

Here in our glistening citadel of limitless reflecting screens we live on the outside. Today we may awaken and instantly and unthinkingly reach for the phone, its glow reaching our eyes before the light of dawn, its bulletins dart into our minds before even a moment of acknowledgement of this unbending and unending fact: you are going to die.

You and your children and everyone you love is hurtling toward the boneyard, I know you know. We all know but because it yields so few 'likes' on Facebook, we purr on in blinkered compliance, filling our days with temporary fixes. A coffee here, an eBay purchase there, a half-hearted wank or a flirt. Some glinting twitch of pleasure, like a silvery stitch on a cadaver, to tide you over. And you're probably too clever to 'repose in God', or to pick up some dusty book where the poetry creaks with loathing for women, or gays or someone. Maybe if quantum physics could come up with some force, or web, or string or something that tethers the mystery to something solid, something measurable, you'd think again but until then there's nothing but an empty grave and a blank tombstone, chisel poised. So no one's going to blame you if you perch on a carousel of destructive relationships and unfulfilling work, whirling round, never still, never truly looking within, never really going home.

13

Because I had 'the gift of desperation' because I fucked my life up so royally, I had no option but to seek and accept help. Since being relieved of the more obvious manifestations of my incessant drives and appetites, I have paced backwards like a flunky leaving the Queen through a series of less obvious, and not lethal, but still bloody uncomfortable addictions. I believe that what the 12 Steps and their encompassing philosophy, which I will lay out for you in these pages, will provide is nothing less than a solution to the dissatisfaction of

living, and dying, to anyone with the balls to do the work. And it is work. Indeed it is a personal rebirth and the journey entails all manner of uncomfortable confrontations with who you truly are. Be honest, have you ever sat down and inventoried all of the things that bug you: the childhood skirmishes; seething stings of patricidal rage; your fury with the government or traffic or global warming or racism, or Apple for continually changing their chargers? When are you planning to become the person you were born to be? To 'recover' your connection to an intended path? On holiday? When the kids leave school? When you get a pay rise? Tick-tock, tick-tock, chisel poised.

I am not writing this book because I think I'm better than you. I know I'm worse. I have spasmed and spluttered through life motored by unconscious drives, temporally fixing in a way so crude and ineffectual that the phenomenon is conveniently observable. The condition in extreme is identifiable but the less obvious version of addiction is still painful, and arguably worse, because we simply adapt to living in pain and never countenance the beautiful truth: there is a solution.

14

We adapt to the misery of an unloving home, of unfulfilling work. Of empty friendships and lacquered alienation. The 12 Step program, which has saved my life, will change the life of anyone who embraces it. I have seen it work many times with people with addiction issues of every hue: drugs, sex, relationships, food, work, smoking, alcohol, technology, pornography, hoarding, gambling, everything. Because the instinct that drives the compulsion is universal. It is an attempt to solve the problem of disconnection, alienation and tepid despair, because the problem is ultimately 'being human' in an environment that is curiously ill-equipped to deal with the challenges that entails. We are all on the addiction scale.

Those of us born with clear-cut and blatant substance addiction are in many ways the lucky ones. We alcoholics and junkies have minimized our mystery to tiny cycles of craving and fulfilment. Our pattern is easier to observe and therefore, with commitment and help, easier to resolve.

If your personal pattern happens to be the addiction equivalent of the 'long form con-trick', as opposed to a 'short grift', it can take ages to know just what your problem is. If you're addicted to bad relationships, bad food, abusive bosses, conflict or pornography, it can take a lifetime to spot the problem, and apparently a lifetime is all we have. This book is not just about extremists like me. No, this is a book about you.

Do you have that sense that something is missing? A feeling in your gut that you're not good enough? That if you tick off some action, whether it's eating a Twix, buying some shoes, smoking a joint or getting a good job, you will feel better? If you do, it's hardly surprising because I believe we live in an age of addiction where addictive thinking has become almost totally immersive. It is the mode of our culture. Consumerism is stimulus and response as a design for life. The very idea that you can somehow make your life all right by attaining primitive material goals – whether it's getting the ideal relationship, the ideal job, a beautiful Berber rug or forty quids' worth of smack – the underlying idea, 'if I could just get X, Y, Z, I would be okay', is consistent and it is quite wrong.

