

# **Break Free from Addiction**

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This book accompanies the Udemy course: Break Free from Addiction

<https://www.udemy.com/break-free-from-addiction/>

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## **What do Addiction and Disney have in common?**

Dumbo thought he needed his 'magic' feather to fly. He thought that the feather gave him a special power and that he would sink like a stone without it.

Addiction is searching for the very thing you have all the time and believing that you'll find it in whatever you use.

But both Dumbo and addicts are, innocently, looking in the wrong place.

No one needs a magic feather to fly. You already have wings.

## Introduction

Addiction is a subject that has always interested me. Most people know someone who is addicted to something and almost every family contains an addict of some description whether it's a socially acceptable addiction or one that people have a judgement about. For instance, my dad was a smoker, a gambler and he married an alcoholic. Not my mum but his second wife. And then my mum married an alcoholic too.

Before I tell you what this book is about, let me tell you what it isn't about. This book isn't about setting goals to be habit free or using willpower to overcome addiction and I won't ask you to examine your past to see why you fell in to addiction. You won't have to learn techniques or tools to apply when you get craving and urges.

This book is not going to give you any more information about each specific addiction and what each form of addiction does to the body. Or what happens to the body during withdrawal, there is plenty of information online on these subjects.

One of my peers called a friend, someone who works in the mental health field, and said, "I've just been asked to talk to a group of alcoholics but I don't know anything about alcoholism?"

"No," was the reply, "but they do! They don't need to know anything else about being an alcoholic."

Anyone who is in addiction knows far more about their addiction than I do. But what they can't see at the moment is how to get out of addiction

Addiction comes in many forms; drugs, alcohol, gambling, exercising, internet porn and even spending too much time on social media and so I don't bore you by repeating a long lists of addictions during this course, I'll often use the example of alcohol addiction and the male gender.

There are many ways people manifest their addiction. For instance I've had clients with a drink problem turn up at 9 o'clock in the morning already drunk and yet I've also had a client who was very disciplined with her addiction, she drank four bottles of wine a day but she didn't start drinking until 10am once she had taken the children to school. She would drink solidly until 1pm when she would stop so that she could sober up enough -although she never felt drunk - to pick up the children (always on foot, thankfully) and not start drinking again until 5pm once the children were home.

But it doesn't matter how an addiction shows up or how differently people deal with their addiction. One constant is that an addict is always looking for something on the outside to deal with something that was created on the inside. And because you are always looking in the wrong place there is always an insatiable yearning and emptiness.

Another constant is that addiction is always the last step in the process. Thought is the first step and all addiction is an innocent misuse of thought.

In this book I won't be talking about managing your addiction nor will I talk about willpower or how to get through the withdrawal period. I'll be talking about a way that you can recognise your addictive feelings for what they are and let them go.

This book will help you to see your addiction differently and to see that it can be easier than you thought to let go of.

But you can't see this for someone else. If you have a partner, family member or friend that you want to help, you have to accept that they need to want this for themselves. By all means show them this course and hope that they see something.

But the best way that you can help them is to see this for yourself.

So what will we talk about? We'll talk about what addiction is and why some people get addicted.

Many people live in fear. I'm not talking about people living in war zones or those living in countries that have to face disease and hunger. I'm talking about the person sitting on the bus next to you, or in the car alongside you at the traffic lights. The people that live in constant fear from their fearful thoughts about life.

And what takes the edge off that fear? What appears to shut down the fearful voice in your head? A drink, a cigarette, a line ... you fill in the blanks

But this only shuts down the voice momentarily doesn't it?

You might feel good adding funds to your online poker account, after all, you're sure that *this* is the big game for you. Or, when you finish that bottle of wine but how do you feel the next day?

When your bank account is showing zero or you've got a hangover? Your fearful thoughts haven't gone away, they have probably just got stronger.

The aim is for you to have a happy life free from addiction rather than being clean but not happy. I've had clients come to me once they have been through other therapies and are clean but they now need help because they're depressed. That's not much of an incentive to give up whatever it is that you use to feel better, is it?

You can live free from addiction and be happy. But be warned this approach will appear to be way too simple.

It can't be that easy to be free from addiction, can it?

## The psychology behind this book

We are all thinking beings. It's a fact that we are always feeling our thinking

On one level we know this, it makes sense but on another fundamental level this fact passes us by. We know that we are thinking but we don't always make the link between thought and feeling.

We imagine that we are feeling our circumstances but we are only ever feeling our thinking.

Our experience of life is created by three basic principles; Mind, Thought and Consciousness and I've seen this understanding shift people from addiction to health.

In the world of science and physics, there are basic values, basic principles but this has always been missing in the field of psychology until now. These three principles of Mind Consciousness and Thought explain the underlying principles behind the human experience.

Mind is universal energy and you can call it whatever you want, spirit, God or whatever it means to you. This is the formless intelligence behind life that creates consciousness and gives us the gift of thought.

Consciousness is what brings thought to life, it's the ability to experience reality and the way we experience reality is through our thinking.

Thought gives us our moment to moment reality.

We are always feeling our thinking and whatever thought we have feels real, thanks to consciousness. But what is thought? Thought is energy in our heads and it takes form in our personal consciousness as new ideas and it's the frame that we put on that energy gives us our thought and our feeling moment by moment .

I'm not talking about positive thinking or affirmations but understanding that thought is the way we make sense of the world and our reality, and the only way we can change our reality is to change thought

This isn't reframing or rewriting your story but just to see **that** you're thinking and when you see this, thoughts naturally change.

You have a hundred billion neurons in your head, that is an unlimited capacity to have new thought but if you keep thinking about yourself and you life in the same way, you'll continue to feel the same. You'll never be able to stop thinking so treat yourself to a new, fresh thought.

## Claire

In 2012, I started the first wellbeing workshop in the UK sharing the principles of Mind Consciousness and Thought for those who were in recovery from drugs, alcohol and mental illness. In this group I met Claire. Claire is the most wonderful woman who had been a crack cocaine addict for many years, she'd lost her children, her home and had lived on the street, she'd been beaten, held hostage, went to prison and was now clean.

Claire told me that before she was introduced to the principles of mind, consciousness and thought, she thought that she was in recovery but then she realised that she had been abstaining rather than recovering.

Claire sat down with me and told me her story and I use her words throughout this course. You will know when it is Claire talking as her narrative is in italics and bold.

Claire had first been raped at the age of 12 but even before this happened she had felt so unhappy that she'd tried to kill herself. All Claire wanted when she left school was to have her own children and she went on to have four children. Sadly her third child, a daughter called Naomi died when she was eleven weeks old.

That's when Claire started taking Heroin as she couldn't deal with the pain.

Claire came to see me one Thursday, she had been clean of class A drugs for nine years but her father, whom she loved dearly, was dying from cancer and Claire was frightened that she would use again when he died, because that had been her coping mechanism when Naomi died.

Claire had understood a lot from our group chats and as we sat and talked that day she very soon saw that she didn't have to use again just because that was the way she'd coped in the past. We talked about grief and thought and she left feeling very settled.

The next Sunday morning as I was on my way to a two day training, I received an email from Claire telling me that she was on the way to the hospital as her much loved nephew had been admitted and was on life support.

Her Nephew had been to his first rave the night before and had taken Mandy (also called MDMA and Ecstasy). He'd had such a massive reaction to the drug that his heart was failing, he was on dialysis and the doctors had been forced to cut his legs open because his muscles had swelled

We kept in touch by text during the day and the next morning Claire sent me another email to say that the family were waiting for the doctors to decide whether to turn the life support machine off.

At lunchtime, I turned my phone on to hear a sobbing voicemail telling me that the machines were turned off. I immediately sent a text to Claire (I couldn't call as she was at the hospital) and received a text back to say he had just died

Later that week Claire's father died in her arms. She was devastated by the events. Totally grief stricken.

And she didn't go back to her old way of coping, of numbing the pain, of surviving. She stayed clean. And this course will show you how you can too.

## What is addiction?

*“What characterises an addiction? Quite simply this: you no longer feel that you have the power to stop. It seems stronger than you. It also gives you a false sense of pleasure, pleasure that invariably turns into pain”*

Eckhart Tolle

So when does something you like doing become an addiction? The tipping point appears to be when you're not choosing anymore. There is no choice - you have to. Full stop. The pleasure comes in not feeling the pain.

Addiction can creep up on you. At first it's a bit like the anecdote of the boiling frog. You know the story (and it is, apparently, just a story. No frogs were harmed in the making of this anecdote), if you put a frog in boiling water, it will jump out. But if you put a frog in cold water and then bring it to a boil slowly, the frog won't perceive the danger and will be cooked to death. If you have a big night out and suffer the next day, you'll probably jump out of drinking for a few days at least. But, if your drinking increases slowly, you might not perceive the danger until it is too late.

