

## **BUDDHISM AND ALCOHOLISM**

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Social factors are important in the genesis of alcoholism (Connor, 1975; Slater and Roth, 1969). Religious influence is among these but is difficult to demonstrate decisively as other factors also operate. The incidence of alcoholism certainly is high in the West where the prevailing Christian view is indulgent towards the consumption of alcohol. In contrast, the incidence among Buddhists would be expected to be low. However, the incidence of alcoholism among Buddhists in Sri Lanka is surprisingly high (Wijesingne et al, 1978).

In an attempt to find out the reasons for this, we questioned Buddhist alcoholics identified in a previous community survey about their religious beliefs and the discordance between these beliefs and their alcoholism. Nearly all claimed to have faith in Buddhism. Most argued that their drinking did not constitute a major transgression of the teaching. Among the arguments were that 'moderate drinking' was permissible or that they had control over their behaviour even after alcohol or that they abstained on religious occasions. A few omitted reciting the fifth precept which device was claimed to relieve them from the obligation to avoid alcohol

Although Buddhism condemns taking alcohol, it has by its liberal attitude of leaving to the individual the freedom to decide on his actions, failed to act as a check on alcoholism. Since no edicts are issued for laymen, those who wish to consume alcohol are able to rationalise their behaviour and so continue to drink without compromising their religious convictions.

### References

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