Addiction is when natural biological imperatives, like the need for food, sex, relaxation or status, become prioritized to the point of destructiveness. It is exacerbated by a culture that understandably exploits this mechanic as it's a damn good way to sell Mars bars and Toyotas. In my own blessedly garish addiction each addictive pursuit has been an act of peculiar faith that the action will solve a problem.

In this book we will discuss, with me doing most of the talking, how we can overcome our destructive and oppressive habits, be liberated from tyrannical thinking and move from the invisible inner prison of addiction to a new freedom in the present.

What makes me qualified for such a task? A task which, in a different lexicon, might be called achieving peace, mindfulness, personal fulfilment, or yet more grandly ‘enlightenment’, ‘nirvana’ or ‘Christ-consciousness’? Certainly not some personal, ethical high ground. My authority comes not from a steep and certain mountain top of po-faced righteousness. This manual for Self-Realization comes not from the mountain but from the mud. Being human is a ‘me too’ business. We are all in the mud together. My qualification is that I am more addicted, more narcissistic, more driven by lust and the need for power and recognition. Every single pleasure-giving thing that’s come my way from the cradle in Grays to the Hollywood chaise longue has been grabbed and guzzled and fondled and fucked, and smoked and sucked and for what? Ashes.

16

Do you sometimes question whether you even have the option or right to be happy? The churning blank march of metropolitan life feels like the droning confirmation that joy is not an option. Escalators like conveyor belts to a mass grave, grey streets like a yard. Thank God, I’ve not (yet!!) been to prison but when I think about the levels of categorization from worst to least awful, I ponder freedom in general. Worst – being locked alone in a solitary cell in a category A, maximum security prison – to less awful, with increasing tidbits of liberty through categories B and C, with privileges like a kitchen job or a library job (if *The Shawshank Redemption* is to be believed), down to an open prison where inmates can cycle into town for a few hours. How much further along this scale of freedom is the life of a man or woman in a drab flat, imprisoned by drug addiction, surviving on benefits, or anyone trapped in a job they hate, or a kid at a school

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they’d rather swerve, all living with twisted and anxious guts? Or my life? Or your life? I’m not saying that it’s worse to have a job in London that you hate than to be a jolly C-cat prisoner, skipping off to the workshop twirling a spanner; I’m saying that we are all in prisons of varying categories.

Hang on to your hat and grab your pistol of cynicism in preparation to gun me down here and now, because I’m about to allude to how a recent experience in my mollycoddled life made me feel like I was in a first-class penitentiary. On tour in Australia I was travelling in air-locked privilege from plane to car to delightful hotel room to arena when struck from within by a yearning to escape that I couldn’t ignore. I arrived in Brisbane at a towering and chintzy hotel and was taken to a room that blasted me with immaculate comfort but when the door closed behind the perfectly friendly guard and I was alone I couldn’t open a window, because, y’know, these buildings are high and it’s dangerous. Presumably due to suicide. You cannot get to air, the air you breathe is packaged and one of the few commodities of our wasteful age that is fastidiously recycled.

Now I hope I’m not trying to dress up a tantrum as an epiphany here, but I felt trapped, that I had no way back to nature, nature like the sky, nature like the sky inside, there was no way to breathe, to be a human. Suddenly I felt I had to scramble to have access to natural conditions, in one jarring moment I felt the g-force of the rapid

journey from hunter-gatherer to hunted and gathered. No wonder people hanker after animalism and raw thrills. No wonder people go dogging, hot real breath on a windscreen, torch lights and head lights searching, huddled strangers clutching in the dark for the piercing relief of orgasm. No wonder people use porn, hunched over a laptop, grasping and breathless, serious and dutiful like a zealous attendant clerk at a futile task. From this form of escape I am not long exempt. I usually laugh afterwards. As soon as the biological objective has been reached I am ejected from the mindless spell. I look down on myself and sometimes enquire out loud, 'What was that all about?', like some monkey man coming to consciousness, and I glance back transcended, 'Was that honestly your best idea at solving the way you feel? Now get me some tissues and a bible.'