But ask yourself, do you find yourself seeking out friends to drink with? Do you encourage your workmates to have a cheeky drink after work? Has your circle of friends changed and now includes more drinkers? Do you find yourself accepting invitations to see friends that 'enjoy a drink' and refusing invitations to see friends who are moderate drinkers?

It's very easy not to be aware of these changes as they can happen slowly but look at your last year and consider these questions.

Are you a social drinker or a drinker who thinks he's being sociable?

Early on, addiction is about wanting the drug, anticipating the feeling, the high dopamine levels.

***To be honest when I first took anything that changed my, or altered my senses, I really loved, I enjoyed it, it was freeing. I didn't have to cope with what was going on, it's just like everything is fuzzy, it's psychedelic and it's all warm and mushy inside and all that.***

Then there is a transition to needing the drug, when dopamine levels are really low without the drug. Addiction really takes hold when the issue isn't how good the drug feels but how bad it's absence feels. The motivation is no longer to feel good but to stop feeling bad.

The addict then thinks that he drinks because life is awful without recognising that life is awful because he drinks.

Before you realise it, the addiction becomes a bigger problem than any pain you drank to avoid. Addicts become stuck because the alcoholic can't imagine life without drinking and life becomes their drinking, their focus becomes how to get the alcohol and to get away from suffering.

But surely, it doesn't matter if wine o'clock has crept up from 6pm to 4pm, does it? After all, the kids are driving you mad, or you've clinched that deal and you deserve it, or you're upset about something and you need cheering up. So it doesn't matter. Does it?

But let's look at why you think that you need a drink? Having a glass of wine with friends or because you fancy one is a whole different prospect than imagining that the wine will change your feelings. A drinking problem is really a thinking problem. If you're upset about something that has happened, the only way you can stay upset about what has happened is if you keep thinking about what has happened, because, it's not happening right now, in this very second, so you must be remembering a past event or imagining what might happen in the future.

***it's freed me to actually accept that I don't have to forever feel bad about what I've done in the past because it's gone now ... I have lived in the past most of my life really, or not even in the reality of anything to do with my past, but in what I was thinking about what had happened in my past and basically living in my head***

So you're looking to the wine to shut up, block out or turn down the volume of those thoughts. When you think about having a glass of wine you let go of the upsetting thoughts and replace them with thoughts about the wine and you start to feel better. Then you attribute the feeling to the wine rather than to the fact that you have dropped the thoughts.

If the pop of a cork or the glug of liquid pouring in to a glass gives you a good feeling, you can see that the feeling can't be coming from the wine but from the anticipation of the drink and it's effects. The thought gives you the feeling, not the alcohol.

Addiction is not about a lack of willpower or discipline, all addiction is rooted in an attempt to feel better, addiction starts as a way to not feel what you're feeling, numbing painful feelings. You want to feel better in your own skin. And you want this relief immediately, you don't want to sit and meditate the feeling away or run around the block, delay is not an option. A drink is the best option.

Addiction is also denial. After all, what do you think an addict looks like? You don't have to look like the stereotypical down and out (although you might do) or z list celebrity sleeping on a park bench. You might be a functioning addict holding down a highly paid job, or you might start by just having a line at dinner parties, and you don't fit your idea of an addict.

You might deny that you have a problem because, after all, drinking is helping you to forget your problems, isn't it? Addicts often don't think they have a problem even though their life is falling apart.

***you know I didn't see that I had a problem for years and years and years ... and I met the girl who had lost the house and the kids and standing on the street corner, and I said I'd never get that bad and then I did get that bad and then someone said to me, a worker, probably from court or something, a drugs worker said well, if you haven't got a problem now, have you done anything this year that you wouldn't have done two years ago, and I said, well yeah, of course I have and he goes well how do you know that you're not going to be doing that in two years time? I thought, oh yeah because it wasn't fun.***

Addiction is searching for the very thing that you have all the time. Peace and happiness are innate, they are built in at birth and yet people spend their whole lives looking for these things.

Have you heard the story of the Golden Buddha?

Once upon a time, in Thailand there was a temple that had a huge statue of a Golden Buddha. A messenger came to the village with news that the village was going to be attacked and plundered and so the villagers had the idea to cover the statue with clay, mud and concrete so that it looked like a common statue and wouldn't interest the invaders. And when the village was attacked, all the invaders saw as they passed the temple was a big, stone buddha. Years went by as the village was occupied by the invaders and everyone forgot about the Golden Buddha. Everyone forgot it was golden underneath the clay until a long time later when a young boy, playing at the foot of the statue, accidentally dislodged some clay and saw the gold beneath. He called everyone else and they picked off the clay to reveal the glorious, golden Buddha.

The metaphor is clear. Every one of us is a Golden Buddha covered with layers and layers of thought. You were born golden and connected to your health and happiness, at one with everything and everyone. And you never lose that.

When you let the layers of thought drop away, you allow yourself to shine.

But how do you let go of years of accumulated, habitual thinking? Well, believe it or not, your craving or compulsions are a gift. I know it may not feel like that but when you're in the grip of tension and stress that lead you to want to drink, this is a signal that you are lost in your personal thoughts. Your mood is your very own feedback system. In the same way your body tells you when you're cold, tired or hungry, your moods are telling you about the quality of your thinking. You don't need to analyse the thoughts or try to change them, just noticing that you're having those kind of thoughts will cause a shift. The problem is that when you're in this mood, the feeling is real, you are feeling the craving in the body but this is a reminder of how powerful thought is, you are feeling whatever you are thinking in the moment.

So whilst it might feel like your craving is a physical need, addiction is always 99% mental and 1% physical and so craving is your wake up call to what is going on in your head.

## Why do some people become addicted?

Why is it that some people seem to be more susceptible to addiction than others? Why is it that someone can be hospitalised and given Diamorphine (which is a form of heroin) for weeks, or even months, but when they leave hospital they aren't addicts? The difference always comes down to thought. The way that people think about themselves and their situation. Someone that has been taking morphine for pain sees the drug as medicinal and once their physical pain stops, they don't need the medicine. But for someone who battles mental pain, the pain doesn't go away so they look to whatever their addiction is to feel better. All addiction is an innocent attempt to feel better, but' like Dumbo and his feather, the addict is looking in the wrong place.

***I used drugs to suppress what was going on. Initially, I used it as pain relief, you know from very young with all the glue and that sort of stuff.***

When you're in the grip of addiction or someone you love is addicted, it can look as if it is the 'thing' that is causing the addiction. But this is a misconception, after all, the cause of compulsive gambling isn't a deck of cards.

I've spoken to alcoholics who would, literally, drink nail varnish remover if they didn't have a drink in the house (regardless of the consequences) or another person who drank four bottles of red wine a day but wouldn't touch white wine or spirits. Someone with food issues will believe that food has power over them and cannot rest until the fridge is empty of food but can happily ignore the half bottle of wine in the fridge because it's of no interest. If the cause of addiction was a thing (alcohol, food, drugs etc), and the thing had power, wouldn't we all have the same feelings about the the thing? Nothing would be off limits, would it?

Lance Dodes, psychiatrist at the Harvard Medical School Division on Addiction says, "Addiction is a human problem that resides in people, not in the drug or in the drugs capacity to produce physical effects."

So how can one person become addicted to one thing whilst another person can take or leave it? You can see by now that it all comes down to the way an individual thinks about the thing. A client once told me that her mother had appeared never to eat when my client was younger. "She existed on 40 cigarettes, coffee and a whisky in the evening" my client said. But now, aged 85, her mother had forgotten she smoked and so stopped overnight. There was no physical withdrawal or painful moods. She just stopped. She stopped thinking about cigarettes and they had no interest for her.

Now, I'm not saying that it's as simple as just forgetting that you drink or that you shouldn't go through a detox process to clear your body of the substances in a safe environment, before being in a position to clear your mind but this example demonstrates the power of thought, of the mind, on breaking addiction.

When you live in a head full of painful thoughts, the less effective your own internal innate happiness system is, and so the more you look outside for happiness or peace through the addiction because it feels rewarding. You have a constant need to fill your body and minds with external sources of comfort and happiness.

***Well it was really dark like, I wasn't living, I was sort of, I was always seeking for whatever reason, some was to numb the pain, some was to bend reality because I didn't like reality, but I was always looking outside for something to put inside me.***

When you can't see that you are creating your own reality, you can't imagine the possibility of living without your drug of choice. To expect an alcoholic to give up drinking is like asking a non addict to imagine living without whatever it is that gives him pleasure.

Alcohol, amongst other addictions, releases endorphins so it's understandable that someone who hasn't recognised their own innate health and is living in insecurity looks for pain relief in alcohol. When you are in a world of pain, you just want a way out and it natural to look to your addiction to soothe the pain.

***I liked it as an anesthetic, I liked it to numb the pain***

Endorphins bear resemblance to morphine, powerful relief of both physical and emotional pain. But it is shown that positive expectations can turn on the endorphin system too. Scientists have proven, with imaging study, that when people expect relief from pain, the activity of opioid receptor increases. This is the placebo effect that takes place, so even if the medication doesn't work, the brain is soothed by its own painkillers, the endorphins.

