

### **Bitter Work: Part 3**

by Mohammad Khan

Most people think addicts do drugs or fall prey to addictions because they're weak-minded or never grew up to make adult decisions or they should just say no to drugs. Addiction isn't an impulse to want something, it's an impulse to fulfill a void caused from a form of pain. Instead of asking why the addiction, ask why the pain? The void is different based on the addiction, upbringing, but for me workaholicism fills the void of knowing your valued or wanted. Because somehow I rationalized early on in childhood, that I wasn't wanted. From the outside, you'd see a happy, loving family, but I never felt any of it. The high for me came from the success of finishing a project or solving a problem and the accolades that come with it. You brush off the praise humbly, but subconsciously crave the narcotic dopamine from feeling valued and wanted. It's the late night texts saying someone needs help. It's the weekend meetings that make you feel valued and that you are worth someone else's time. It's being available at a moment's notice so that you can get your fix. These voids often stem from childhood problems from the lack of a nurturing environment.

It's a difficult addiction to combat, let alone admit it's a problem. Western society, specifically in the U.S, glamorizes the late worker, the go-getter, the one who puts in the long hours day in and day out. I'm not saying you're a workaholic if you do work long hours consistently. An addiction isn't defined by how it negatively impacts you, it's how it systematically destroy the relationships you have with people closest to you and the motivation behind your choices. Someone who works long-hours out of necessity to stay alive versus someone who works even they don't have to.

Society puts those who work hard on pedestals, and rightfully so. Give credit where credit's due, but society forgets the nuances to working hard. When you hear that someone dies and they spent their lives dedicated to making the world better is admirable, but most of the time they worked hard at the expense of their own physical health. Workaholicism can cause diseases due to the prolonged exposure to stress. So when someone is going through Chemotherapy and decides to continue working, they're doing so at their own expense. The body needs time to heal, yet we applaud people who work through illness. We wouldn't tell someone with a broken leg to run a marathon, so why do we applaud and glorify those who work despite being despite being physically, mentally, and perhaps emotionally sick?

And if you're lucky enough to detox or work with a therapist on your addiction, afterwards you're on your own. You have to hunt for support groups and additional help. If you relapse, you get ridiculed for not having will power to stay away or the motivation. And that's just what other say to you, the internal ridicule is worse. No one is a better critic than your inner self.

Breaking an addiction isn't a one time process, it's like tending a plant. You have to constantly care for the plant for it to survive. You can't take a day off else the plant will grow weaker or get sick. If you slip, then you slip far. For example, if you're a recovering alcoholic and you've been sober 5 years, and someone offers you a drink, you turn it down because you know, you don't just want one drink, you want 10 drinks. Things in your life may be going well, and you will still want 10 drinks because you're an alcoholic. It's not that I want to continue working, I want to never stop working because I know the high that's coming if I do keep working because I'm a workaholic.

What makes addictions generally, well addictive, is how the addict feels. Addicts are responding to trauma. The addiction isn't the problem. The addiction is an attempt at solving the problem.

Most of the times, the trauma is emotional and deeply ingrained in their brains. If an addict takes medication to not feel pain or to feel loved or to feel valued or in control, is that wrong? Is it wrong to feel loved? To not suffer in emotional or physical pain? Who are we to force an addict to quit something the helps them live pain-free? There must be a better way to solve the problem than punishment, incarceration, and ridicule.

