

## **DETOXIFICATION - FOR FUN AND PROFIT**

by William F. Hewitt

### **Friends and Neighbors**

Why don't we do ourselves a favor? Why don't we eliminate the overwhelming spiritual taxation that we impose on ourselves through the breeding and slaughter of billions upon billions of animals? Why don't give we our bodies some relief from the poisons we ingest? And, at no extra charge, we could at the same time relieve our overburdened earth from the tropical rainforest fires, the desertification, and some of the water pollution. And, while we're at it, just for fun, let's close down the zoos and aquariums, and eliminate the fur industry.

By raping the land on which we dwell, contaminating the water on which we depend, fouling the very air we rely on to survive moment by moment, and wreaking horrible cruelty on the animals with which we share this planet, we compound all of our problems greatly, at the physical, psychic, and spiritual levels.

Our predilection for meat and dairy products has given us a plague of heart disease, gastrointestinal cancers, and obesity, along with rivers of blood from the slaughter, as well as mountains of excrement, polluting our waters, not to mention the devastation of rangeland and rainforest for feed.

If people would only realize the health benefits of a nonmeat diet, habits might change.

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The human body does not contain the right kind of organs and enzymes to properly digest the amounts of meat that individuals eat. The overconsumption of meat contributes significantly to obesity, diabetes, osteoporosis, gastrointestinal tract cancers, and cardiovascular disease. We also ingest all the bioaccumulated chemicals from pesticides, fertilizers, steroids, and antibiotics that one finds in any respectable cut of meat.

If vegetarianism were to take hold worldwide, farms would be vastly better able to produce enough food for people everywhere, and much more safely. These foods -- fruits, vegetables and grains -- can be cultivated, stored, and transported using far, far fewer fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides, and rodenticides than we now use.

Fifteen or so thousand years of deficient thinking has blinded us to the realization of how important it is to natural resource protection to not breed animals for slaughter. In the U.S. alone, more than six billion pigs, sheep, birds, and cattle are "processed" for food every year. More than five billion tons of American topsoil is eroded annually because of animal agriculture. And in the developing world, scores of millions of acres of forest land are cut down for grazing land every year. This is land that takes many years to return to its natural state, if ever, when you get only one, at best, two seasons of grazing out of it. Whatever land is used, the difference in yields per acre is staggering: 20,000 pounds of potatoes can be grown annually on one acre versus 165 pounds of beef. The ratio of fossil fuel use in a meat-centered diet versus a meat-free diet is fifty to one. Groundwater depletion from grazing and the use of billions of gallons of water for processing further exacerbate a worldwide water shortage. Twenty-five gallons of water are necessary to produce a pound of wheat; 2,500 for a pound of meat. The wastewater from food processing and

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the runoff from feedlots and slaughterhouses are major polluters of rivers and streams. Why are we so cruel to ourselves?

Cruelty destitutes us. In an age of synthetic fabrics, with which we can insulate ourselves perfectly well, need we clothe ourselves in the fur of animals raised on farms, then electrocuted? For our vanity? Does glamour require that baby seals be clubbed to death, or that fox and beaver have their legs snapped by iron jaws?

A wild animal is born, believe it or not, quite separately and apart from the family of man. We people are not endowed with anything more valuable by creation that would entitle us to dominion over them. A wild animal belongs in the wild. A polar bear is not, I think, a polar bear unless he is in the Arctic. An iguana is not an iguana outside the jungle, nor a killer whale itself outside the ocean, nor an elk an elk outside rocky mountains, nor a lion its prideful self off the veldt. Close the zoos and the aquariums. They are a farce. You are not seeing the real animals there anyway. You are merely seeing a broken spirit housed in a finite collection of tissue and genetic matter. The animal you think you are seeing, outside its natural habitat, is no more that animal than a stuffed one. "We educate the public," the gaolers cry. Nonsense. Film the animals in the wild, in their habitat protected from man's depredations, and show your public. That will educate more honestly. Take your children to visit the wilderness. That is where the animals belong.

