

## **Bitter Work: Part 4**

by Mohammad Khan

According to the CDC, there were more than 70,000 deaths in 2019 alone due to drug overdoses in United States. There are ways to combat addiction through support groups and medication but there's still a prevalent stigma with addiction and relapse that must be combatted first.

Almost 21 million Americans have at least one addiction, yet only 10% of them receive treatment. We can't approach addiction as something to be shamed and ridiculed. If the addiction provides a sense of relief and comfort for addicts and we rip it away from them, what does that say about us? Is it wrong to feel loved or tranquility? We need a paradigm shift with addiction that brings compassion and mental health into field along with the physical care.

Instead of asking why the addiction, ask why the pain. Alcohol, cocaine, morphine, and other addictive habits produce endorphins and provide a temporary sense of relief from pain. There are clinics that provide supervised drug injection sites where addicts can take an injection of heroin or other drugs under medical supervision. Under supervision, taking the drugs will not be as harmful and the addict can try and fix the source of their pain.

Many of the world's problems are caused by people who are dealing with their own insecurities. An addiction to power and attention creates autocrats in many countries and can get you elected president because an addiction to power is an attempt to fill the emptiness they feel, and maybe we recognize that.

Hurt people, hurt people. Our current "war on drugs" in the U.S needs a new angle, the hard crackdown on drugs and the shame brought about has not worked. A compassionate lens to help us solve problems that we once thought impossible.

Human nature is cooperative, community minded. There are more organizations lifting humanity instead of beating it down. We need to tap into our common humanity and reach out to the addicts close to us and those in pain. And care for them and be present. Say "I love you and no matter what state you are in, I love you and care about you."

A Hungarian-Canadian physician, Gabor Matè, once said, we judge addicts because we actually see that they are just like us and we don't like that, so we say 'you are different than us and you are worse than we are'. There is no "other" in the mirror; it's just you.

Social justice lawyer, Bryan Stevenson, once said, "Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done,...the character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned."

The bitter work we all have to do is look at addicts and at ourselves and realize that they're no different than us. That even the worst of us deserve some compassion and mercy.