What are we doing when we're masturbating? Or swallowing mindless food. Or swilling silly drinks? Who there do we serve? What is the plan?

18

The feeling I had in the hotel is real. The need for connection. The feeling I had when I used drugs was real. The feeling, the need, is real. The feeling you have that 'there's something else' is real.

What happens when you don't follow the compulsion? What is on the other side of my need to eat and purge? The only way to find out is to not do it, and that is a novel act of faith.

Incidentally here's how I actually solved the 'problem', I left the hotel at daybreak. I wish I could say I moved into a 'community of indigenous peoples down by the river' where we grew our own veg and sang songs about our ancestors and an elder gave me a tattoo of a rabbit God on my groin and told me I had real spirit and gave me a tribal name, and it was then I knew my purpose – 'to connect with the Great Unknown', to weave the consciousness of man and

the consciousness of nature into a perfect tapestry, to tell the story of oneness with such clarity that God herself would come to the aid of the good and nature would rise through torrents and branches, flames and feathers and flood, and deliver us unto heaven. The still and ever-present heaven within.

But actually I just moved to a better hotel with a balcony.

Nihilism has quietly risen then, a pessimistic acceptance of pointlessness reigns in every addict, pleasure a defibrillator to jerk us along. Now, with fourteen and a half years gratefully drug-free, I identify strongly still when I hear of someone who just can't stay clean. I understand. I remember, more than remember, I occasionally relive. 'I know this won't work, this fix, this drink, this destructive and unlovely act but it will give me distraction from now, for now. And that is enough.'

Here's some good news for the fallen, for those of you that are reading this in despair, the junkies, the alxies, the crack-heads, anorexics, bulimics, dyspeptics, perverts, codependent, love-addicted, hopeless cases: I now believe addiction to be a calling. A blessing. I now hear a rhythm behind the beat, behind the scratching discordant sound of my constant thinking. A true pulse behind the bombastic thud of the ego drum. There, in the silence, the offbeat presence of another thing. What could it be, this other consciousness? Just the sublime accompaniment to my growing nails, pumping heart and rushing blood? These physical and discernible bodily phenomena, do they have a counterpart in a world less obvious? Are we addicts like the animals that evidently pre-emptively fled the oncoming tsunami, sensing some foreboding? Are we attuned to prickling signals that demand anaesthesia? What is the pain? What is it? What does it want?

Now, let's not forget in all the excitement that this is a self-help book, a guide to tackling addiction in all its forms, a guide that will encompass certain principles that, if followed, will free you from the misery, however quiet or consuming, of your condition. An integral, unavoidable and in fact one of the best parts of this process is developing a belief in a Higher Power. Not that you have to become some sort of religious nut. Well actually you already are a religious nut, if you take 'religious nut' to mean that you live your life adhering to a set of beliefs and principles and observances concerning conduct. Most people in the West belong to a popular cult of individualism and materialism where the pursuit of our trivial, petty desires is a daily ritual. If you're reading this specifically because you have addiction issues, whether to substances or behaviours, you are in an advanced sect with highly particular and devotional practices, sometimes so ingrained they don't even have to be explicitly 'thought', they are intensely and unthinkingly believed. 'If I find Miss Right, all will be well.' 'If I can get my rocks off, or yawn down a pint of ice cream, I'll be okay.' What this program asks us to consider is the possibility of hope. Hope that a different perspective is possible. Hope that there is a different way.

20

To undertake this process, the pursuit of happiness, or contentment or presence or freedom, we have to believe that such a thing is obtainable.

Through this, the rather grim and at times, let's face it, bloody glamorous research of my life I've inadvertently happened upon some incredible people and ideas that, one day at a time, sometimes one moment at a time, lift me out of the glistening filth and into the presence of something ancient and timeless which I believe, no matter what your problem, will give you access to The Solution.

The Twelve Steps

You know me, right? You know I hate systems, especially ‘The System’, a bogus set of instructions for us, the people, to follow, while the truly free wallow in privilege. So imagine my initial resistance to this system, the 12 Steps, ‘Don’t tell me what to do, I’m an individual, I’m a maverick, I’m a hustler, I’m a poet, wandering through the wind-lashed wilderness screaming my song into the po-faced and judgemental world.’