One member of the wellbeing group I used to run told me that he would get the 'clucking' when every muscle in his body twitched and his bones ached for a fix. He would get to his dealer and as soon as the drug was in his hand, before he had even cooked it, let alone smoked it, the symptoms would disappear. The pain stopped.

## What addiction isn't

Addiction isn't an illness or disease. Flu is an illness. Viewing addiction as an illness limits it to a medical issue. Of course, it does have some of the characteristics of an illness but treating addiction as a disease or illness doesn't explain what addiction is about, and if you believe you have a disease, you might use this label as a crutch to continue to use, "it's not my fault" you might say, "it's a disease". You probably already feel sick and out of control rather than in charge of your life, and even the thought of having a disease is disempowering. You have to fight a disease and hope that you survive it. Supporting the disease model doesn't encourage you to acknowledge your ability to return to your innate state of happiness and peace.

No one thinks that smoking is a disease? And yet this is classed as an addiction. There aren't any Cig Anon programmes for reformed smokers to attend. And why are ex smokers referred to as reformed rather than recovered?

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) say: "Addiction is defined as a chronic, relapsing brain disease." But the brain, unlike all your other organs, is designed to change as you learn new things. If you had a brain that didn't change, you'd be in a coma.

Psychologist, Dr Bruce Alexander says that the neurobiological claims that are used in documentaries and books put forward the idea that there are innate differences and irreversible alterations in the brain structure of addicts and, yet, Alexander says that most neuroscientists that work in the field of substance and addiction have a less rigid view.

You learn addiction through neuroplasticity, which is how you learn everything. You maintain your addiction because you lose some of that plasticity for a while and the addiction then reduces further plasticity. Neuroplasticity is the brain's natural starting point for everything you learn and that might include the addiction but also the recovery. When you recover, your neuroplasticity returns and your brain starts changing again. Addiction results from the motivated repetition of the same thoughts and behaviours until they become habitual. Repetition changes the brain's wiring and the way the brain changes has more to do with learning and development than disease.

Alexander says that it is important to distinguish between the official view, which often uses the language of neuroscience, and reports from the neuroscientists that do the research. Whilst official viewpoints are put forward with authority although neuroscientists are inclined to question some of these views.

## **But isn't addiction down to Dopamine?**

But what does seem undisputed is that the neurotransmitter dopamine seems to be a key player in addiction.

When we're hungry we need to eat, when we're tired we need to rest. In order to satisfy these needs, neurons (our nerve cells) release neurotransmitters (the chemicals that send the messages between neurons and tells us how to respond) into the synapse (the gap) between neurons.

The neurotransmitters move across the gap to the next neuron where they activate receptors designed to recognise that specific chemical and so create sensations of hunger or tiredness. These neurotransmitters are then reabsorbed when we are full or rested and the signal isn't needed any more but some stimulants interfere with neurotransmission, activate receptors and block them.

So, in addiction, the chemical functioning of the brain is altered as the reabsorption of dopamine is blocked. When the reabsorption process is blocked, dopamine accumulates in the synapse and the brain experiences a surge of natural chemicals which cause a high in the reward centre of the brain. The reward centre helps us to learn what we did to feel good so that we'll know to repeat the behaviour to feel good again.

This is how we learn but because the sensations are so powerful, you repeat the addictive behaviour again and again until it eventually supplants healthy behaviour, even if the results aren't what you want.

***I really, really hate crack but I also really really love it and that's why I hate it because that's the only one, out of all the things I've tried that made me just do things that I didn't want to do but I was just doing them.***

This reward centre, the nucleus accumbens, doesn't make a distinction between a heroin addiction or nail biting, it's all the same thing at this level. A nail biter may not feel as if they have a choice but no-one says that the biter is addicted to nail biting, they just call this a nasty habit. But it is this part of the brain that leads the addict to believe that they can't resist cravings and explains why many addicts continue with a habit they have no desire for which, in turn, leads to tolerance.

Dopamine tells us something wonderful is going to happen when we take that sip, line or bring out our credit card. But if it doesn't happen, we are still sure that it is going to happen, so we do it again. And again. Each time we have the expectation of more pleasure, we are conned by the Dopamine rush. We have distorted Dopamine soaked memories of the pleasure we once felt.

***the trouble is I was always chasing for something better, something better and it keeps you there for a long time***

But research shows that dopamine is released at the thought of an activity whether the activity happens or not. In one study, when monkeys were shown a light associated with food, dopamine increased but when they got the food they were expecting, dopamine producing neurons weren't activated at all. (Getting The Brain's Attention, Science, Oct 3, 1997).

## **But I never get a hangover?**

When the brain floods with dopamine and other neurotransmitters and the brain receptors become overwhelmed, the brain then produces less dopamine and the addiction isn't as pleasurable. You need increasing amounts of the alcohol to get anywhere near the first euphoric feeling.

The pleasure reduces but the memory of the reward is still there as so you have to try to recreate it. You don't get the feeling you want but we still keep expecting it and the illusion continues.

***Yeah but you don't, [ get the feeling you want] you never do, you never ever do, but I didn't know that at the time, I blamed it on other people where really I should have looked at what it was for real but you don't when you're in it***

Continuing with the habit leads to tolerance and tolerance is when repeating something changes the way we react to it. When someone takes drugs, for example, the brain responds to the overstimulation by numbing the target receptors so that each hit creates less of an effect so you need to take larger doses to achieve the same effect.

You might think that it's great that you don't ever get really drunk, despite the amount you drink. And what a bonus it is that you never get a hangover! Except it isn't a bonus, your lack of hangover is showing you how hard your body is working to stop you overdosing.

This is why someone who has been dry or clean for months through choice, or maybe even imprisonment, will take the same amount that they had before they stopped, but because the body has self regulated the system cannot cope with this onslaught. The person overdoses.

When you stop taking drinking, you'll experience withdrawal and the severity of your withdrawal will depend on the amount you drank and when withdrawal kicks in, the main driver is to reduce the suffering of withdrawal and so you drink again and the dance continues.

Although withdrawal is clearly a large feature of addiction, a person's dependence on substances or behavior doesn't mean that he is addicted to it. Withdrawal doesn't mean that you are addicted, if someone goes out for the evening and has too much to drink, they suffer withdrawal the next day as the head and body recalibrate.

Addiction isn't your friend, addiction is a thief, it takes rather than gives and anything you think it gives, is an illusion.

***I wanted to kill myself but I thought well someone else can stick the needle in my arm and let's hope that it's their air bubble that will, you know, but luckily, obviously, it didn't work ... it took everything away from me***

Addiction isn't a balanced life, and it doesn't stem from happiness. If you're happy and you drink, you will still feel happy but you won't necessarily confuse the feeling of happiness with the drink. There is a big difference in doing something because you're enjoying it and relying on it to make you feel better. The alcoholic wants to feel better and believes that the alcohol will do this because of the initial feeling of wellbeing, which is, of course, a detachment from the feeling of deprivation and craving. The addiction doesn't fix you or stop you from feeling unhappy.

***I think I've always looked for something that made me feel warm inside and made me feel different because it used to really hurt, not hurt physically but mentally***

Addiction isn't a weakness, a bad choice or a lack of willpower.

In fact, addiction isn't the problem, your current version of reality is the problem.

## Do you wear the label of addict?

So who are you? Do you wear the label of addict? Do you call yourself an alcoholic? Gambler? Do you think that you *are* your addiction?

***I mean I would say that now, as they say in treatment that I will always be an addict but I choose not to ... now I think that that isn't really healthy either. I'm still holding on to the labels of old aren't I? I used to use and now I don't, so what, get on with it.***

Labeling yourself as an alcoholic or whatever else you might call yourself reinforces the feeling that you are 'stuck' and it is impossible to change, you start to identify with the label and become the behaviour. But we are only ever one thought away from feeling differently.

When you become your label, you're spending your days locked in a cell of your own making. You might keep pushing at the door trying to get out. Hammering on it and screaming for someone to release you. But then, when your thinking calms down, you get quiet inside, you might hear that quiet voice of wisdom whisper, 'pull the door, don't push it.'

The addict can't see how to open the door to go beyond the addiction. You can't imagine a time when you won't be an addict. It doesn't matter what the addiction costs, it has become so much a part of your self image that you can't separate self and addiction. You would cease to exist.

You might imagine that the label you wear is real because everyone around you identifies you with this label and most of the people you see around you wear the same label. You might imagine that the illusion that you're living in is real because, after all, everyone else is living in the same illusion. If you surround yourself with people who act like you, that's all you see. You've heard of the saying, 'you become like who you hang around with'

***So everyone around me seemed to be alcoholics or drug addicts ... And I thought everybody does it and I remember my younger brother saying one time, well you might think that but that's just the pocket of people you're living with but, I can assure you Claire, that there is a lot more people living in this world that aren't doing it, and I just wouldn't have it***

Push open the door and stop being a prisoner of your own thoughts, beliefs and limitations.

