

Amir Pirani

Trauma, Addiction, and Trauma
Portraying the Cycle of Suffering in Addiction

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Portraying the Cycle of Suffering in Addiction

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Table of Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	7
<i>Preface</i>	9
<i>Structure of the Book</i>	11
CHAPTER ONE: Rothschild 2.	15
CHAPTER TWO: Trauma and Addiction Epidemiology	21
CHAPTER THREE: Addiction-Induced Trauma	59
CHAPTER FOUR: Addiction-Induced Post-Traumatic Syndrome	101
CHAPTER FIVE: Addiction	137
CHAPTER SIX: Addiction-Induced Suffering and Delinquency	169
CHAPTER SEVEN: Treating Substance-Addicted Trauma Victims	207
CHAPTER EIGHT: Animal Assisted Therapy for SUD.	273
CHAPTER NINE: Prolonged Exposure Treatment for SUD	303
CHAPTER TEN: The Cycle of Suffering	329
CHAPTER ELEVEN: Epilogue	363
<i>References</i>	373
<i>Appendices</i>	379

Foreword

In 1992, Amir Pirani founded, and today continues to manage, the Rothschild 2 Treatment Center for Substance Abuse in Neve Tzedek. The center runs in association with the social services administration in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. I have guided and witnessed the work of Amir and his highly devoted staff for many years.

Substance addiction has been a strategic problem for many years now. Most violent crimes in society, including moderate vandalism, stem from problems resulting from substance and alcohol addiction. This book addresses the sources of these problems.

Approximately 40 percent of all heavy substance addicts who approach the Rothschild 2 Center manage to rehabilitate themselves, successfully completing a detoxification program, therefore minimizing work on a myriad of police and court cases, the addicts' suffering, as well as their relatives', and the public's as a whole. The key to such therapeutic success lies within implementing innovative models for coping within the framework of treating individuals with a history of substance abuse and their rehabilitation while relying on identifying the cycle of suffering in which they have been captive for many years.

The author illustrates how personal trauma in the addict's early years correlates with his drug addiction later in life.

The book opens by epidemiologically examining the substance addiction issue. The following chapters review the professional literature addressing trauma and sexual abuse due to addiction, thereby triggering further causes for addiction, such as environmental and parental neglect, as well as physical and verbal abuse. The author then progresses to discuss the development of post-traumatic anxiety, which often constitutes a predisposing factor to addiction. The book's conclusion offers a portrayal of unique therapeutic methods developed at the Rothschild 2 Treatment Center, some of which involve working on revealing trauma and animal assisted therapy.

The author calls for establishing a multi-professional work setting, where the parties involved offer guidelines for research, planning, and treatment of substance addiction issues that stem from trauma.

There is no doubt in my mind that this book is an innovative one. It includes a sound theoretical foundation, successfully implemented professional interventions with substance abuse victims. *Trauma, Addiction, and Trauma* is mandatory for those who engage in preventing substance abuse and treating the addicted, as well as those engaging in law enforcement and social work.

Professor Shlomo Giora Shoham

Preface

A wound full of worms festered on a black rabbit's back. For fear of its near death, we released it from its cage. A rooster with a handicapped leg wandered around, rejected by its flock. The rooster pecked out all the worms from the rabbit's wound. They are both alive, at Rothschild 2.

Structure of the Book

The book portrays an issue, a place, and people.

- Issue: Mental stress and trauma related occurrences
- Place: Rothschild 2
- Active Participants: Substance addicts, who experienced the damages resulting from stress, trauma, and abuse

The book portrays the four components that comprise the theoretical model I developed:

1. Stressful and traumatic experiences
2. The resulting mental condition, namely, post-trauma
3. Substance abuse and delinquency
4. The fact that crime yields further mental suffering, namely, trauma-prompting addiction, which, in turn, results in further trauma.

The book comprises 11 chapters:

The preface, which is the conceptual description of the processes unfolding at Rothschild 2 as described in this book, introduces the reductive connection formed by treating thousands of individuals addicted to substances, who seek treatment at public welfare services.

This connection implies that most of my patients are characterized by a traumatic past preceding their substance addiction, thereby inspiring me to provide justification and to portray the cycle of suffering's theoretical structure.

Chapter Two presents epidemiological research findings, thereby being of particular interest to professionals engaging in psychological therapy. In addition to several studies lacking in Israeli professional literature, I present numerous important studies, conducted worldwide, measuring the relationship between the repression of severe psychological trauma and substance abuse.