22

Especially, as in its original form, form the 12 Steps says the word God as freely and as frequently as an ecclesiastical Tourette’s sufferer. I sat in chilly rooms in the British countryside all chastened and desperate, looking at these bleak edicts on the wall, thinking, ‘maybe for you, but not for me’. Curiously, later examination of these principles revealed that self-centred, egotistical thinking is the defining attribute of the addictive condition. Self-centredness is a tricky thing; it encompasses more than just vanity. It’s not just Fonzie, looking at himself in self-satisfied wonder and flexing his little tush, no. Here is a more opaque example of self-centredness. If your partner is a bit wayward, you know selfish or difficult and you cast yourself as the downtrodden carer, pacing behind them going, ‘I don’t know what they’d do without me’, that is another form of self-centredness. You are making yourself and your feelings about the situation the ontological (steady!) centre of the world. Is there a different way that you could be you? Especially as we all know, don’t we, the you being you and me being me is the absolute alpha and omega of the world today, flick on a TV, glance at your feed, it’s all about me, me, me, the perfect product, holiday, hair tonic, telephone provider for my unique self. Well that’s just fine and dandy, but I don’t really know what ‘me’ is or what ‘me’ wants and now I’m beginning to question if thinking about ‘me’ all day is doing ‘me’ any good.

The first time I saw the Steps, I thought, ‘Hmm, a bit religious, a bit pious, a bit ambitious’. There was the ‘Christy’ feel. Look at the third step, ‘turn our will and our lives over to the care of God’ – steady on old boy, that just sounds like a cosy version of ISIS.

But now I know that you could be a devout Muslim with a sugar problem, an atheist Jew who watches too much porn, a Hindu who can’t stay faithful, or a humanist who shops more than they can afford to and this program will effortlessly form around your flaws and attributes, placing you on the path you were always intended to walk, making you, quite simply, the best version of yourself it is possible to be. In my case, as you will see, this includes a good many flaws, some odd thoughts and occasional behavioural outbursts.

If this is your first time looking at the steps, note your own feelings toward them.

- 1 We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
- 2 We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- 3 We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
- 4 We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- 5 We admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- 6 We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- 7 We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
- 8 We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
- 9 We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
- 10 We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- 11 We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
- 12 Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to addicts, and to practise these principles in all our affairs.

Here is how I look at these steps now, and it's how I invite you to look at them too. It certainly demystifies it. I've probably overcompensated with the 'f' word, but my point is that this is a practical system that anyone can use.

- 1 Are you a bit fucked?
- 2 Could you not be fucked?
- 3 Are you, on your own, going to 'unfuck' yourself?
- 4 Write down all the things that are fucking you up or have ever fucked you up and don't lie, or leave anything out.
- 5 Honestly tell someone trustworthy about how fucked you are.
- 6 Well that's revealed a lot of fucked up patterns. Do you want to stop it? Seriously?
- 7 Are you willing to live in a new way that's not all about you and your previous, fucked up stuff? You have to.
- 8 Prepare to apologize to everyone for everything affected by your being so fucked up.
- 9 Now apologize. Unless that would make things worse.
- 10 Watch out for fucked up thinking and behaviour and be honest when it happens.
- 11 Stay connected to your new perspective.
- 12 Look at life less selfishly, be nice to everyone, help people if you can.

What about my precious individuality though? I can't subject my unique mind to a system, 'the philosophical prison ain't been built that can hold me, baby!' That may well be and resisting authority is all fine and dandy, but the point of that surely is to resist being oppressed or exploited by that authority? There is no oppression or exploitation here. Furthermore, and dim the lights and cue the *Twilight Zone* music, 'Who is the me that I am trying to protect?', that's a question that we'll ponder over these chapters and possibly answer. Although, I'll be honest, the riddle of understanding the true nature of Self has baffled the finest minds humanity has had to offer since time began. Still, I like a challenge.

Now, in the way I had to substitute the word 'addiction' for 'drugs', you might need to make a substitution of your own. For food, tech, gambling, obsessive relationships, porn – in fact whatever it is that you want to change. Think of yourself as a computer with a virus and this as a code that will cleanse you. If you follow this path, if you do the things suggested in this book, it will induce a change in you.