## What else do you call yourself?

Another label that people often wear is the, “I’m not good/happy/clever enough” label. Do you feel, or have you ever felt, as if you aren’t ‘enough’? Do you look around you and compare yourself with other people? This feeling has become such a problem that it is now a diagnosed syndrome, ‘FOMO’ (Fear of Missing Out), a syndrome that is amplified by social media. Social media fosters the impression that everyone else is having a better life, more fun, more money, better relationships and you might start to feel inadequate. You might feel as if you’ve had, or are having, a hard life. It’s not fair. So what do you do to feel better?

The feeling of being inadequate and incomplete is the baseline of addiction, after all, no one that is feeling whole and happy becomes addicted. They may have the occasional binge but then they leave whatever it is alone for a while.

Addiction results from needs not being met. Think about it, when we’re feeling as if we’re not enough, innocently we start to tell ourselves things like, “I’m so lazy, ugly, fat, stupid.” So surely, you don’t deserve to do well and have a good life, do you?

***I really wasn’t happy and I never would be happy and I was always telling myself off and I thought that I was worthless and I was always going around and around and around like that banging, you know, banging your head against a brick wall and putting your head underneath a bus***

“I don’t deserve to live a happy life.” If you tell yourself these things often enough, how can you fail to believe these messages?

Notice that you’re having these repetitive, old thoughts. Don’t ask where they came from, don’t ask if it from your mother or school, who cares? Just notice that you’re doing it again.

I’m sure that you can give me example after example about why you can’t have a happy life. You can tell me about the hard life you’ve had and how difficult things are. And I really do feel for you. I know that your circumstances feel real, but, without realising, you’re living in an illusion of self generated thought. You’re feeling low and unhappy, and when you feel like this, it makes sense to drink the feeling away.

Also, when you feel like this, it’s difficult to remember that *you* are creating the thought that you aren’t good enough, that you are somehow lacking. It looks like a fact but you can create any thought, and you will always feel the thought you’re having, whatever flavour of thought it is. Without thought, there would be no experience and it really is up to you how you use the gift of thought. You don’t always know where the thought comes from, but it is up to you what you do with the thought once you notice it.

You might feel trapped by your circumstances, by your addiction but, really, you’re trapped by your own thought system. Innocently, as we have talked about before, you

have created your own prison. You might feel as if you have reached rock bottom, but rock bottom is just a change of perspective, a change of thought.

When you consciously realise that the only person or circumstance keeping you from living a life of peace is yourself, the responsibility is frightening and you can come up with a hundred reasons why you can't have what you want. Whatever reasons you come up with, it always boils down to thinking, 'I'm not worthy.' This thinking is familiar and habitual.

When you do things out of habit, you lose your power to create and choose your life and choosing is the definition of freedom. Innocently, you fall in to a victim mindset and feel even more hopeless.

Feeling hopeless and not good enough, not in control, hate your boring life and feeling as if you are at the bottom of the pile, leads to insecurity and insecurity makes you susceptible to addictive habits.

Robert Sapolsky talks about the effect of feeling at a lower rung in life's hierarchy, in his book, 'Why Zebras don't get Ulcers.' He says, 'if you're going to be a savanna baboon, you probably don't want to be a low-ranking one. You sit there for two minutes digging some root out of the ground to eat, clean it off and... anyone higher ranking can rip it off from you. You spend hours sweet-talking someone into grooming you, getting rid of those bothersome thorns and nettles and parasites in your hair, and the grooming session can be broken up by someone dominant just for the sheer pleasure of hassling you. Or you could be sitting there, minding your own business, bird-watching, and some high-ranking guy having a bad day decides to make you pay for it by slashing you with his canines.'

Sapolsky likens this to the hierarchy in the human world and says that the important thing isn't how low you are in the hierarchical ranks, whether in society or in the workplace, or how much you're paid or have in the bank but, rather, how you *feel* about your place in the world. If you feel poor and overlooked, you will succumb to stress and are likely to look outside of yourself for something to take the stress and painful thinking away. If you feel as if some big baboon, or scary life circumstance is looming, it's easier to lose yourself in a bottle rather than in your own head.

But maybe you do feel worthy of having a good life and you do deserve to be happy but, it's not your fault, you just have an addictive personality?

## Is there such a thing as an addictive personality?

Using anything outside yourself to change your feeling is something that humans have always done. This can be done by drinking, shooting up, food or running, but for the majority of people this doesn't lead to compulsive behaviour, so does this mean that those who take anything to the extreme have an addictive personality? Maybe you can't help your addiction?

In 1990, newspapers reported that researchers at the University of Texas had identified the gene for alcoholism. This news was greeted with tremendous interest, and the media got very excited that the end of alcoholism was in view. Time magazine said:

*The benefits from this line of research may be huge. In five years, scientists should have perfected a blood test for the gene, to help spot children at risk. And within a decade, doctors may have in hand a drug that either blocks the gene's action or controls some forms of alcoholism by altering the absorption of dopamine. Eventually with genetic engineering, experts may find a way to eliminate altogether the suspect gene from affected individuals.*

The researchers never made the claim that they had discovered the 'alcoholism gene' but some of the public statements fed that mistaken impression. Six years they said,

*Unfortunately it was erroneously reported that [we] had found the 'alcoholism gene' implying that there was a one-to-one relation between a gene and a specific behaviour. Such misinterpretation are common - readers may recall accounts of an 'obesity gene' or a 'personality gene'. Needless to say, there is no such thing as a specific gene for alcoholism, obesity or a particular type of personality.*

The addiction specialist Lance Dodes reported that, 'The most important finding of research into a genetic role for alcoholism is that there is no such thing as a gene for alcoholism, nor can you directly inherit alcoholism.'

Not only is there no addiction gene, there couldn't be one. Before the study of epigenetics, it was believed that we have about 120,000 genes in our body, a gene for each protein but since the Human Genome Project, it has been discovered that there are only about 25,000 gene sequences in our DNA - less than in a worm and about the same amount as in a weed!

The painful, uncomfortable urge to drink or to use is neurologically strengthened each time you drink or use. You have about 100 billion neurons in your brain and that is a huge capacity for new thought. Each time you have the same habitual thoughts, you are firing the same neurons and strengthening that neural pathway. And it is so easy to change a neural pathway. You just let go of the same thought to have a new one and the neurons that make up the old pathway will detach from each other and reattach to a different neuron to create a new pathway.

Therapists often talk about compulsive addiction, compulsive gambling for example, as if it's a bad thing but having a compulsion to finish a chapter of your book before you put the lights out wouldn't be called a problem, would it? Compulsions are just repetitive thoughts, repetitive neural pathways and repetitive behaviour.

It's true that you might be attracted to another form of compulsive behaviour once you have tackled the first addiction and this might confirm your opinion that you have an addictive personality.

But if you get hooked in to another behaviour, all that you're doing is 'curing' one addiction with another. You may believe that the new addiction is better because it's healthier, people can get addicted to exercise to replace smoking or drinking and can't see that they have swapped addictions. This is probably the closest thing that there is to an 'addictive personality' and the only reason that the compulsions continue, is because you have addressed the behaviour and not the cause.

## Is it possible to change?

Once upon a time there was a frog sitting by a river bank when along came a Scorpion.

“Hello Frog,” said Scorpion. “I wonder if you would be kind enough to give me a ride across the river on your back.”

Frog knew that Scorpion couldn't swim.

“I don't think that's a good idea,” said Frog. “You have a deadly sting. You might kill me.”

“But why would I do that?” replied Scorpion. “If I stung you, we would both die.”

“Mmm,” thought Frog. “That makes sense.”

“Alright Scorpion, jump onto my back and I will give you a ride across the river,” he said.

So Scorpion jumped onto Frog's back and Frog began to swim across the river. But halfway across, Scorpion took his deadly sting and stuck it into Frog's back. And as the poison filled Frog's body, his arms began to stiffen and they both began to sink. “Why?” gasped Frog in despair.

“Sorry Frog,” said Scorpion. “It's just my nature.” And Frog and Scorpion died.

Can you change? Can you give up your addiction? Or, should you keep it because, ‘that's who you are?’ We often tell ourselves that, ‘this is how I am’ as if this is it and it's impossible to act or think differently. But your personality is made up of how you think, how you act and how you feel. In the moment. Moment by moment. If you want to act differently, then you need to be aware of the thoughts that you're having, you must become conscious of the unconscious behaviour that you are expressing.

***Because my mind could easily ... I could allow myself to go back in my head and then end up using that as, oh well you know, it's not my fault because of blah blah blah, but hold on a minute Claire, the choice, you've actually got choices now and like with the tears, I mean it's similar, I can turn the tap on and off.***

Don't be ridiculous, you might say. We all know that personality is laid down at birth, it's all to do with genetics, isn't it?