Chapter Three addresses theoretical and evidence-based knowledge in literature, relating to psychological stress and trauma events. The stress events experienced by patients is similar in character to the stress and trauma damaging combat field soldiers, citizens who experienced terror attacks, stressful situations, and abusing others. In their interventions, professionals witness these conditions with sexually abused individuals, those who experienced environmental and parental neglect, or those who experienced physical and verbal abuse. Trauma is trauma, no matter the source.

Chapter Four discusses the anxiety disorder Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD), a psychological syndrome common among a high percentage of Israelis, many of whom have experienced domestic abuse, or trauma from the wars throughout Israeli history, or have experienced terror attacks. My patients have suffered wounds and stress induced by sexual trauma, physical assault, violence, and civilian acts of horror. Their trauma and post-trauma victimization preceded their substance abuse.

Chapter Five presents various research approaches to the drug addiction issue. The chapter presents some of the existing professional knowledge regarding the factors affecting an individual's addiction to drugs, and the circumstances that induce it. Investigating the prolonged addiction to drugs is supported by the viewpoint implied throughout the book; accordingly, addicts bear the burden of past stress and trauma events that went untreated.

Chapter Six portrays situations associating delinquency and further so-called "psychological suffering." I address delinquency situations where an individual acts to obtain money, which often covers the purchase of the substance. Delinquent acts often yield further psychological suffering, accumulated layers one on top of the other result in a downward spiral of mental suffering, namely, obtaining money in order to use substances, and using in order to obtain money.

Chapter Seven discusses treating substance addicted trauma victims (SUD). This chapter identifies the similarities between treating stress or trauma victims and treating substance addicts, emphasizing the professional uniqueness compelled by treating substance abusers who have suffered stress and trauma.

Chapter Eight addresses various treatment techniques developed by the professional staff at Rothschild 2 Treatment Center. Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) and animal assisted group intervention take place with emphasis on the important rules dictated by AAT and the role of responsibility and compassion present in the treatment process. Additionally, Rothschild 2 highlights the importance of a safe environment in a therapeutic setting.

Chapter Nine presents another therapeutic tool for treating trauma victims, Prolong Exposure (PE), developed by Professor Edna Foa.

This tool was tested at Rothschild 2 as an experiential intervention among SUD.

Chapter Ten presents the Cycle of Suffering theoretical model I developed, extensively addressing its four components, briefly addressed in the preface: trauma, post-trauma, delinquency, and further psychological suffering.

Chapter Eleven offers insights I have acquired as an individual, author, and therapy professional.

The book presents various cases that are merely a drop in the ocean of the human suffering I have encountered throughout my career. All the characters appearing in this book remain transformed and mixed by my imagination, to maintain anonymity. In writing, I seek to draw the reader closer, even to the slightest extent, to understanding the enormity of human suffering, the source of the damage caused to my patients prior to their substance addiction.

The following chapter addresses research findings that imply the strong relationship of stress and trauma and using drugs.

CHAPTER ONE

Rothschild 2

I decided to write this book following many years of working with stress and trauma victims, who became addicted to substances. The thousands of clients whom I have treated since 1992, at the Rothschild 2 Treatment Center, inspired me to relate their story.

An abundant body of literature related to stress and trauma resulting from wars, terror events, and abuse is available in Israel. It is sufficient merely to refer to several books: *Mental Health in Terror's Shadow* (Eli Zomer & Avi Bleich, 2005); *The Shattered Secret* (Eds. Zvia Seligman & Zahava Solomon, 2004), as well as books by Lahad, Eilon, Shalev, Noy, Klein, Berger, Arnon, Omer, among others, that address trauma victim treatment in Israel. However, professional literature discussing stress and trauma among substance addicts is scarcely available. The professional literature I found in Israel addresses the relationship of trauma and addiction to a rather limited extent.

In my writing, I place focus on this relationship, which acts as a guideline throughout the book. I am well aware that focusing on the relationship of trauma and addiction is not to be taken for granted, because as thoroughly as it may be explored and investigated, it

will not be sufficient for the readers to illuminate the areas where suppression, denial, and shame still dominate.

Approximately twenty years ago, a few years after leaving my kibbutz, I established a substance abuse treatment center at the request of the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality social services. In its initial planning stages, Rothschild 2 stood to service a population of prolonged substance abuse victims, living in the center of Tel Aviv. I have lived in Tel Aviv since 1987, coming to the big city from Kibbutz Nir David, located in the Beit She'an Valley. In Tel Aviv, I was in for an entirely new, and strange, world—the other side of humanity, as a matter of fact. In urban Tel Aviv, I came across four core insights, which also inspired this book.