26

If then you have an obvious addiction issue, you are in luck: there exists already an incredibly effective method for tackling it and redirecting the destructive energy of your condition into a new way of being. You'll find much identification in this book and it'll be a useful companion to the other literature and support groups that are available. If you have a more wily malady, a sadness, a dissatisfaction, a longing that you are dealing with in ineffectual instalments, I promise you that if we earnestly apply this program to your life, your perception will alter and with it, your world.

There are now hundreds of 12 Step movements with new objects of unwitting fetishization: narcotics, gambling, food, gaming, sex, hoarding. There are in fact now sufficient organizations successfully deploying this method for us to assert that there is a common

yearning that initiates, then fuels, the addictive cycle. When I first encountered the 12 Steps I had to apply them to drugs and alcohol. They worked. Then sex, food and work. They are working. Now I apply them to every thought or feeling I have, knowing they are a means of negotiating my experience of the external world and my place within it. My professional life, my domestic life, my spiritual life and my new life as a dad are all lived via a map that has been drawn up using these principles. No two people use the 12 Steps in the same way, written into them are multiple clauses that allow for limitlessly diverse individuality.

Where I have found this program most rewarding and yet most challenging is in the way that it has unravelled my unquestioned faith that I was the centre of the universe and that the purpose of my life was to fulfil my drives, or if that wasn't possible, be miserable about it in colourful and creative ways. So whilst this program will work for you regardless of creed or lack of creed, it will also disabuse you of the notion, however conscious of it you are, that you and your drives are the defining motivations for your life. The reason I worked the 12 Steps was because I was desperate. The reason I continue to is because they have awakened me to the impossibility of happiness based on my previous world view: that I am the centre of the world and that what I want is important.

27

I can attest personally that the 12 Steps work with severe addiction issues. If you have them, you should engage with the appropriate 12 Step support group. My hope for this book is that wherever you are on the scale of addiction, chronically ill or privately concerned or simply seeking change, you will benefit from working these steps in the way I did, honestly, openly and willingly.

If you're like me, you like to 'half-arse' things. Me, I'll buy a book on healthy eating or meditation and that'll be enough, I will use the

social tool of 'consumerism' to satiate a need and leave the matter there. A book on healthy eating untouched on the shelf will not improve my Body Mass Index, whatever the hell that is. A book on meditation, flung to one side, will not elevate my consciousness and attune me to the Great Oneness behind my thoughts and feelings. If you're not going to do the things suggested in the book you may as well spend the money on cake or blow it down the track. It also, and I don't really want to tell you this, isn't easy. This isn't 'How to change your life in ten minutes while sat on your arse writing messages to the universe and popping them under your pillow.' It's bloody difficult. It is the hardest thing I've ever done. Actually no, the hardest thing I've ever done is toil under the misapprehension that I could wring pleasure out of the material world, be it through fame, money, drugs or sex, always arriving back at the same glum stoop of weary dissatisfaction.

That's why the first step is saying, 'I'm fucked, it's not improving, I want to change.' Tacitly you have done that by reading this far.

1

Are you a bit fucked?

Step 1: We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.

This is an invitation to change. This is complicated only in that most of us are quite divided, usually part of us wants to change a negative and punishing behaviour, whereas another part wants to hold on to it. For me Recovery is a journey from a lack of awareness to awareness. Let me tell you what I mean using my own vanilla experience as a bog-standard drug addict and alcoholic.

I always felt I was rather too clever for something like a ‘program for living’, certainly one that had any religious overtones. It’s not that I thought that religion was ‘the opiate of the masses’, if it was, I would’ve had some, I loved opium. It’s that I thought it was dumb. Drab, dry, dumb, shouty, hysterical, dumb. Small-town dumb. Foreign dumb. Take Christianity, either it’s so medieval and swathed in pageantry that it’s droning and ridiculous or they try and modernize it and make it cheesy. Bad guitars, jumpers and knowing, sympathetic looks. No. Thank. You.