In his book, *The Wisdom of your Cells*, Dr Bruce Lipton, a cellular biologist, describes how he placed one pluripotential stem cell, this is a cell that can become anything when it grows up, into a Petri dish, and nourished it with cell culture medium (blood) until it divided into many genetically identical cells. Lipton then split the cells into three Petri dishes and exposed them to three different environments and Lipton says that the environment for humans isn't where you live but how you think. He is talking about an internal environment. Your thoughts create your environment.

What he discovered was that the environment to which the cell was exposed determined whether the cell became a muscle cell or a fat cell or a bone cell. Even though all the cells were genetically identical, they expressed themselves differently. What controlled the fate of the cells? Not the genetics. They were all genetically identical. The sole difference was the environment that the cell was exposed to.

With fifty trillion cells in your body, the human body is the equivalent of a skin-covered petri dish. Moving from one environment to another alters the composition of the 'culture medium,' the blood. The chemistry of the body's culture medium determines the nature of the cell's environment within you.

This is because your blood's chemistry is largely impacted by the chemicals sent from your brain. Brain chemistry adjusts the way the blood is made up based upon your thoughts. So this means that your thoughts about any given thing, at any given moment, can influence the brain chemistry, which, in turn, affects your cells. In other words, your thoughts have a direct and overwhelmingly significant effect on cells.

According to Dr. Lipton, gene activity can change on a daily basis. If the perception in your mind is reflected in the chemistry of your body, and if your nervous system reads and interprets the environment and then controls the blood's chemistry, then you can literally change the fate of your cells by altering your thoughts.

In fact, Dr. Lipton's research illustrates that by changing your perception, your mind can alter the activity of your genes and each gene can express itself over 30,000 different ways. He gives more detail by saying that the gene programs are contained within the nucleus of the cell, and you can rewrite those genetic programs through changing your blood chemistry.

Dr Lipton says, "Since the subconscious programs operate outside the range of consciousness, we don't experience ourselves playing out these behaviors. Therefore, we don't even see ourselves sabotaging our own lives, and as a result, we don't take responsibility for the lives we lead. We see ourselves as victims of forces outside of our control. It's hard to own what we've done our whole lives. So we perceive ourselves as victims, and we believe that genes are in control."

So your cells respond to your thoughts and your emotions and your mind's perception of the world changes the biology and chemistry of your body which changes the cells in your body.

So all of this means that you all have the power to re-choose your life. You can choose to live differently, to feel differently just by thinking differently. In so doing, you set in motion a new level of awareness of the infinite possibilities within each of us.

But this freedom can be scary. You can't hide behind the label of addict anymore. But why would you want to?

## **Are you enough?**

We've looked at how many, many people feel that they aren't enough and how this can be a trigger for addiction and we'll investigate this even more in this section.

***from a very young age I was really not happy with the way I looked, I wasn't happy, felt like a reject, I felt that no one loved me***

Almost every addict I have worked with has told me a story about their past and their treatment from parents or other family members. They were locked into their feeling of rejection and hurt and, innocently, carried this feeling around with them every day.

***I've always known that I was adopted which did, and has, and it still does, a little bit, affect me in the way I think about myself ... I have never, I never could identify with anybody***

No one is empty or lacking, we all have the innate health and wellbeing we were born with but many people don't feel this, rather than feeling health, they feel emptiness and so experience themselves as lacking. Addiction widens the gap between health and behaviour as the addict judges himself and the more he does this, the more he feels like an outsider and moves away from health to destructive behaviour. The deeper your sense of self loathing, the more you look to whatever your drug of choice is to feel something.

When you lose a sense of self and you innocently misunderstand where your experience is coming from, you don't feel as if you're enough, emotionally you're like a leaf in the wind and are a victim to the outside world and your moods go up and down depending on those people around you. When you're in addiction, it may look to family and friends as if you don't care but this is a time when you are more sensitive to rejection and how much you drink or use can depend on what is happening in your relationships.

Because your self esteem is low and you feel lonely, it's easy to start a new relationship as soon the last one finishes;

***So, I kind of, I used to get into relationships. I was just going from one person to another person. I suppose you're looking for comfort in someone's arms when you've not, kind of, got it.***

When you don't feel as if you're enough, or if you feel self loathing or, shame at where your addiction has taken you, you are conscious of the disconnection but can't see how to re-connect. The fear of what you have done, or haven't done, or the failure to be who you think you should be, makes you believe that you're unworthy of connection, love and belonging. No one is ever going to feel better or behave better by feeling ashamed or by being shamed. When you feel hurt and isolated, you'll reach for whatever will offer the fastest comfort.

Whether it's society or friends and family that judge and condemn the addict, we are creating exactly the circumstances that are most likely to keep the addict using.

Everyone has a need for connection and so disconnection always causes pain. But when feelings of disconnection are added to feelings of not belonging, loss of identity and not feeling that you are enough, the disconnection causes pain, pain that you want to stop. And because drinking stops the pain, you may not see that you are creating a problem.

***they put me in to a homeless families hostel infested with cockroaches, supposedly a maximum of 52 days but I was in there for two years but in that time I was actually drinking, well not, well I would say now looking back it is a drink problem but I didn't see it then. I wasn't shaking if I didn't have a drink, it was more for company and standing up for myself***

Just like disconnection, we also fear being vulnerable and yet vulnerability, like every other emotion, is neutral. You don't have to embrace your vulnerability nor do you have to fear it. It's just another emotion created by having vulnerable thoughts. Trying to repress the feeling or analyse it is just adding more layers of thought. When you try to avoid vulnerability, you shut down the capacity for feeling emotion. You become a void. A vacuum. And we all know the saying that, 'nature abhors a vacuum' and you will do anything that you can to fill it.

Feeling shame and feeling vulnerable isn't nice and so it's easier to numb the pain than feel it. But numbing vulnerability doesn't just deaden the pain, it can deaden all feelings including those of love and joy. You can't selectively numb the feelings you want to, just like you can't selectively lose weight from just one area of your body, "I just want to lose the arm fat," you might say, "not the boobs" but you can't, and when you numb the pain, you numb the possibility of any joy.

So you numb your feelings which increases your sense of isolation and psychological isolation can be terrifying and can lead to a feeling of hopelessness and desperation. Anyone would do anything to escape these feelings.

If you want to feel connection and love, you have to feel that you are worthy of love and belonging.

***I did get to know my Brother's friend from down the road and she gave me a cleaning job and I've got keys to her place and she didn't know me but she knew my past, and I thought, hold on a minute, and then my brother gave me keys to his place to clean and then my other brother gave me keys to his place and I thought, hold on a minute, something's happening here, people are trusting me and then it was really good, especially to be a key holder for someone's house. So I thought OK maybe things are on the way up?***

If you have a fear of not being worthy or good enough, you won't feel that you deserve real connection but you're predisposed psychologically, spiritually and emotionally to connection and love. It's what gives colour to your world and when you perceive that the colour is missing, you look for it elsewhere.

Everyone has a need for connection and love, and because of this, addicts hardwire themselves to expect rejection and, sadly, you'll get what you expect and the void between you and others gets wider.

One way to fill that void is with forgiveness. Some addiction programmes encourage you to ask forgiveness from the people that you have hurt or forgive those people that you believe have hurt you. And whilst it is important to forgive others it is also important to forgive yourself, you don't have to keep remembering past events in order to keep forgiving yourself. Be kind to yourself. You can't move forward if you are carrying the weight of self recrimination, self hate and self abuse.

***But it's actually helped me to forgive myself, no, in fact no, I think I was trying to forgive myself for all those years but I couldn't, but the three principles has helped me to see that I don't have to forgive myself. What was I doing? Am I doing it now? Am I suffering like that now, no. I can go back and remember but I don't need to remember it with the pain that used to lead me to go and go on and pile it on and on.***

## Is the pain of social rejection real?

You are hardwired to connect with others, it's what gives purpose and meaning to life and so when you are disconnected you can't feel whole. Always looking for that wholeness, 'searching for my other half', looking for the yin to your yang and, feeling as if you aren't living the life you feel you are meant to, causes physical pain.

Science has proven that neurology influences physiology using fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) and a study in 2011 found that the pain of social rejection and disconnection really is felt as a physical pain.

Subjects took part in an experiment where they played a virtual ball game with what they thought were two other participants sitting at computers in a different rooms although, in fact, the game was computer generated. The participant is included in the ball game for the first few minutes but then excluded and not thrown the ball at all. The game only took a matter of minutes but, even, in this short time, the social exclusion was found to result in feelings of anger and sadness.

Anatomically, physical pain is registered in one part of the brain, the thalamus, but the impact is experienced in another part, the anterior cingulate cortex, or ACC. The brain gets the pain message in the thalamus, but 'feels' it in the ACC. This area 'lights up' or is activated when we react to the pain stimulus and it also lights up when people feel the pain of social rejection. We feel physical and emotional pain in the same part of the brain. And it's in the cortex - the ACC and elsewhere - that opiates help us to endure pain by reducing not just its physical but its emotional impact.

