

[PDF] In The Realm Of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters With Addiction

Peter A. Levine, Gabor Maté - pdf download free book



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Description:

Amazon.com Exclusive: A Letter from Gabor Maté

Dear Amazon.com readers,

I've written *In The Realm of Hungry Ghosts* because I see addiction as one of the most misunderstood phenomena in our society. People--including many people who should know better,

such as doctors and policy makers--believe it to be a matter of individual choice or, at best, a medical disease. It is both simpler and more complex than that.

Addiction, or the capacity to become addicted, is very close to the core of the human experience. That is why almost anything can become addictive, from seemingly healthy activities such as eating or exercising to abusing drugs intended for healing. The issue is not the external target but our internal relationship to it. Addictions, for the most part, develop in a compulsive attempt to ease one's pain or distress in the world. Given the amount of pain and dissatisfaction that human life engenders, many of us are driven to find solace in external things. The more we suffer, and the earlier in life we suffer, the more we are prone to become addicted.

The inner city drug addicts I work with are amongst the most abused and rejected people amongst us, but instead of compassion our society treats them with contempt. Instead of understanding and acceptance, we give them punishment and moral disapproval. In doing so, we fail to recognize our own deeply rooted problems and thereby forego an opportunity for healing not only for them, the extreme addicts, but also for ourselves as individuals and as a culture.

My book, in short, is an attempt to bring light to core issues shrouded in darkness. The many positive responses I've received encourage me to believe that I've succeeded in making a contribution toward that goal.

Best wishes, Gabor Maté

A Q&A with the Author Question: The title of your book has its origins in the Buddhist Wheel of Life. In the Hungry Ghost Realm, people feel empty and seek solace from the outside, from sources that can never nourish. In what ways is our culture trapped in this realm? What can society learn from drug addicts who take the feelings of lack that everyone has, to the extreme?

Gabor Maté: Much of our culture and our economy are based on exploiting people's sense of emptiness and inadequacy, of not being enough as we are. We have the belief that if we do this or acquire that, if we achieve this or attain that, we'll be satisfied. This sense of lack and this belief feed many addictive behaviors, from shopping to eating to workaholism. In many respects we behave in a driven fashion that differs only in degree from the desperation of the drug addict.

Question: What makes your book so beautiful is its multi-layered, personal approach. You don't rely solely on your patients' stories, but also dig into your personal experience with addiction and the relevance of Buddha's teachings. What were some challenges you faced when writing so frankly about your own addiction and your family?

Gabor Maté: In a sense my personal issues are not personal at all--just human. Once I understand something, I want to share it. There is no shame in having flaws--just challenges to keep learning. Many people have told me how much they have appreciated my being open like that--it helps them be open with themselves.

Question: Your book ends on a positive note, with the idea that brains do have the ability to change and grow in adult life and even to heal themselves. Does this undermine your previous assertion that you don't expect most of your severely addicted patients to get clean?

Gabor Maté: No, there is no contradiction here. The human brain is exquisitely capable of development, a capacity known as neuroplasticity. But, as with all development, the conditions have to be right. My pessimism about my clients' future is based not on any limitation of their innate potential, but on their dire social, economic and legal situation and on the essential indifference of

policy makers--and of society--to their plight. In short, the resources that could go into rehabilitating people are now sunk, instead, into persecuting them and keeping them marginalized. It's a failure of insight and of compassion. We are simply not living up to our possibilities as a society.

Read an Excerpt from *In The Realm of Hungry Ghosts*

I believe there is one addiction process, whether it manifests in the lethal substance dependencies of my Downtown Eastside patients, the frantic self-soothing of overeaters or shopaholics, the obsessions of gamblers, sexaholics and compulsive internet users, or in the socially acceptable and even admired behaviors of the workaholic. Drug addicts are often dismissed and discounted as unworthy of empathy and respect. In telling their stories my intent is to help their voices to be heard and to shed light on the origins and nature of their ill-fated struggle to overcome suffering through substance use. Both in their flaws and their virtues they share much in common with the society that ostracizes them. If they have chosen a path to nowhere, they still have much to teach the rest of us. In the dark mirror of their lives we can trace outlines of our own.