I had two serendipitous licks: one, I was introduced to the 12 Steps by a seriously committed atheist and two, I was privately desperate. I was broken. I had run out of ideas and juice and was only kept moving by inertia. I’d given up thinking about why I felt sad, or different, or hopeless, I just knew I did, and I left that knowledge parked to one side in my mind, unaddressed, ignored, rotting. Meanwhile I drank and used drugs to keep me upright and functioning, to stop the sadness running over. If you had ever tapped me on the shoulder and said, ‘Hey Russell, what’s your plan?’, I may have reflexively spouted some cock-eyed optimism about ‘waiting for my break’ or ‘this time next year I’ll be a somebody’ but deep down I knew I had no plan. I ask you now, do you have a plan? You don’t have to answer me now, in fact, there’s very little point in answering me at all, given that I’m

not there (you're now alone, reading this!), but can you, in what ought to be the sanctuary of your mind say to yourself: 'I have a plan. I know where I am going.' My way of coping with the quiet anxiety of uncertainty was to find distractions and pleasures. I was never still. I was seldom reflective. I sustained myself with distraction.

Here is a clinically accepted breakdown of the cycle of addiction. If this model is reflective of the aspect of your life that you'd like to change, it's likely that the 12 Step model will too. Let's see:

A 5-point guide to the cycle of addiction

- 1** Pain
- 2** Using an addictive agent, like alcohol, food, sex, work, dependent relationships to soothe and distract
- 3** Temporary anaesthesia or distraction
- 4** Consequences
- 5** Shame and guilt, leading to pain or low self-esteem

32

And off we go again. I'll tell you how this applies to me and you can mentally keep track with its application to your problem – and don't let yourself off the hook if I seem crazier than you, that's my qualification for writing this book, remember. I was in pain. As long as I can remember, I didn't feel good enough. Now I'm a little older I think, 'What does that mean, good enough?', compared to what, when, where, how? But back then, in my gurgling and nervous childhood and rash and frenetic teens I just felt inadequate, incomplete. Not good enough. And it hurt. I looked out at the world as if from within an aquarium and it felt lonely. I also had no technique for addressing that feeling so I had to invent some. That is number 2 on the 5-point guide. I used an addictive agent and in my earliest incarnation of addictive behaviour I used the innocuous toxin, sugar. Chocolate. Food. I put stuff in my mouth and I felt better, what's wrong with that? Forgive me if I'm patronizing you

6 You don't have to not drink for twenty years today. You don't have to give up white bread for all eternity, right now. This "one day at a time" cliché when taken plainly is no less profound than any "be in the moment" Eastern wisdom I've since encountered. Today is all I have.'

here, I want you to understand a few crucial points: I was managing my feelings through external means and the object is not in itself bad. There's no point in demonizing chocolate biscuits, they of themselves are not the problem. They won't of their own volition kick down your front door, shine a flashlight in your face as you sleep, drag you from your bed and jam themselves down your throat. The participation of your consciousness is a prerequisite. For some people a chocolate biscuit is a harmless treat. For some a wee drop of rum or saucy nip of smack is a tonic. The heroin will ferry you to crisis more quickly than a chocolate Penguin biscuit but the key point is the function of this external agent in your life. Number 3 is a temporary numbing, the moment of grateful exhalation and relief, post-biscuit, post-coital, post-gratifying text from the object of your obsession, post-whatever it is you're fixing on. Point 4 is 'consequences', what is the price paid? I used to feel awful as a kid after I'd snaffled my way through a week's worth of biscuits in one absent-minded sitting. I don't think there's a person alive who doesn't reproach themselves momentarily after an orgasm achieved in solitude. And after using drugs, when I was coming to the end of my sojourn into substance misuse was the only time I could countenance quitting. Number 5 is 'pain' and we're back to the start of the cycle.

As Eckhart Tolle says, 'addiction starts with pain and ends with pain.' Here we can see that dissected. As the cycle of addiction goes round it gathers momentum, like an out-of-control carousel, like the

‘ I was a kid, then I was an addict and by the time the idea of working a program had reached me, which with substances means abstinence and with behaviour and food means structure, I was twenty-seven, a heroin addict and in serious trouble.’

