one of us knows the human need for solid food and liquid food. The first is meat, vegetables, fruits, etc... The second provides the necessary water: fruit juice, milk, wine, beer, cider, all mineral waters...

How does it work? When the body needs solid food, **the mind receives a message which is called "hunger"**. When the body needs liquid food, the mind receives a message **which is called "thirst"**. Everybody knows these two signals. When the signal of "hunger" appears one thinks more and more about eating.

But these two signals of hunger and thirst have their opposites, nevertheless important for health. They are called **"signals of satiety"**. They cut off hunger or appetite at the right time; beyond, that point, eating becomes less interesting and even painful when a forced meal is prolonged. These opposites - also called "instinctive stops" - are very important for health: they adjust drinking or eating, to the quantity required by the body. They avoid serious diseases by overload.

These signals have an extraordinary precision. Let us check our weight from one end of the year to the other. In this time, everybody eats nearly a ton of food. You will keep the same weight whatever momentary variations of feeding, according to the seasons, or physical activities, etc... **The slightest disturbance**, in the arrival of these signals will involve loss or gain of weight. Water is most precisely regulated, and each intake is rigorously programmed by the body; the instinctive stop signal is imperative: the displeasure quickly replaces the pleasure of satisfying one's thirst. These things, which you have recognized, occur thus for all foods and drinks except for a certain few:

- **chocolate**: for almost everyone, chocolate does not excite the signals of satiety but, on the contrary, the desire increases as one eats it; that is why chocolate makes an appreciated delicacy, even after a large meal;
- **alcohol** involves the same reaction, but not in all people; for 8% to 11% of human beings: alcohol-dependent, who are going to appreciate it, seek it and suffer from it.

Alcohol is a food which is drunk. It prevents, in your body, the signal of satiety to occur, and worse, makes the need even stronger. This reaction does not exist in all people. Here lies the real danger of the disease since it goes in contrary direction of biological laws, therefore of life.

It obliges the ingestion of toxic amounts since the natural regulation never intervenes in order to limit it, as it does for the other substances (except chocolate). **Alcohol, for you, functions the wrong way**. Being hospitalized alcohol was not given to you, and you had less and less need to drink as your body was free of it. Whereas, without eating, you would be more and more hungry...

Here is what occurs in dependent people:

- **no alcohol in the body: no need**;
- alcohol in the body: **more alcohol no longer stops the desire for drinking**. It

follows a psychological reaction of search for drink, but nobody, alcoholic or not, can stop the consumption of a product which itself increases the appetite to consume it.

And other people?

Normally, after a sufficient meal, one doesn't need an effort of will-power in order stop eating or drinking. That is why sober people stop drinking. That is why they are sober. This is very important but, we think, for you, the most difficult to imagine. You have already been to a restaurant or a pub. You noticed sometimes that others, when going off, left on the table, a bottle of wine, or a half full bottle of beer. That could appear to you unthinkable, and it happens that patients told me that they have gone to finish them off...

Notice that at the same time, you have yourself left bread in the basket on the table without thinking of it. In the same manner this neighbour gave up the remainder of his drink. **He did not do it because he had more will-power than you, or more moral standards, or a stronger personality...** Quite simply, for him, the desire for wine had disappeared, as for you, the desire for the bread which you left.

There is therefore a difference between you and other people (the "civils" as the AA call them). Your desire persists and increases as and when you drink: **"when I start I can no longer stop myself"**. But if you feel that your will-power is put to the test, alcoholism is present. You must know that when drinking or eating are needed, will-power is always the loser; this is a natural law. Otherwise the human race would not exist. In fact, what the dependent patient, does not experience with respect to alcoholic drinks, is a disappearance of the need which permits others to stay sober.

To make alcohol reserves.

What has just been described, will explain to you many things. In the first place, making reserves of alcohol, and hiding them. This "typical attitude of the alcoholic", as a patient said, becomes sometimes an obsession. The dependent person who acts thus is acting, without realizing, **as do all human beings who fear a deprivation** of food or of drink.

A patient, who buried bottles in his garden, noticed that his dog buried bones in the same place. Both obeyed the same reflex of survival. During the war each family made provisions and "did not proclaim it from the housetops". **With the dependent person, the fear of deprivation causes the same reflexes and the same secrecy.** The need for alcohol makes this reflex reappear in you, so long as the need doesn't leave you. In this respect, this behaviour occurs with all living beings.

Why it is so difficult to speak?

It is with speech that the drinker meets the most difficulties. Without knowing it, the patient is confronted with impossibilities of speaking that everyone meets: it is not enough to have words to be able to express his ideas. This verbal blockage has precise origins; sexual [modesty](#), which everyone is acquainted with, is the best example. It should be known that the human being is thus made that he **is able to speak when the body obeys his mind but not when his mind must obey his body**. That may appear strange, but sexual life is precisely a field where it is necessary to obey one's body.

- it is not the case of work, leisure, a walk: here the mind decides, the body carries out; **all can be expressed completely** and without problem;

- on the other hand, with sexuality, **the mind must as possible obey the body as closely as possible**: our sexual life should not be spoken about; modesty stops the language.

However, the dependent person no longer seeks alcohol in order to accompany a meal, nor to toast an occasion. The drinker doesn't approach drink for any of these particular or convivial reasons. He goes toward drink because **his body claims it and he obeys**. He thus can neither speak **of** it, nor speak **about** it: drinking alcohol becomes **a secret act**. Generally, and better than anybody, the patient knows these blockings which compel him to lie and put him at such a distance from others. There are indeed moments when he needs to speak, especially when he begins to feel his impotence in stopping by himself.

But **what cannot be told, can also not be shown**. Like the sex act, the gesture of drinking cannot be shown. The secrecy and loneliness end up being essential. One understands that the patient feels depressed and even guilty. It would be necessary then to entrust to somebody, family, friend or doctor. You understand now why **more it becomes necessary, less one can speak**.

As always, the impotence of speech is the source of all the conflicts. The more the family becomes distant, the more the drinker has need of it. In such a disease this speech difficulty may be the most harmful symptom.

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