The research concluded that people that feel social rejection are more likely to take harmful substances. The feeling of separation and isolation creates the feeling of being outside society, and encourages an 'us versus them' mentality.

Addicts often feel rejected by their families and believe that their families don't love them and the more they fear rejection the more they use, and the worse their behaviour becomes and the more they push their family away, and so the fear becomes a self fulfilling prophecy.

***my mum always seemed that I was never good enough, I was never really loved by my mum***

If the only connection you feel is with the people you are using with, then, naturally they are the people you're going to feel a sense of belonging to, your new 'family' of other addicts and pub friends start to become very important to you and you can miss this sense of camaraderie when you are clean. But you don't only miss your addict friends, and constantly chasing a high, but you might miss the rituals your addiction entails and without these rituals, you can feel lost.

After all, when your mind and day isn't full of how to get the money to get the alcohol or drugs, you have more time on your hands and you might be consumed by bad memories, anxiety and boredom. Without seeing where these feelings are coming from, it's easy to go back to the only behaviour you know to block out these unwelcome thoughts and feelings.

But remember, your thoughts about yourself, your situation, past or future are just thoughts. You can't have any feelings about the future because it hasn't happened yet and you can't say what your next thought is going to be. Whatever you're feeling, feels like reality because at the second you have the thought, it is real but the second after, if you have a new thought, you're in a new reality. Yes, I know that everything on the outside might be the same but your feelings about the outside can change.

***it's like I was going around with, what I chose to have, the worlds problems on my shoulders. I would say that I still have the worlds problems on my shoulders in one sense but I'm not choosing to think that that's what my overcoat is made of. I don't have to.***

## The Alexander Experiment

Professor Bruce K Alexander, a psychologist at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, highlighted the importance of being part of a healthy community and how disconnection is an element of addiction in his Rat Park experiment.

Dr Alexander was an experimental psychologist at a time when it was common to use white lab rats for research. The rats lived in solitary confinement cellblocks, isolated and unable to see or touch each other. And they were the lucky ones. What was even worse than solitary confinement was when the rats were put into boxes and endured either 24 hour starvation or could get tiny pellets of food one at a time if they pushed a little lever on the side of the box over and over again.

Experimental psychologists thought that these boxes, Skinner boxes as they were known, were a good place to study addiction. They perfected a way to allow the rats to inject small doses of a drug into themselves by pressing a lever. The drug reached the rats brains moments after self administration. The researchers watched as the rats pressed the lever frequently enough to consume large amounts of morphine, heroin, cocaine and other drugs. Many of the rats preferred the drug injections to food and water and continued pressing the drug lever until they eventually died.

This study appeared to corroborate the theory that drugs were extremely addictive and the media went wild over the research. But Alexander had his doubts about these results, he knew that in normal circumstances rats are highly social, sexual creatures and, just like humans, solitary confinement can drive them crazy. Rats, like humans, would prefer to take mind numbing substances rather than be mind numbingly bored, emotionally isolated and powerless.

So, in 1977, Professor Alexander gathered a team of Simon Fraser University Researchers to repeat the study but with a big difference. In one part of the room they built standard wire cages that would alienate the rats and stop them from interacting. In another part of the room, Alexander and his colleagues built a big plywood box and filled it with things that rats like; climbing platforms, tin cans to hide in, wood chips for playing in and running wheels for exercise. Rats of both sexes were put into the box and soon the enclosure was filled with adult rats and baby rats too.

They called the enclosure Rat Park and the team ran several experiments comparing the drug consumption of rats in Rat park with the rats in solitary confinement and it was no surprise that the isolated rats consumed more of the drug solution in every experiment. For the rats in the park, morphine had no attraction even when it was dissolved in a sticky, sweet liquid. The social rats in the park would even go through withdrawal rather than consume the morphine. So, in a natural surrounding a rat will stay away from the drug if it is given a choice. Alexander reported that, "Nothing we tried instilled a strong appetite for morphine or produced anything that looked like addiction in rats that were housed in a reasonably normal environment." In contrast, isolated caged rats consumed up to twenty times more morphine.

Alexander believes that there are many human beings who don't have a healthy social or cultural life and use their addiction as a way of coping with their dislocation and lack of connection with others, as we've said, as an escape, a pain killer. They use drugs or addictive behavior as a way to deaden their senses and, at the same time, to substitute an addicted life for a full life.

Alexander asked, "What if the difference between not being addicted and being addicted was the difference between seeing the world as your park and seeing the world as your cage?"

## **But it's too difficult for me to stop!**

You might think that it's alright for rats, and for other people, but your situation and circumstances are too difficult, too harsh, to overcome addiction. I do understand but I'd like to tell you the story of Modello. Modello demonstrates something about the human spirit, how we are all resilient and how each and everyone of us can overcome the most terrible living conditions and circumstances and get free from addiction.

So what is Modello? It is the story of how understanding the human mind changed lives in one of the most violent and dangerous low income housing projects in South Florida.

The Modello housing project was an example of 'model' living for poor people on the outskirts of Miami. But Modello was a mess. One of the residents said, 'There were drugs galore, people breaking in to your houses, fights and women fighting each other like animals in the street.'

Over the years, service providers had been given funding to 'fix' Modello but these programmes didn't bother to adjust to Modello's special needs. When a 'client' didn't fit the mould, the service provider blamed the client. Residents had never made it easy, after all, who wants someone to come in and fix them? They went out of their way to give the service providers a hard time. The residents would test the providers and the providers didn't pass the test. The providers would offer short term programmes and when the programmes weren't immediately successful, they would get frustrated and leave. Residents became disappointed and angry.

Dr Roger Mills, a Doctor of Psychology, was trained as a community organiser and he went in to Modello with funding and a new way of working which was then called, 'Psychology of Mind (P.O.M) and is now called, The Three Principles.

When Dr Roger Mills first went in to the housing project, he said, 'There were six entrances in to the Modello Project, and there was a different gang at every entrance. It was like the Burger King of any dealing. People would drive through and get their crack and drive away. There were shootings every night between these gangs, turf battles. It was just like the Wild West, literally.'

It was a place of nightmares, a place where the residents had a high drug and alcohol problems.

One of the residents, Lisa said, 'Everyone felt such hopelessness. It was depressing. It felt like we were in this world, and everyone else was in another world. It was, like, this is what my life is going to be like.'

Things were so bad in Modello that even the police wouldn't go in. There were gun shots at night and so many shootings that residents slept on the floor to avoid the bullets.

A regular children's game was, 'crackman'. The children would pick up leaves and rocks and they'd sell the leaves for the rocks because this is what they saw on a daily basis, drug transactions took place on the street and on residents porches in front of the children.

Women sold their daughters as prostitutes so that they would have drug money. Prostitution took place on the street where children played.

Florida Magazine claimed in October 1987 that 'Modello is the ugliest welfare project in Dade County, a county with 60 ugly welfare projects. 12,000 ugly welfare apartments ... it is home to 100 woman, virtually all of them black welfare mothers. It is also home to 100 teenagers and 300 children who squat in asphalt, play with cartons, crawl under pilfered shopping carts.'

When Dr Mills first got the grant to go in to Modello, he was told, "Their circumstances are too strong against them. You can't raise people's self-esteem and well-being in that kind of setting'. But he didn't agree although Dr Mills hadn't seen anything like it. He had never seen such a distressing community with so much drug dealing out in the open, where the neighbourhood culture supported it so much that nobody wanted to mess with the drug dealers. The drug dealers boldly stood on every corner, harassing or confronting anyone who drove in.

The buildings were run down, the doors were falling off their hinges, the windows were broken, paint peeling off walls, broken down cars, piles of rubbish everywhere, little kids running around and, badly clothed, dirty and uncared for. Even on a school day, more than two hundred kids roamed the grounds unsupervised. It looked like the middle of summer or a holiday. Dr Mills watched as the children played a game that looked like 'drug dealers vs the cops' The drug dealers were the good guys.

Dr Mills didn't want to be seen as another agency. He wanted to get to know the residents, hear their stories, learn about their lives and listen to them. Dr Mills considered the residents equal and treated them that way. He believed that they could work together equally to solve the community's problems.

There were extremely high levels of apathy, depression and hostility. Residents were feeling, 'what's the use?'

Dr Mills was asked, "what does self esteem or people's thoughts have to do with the fact that their roofs are falling in, that they're dodging bullets on the way home. that their kids are involved with drugs, that their old man is beating on them and sleeping with their daughter. All these terrible things are going on in their lives. What does this have to do with 'thought' or anything you're talking about."

Dr Mills replied, "It has everything to do with it. The reason things are the way they are down there is that people who live there don't think they can do better. They've been conditioned because of their upbringing or their experience with society or whatever

they've learned in their lives to think that's the best they can do - be dependent and hustle and manipulate and steal and cheat and lie to get ahead and not trust anybody and be suspicious or think that the world is against them. I'm not saying that's right or wrong."

