

Perhaps time to talk about drinking

April 7, 2013 by Daniel J. Bauer

The topic of alcohol and drinking came up in one of my General English (GE) classes on Wednesday. The next day, a local newspaper ran these headlines on news stories: “‘Two-hour’ alcohol ban at Kenting Music Festival” (TT 4-4-13 p. 2) and “Lawmaker slams commission’s ‘drinking program’” (p. 3).

I recently asked my GE students to write a paragraph or two about their plans for the Tomb Sweeping holiday, popularly termed “spring break.” One wrote that she had originally planned a night out with friends, singing and drinking at a KTV. “I thought about it a few times, and changed my mind,” she said. “I was afraid of getting a hangover at a KTV. And you know how girls can get into trouble if they have hangovers at KTV parlors.”

Let’s give this student credit for being open about a sensitive subject and willing to share, not hide, a worry. She was wise to give some careful thought to drinking and its consequences.

Larger issues aside, yes, I did use the opportunity to straighten out the English there. The phrases to “get drunk” and to “get a hangover” are not synonymous. They describe different situations. If we imbibe too much alcohol on a particular occasion, it is certainly possible to feel more than merely comfortable, and to cross a line and become intoxicated or inebriated and thus, to get drunk. People who drink too much are apt to suffer the next day from a hangover. It seems unnecessary to go into the precise symptoms of a hangover, the headache, nausea, and so on.

The Kenting Music Festival ends tonight. It began four days ago. I can imagine that with a gargantuan list of bands and performances, not to mention strong public support, it was a whale of a show. Statistics over the past five years for traffic accidents in the Kenting area after the Festival and other concert events such as Spring Scream are worrisome. Authorities say 70 accidents occurred, 35 of them because of drunk drivers (p. 2). Such neat numbers strike me as somehow too neat but, nevertheless, they point in an ominous direction.

So, the page 2 news was that authorities this year planned to ban sales of alcohol on the premises of the Festival for the final two hours of the concerts. Forbidding the sale of alcohol at the venue during the tail-end of long days of music may reduce some irresponsible drinking, but you have to wonder. If members of the audience are allowed to freely bring in alcohol from outside, this “solution” appears akin to sticking a finger in the hole of a dike during a horrible flood. The real challenge, of course, is to persuade friends who drink to adopt a designated driver rule. Someone in the car needs to volunteer to not touch alcohol or at least to stop drinking several hours before hitting the road. What we all sometimes need in life (I, like everyone else) is just a little more common sense, no?

The Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission came under attack last Wednesday when legislator Chen Chi-mai questioned the ins and outs of a recent government sponsored student exchange program in Mongolia. One of the 17 university students had reported on preparatory sessions that focused on “alcohol tolerance” and “drinking skills.” The father of another student had warned her not to drink in Mongolia, but she found her hosts irresistible in their misguided hospitality. “I could not resist having glass after glass,” the student wrote. “At the end, some people passed out [and] some became scared of drinking” (p. 3).

We who choose to enjoy alcoholic beverages owe it to ourselves and the people around us not to harm our health or the safety or peace of mind of others.

Some of the exchange students found their Mongolian hosts too pushy with their hospitality. Whether we realize it or not, demanding that others drink when they don’t want to is boorish. We in many cultures, including Chinese and Taiwanese, easily make this mistake.

We ought to hear the words when someone says, “No, thanks.” At the same time, when a part of us tells us, “I want more,” perhaps the part with common sense should say, “No, you don’t. Enough is enough.” (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points:

1. You do not have to talk about yourself or your own experience drinking alcohol, but answer this Q: Are you comfortable with the drinking of alcohol that you see around you in your life?
2. If you were a parent, how do you think you'd feel about your college aged "child" drinking alcohol. What advice would you give to her / him?
3. Can you share any stories about Kenting's big Music Festival, Spring Scream and so on?

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