Review "A riveting account of human cravings, this book needs to get into as many hands as possible. Maté's resonant, unflinching analysis of addiction today shatters the assumptions underlying our War on Drugs."

—Norm Stamper, former Seattle Chief of Police and author of *Breaking Rank: A Top Cop's Exposé of the Dark Side of American Policing*

"In this brilliant and well-documented book, Gabor Maté locates the source of addictions in the trauma of an emotionally empty childhood, making it a relational rather than a medical problem. Such a radical thesis of cause leads to human connection rather than traditional treatment as the cure. This passionate and compassionate book, filled with scientific evidence and personal narratives, should be on the shelf of every person interested in the pervasive challenge of addiction."

—Harville Hendrix, PhD, author of *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples* and cofounder of Imago Relationship Therapy

"Dr. Maté's latest book is a moving, debate-provoking, and multi-layered look at how addiction arises, the people afflicted with it and why he supports decriminalization of all drugs, including crystal meth.... [*In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*] reads not only as a lively textbook analysis of the physiological and psychological causes of drug addiction, but also as an investigation into his heart and mind."

—*The Globe and Mail*

"It's time to give Maté ... the Order of Canada for this erudite and sensitive book about the lives of Downtown Eastside intravenous-drug users, the neurobiology of addiction, and the folly of the war on drugs. It's compulsively readable and packed with new scientific discoveries about addiction. If you know the parent or sibling of an addict—or the prime minister, for that matter—please give him this book."

—*The Georgia Straight*

"I recommend this wonderful book for anyone struggling with the heartache of addiction personally or professionally. Dr. Maté makes the thought-provoking and powerful arguments that human connections heal; and that the poverty of relationships in the modern world contribute to our vulnerability to unhealthy addictions of all manner. His uniquely humane perspective—all too absent from much of the 'modern' approach to addictions—should be a part of the training of all therapists,

social workers, and physicians."

—Bruce Perry, MD, PhD, Senior Fellow, Child Trauma Academy, Houston, and coauthor of *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog*

"Gabor Maté's connections—between the intensely personal and the global, the spiritual and the medical, the psychological and the political—are bold, wise and deeply moral. He is a healer to be cherished and this exciting book arrives at just the right time."

—Naomi Klein, author of *No Logo* and *The Shock Doctrine*

"With unparalleled sympathy for the human condition, Gabor Maté depicts the suffocation of the spirit by addictive urges, and holds up a dark mirror to our society. This is a powerful narrative of the realm of human nature where confused and conflicted emotions underlie our pretensions to rational thought."

—Dr. Jaak Panksepp, Distinguished Research Professor of Psychobiology, Bowling Green University, Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry, Medical College of Ohio, and author of *Affective Neuroscience*

"With superb descriptive talents, Gabor Maté takes us into the lives of the emotionally destitute and addicted human beings who are his patients. In this highly readable and penetrating book, he gives us the disturbing truths about the nature of addiction and its roots in people's early years—truths that are usually concealed by time and protected by shame, secrecy, and social taboo."

—Vincent Felitti, MD, Clinical Professor of Medicine, University of California, and Co-Principal Investigator, Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

"Dr. Gabor Maté distills the suffering of injection-drug users into moving case histories and reveals how clearly he himself, as a music collector and workaholic physician, fits his own definition of addiction. Informed by the new research on brain chemistry, he proposes sensible drug laws to replace the War on Drugs. Inspired by the evolving spirituality that underlies his life and work, he outlines practical ways of overcoming addiction. This is not a fix-it book to hurry through, but a deep analysis to reflect upon."