Whilst the authorities believed that change could only happen by giving people jobs and getting them more income, in other words changing the outside in order to change the inside, Roger Mills insisted that the change had to come from the inside, "You've got to change how people think, and in order to do that you've got to understand that it has something to do with their thinking."

Dr Mills believed that relationships and connection were the key. People are important and need to feel important in their own lives. Dr Mills saw the residents, whatever their addiction, as healthy. Because even in the midst of addiction, your self esteem and confidence are like the sun behind the clouds, you can't see it but it's always there.

Clearly, in Modello, the drug dealers were the biggest, most obvious, problem. They caused the shootings. They had everyone living in fear.

No one in the community would do anything about it. So long as the people in the project supported the drug dealers it inadvertently supported crime, prostitution and crack houses. The dealers knew they were protected, so long as they kept people in fear they would have no trouble.

But over time, a miracle happened. The community ran out the drug dealers.

And for the first time some of the young men, who had previously stood on the corner selling drugs during the day, went to school and graduated and then went to college.

The women who lived in Modello changed their minds which in turn changed lives. They were no longer abused or the abuser, they were alcohol free and drug free. They were able to listen to their own wisdom. "You know" one of the residents, who had been a very heavy drinker, said to her partner, "you can drink all the beers and the liquor in the bar, but when you wake up the next day, your problems will still be there and then you have to take another drink and another drink, and that problem is still going to be there."

Dr Mills said, "Peoples lives became what they think is possible."

And it is possible.

*Reference:*

Get the full version of the book, 'Modello' by Jack Pransky on Amazon.

## What type of treatment is best?

***I didn't like rehab, you got woken up by a bell, it reminded me of boarding school, anything to me, that reminded me of being locked up, having my liberty taken away, even though I was in the chains of the addiction***

Treatment for addiction varies greatly. There are places in the US that book you in and then throw you out if you can't pay. There are places in the UK that discharge you (or throw you out!) regardless of whether you have anywhere to sleep or if anyone can pick you up. There are places that encourage you to 'grit your teeth' and get through it without ever helping you to understand why you're addicted?

I asked Claire why she went back to using after getting clean in prison. She said,

***Just to survive out on the streets, I mean you get your £27 release grant, which most people used to call it a relapse grant, and then I got a room in a bed and breakfast for two weeks while the council decided whether they were going to house me. But because I made myself intentionally homeless when I lost my home, or I had it repossessed, then they weren't going to help me so I was, basically, back out on the streets again so I thought well I'm drinking, I have to drink because I have to put this front on, and it just goes hand in hand really so by that time I had got a bit disillusioned and I thought well ...***

There are many recovery centres out there ranging from the ones you have to attend to avoid prison to expensive rehab.

***I tried an NA but I didn't like the, My name's Claire and I'm an addict and I thought, you know, but the thing that put me off is the people that were there, and I don't know why they were there but after, at the middle cup of tea bit, people were seeing how much money everyone had got and by the end we all left and clubbed up together and got drugs so I thought, well that's a load of rubbish.***

There are as many types of treatment as there are types of addiction. Many people can overcome their addiction with a therapist's help and some can become free without any outside help. But depending on the severity of your addiction, it may be necessary to clear your body of your addiction in a safe environment and all good recovery centres should begin with a medically assisted detox that starts before any major withdrawal symptoms occur.

But I'm not going to talk about all the different types of treatment, I'm talking about holistic treatment and, in particular, a principles based treatment. The difference with a principles treatment is that the focus is on recovering health rather than recovery from a disease because the model isn't rooted in the disease concept. Principles recovery is learning to live in the moment, moment by moment and believes that you don't have to go back in to the past in order to recover.

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***I did go to rehab initially to try and stop and not go to prison, and I did do really well when I was there but I didn't like, they kept telling me, anytime I was saying anything and I started crying I would laugh it off and then the counsellor used to make me go back to that bit and I really didn't like it because it's too raw so you know, I think I was trying to swim uphill down***

The past isn't real, it was only real when it was in the present moment. Some therapies want you to go back in to the past to revisit hurtful times, to see if you can work out where your addiction might have started but all that happens, because you are always feeling whatever you're thinking is that the memory will feel real and you'll feel as bad now as you did at that time. And what do you do to feel better?

***I think it's actually, I think it's difficult to say actually, because I'm still kind of leaning about the principles but it's freed me to actually accept that I don't have to forever feel bad about what I've done in the past because it's gone now and I did carry around a lot and, of course, when I'm going back, and I know from my understanding of the principles there's me, actually, the same as everyone else thinking, no I'm actually feeling this thought and it was really real and you can't just tell me, you don't know what it's like, I've gone through it, I've suffered and blah blah but that's when you're remembering what you've done, so it's freed me up to actually look to the future because I was carrying, I was living, I have lived in the past most of my life really or not even in the reality of anything to do with my past, but in what I was thinking about what had happened in my past and basically living in my head.***

## **Addiction programmes are not for me!**

As well as constantly telling you to remind yourself of their past, traditional therapy tells you that you must identify yourself with your illness or suffer a relapse. You must accept that you are an addict.

Programmes like the AA foster a reliance on attending group meetings and your self esteem is conditionally based on how well you are working the programme and your group attendance.

I've met many addicts, Claire included, who couldn't get on with AA and had no wish to start another 12 step programme.

***I didn't like AA because, apart from the fact that I just wanted to say, Hi my name's Claire, not that I'm an alcoholic or whatever but then because I was dual, I was going there sort of with drugs and drink and AA wouldn't let me talk about drugs, oh no we don't, and so I thought this is a load of ...***

I have great respect for the AA programme but can see how the model doesn't always work in the same way that it did when first conceived by Bill Wilson in the 1930's. However, something that does help AA members is the sense of community. As I've already talked about, most people in addiction lose their 'tribe' and welcome the sense of belonging, but rather than strengthen the recoverer, these groups can replace the addiction and it becomes worrying and upsetting if the recoverer can't attend a meeting.

In treatment, you should be reminded of who you are, innately, and helped to be comfortable with yourself rather than running away from the self. You should be encouraged to find your own health because when you see it for yourself it will be real to you, having your own insight is powerful because once you see it, you can't lose it.

***So it's given me freedom from living inside my head, I know that I've been out of my head most of my life.***

Principles therapy doesn't tell the addict what to do but listens carefully to understand the reason behind the addiction. Treatment should treat the individual like an individual so there can't be a one size fits all approach. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University reported in 2012 that 'research evidence clearly demonstrates that a one-size-fits-all approach to addiction treatment typically is a recipe for failure.'

Traditional treatment tell you you're an addict and give you a list of things to do. You are not an addict. You were a normal person before the addiction, you're a normal person that's self harming during the addiction and once you get through the physical addiction, you're still a normal person.

Some programmes view addiction as a life long illness that you can resist but not get over. You must always be on guard, looking over your shoulder so it doesn't creep up on you. Addicts might believe that they will be addicted for life and groups like AA tell the addict that they are powerless against their addiction but I don't believe that this is true. You will only be powerless while you think of yourself as powerless. These outside in models aren't giving power back to you and don't help you to believe that you can stay healthy going forward rather than spending the rest of your life avoiding what you don't want.

## What about other treatment models?

Some centres also use Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in their programmes. CBT identifies the internal, mental, social and environmental triggers that lead to addiction and develops coping strategies to avoid triggers. The addict learns how to plan to handle stressful situations and emergencies and the possibility of 'failure' is incorporated in to the recovery plan.

The idea is that by preparing psychologically for the challenges the addict will invariably face, it is hoped that they will establish better coping mechanisms than by relying on willpower alone. There isn't any substantial evidence that anyone who has become addicted has lost their will power, are out of control or their brains have been hijacked. You are no different from anyone else. The only difference is what you do when you feel insecure.

A principles approach doesn't focus on willpower and helps the recovering addict see that there aren't any difficult situations or challenges, just difficult and challenging thinking.

I'm not saying that there won't be challenging circumstances ahead but how do you know how you will face something that hasn't happened? How challenging a situation is will depend on your state of mind in that moment. Outside circumstances are not giving you your feeling, your thinking about the circumstances is causing the feeling. And why would you prepare, this minute, to face something that doesn't exist? If you think about challenging times, you will experience stress and upset and we all know what stress and upset do to an addict. But at this moment in time, the recoverer isn't facing the challenge, the challenge isn't real.

***it's just the way i'm thinking, that's just life and I am in control of my life now, even though my circumstances are sometimes out of my control, but I am still in control in the final day of play because it's me, I'm living in this body in fact I'm properly living and I could feel, or I could ruin it all by saying, oh it's not my fault, it's that persons fault or I've thought it so therefore it is but it doesn't work***

Some therapies help you to deal with your thoughts. To cope with your thoughts. The thoughts that you have created. So why do you need to deal with the thoughts you've created? It's a bit like the scene in the film Fight Club when Brad Pitt and Edward Norton get in to a fight even though Edward Norton has discovered that Brad Pitt isn't flesh and blood, he is a projection as Norton is suffering with Dissociative Identity Disorder. They get in to a huge fight and the viewer sees them throwing punches and really laying in to each other. And then you see the scene through CCTV and you see Edward Norton fighting with himself as there is no one else there. This is like battling thoughts about your addiction. Once you see that you have created them, there isn't anything to battle with?