It's ironic that the hunters and the anglers, in quest of ducks and deer and rainbow trout, have done more to protect habitat than anyone. They have been the most responsible for the surge in many wildlife species. Why? Because they know that the wetlands and streams, woodlands and grasslands are where their game live. You may question a hunter's morality, but you can never

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question the hunting community's collective contribution to the preservation of wildlife in general.

Let's get smart about this: giving our friends and neighbors in the animal kingdom a break can really help us as people - measurably and immeasurably.

### **Detoxifying Agriculture**

Now, let us go back to the countryside. Here is where the world's food is produced. Here is where the cotton and wool and silk is grown. Here is where the rubber and wood are harvested. Here is where the coal and oil, iron and aluminum are mined. Here is where 55% of the six billion of us live.

To liberate the future from the past, we need to break old and bad habits. The subject of animal agriculture has already been broached. The world's farmers could easily relieve themselves of terrible burdens of water waste and pollution, enormous costs in chemical use and feed, and gross inefficiencies in land use were they to eliminate the use of animals to produce meat.

We need to detoxify our food and our land. The oceans of chemicals that are spread on our crops to fight insects, rodents, funguses, and all manner of other blights, can be eliminated. The treasure that is sucked up out of farmers' pockets by chemical companies could stay home, on the farm. Organic farmers the world over have proven that crop rotation, the application of natural fertilizers, and the use of beneficial insects that eat crop pests all are tremendously cost-effective. Yields are comparable to industrially produced crops.

Kick the chemical habit. Like cocaine and alcohol, agricultural chemicals cost too much,

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their benefits are dubious, and they can be phased out of our farms quickly and easily, leaving the land, the water, the farmers, the farm workers, and the consumers healthier.

### Addictions and Dependencies

We have touched on how world agriculture has become increasingly more dependent on chemicals. But let us not forget for one instant the chemical and other dependencies that we inflict upon ourselves as individuals. Perhaps more than anything else, our ignorance and cruelty as individuals and as societies are intensified and exacerbated by addictions. Our economic productivity and moral strength are eroded by addictions. With every addiction indulged, we take ourselves farther from the spiritual clarity resident within us. With every drink or pill not taken, with every unthinking act on which we do not follow through, we find ourselves closer to peace.

Alcohol: as ancient, at least, as agricultural civilization. "Demon rum" the American Temperance activists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century called it. We have all seen its destructive power. It is a poison. Whether it is the *chang* consumed by young adults and children in Tibet to mask the pain they endure from poverty and cultural oppression by the Chinese, or whether it is the vodka that Russians consume in gallons as a way of life, or the gin that the English are said to favor, or the whiskeys that the Irish and Scots consume, or the wines that the Mediterranean peoples love, or the beer that the German people so adore and in which American college students ritually drown themselves - whatever the brew in whatever the land, alcoholic beverages are still, without question, toxic. To what extent an individual chooses to poison him or herself certainly is an important factor. Everyone who drinks is not an alcoholic. However, given the volumes of alcohol

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consumed in this world, many societies could certainly be said to be themselves alcoholic or bordering closely thereon.

According to statistics available to the World Health Organization (WHO), there are around three quarters of a million alcohol-related deaths each year. Alcohol-related diseases and injuries account for between three to four per cent of the annual global burden of disease and injury. Alcohol is a significant factor in hospital admissions, road traffic deaths, industrial accidents, accidental drowning, homicide and suicide.

The morbidity and disability resulting from alcohol misuse represent a major burden to nearly all countries in the world. Quite apart from the problems affecting individuals, alcohol is implicated in a range of social problems including domestic violence, marital breakdown, absenteeism from work, and child abuse. Drinking by women during pregnancy has been linked with a higher risk of miscarriage, still birth and premature births, and fetal alcohol syndrome.

