

## Drugs: Another Form of Slavery to Survive

An Interview with Sala Udin

(Taken from the Institute on Black Chemical Abuse, Spring, 1991)

Sala Udin is one of the early African American pioneers of the chemical dependency field. He was founder and director of a residential drug treatment program, House of The Crossroads, in Pittsburgh, PA, which began in 1969 when the field was new and practitioners were feeling their way through uncharted territory. Udin's task was even more daunting, since he was also attempting to help create treatment models, as we have done here at the Institute, that address the specific needs of African American clients. He took on training and consulting duties for the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) in 1979 and continues to be one of the busiest trainers in the substance abuse field today. In 1984 Udin and Byron Kunisawa founded the Multicultural Training Resource Center in San Francisco, CA, which he directed until becoming a free-lance trainer and consultant this year, specializing in Valuing and Managing Diversity in The Workplace. He lives and works in Oakland, CA.

Scope: Sala, I've just read an article you recently wrote in which you talk about chemical dependency in the African American community as a new form of slavery.

SU: Yes, I think when you look at chemical dependency and historical slavery, there are a number of corollaries. Some of the aspects of the drug trade that are secret and hidden definitely remind one of the slave catcher hiding in the bushes down by the river...the dealing we see on the street is just the tip of the iceberg. Behind that is a vast economic enterprise, which in essence, like slavery, involves the capture, ownership and sale of human beings, within a context that gives rise to violence and early death. On the individual level, addiction to a chemical is total dependence, not unlike the slave/master relationship.

Scope: So, what path do we take up and out of slavery?

SU: I think the models we have for survival are primarily rooted in our historical struggle for our rights. When Gramma tells Johnny to hold his tongue and do right, and so forth, she's passing on to him things that come from our collective experience that we ought to uphold and value. To the extent that we are successful in passing these on, we are helping produce people who are prepared to contribute positively to our

community and advance our struggle. To the extent that we fail to pass these things on, and we allow our children to be swallowed up by neglect, or we make mere integration our goal and allow some of the painful realities of life in this system to be glossed over, to that extent we help produce people who are impaired in their ability to be effective contributors to the African American community.

Scope: So you, like many people in our community, would say much of what needs to be done to address the problem should be done by us with our own internal resources?

SU: There is a significant amount we can do—in fact, there are certain things only we can do. Some things don't change no matter what we do internally. The oppressive social systems and the power relationships we face in this society are an intransigent part of our every day reality. We have to create healthier, non-destructive ways of dealing with that reality. We have to inoculate ourselves and our children against the negative psychological effects of the social conditions we face. Once again, I'm talking about the tools we've gotten from our fight against oppression and racism. The development of a strong sense of self, for instance, is a kind of inoculation—a sense of who you are as an individual as well as a sense of who you are as part of an African community with very deep, very strong roots.

One hundred thirty years ago, because Africans in this country were observed to have so few problems with alcohol, there was speculation that we were actually physically immune to addiction. We are now depicted as being culturally predisposed to addiction, crime, and violence. Neither one is true. Historically, Africans have indeed used alcohol but only in certain specific contexts, and with strong social sanctions against abuse.

Therefore, we need to spread the word to our young that drunkenness and drug abuse are not part of our heritage and that they frustrate our ability to get where we need to go as a people.

Scope: Many, including you, have suggested that considering the overwhelming presence of drugs in the African American community, it is amazing more people aren't addicted. Obviously, considering how much the black family is maligned, a lot of black families are doing something right. What is it? What can we do to publicly

applaud their successes?

SU: Some families have been very successful at passing on the kind of sense of self I've been talking about, but it's not that simple and I don't want it to sound like it is. Most people are familiar with the phenomenon that we see sometimes where people in the same family—same environment; taught the same values; everything—come out very differently. One person comes out o.k. and another doesn't; there are many factors involved. But I do think when we teach our children pride in self, and this is reinforced throughout the community in meaningful ways, that's the best shot we have at helping the largest possible number of people void alcohol and other drug abuse and all the health and social problems that go along with it. I'd like to see a study that shows how the children of sixties and seventies activists—politically conscious, African-people—are doing. I'd be willing to bet that they are showing significantly lower rates of addiction than other groups. Strong movements like the Nation of Islam—what they have created is strong, collectively understood principles and codes of behavior that have had the end result of creating a highly motivated, highly disciplined group of members.

