

## Alcohol

### (part 1 of 2): The Devil's Deadly Disease



In the year 988 CE, Prince Vladimir, sovereign leader of Kievan Russia, opted for Orthodox Christianity as his state religion. Legend says his ambassadors were much more impressed with the gold and grandeur of Byzantine's cathedrals, especially Constantinople's Church of Santa Sophia (now Istanbul's Mosque of Haya Sofiya) than they were with the simple and austere décor of the Islamic houses of worship (i.e. the mosques) in nearby Volga Bulgaria. But another, more telling reason for the Russian Prince's favoring Christianity over Islam was, so the chroniclers tell us, the Russians' love of alcohol. The Muslims' absolute abstention from liquor was a sacrifice too far for Vladimir's countrymen to make. Alas, it would appear that their insatiable thirst for a "good" drink, particularly vodka, has plagued the Russian nation ever since.

According to a report published in the year 2000<sup>[1]</sup>, a staggering two thirds of Russian men die drunk and more than half of that number die in extreme stages of alcoholic intoxication. At 57.4 years, Russian men have the lowest life expectancy in Europe. Although heart disease, accidents and suicides account for nearly 75% of male deaths, they are seldom sober when they die. Wrote the daily *Kommersant* newspaper in commentary of a three-year study of men aged between 20 and 55 in Moscow and Udmurita:

**"Everyone is drunk: murderers and their victims, drowning victims, suicides, drivers and pedestrians killed in traffic accidents, victims of heart attacks and ulcers."**

Though they make for bleak reading, these statistics should not and do not suggest that alcoholism be taken as an ethnic marker for the Russian, nor indeed for any other tribe from the children of Adam. As Mr. Cherniyenko, vice chairman of the National Organization of Russian Muslims, remarks:

**“One can say that drinking vodka or wine is a significant aspect of Russian culture, yet I can be a good Russian while not drinking alcohol... Most of the social problems in Russia are caused by alcohol consumption. If we can introduce some Islamic social values to Russia, society and the country will become stronger.”**

Looking much further west across the Atlantic (or east across the Bearing Straits) towards Russia’s great rival during the Cold War, the United States, we find that the American nation does not fair much better when it comes to drink-related death and injury. According to a 1988 study by the American Medical Association, some 100,000 deaths and \$85.8 billion are linked to the abuse of alcohol, with 25 to 40 percent of hospital beds being occupied by people being treated for alcohol-induced complications. Alcohol is also the US’s leading cause of traffic accidents, with 17,126 people killed in alcohol-related crashes in 1996 alone, according to government statistics. Alcohol is also the principle cause of family breakdown in the US. And in another report published in 2006 by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, test results from suicide victims in 13 states showed that 33.3 per cent – one in three! - had alcohol in their blood. But again, statistics aside, there is nothing intrinsic in the American physiology that consigns it to an alcoholic abyss. Take the bottle away from the American, as happened in one particular Islamic setting, and a rather different result is recorded.

**“Our sick call rate went down, our accident and injury rate went down, our incidents of indiscipline went down, and health of the force went up. So there were some very therapeutic outcomes from the fact that no alcohol was available whatsoever in the kingdom (of Saudi Arabia).” (Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of allied forces in the Persian Gulf War, explaining to the US Congress how a scarcity of alcohol made for a better American soldier. June 13, 1991)**

Even the unborn are not safe from the dangers of alcohol. Fetal alcohol syndrome is a rather nasty disease caused by exposure to alcohol in the womb. The disease strikes one to two babies in every 1,000 births worldwide and results in chronic physical and neurological damage. According to a 10-year German study<sup>[2]</sup>, symptoms include long-lasting brain damage and temporary physical deformities including a smallness of the head and stunted growth. To avoid fetal alcohol syndrome, not only are mothers recommended to completely avoid alcoholic drink during pregnancy, but doctors also recommend that men practice abstinence for several months prior to conception.

**“...Will you then not abstain?” (Quran 5:91)**

Suicide, homicide, domestic violence, grievous bodily harm, vandalism, self abuse and unborn-child abuse! – all evil consequences of alcohol consumption. And yet, the disease of alcohol is easily and roundly avoided by the adherents to the religion of Islam, or by those who find themselves in areas where Islamic writ is observed. For if alcohol is indeed a disease, no less the

Devil's deadly disease, then it is one from which the pious Muslim is immune, even though it be the only disease which

- is sold in bottles;
- is advertised in newspapers, magazines, radios and television;
- is contracted by the will of man;
- has licensed outlets to spread it;
- produces revenue for the government;
- brings violent deaths on the highways;
- has no germs or viral cause;
- propels one's health to self-destruction;
- destroys family life and increases crime.<sup>[3]</sup>

**“O you who believe! Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks), gambling, idolatory and the divining of arrows are an abomination of Satan's handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful. Satan seeks only to cast amongst you enmity and hatred by means of strong drink and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of God and from his worship. Will you then not abstain?” (Quran 5:90-91)**

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#### Footnotes:

<sup>[1]</sup> *Kommersant*, Moscow, May 19, 2000.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Associated Press*, London, April 8, 1993.

<sup>[3]</sup> This bulleted list was first published by IPCI, Durban, in a pamphlet entitled: *Fire in your bellies*.