34 spinning of my nauseous head when drunk. The legal age to drink in the UK is eighteen, by the time I was nineteen medical professionals and the teachers at my college had identified I had a problem and were telling me I needed help. In retrospect, it was evident much earlier, in the way I ate, related to people, thought about myself and my sexuality. I wish I could’ve identified these patterns, this tendency sooner, so I could’ve begun to apply the methods outlined in this book. For me though things had to get worse, I had to repeat this pattern for ten years with consequences increasing with each vertiginous whip. I didn’t know there was another way. I was a kid, then I was an addict and by the time the idea of working a program had reached me, which with substances means abstinence and with behaviour and food means structure, I was twenty-seven, a heroin addict and in serious trouble.

Step 1 invites us to admit that we are using some external thing, a relationship, a drug or a behaviour as the ‘power’ that makes our life liveable. It asks if this technique is making our life difficult. By admitting we are ‘powerless’ over whatever it is, we are saying we need a new power, that this current source of power is more trouble than it’s worth.

I have made this admission many times and I make it still each day. It began with the admission that I was powerless over drugs and alcohol, they were the most obvious and troublesome power sources

that I was using. The 'unmanageability' here meant the negative consequences in my life were stacking up and importantly, once I start with drink and drugs I don't know when, or if, I will stop. The very act of drinking or using sets me on a course that I am unable to reliably arrest. It is admittedly more subtle when applied to pornography and overeating but it is still clear that I have to structure my thinking around these behaviours and that the structure can't be based on compulsive behaviour.

To return to my point about 'two minds', a divided self, my experience of that was as follows. When I first heard about the program and the idea of abstinence was explained I thought both 'fuck that' and a kind of low resonant thud of acceptance that abstinence would be my path. One of the many paradoxes of the spiritual life I encountered here lies in the trite maxim 'one day at a time', as in 'just try not to drink today', 'try not to eat unhealthily today' and 'try not to act out sexually today'. I knew they meant 'you can't ever drink again', 'no more chocolate. Ever' and 'you are now celibate'. 'Your ballroom days are over baby.' And they do mean that. If you are a serious alcoholic, you cannot drink. If you have food issues you will always need structure around eating. We have to accept it. Where the 'one day at a time' homespun, thanks Nan, wisdom kicks in is with the rather Zen and incontrovertible truth that life is experienced in the present, beyond today your projections of life are conceptual. You don't have to not drink for twenty years today. You don't have to give up white bread for all eternity, right now. And if you do make it through today, and wake up tomorrow, what does it really matter that you didn't act out yesterday? I mean, you're not accumulating tokens for punitive pleasure. This 'one day at a time' cliché when taken plainly is no less profound than any 'be in the moment' Eastern wisdom I've since encountered. Today is all I have.

Now that I'm fourteen and a half years clean, one day at a time, I like to riff on this concept like I'm Charlie Parker or Foucault. When I feel

like I want to act out sexually, I surrender it, I don't act out. Then the next day, or even an hour later I think, 'Imagine I had done that? It would be over now anyway and I'd've detonated my family'.

Step 1 means you can change. It means surveying the landscape of your life, your family relationships, your working life, your sexual behaviour, your eating, your use of your phone, drugs and alcohol, the way you spend money and asking, 'Am I happy with this?' 'Is this how I want to live?' If there is a behaviour or problem that lurches out garishly, some glaringly obvious looming catastrophe that this surveillance reveals, then it is here that you can take Step 1. I am 'powerless over this and my life has become unmanageable.'

36 This unmanageability concept is interesting too and as well as the more obvious interpretation of chaos and disorder there is a deeper, scarier meaning. The first aspect in my case was plainly observable: unpaid debts, hospital visits, jobs lost, relationships lost, friends holding up their hands and reversing out of my life. I was creating chaos. I had followed another well-known 12 Step trope, 'First my using was fun, then fun with problems, then just problems.' The positive aspects of my character were becoming redundant, it didn't matter that I was bright, or kind or talented, these traits were being diluted to the point of irrelevance by the seeping negativity of my addiction. The unmanageability though has a disturbing and, in my case, demonstrable clause: when I yield control to that part of myself, when I drink or use or say 'fuck it' around any destructive behaviour, I don't know when I'll get my life back or what state it will be in when I do. The unmanageability at its heart means that there is a beast in me. It is in me still. I live in negotiation with a shadow side that has to be respected. There is a wound. I believe that this is more than a characteristic of addiction. I think it is a part of being human, to carry a wound, a flaw and again, paradoxically, it is only by accepting it that we can progress.