Tobacco is another product that keeps people in thrall. To say that tobacco is not addictive is pure bunk. As scores of millions of Westerners have slowly diminished their use, recognizing the destruction wreaked by heart disease, respiratory diseases such as emphysema, and cancer, and the health costs to their societies, the tobacco companies have raced to increase their marketing and sales in other places. Smoking is estimated to have caused around three million deaths a year in the early 1990s, and the death toll is steadily increasing. It is expected to rise to ten million deaths per year by the 2020s or early 2030s, with 70% of those deaths occurring in developing countries.

According to WHO estimates, there are around 1.1 billion smokers in the world - about

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one-third of the global population aged 15 years and above. Globally, approximately 47% of men and 12% of women smoke. In developing countries, available data suggest that 48% of men smoke as do 7% of women, while in developed countries, 42% of men and 24% of women smoke.

We don't, as societies, generally acknowledge the addictive nature of alcohol and tobacco use. There are too many vested interests and far too much money at stake to allow individuals and societies to take unadulterated looks at themselves and their habits. We are bombarded, everywhere in the world, every day, with advertising to promote alcohol and tobacco use. We are meant to think that their use is culturally sanctioned, in fact encouraged, making us sexier and more potent somehow. Tobacco and alcohol companies spend many billions of dollars annually throughout the world to promote their products. For instance, tobacco makers spend an estimated \$200 million a year on sports sponsorships alone.

Of course the profits are staggering. One example: China accounts for 1.75 trillion of the 5 trillion cigarettes sold annually in the world. The government tobacco monopoly, the China National Tobacco Corp., is the most profitable corporation in the world, accounting for 12 percent of the revenue of the Chinese government! With money like this flowing into the pockets of the P.R.C. oligarchy, why in the world would the government ever institute public health measures to protect its people?

What are accepted as illicit drugs - cocaine, heroin, opium, marijuana, the psychotropics - still have great currency worldwide. The profits here are enormous: \$400 billion a year according to the U.N. The physiological and psychological harms engendered by these substances is well documented. However, many of us, particularly in the developed world, find some cachet, some

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allure in drifting into various kinds of altered states and stupors. Interestingly, extremes of poverty and affluence seem to lead individuals to the same place: a sense of need to obliterate their reality with chemically induced euphoria or oblivion, however short-lived. It is estimated by the U.N. that 218 million people worldwide use psychoactive substances. Recent figures suggest that drug injection is responsible for between 100,000 and 200,000 deaths per year worldwide. Using needles brings with it the associated risk of spreading the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B and C, and other blood-borne infections.

In both developed and developing countries, the inhalation of volatile solvents and other inhalants is an increasing problem, especially with street children and indigenous young people. They use easily available substances such as glue, petrol, paint thinners, domestic polish and aerosol sprays. They are cheap and easy to get. The harm they cause includes neurological and psychological dysfunction, liver and kidney damage, and sudden death.

Beyond these, however, there are extraordinarily puissant new drugs available to people. The difference with these is that they are legal. We are dosing ourselves more and more with pharmaceutical panaceas: Valium, Prozac, Ritalin (for our children), etc., etc. Psychiatrists and physicians too lazy and afraid to deal with their patients' underlying problems write prescriptions as if they were getting a cut of the sales. If they make us feel better, and allow our medical and psychological caregivers to get off the hook, think how great they must make the drug companies feel.

The lust for profits - not the relief of suffering, not curing illness - is what motivates the pharmaceutical companies. Consider this: 500 million people a year - 1/12th of the world's

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population - contract malaria. 1.5 to 2.7 million die as a result. Have the drug companies mounted a concerted campaign to find a vaccine? Not surprisingly, almost all of the victims are from societies too poor to pay for the research, development, and employment of drugs that might prevent or at least keep malaria at bay. So the answer would be no.

There is what we ingest and there is what we do. Our behavior can be as addictive and poisonous as the substances we use. That must be the subject, however, for another essay.

Let's use our heads for a change. Throw out destructive habits like meat eating, alcohol drinking, drug use, and the abuse of other pursuits, to paraphrase the Buddha, that "do not tend to edification." What's left? There's quite a huge universe of opportunity that remains, believe it or not, for recreation, learning, meaning, enjoyment, fun, and growth.