Scope: What hope do you see for reaching the young people who don't come from families where that kind of learning and self-esteem building takes place?

SU: The brightest beacon of hope seems to be coming from elements of the Rap/Hip-Hop movement, some of whom have shown courage and real leadership in their songs and videos that publicly deplore violence, drugs, and disrespect of African American women. Rap is where some of our young people have learned about the contributions of leaders like DuBois, Garvey, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King. Some of the rappers have even retrieved centuries of African history and raised it up as hope for young people who think they are nobody, to remind them that they come from regal stock; that they are the direct descendants of people to whom world civilization owes a deep debt. I think the pride and the strength and the healing that can come from the rich waters of African consciousness will continue to be increasingly valued and passed along by our young as time goes on. I'm really fairly hopeful about the future.

## HIS OPINION

### Birth Control: Who Should Be Responsible

BY ULLYSES TUCKER, JR.

Several months ago, my grandmother Tucker called me from Washington, D.C., to inquire as to whether or not I had any "fish" baking in the oven out here. Fish? Sarcastically, I replied NO and told her that I'd baked some chicken for dinner. I also questioned why she telephoned me about "fish" since I am a responsible adult when it comes to putting "fish" in the oven.

Those individuals with grandmothers from the old school of dreams and visions should have ascertained by now that I'm talking about pregnancy. According to my grandmother, her dreams about "fish" means that someone in the family is either pregnant or has someone pregnant before they've made the family aware of the fact. Despite denial by several family members in the past, Grandma has not missed a pregnancy call in recent memory and she is not afraid to share her revelations or say "I told you so..." If Cliff Robinson of the Portland Trail Blazers could shoot free-throws as accurately as my grandmother predicts pregnancies in the family, he would have one of the highest shooting percentages in NBA history.

Recently, or since her first telephone call to me, I've learned that my 16-year-old niece is expecting a child by some teenage guy she knows. Ironically, she will have the child at about the same age her mother, my sister, had her. Hurt by the news of her pregnancy, I questioned her mother about birth control and other methods used to prevent birth. Her reply? My sister made arrangements to get birth control for my niece once it became apparent that she was sexually active, but she didn't take them consistently. What else could my sister do? After moments of reflection, refusal to reward her a gift for

teen-parenting at the baby shower, and listening to an objective opinion from a well respected friend in Chicago, I asked myself whose responsibility is it to use birth control and why does the burden always fall upon the woman? Why didn't the young man courting her, or luring her into bed, wear a condom or abstain from the act itself? Did she want to get pregnant? What social/psychological factors contributed to this situation? Did they care? Why is it so difficult for young people to just say NO to sex or wait until they can handle the responsibility?

So many young men, black men (16-21 years old) to be specific, feel so out of touch with mainstream society/culture or white America. Many are angry, underskilled, and see no hope in the future. Compared to their white counterparts, they (young black males) are disproportionately unemployed and come from single parent households. Last year alone, 19,000 black males died as a result of gang violence and homicides. Out of touch and disenfranchised in their minds, many black males look at fathering a child as a badge of honor and reinforcement of their manhood. As the young man's mother told him, "Neither one of you have a pot to piss in or a window to throw it out of..." Chilling words that all youngsters should listen to because ultimately, children born in these conditions usually become burdens on the welfare system or their parents.

Economic responsibility aside for a moment, the question of who is responsible for the birth control still remains. Who? Both parties involved in sexual activity should be responsible for birth control and other means to prevent birth, if not having children is the objective. "I thought you were taking the pill" is a very lame excuse in

this day and age.

Most men are totally unaware of the mood swings, weight fluctuation, physical problems such as hair loss, tender breasts, and headaches, associated with taking birth control pills. It's so much easier to put on a condom than placing the guilt or responsibility on a woman for popping up pregnant. With all types of STD's (sexually transmitted diseases) being passed around today, it makes good common sense to use a condom anyway.