1. Conversations with many of my clients indicated that they did not choose substance abuse. Rather the substance abuse was a consequence of prior psychological suffering. Those who came to therapy were individuals hurt by others: a stranger, relative, acquaintance, sibling, mother, or father. For their benefit, I established *Kibbutz Acher* (Alternative Kibbutz), a therapeutic structure integrating love for nature, animals, and humans—a place in nature, a world where humans and animals are equally treated. I did not embark on this work with any pre-meditated, structured theory. My existence until then came to life inside me and channeled itself to manifest in my new position. Family, adulthood friends, kibbutz childhood friends, the impression of nature by which I was surrounded while growing up, including the Asi Stream crossing the kibbutz, a tributary of the Sachne Spring, the huge lawns, the eucalyptus and ficus trees, the singing of the birds, the kibbutz dogs, all join together in my mission. My longing for my childhood's natural scenery inspired me to reconstruct memory images of visual, emotional, and sound experiences in the very heart of tumultuous Tel Aviv. There, the

professional psychology and social work studies and the many years of engaging in psychotherapy as well went into fulfilling a significant role. My first few years in Tel Aviv channeled a life of supposedly flowing routes that would not normally intersect, into a point where they would meet. In the one course of my life, my professional practice, I had heard horrific stories of individuals hurt by others. They are ordinary people that we meet every day. Meanwhile, in the other course of life, I attempt to offer a humble contribution to those victims. I realized there were very few intersection points where I would be able to assist, and only to a handful of people.

2. My clients lost their natural ability to feel because of the severe abuse they had undergone, but it's possible to restore and revive this loss through contact with pets. I thank my devoted employees: Alex, who shared my dream of "rabbits rubbing against our feet," Effye, Zehave, Ilan, Moshe, and Eli, mature, experienced facilitators who have worked with me for many years. I include the social workers Marganit, Rama, Niva, Tal, Maya, Michal, Carmit, Dr. Marina, Liat, Daphna, Inbar, and many others. Thanks to the assistance of my clients who know what true love is and the assistance of my daughters, who came with me to feed the pets and clean the petting zoo every weekend. The natural therapeutic jewel, Rothschild 2, developed, expanded, and flourished, thanks to all of you. From a dilapidated shelter on south Rothschild Street, bordering with the Neve Tzedek neighborhood, the place became a flourishing garden full of trees, vegetation, and pets, immersed in a pleasant therapeutic atmosphere. Rothschild 2 is a professional structure with a sound foundation, having established behavioral rules, appearance, and policy. It is not only a structure of therapy and employment, but also a second home to those who enter its gates: the clients, who come at moments

of sadness and joy, their relatives, the professional staff working collaboratively, mutually consulting and updating, and its many guests. I always get a grasp on any professional doubts in the narrow hallway connecting the therapy rooms, colleagues sharing while the aroma of espresso wafts in from the small kitchen to the corridor and the therapy rooms.

The book *Trauma and Recovery* by Judith Herman (1992), to which I was introduced in 2003, played a dominant role in my writing. This book allowed me to draw the following conclusions:

3. Most clients were troubled by intense stress experiences, sexual traumas, extreme physical or psychological abuse, and other human cruelties. They resorted to substance abuse and long term addiction not only because they remained silent about the abuse they experienced but also due to the limitations associated with the budget allocated for assisting substance abuse victims, their treatment, and rehabilitation. My clients resorted to substance abuse due to a prior shock they had to endure. Thanks to my clients, I realized that using substances served as some sort of self-medication, a relief from their painful, open wound in their soul. For a while, the substance relieved, if only superficially, the pain of stress and trauma they had experienced. Even I did not know, nor did I realize, how dearly this self-medication cost. What consequences Israeli human society had faced, and would face, for choosing to turn a blind eye.
4. Those clients who found temporary relief and a source of relaxation were those who did not receive any professional treatment for their abuse, resorting to theft, harming others, engaging in substance trafficking, and selling their bodies in order to obtain money for the next dose, for relieving the pain of traumatic memories. The

trauma resulted in addiction, which, in turn, resulted in another psychological trauma. The complete cycle of suffering revolves continuously. This suffering cycle needs breaking.

I believe that with the assistance of the clients' strength, my family, my wife Atalia and my daughters Yuli, Ziv, and Aviv, the emotional support of my female dogs, Kamma and Choco, who became my friends, and my colleagues, I was able to muster the strength to slow down the cycle of suffering and even break it in some cases. I present the therapeutic process in this book.