## **(part 2 of 2): The Mother of Every Evil**

**“O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That we should with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause transform ourselves into beasts!” (Cassio, in William Shakespeare's Othello, act 2, scene 3)**

One day, as he came out from his mosque, the Prophet Muhammad, may God send praises upon him, noticed his cousin and son-in-law, Ali b. Abi Talib, visibly upset. When the concerned Prophet asked Ali what was troubling him, Ali simply pointed to the bloody carcass of his dearly cherished camel - no ordinary camel, but the war-weathered camel that Ali would mount

in his valiant defense of the Prophet and Islam on the battlefield. Ali told the Prophet that one of their uncles had been responsible for the unsanctioned slaughter of his animal, and so the Prophet went to ascertain his (i.e. the uncle's) side of the story.

Entering in the presence of his uncle, the Prophet found him drunk with wine. Upon seeing the displeasure in his nephew's face, the uncle knew at once, despite his intoxication, that the Prophet had come to question him about Ali's beast of war. With nothing good to say in his defense, the guilt-ridden, drunken uncle blurted out to his nephew: **"You and your father are my slaves!"** The Prophet's only response to the blasphemous outburst was to exclaim: **"Truly, alcohol is the mother of every evil!"**

And so, from the biography of the Prophet Muhammad we learn a weighty lesson as regards the colossal and evil consequences of alcoholic drink. Any one of the alcohol-inspired acts in this short episode from the blessed Prophet's life would suffice the reader as an admonition: whether it be the culling of Ali's camel, the drunken state of an uncle of a Prophet of God – let alone His last and final messenger to mankind - or the wicked insult he spewed out against him and his own deceased brother, who was no less than the father of the Prophet of God. How much worse then when we consider all these crimes together? Not to mention the many evils indirectly resulting from the uncle's consumption of the alcohol, such as the loss to the Muslim community of one its battle-hardened steeds of war, or the pain, anguish and, perhaps, embarrassment that Muhammad must have felt at this tragic family affair. No doubt, it was precisely because the Prophet recognized that it was the alcohol that gave birth to and nurtured all these foul sins that he denounced it as: **"the mother of every evil!"**

Hence, we find Islam completely forbidding the consumption of alcohol, whether in large or small amounts. The Prophet Muhammad said:

**"If a large amount of anything causes intoxication, a small amount of it is also prohibited."**<sup>[1]</sup>

In this one *hadeeth* narration, we see the perfection of Islam as a religion, its conclusiveness as a legal code, and its comprehensiveness as a way of life. As one German convert to Islam noted:

**"[Islam] values the moral and spiritual health of a nation as much as its physical well-being. It considers anything that interferes with the normal working of the mind, numbs our senses, thereby reducing our level of shame or responsibility, or clouds our perception as harmful (this includes alcohol as well as other drugs altering the mind). And recognizing that different people react quite differently to the same stimulant, it does not leave the judgment, as to how much is acceptable to them. Too many people thought they had control over their drinking habit, yet ended up having 'one glass too many'. Islam categorically states that if a substance can destroy the clarity of the mind in large quantities, it**

**is harmful even in minute quantities. Islam, therefore, advocates a total prohibition of narcotic drugs, including alcohol. It forbids the use, not just the abuse of these substances.”<sup>[2]</sup>**

Yes, there are some benefits to be derived from alcoholic beverages. For example, alcohol can give one strength and confidence; it helps one to relax and, in small quantities, is even good for the health of one’s heart.<sup>[3]</sup> However, as the Glorious Quran states, the harms associated with alcohol far outweigh its benefits. As such, in the final analysis, alcohol is a foe, not a friend of its consumer.

**“They ask you (O Prophet) concerning alcoholic drink and gambling. Say: ‘In them is a great sin, and (some) benefit for men, but their sin is greater than their benefit...’”  
(Quran 2:219)**

It is only because Islam seeks the benefit and betterment of man that Islamic law criminalizes the consumption, production, transportation and sale of alcoholic drink.<sup>[4]</sup> In fact, the mere consumption of alcohol is a criminal pursuit so serious that it carries with it a severe corporal punishment. As for the Hereafter, the punishment is truly grotesque:

**“Every intoxicant is prohibited. God has made a covenant regarding those who consume intoxicants to give them to drink the discharge (of the inhabitants of Hell!)”<sup>[5]</sup>**

To conclude, it is perhaps useful to have the reader ponder over the following well-known story; well-known at least to many a cautious Muslim.

Once upon a time, a bad woman invited a good man to bad deeds. The man, fearing God, flatly refused. But, determined not to let her prey escape, the woman offered him one of three choices, each one more dastardly than the other: to consume alcohol, to commit adultery, or to murder her child from a previous marriage. If the man refused, she would cry rape. So, after having pondered his predicament, the pious man chose what he reckoned to be the lesser of the three evils. However, upon taking the alcohol, the man became drunk and then, under the influence of his brain-killing beverage, he killed the child and committed adultery with the wicked woman.

Ponder, and then consider how easily you yourself could degenerate as a human being if, that is, you too were to embrace **“the mother of every evil.”**

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#### **Footnotes:**

<sup>[1]</sup> Narrated by the Companion, Jaabir, and recorded in the collections of Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud & Ibn Majah.

<sup>[2]</sup> Sahib M. Bleher, *One glass too many*. Pg. 199.

[3] Although, strictly speaking, it is the pigment that occurs naturally within the grape and not necessarily the wine fermented from it that is beneficial for the heart.

[4] “Allah curses all intoxicants (alcoholic beverages); (He also curses) the one who drinks it and the one who serves it, the one who sells it and the one who buys it, the one who makes it and the one who asks that it be made for him, the one who delivers it and the one to whom it is delivered.” (*Abu Dawood*)

[5] *Saheeh Muslim*.