To be a single-teen parent is something of a lifestyle that I would not wish on anyone. There are so many other things young people can do with their lives. Are these teen parents rebelling from the values instilled by their parents? Is it a self-esteem issue, peer pressure, the lack of love or attention in the household, or a continuation of a cycle established by their role models or parents? You would think that my niece would have learned from the single parent experiences of her mother, my aunts, and other family members. Did my sister fail her child at some point? Will she have another child the same way? Will the young man father another child elsewhere? Questions, questions, and more questions.

One teen parent told me that she got pregnant on purpose to receive welfare payments. Throw this mindset into the oven with young men who equate their manhood with their sexuality and that equals babies. These youngsters need jobs, career training, role models in the home and the corporate community. They need love, emotional support, and a sense of hope. MFSB (Mother, Father, Sister & Brother) once released a song entitled, "The People Of Tomorrow Are The Children Of Today..." Help give them that chance.

“I’ll quit.  
I’ll quit.  
I’ll quit.”

“I’ll quit.”  
Tomorrow, right?

Saying it is easy. But if you think you can break the pattern of substance abuse on your own, you're fooling yourself. Despite your sincere promises to yourself and loved ones, tomorrow never comes.

We can help today. Our program takes you every step of the way, from free assessment and intervention, through treatment, family programs and long-term support. With both outpatient and residential programs, we can design a cost-effective treatment plan to meet your needs. You won't even have to travel far.

Experienced professionals at Tuality Chemical Dependency Services will help you heal the wounds of addiction, not just physically, but also psychologically, spiritually and socially.

Call us today at 357-0774,  
and learn to live again.



A member of the Tuality Healthcare Family

Tuality Chemical Dependency Services  
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### TUALITY CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY SERVICES

“I’ll quit.”  
“He’ll change.”  
“She’ll improve.”  
“It’ll get better...”

#### ...Sound familiar?

There comes a time when you have to deal with the obvious, when denying the problem of alcohol or drug dependency—whether your own dependency or that of a loved one—is no longer possible.

#### We can help.

Our professional staff is trained to work with your specific problem. Our convenient location in western Washington County means that you can begin your journey to a chemically free, sober lifestyle with a minimum of inconvenience to yourself and those you love.

The caring professionals at Tuality Chemical Dependency Service will help you recognize denial, alleviate your fears and start you on the road to recovery.

#### In the Workplace...

Did you know that more than 75 percent of drug users are employed, and that 35 to 45 percent of all alcoholics are in professional or management positions, with more than 15 years of experience? It's true. The use of drugs and alcohol constitutes a major work force problem that employers can no longer ignore. Employer Consultation relating to drug and alcohol abuse in the work place is one of the unique services we provide for our business clients. Let our team become apart of your team. Your employees and your "bottom line" will benefit.

Following is a list of our Employer Consulting Services.

- Technical Assistance for establishing drug and alcohol policies and procedures, including drug testing
- Training for managers and supervisors
- Employee awareness and education programs
- Chemical dependency assessments and structured interventions
- Technical assistance in meeting the requirements of the Drug Free Workplace Act of 1988

Our professional staff is experienced in dealing with the specific problems you are facing. We will provide you with the latest information to establish an effective program aimed at creating a drug free work environment.

#### A Place to Start...

##### Intervention:

If denial or fear is keeping someone you love from starting treatment, there is something you can do. It is called intervention.

Our trained professionals bring the affected person together with the significant people in his or her life. Together, they face, in a caring and compassionate way, the self-defeating behavior keeping them from a healthy and productive life. This process usually ends with the chemically dependent person making a commitment to seek treatment.

##### Treatment:

Recovery begins with the decision to enter treatment.

Our patients undergo a comprehensive evaluation to determine what type of treatment program will best meet their needs. All our programs include an individually prescribed treatment plan administered by trained professionals.

#### Family Care...

Our family program is an integral part of both residential and outpatient treatment. It is designed to help family and friends who are experiencing problems resulting from working and living with a chemically dependent person.

Through Tuality Chemical Dependency Services, families can become healthy, happy, functioning units once again. All recovery takes time, and family members need to be involved with each other during the healing process. We offer a four-day intensive therapeutic program to help them stay involved with each other through the long healing process. Patients and their families begin to identify problems and, with the help of our professional counselors, face the issues necessary for recovery.

Help is only a phone call away.

Call our 24-hour Help Line, (503) 357-0774, for a free assessment and evaluation of your personal needs.