

# CLOSING TIME

**Sandra Kimball** suggests cures for an all-too-common disease

**F**OR JEREMY, IT BEGAN AFTER HE went to a *bonenkai*, the traditional end-of-year celebration with fellow workers. He woke up the next morning in a police cell, his frightened and angry wife collecting him after another night of worrying about his safety and whereabouts. He remembered nothing about how he got there.

Mariko was a "kitchen drinker," who started drinking most days at noon and was passed out by the time her two small children came home from school and began to prepare their own dinner. One night, the little one was too ill to cook and Mariko couldn't be roused to make a telephone call for help.

Most of us drink alcohol. But if we find we have difficulty in slowing down the pace, frequency or quantity, and it begins to impact negatively on relationships with others, we need to ask ourselves if we are in the fierce and solid grip of alcohol dependency.

There are many theories about who gets caught in the negative consequences of drinking too much. Attitudes and beliefs, both negative and positive, shape a person's relationship with alcohol. Many people learn from their family or cultural background that patterns of heavy drinking are acceptable. Or, a person can become vulnerable from the pressure to fit into a group, especially in high school or college and later in work situations. Genetics also plays a part. If a person has a biological parent who is an alcoholic, he or she is at greater risk. However, it is still difficult to predict precisely who will find themselves at the mercy of alcohol dependency and abuse.

There is an indulgent approach toward drinking and drunkenness in Japan. Drinking is an integral part of business and social life and cuts across all levels of society. And like Jeremy, there is pressure to drink with co-workers as a mark of company loyalty.

Japan has bucked world trends and alcoholism is alarmingly on the rise. Once the harmful effects were ignored and if you had a problem, it was mostly considered a private matter. But today

public attitudes are changing. Throughout Japan, there is a growing concern about the negative effects of drinking in excess, and more and more physicians, nurses, and counsellors are being trained in therapeutic methods aimed at curbing the destructive pattern of alcohol abuse.

Some believe that alcohol addiction is a disease that cannot be cured, just like diabetes. This is known as the medical model. They believe that people have no control over their alcohol use and that their disease can only be managed by avoiding alcohol altogether. Alcoholics Anonymous is the best-known approach that is consistent with the medical model. Abstinence (no drinking at all) is the treatment goal and for those who stick with it, is very effective. This is the choice Mariko made. She attends weekly meetings, and one year later with the spiritual dimension and peer support offered in AA, she has a calm conviction and a quiet self-confidence to set a positive direction to her life.

Jeremy decided to escape from the cage of dependency by attending a discreet, comprehensive, and all-inclusive rehabilitation programme in Thailand. It offered him the privacy he needed and set out clear, achievable goals for him during his stay and ongoing support for him after he returned home. It uses cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), a short-term, focused therapeutic approach that works from the premise that alcohol addiction is not an incurable disease, but a psychological disorder. The goal in CBT can be either complete abstinence, or moderate or controlled drinking. Jeremy took a good hard look at his risky attitudes and careless behaviour and learned how to make the right choices in limiting his drinking. The by-product of his honest make-over is a new control over his life and a better relationship with his wife and family.

Emmanuel, who on Monday regularly forgot that he had picked fights with colleagues on weekends, was completely ready to quit and simply needed some help to change. With the support from private counselling, he began to redefine himself from the inside out and to reconnect to the fundamental principles he

wanted to live by. He found ways to maintain friendships without drinking and explored safe ways to express the anger that used to explode every time he drank.

If you are living in a pleasant dream, there is nothing pushing you to wake up, but if it's a nightmare, you must do something drastic. A few years ago, I had the privilege of working in a therapeutic community with people waking up from the bad dream of addiction. I say it was a privilege because I continue to work privately and witness the great rewards that come to someone when they turn their life away from a dependence on alcohol or drugs.

Many times we drink too much as a means of coping with problems or letting off steam from concealed frustrations. Although there are different paths leading to the same goal, the end result must include an increased confidence to resist heavy drinking or a commitment to completely stop altogether. Because alcohol dependency sometimes takes a detour to old behaviours before the habit is completely turned around, a relapse prevention plan is a must.

Remember, no one drinks himself or herself into oblivion night after night because they are happy. If you or someone you know is drinking too much, no matter what steps were taken to get there, steps can be taken to leave it behind. **KTO**

## Resources

### Alcoholics Anonymous:

Visit [www.aatokyo.org](http://www.aatokyo.org), or check for local gatherings in KTO's "Meetings" section.

**Residential rehabilitation program in Thailand:** [www.channahthailand.com](http://www.channahthailand.com)

**For trained therapists in Japan:** [www.internationalco-unselling.com](http://www.internationalco-unselling.com), [www.imhpi.org](http://www.imhpi.org)

### For help in Japanese:

Zenkoku Danshu Renmei ([www.dansyu-renmei.or.jp](http://www.dansyu-renmei.or.jp))

*Names and identifying information have been changed to ensure privacy.*