—Dr. Bruce Alexander, Professor Emeritus (Psychology), Simon Fraser University, and author of *The Globalization of Addiction*

"A harrowingly honest, compassionate, sometimes angry look at addiction and the people whose lives have been disordered by it."

—*Ottawa Citizen*

"Gabor Maté's latest book is a sprawling but fascinating look at addiction that is part science, part diatribe, part character study, and part confessional.... The writing is powerful.... the book leaves the reader with a profound sense of empathy and understanding for some of society's most marginalized victims."

—*Quill & Quire*

"[E]xcellent.... One of the book's strengths is Maté's detailed and compassionate characterization of the afflicted addicts he treats...a calm, unjudging, compassionate attentiveness to what is happening within."

—*The Walrus*

"Maté's subjects are the living, breathing embodiment of Canada's grimmest statistics for HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, homelessness, crime, abuse, neglect, overdose, and death. More than merely poor and disenfranchised, they are truly the lowest of the low, reviled by society and demonized by law enforcement. [*In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*] is enormously compelling and Maté is admirably,

sometimes inexplicably, empathetic to all who cross his path."

—*Toronto Star*

"I highly recommend *Hungry Ghosts* to everyone seeking insight into addiction. Gabor Maté's masterful and impassioned treatment of the topic is a welcome relief from the tired old thinking that has kept us from dealing effectively with it for the last 100 years."

—Gerald Thomas, Centre for Addictions Research, for the *Vancouver Sun*

"It seems odd to use the word 'beautiful' to describe a book that focuses, frequently in graphic, unrelenting detail, on the lives of some of the most hopeless outcasts of our society: the hard-core street addicts with whom Dr. Gabor Maté works. Yet that's the word that came repeatedly to mind as I read *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*. It's not only the grace of Maté's writing, though that's certainly a great part of it. It's the sense of compassion that infuses the entire book, the author's continued faith in and affection for the men and women with whom he works, even when he is the victim of their drug-fueled abuse, racial epithets, and thefts. Maté offers no easy fixes (pun intended), but does offer hope and understanding."

—Hal Goodman, *The Record* (Kitchener, Cambridge, and Waterloo)

"*In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* looks at addictions, how they work, who experiences them and what can be done.... The book is a survey of scientific evidence on addiction, but it is haunted by Maté's patients who are wrestling with poverty, violence, mental illness, drug addiction, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, the authorities, their pasts. We read about the depths of addiction, but also the persistence of humanity under the worst of conditions.... That the well-off and the destitute are considered together in this book reminds us that addiction transcends class."

—*The Gazette* (Montreal)

"I highly recommend *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* to anyone interested in deepening his or her understanding of all types of addictive behavior. With Dr. Gabor Maté's help, the foundation is being made to reexamine how to treat addiction from a new premise that engages and honors the heart and soul of humanity."

—HealthyNewAge.com

"[Gabor Maté] has sought to draw a map for human understanding of people scorned, neglected and persecuted by society."

—SeattlePI.com

"In *Hungry Ghosts*, Maté compellingly tells the often desperate and heartbreaking stories of his patients, and calls for a new drug policy paradigm that is grounded in both science and compassion."

—*Real Change News*

"[*In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*] is a taste of a different kind of victory—over our own impulses to leave 'undeserving' souls outside the human circle of affection and good will."

—Crosscut.com

"[*In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*] shows an unflinching look at addiction... Dr. Maté makes observations that cut through all the myths and misinterpretations about addicts and how they live... There are many nuggets of wisdom and insight throughout the book. Readers can literally pick up the book and leaf to any chapter and begin reading—and learn something valuable. It's never boring, never condescending, never too much to read."

—*Addiction Treatment Magazine*

“Dr. Gabor Maté has made an important contribution to the literature on drug use and addiction... Maté doesn't just rely on anthropology and anecdote. He takes the reader instead into an extended look at the research on early childhood development and identifies messed-up childhoods as the key indicator of future substance abuse (as well as many other) problems. It doesn't have to be as extreme as some of these cases, but...

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