***but I do know, I mean it's good to me, I can differentiate between what is real and what is just thought and what is speculation and what is made up and what is just being trivial.***

## What happens after treatment?

Other therapies look to see what needs are unmet by asking questions like when did the addiction start and what are you getting from the addiction but then go on to encourage you to think of guilt ridden memories or times that you were embarrassed rather than seeing your addiction through rose tinted memories, without recognising that this is just replacing one thought with another instead of letting the thought go. The more someone brings up a cringe worthy memory, the less impact it has so eventually this method won't work. Far better to see that you are creating the rose tinted thoughts and just let them go. Replacing one thought with another is too much thinking.

Some therapies want you to feel as sick as you felt when you drank to excess, to smell your vomit, to see yourself looking awful, to visualise your worst fears becoming fact but how is that going to help you? The idea is that you feel as bad as you can and then calm yourself down again by bringing to mind all the good things that you'll experience when you're clean. But why mentally go to that awful place at all?

Drug addicts are often given Methadone as part of their recovery, Methadone is the UK governments main method to stop people taking drugs. It is prescribed to be taken every day, and is meant to reduce addiction but is abused in the same way as drugs. Methadone is very addictive and it rots your insides. Would you want to replace one addiction with another? Methadone is supposed to keep the addict stable but the addict doesn't want to be stable, they are chasing a high so they don't want methadone. Prescribing methadone is not moving addicts on.

Principles therapy enables you to move on and return to a connected life as you recover your self worth. And life may include getting back to work but this isn't always very easy. Employers don't always want to employ ex addicts because they are focussing on the addiction rather than recovery and can't see that you have an amazing amount to offer.

Rather than being out of control, addicts have to meticulously plan where to get the money (even if it is stealing, pimping or prostitution) to get the alcohol or drugs or whatever they need. They have to plan. Alcoholics will always leave a bit of alcohol for the morning, no matter how much they want it at night, because they know that they will need it first thing in the morning to stop the shakes. Addicts are extremely resourceful. Principles therapy will show you how to turn your resourcefulness in to a more productive use.

## **Mental withdrawal**

It's likely that you might go through physical withdrawal as your body begins to adjust to being without whatever it is you used, this can be difficult and may require medical supervision but once you're through it, it's done, although you may still have to deal with psychological withdrawal. Once detoxified, the physical addiction isn't there anymore and so this wouldn't be enough to make you use again. If an addict goes through the physical withdrawal but no one helps with the psychological withdrawal, he will want to use again despite being clean and this is why some people go back to their addiction months, or even years, after they've stopped.

***when I was in prison I went to all the groups and, it's CARAT's (Counseling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare) there ... it's the drug team worker, they do the crack group and relapse prevention and that sort of thing, and I was really good in groups but I did say, well I'm not doing anything while I'm in here but I know I will when I get out because I don't really have anything to go for. I'm going to be homeless again ...***

Relapse also happens when someone tries to 'test' themselves. They think that they're managing their addiction and it's ok to be around their drug of choice. Then the addict relapses, feels awful and uses their relapse to confirm that they are addicted for life.

If you're an alcoholic and can stay off alcohol at a party or when you have guests at home you might think that you're in charge of your drinking. You might also feel that you can handle a drink, after all, you've been sober for six months. And maybe you can, but why take the risk?

***I've had the odd drink. It's not a good idea, and I do remember that each time I do, and it's like I know, I would say that my main addiction was crack and drugs but I also know that, I'd have to be in a good place in my mind to be able to drink safely but the only time my mind ever thinks about having a drink is when my mind isn't in a good place, and I've caught up with the knowledge now***

People respond to triggers too, as if whatever they did in the past must be repeated in the future. One of the addicts in the group I ran used to get really nervous walking through areas where he knew dealers operated as he thought that the temptation might be too much for him. But once he saw that his feeling had nothing to do with the area and everything to do with the thoughts he had about the area and his past, he could see that there was no reason to feel nervous.

Addiction isn't the enemy. You haven't got an enemy. The only reason that you might relapse is because you haven't seen your own innate health for yourself.

Sometimes people fall in to old patterns and this can cause a relapse. Like a smoker buying a packet of cigarettes with his morning newspaper or an alcoholic buying a bottle of wine from the local shop on the way home. But buying the cigarettes or wine doesn't

mean your addiction is rearing up, it just means that you've fallen in to old patterns of thought. And thoughts are not commands.

I opened an email recently that contained some sad news about a friend that was shocking to me. And my first thought was, "I need a cigarette." Now, I haven't had a cigarette for over 15 years and I was able to laugh at my reaction. Clearly, having a cigarette was a coping mechanism of mine at one time but that was just old thinking. I didn't have to follow the thought and go and buy a packet of cigarettes, the thought wasn't a command and nor was it real.

## What if I relapse?

But if you do relapse, don't think that this means that you are addicted for life. All it means is that you've slipped. Draw a line and find help rather than continue to drink until you are desperate again. Find a programme that works for you. If a programme hasn't worked for you, there is no point in going through it again. All that will happen is that you will relapse again and this will add to your feeling of failure and feeling that you have a life long addiction.

Your mood will go up and down as you recover and it's important in recovery not to be fearful of your moods. Does it matter if you feel anxious or unhappy? Be ok with whatever feeling you're in. Don't ask yourself why you're unhappy or keep reminding yourself of things that you're unhappy about - and the mood will shift.

***I do allow myself to allow myself to feel sorry for myself because I don't really want to suppress what's only natural and human but I limit, I'm aware while I'm doing it that that's what I'm doing and sometimes it can feel really good and sometimes it can feel really empowering, but I don't have to carry it, I don't have to live in this imagination, I'd much rather touch things, this is real according to me***

Everyone has a bad day and can get overwhelmed with negative thinking but remember that this doesn't mean anything except that you're having a bad day. Stop feeding the thought so that you don't slide any lower and let the mood pass.

***but the thing is I'm actually allowing myself to feel rubbish if I want to because it's not actually affecting this, or this, it's just letting my emotions and going through the emotions of real, I don't know emotions, isn't it, but it's how long I, I don't say right I'm going to put the stop watch on but I am more aware***

There might be times when you believe that you miss your addiction, maybe you feel envious if you see other people drinking or you have a reaction to an alcohol advert on tv but, again, this is just a thought and you don't have to follow that thought and your memory of what a drink might taste like and how it might make you feel is made up too.

The memory of addiction that a recoverer has is an illusion. If you think back to your drinking days, you might recall hilarious times and a feeling of wellbeing. But you know the reality was very different and you have edited out the unpleasant, unhappiness of those days. When you think about how you feel when you're clean and how awful you felt in the trap of addiction, you can enjoy your sobriety.

If you have an addiction to alcohol, it's sensible to avoid your old haunts and drinking buddies, or put a lock on your phone and laptop if you've been addicted to online porn or gambling but when you reconnect with life and can see that when you drop down into a low mood or something happens that you have a reaction to, you are reacting to your thoughts and not to the mood or the circumstance, you can see that you don't have to

follow the thought, nor do you have to battle with the compulsion when you see that the compulsion is made of thought.

***I know that I would not be where I am today with what I've learned, and ok there's a lot of other factors, but the main one is what I've know about the three principles, it's making me want to cry now because I wouldn't, because I'm actually looking at what I'm thinking, not looking, looking, looking, but ok, this thoughts a bit rubbish, this thoughts a bit suicidal, this, but they are just a list of thoughts aren't they and I can just say hi, that one again, see you later. I'll use it when I need it.***

## **And so to end ...**

There was once a time when all human beings were gods, but we so abused our divinity that Brahma, the chief god, decided to take it away from us and hide it where it could never be found.

Where to hide their divinity was the question?

So Brahma called a council of the gods to help him decide.

"Let's bury it deep in the earth," said the gods.

But Brahma answered, "No, that will not do because humans will dig into the earth and find it."

Then the gods said, "Let's sink it in the deepest ocean."

But Brahma said, "No, not there, for they will learn to dive into the ocean and will find it."

Then the gods said, "Let's take it to the top of the highest mountain and hide it there."

But once again Brahma replied, "No, that will not do either, because they will eventually climb every mountain and once again take up their divinity."

Then the gods gave up and said, "We do not know where to hide it, because it seems that there is no place on earth or in the sea that human beings will not eventually reach."

Brahma thought for a long time and then said, "Here is what we will do. We will hide their divinity deep in the center of their own being, for humans will never think to look for it there."

All the gods agreed that this was the perfect hiding place, and the deed was done. And since that time we have been searching, studying and traveling looking for something that we already have.

And now your search is over.