I took Step 1 when I ‘admitted I was powerless over my addiction and that my life had become unmanageable.’ That I didn’t have control, no matter what I said to myself and others, and that it was getting worse. I knew there was no way out, that I had fear and shame that I didn’t want to face, that I hoped I would never have to. That I would be able, through my will, to bend the world into making me feel alright somehow.

When I met Chip Somers, bloody ridiculous name, I know, who ran the treatment centre where I got clean, he was the first 12 Step person I spoke to. He never mentioned ‘God’ or ‘Higher Power’, as I say he’s a hardcore atheist, he makes Richard Dawkins look like Uri Geller, he just told me straight, ‘You are fucked. If you carry on using like you are, in six months’ time you’ll be in prison, a lunatic asylum or a grave.’ And whilst I was a little shocked, I knew he was right.

You might not be addicted to crack and heroin as I was and the above might seem comfortingly alien so I should tell you, I’ve since worked Step 1 many times. With food, I am powerless over food; if I start eating chocolate, I don’t know when I’ll stop. With sex, if I make sex the panacea, the salve to this pain we discussed earlier, I will soon lose control of my sexual conduct and I’ll end up in more pain. Or work. Or my relationship. In fact I now work this program and therefore this step in a 360-degree fashion. I have no power at all over people, places and things, and if I ever for a moment mistakenly believe that I do – and act as if I do – pain is on its way. If there is something in your life that is causing you a problem and you’re aware of it, I bet you’ve tried using will, crystals, hypnotism and pills to placate it. My suspicion is they haven’t worked and my experience is they never will. Oddly, counterintuitively, in our culture of individualism and self-centred valour, it is by surrendering that we can begin to succeed. It is by ‘admitting that we have no power’ that we can begin the process of accessing all the power we will ever need. I’ve heard it said that we have

the ‘-ism’ before we have the addiction. I now attest to the presence of a conflagratory condition that awaits the substance to ignite it. Now with fourteen and a half years drug- and alcohol-free I cannot clearly say whether it was in sex or drugs that my addiction found its truest expression. Certainly drugs and alcohol have the power to decimate your life with greater efficiency. But my escalation through so-called recreational drugs to hard drugs was underscored by a uniform pain. Many of the associated problems that addiction evokes are caused by their criminal status and poverty. What doesn’t change, regardless of the manner in which addiction is materialized or the economic conditions of the afflicted, is the presence of pain.

Pain is a signal, it’s some aspect of us that’s beyond our somewhat narrow conception of ‘self,’ communicating. A pain in the leg means ‘don’t put pressure on this leg’; a pain in the mind means ‘change the way you live’. With earlier manifestations of the same condition the signals were not easy to read.

38

The impulse that made me eat too much chocolate when I was a kid was the same impulse that led me to heroin addiction in a child-friendly, socially acceptable disguise. Or when I was watching too much TV, even then as a little boy, I was using external resources to medicate because I felt uneasy inside. My personal circumstances may have contributed to this, my mum was ill a lot and I had a tense relationship with my stepdad, but these biographical details are less important than the sense I had that something was missing.

When I was a kid, knelt in front of the TV in the post-school, pre-Mum-home hinterland, I believed I had a solution to the problem of being me with every Penguin biscuit I jammed into my gawping trap. The distraction of the taste, the ritual of unpeeling them like a Buffalo Bill victim, the scraping of the chalk-brown custard guts, enough to occupy me, to fill me up. So the ‘treat’ of a perfectly

6 For me, today, on this planet I thankfully aspire to more than brief interludes of numbness through food, sex and the acquisition of delightful tight trousers with unpronounceable names; particularly as I now know they are all ciphers, poor facsimiles of the thing I'm actually seeking.'

enjoyable chocolate biscuit sandwich-wrapped in foil became an emotional necessity, a survival tool. Alone at home they toppled like a row of calorific dominoes into the hungry void. I already had a sense of shame and solitude around this behaviour. There was already something other than the simple eating of biscuits at play.

When through the storm of puberty I graduated to porn, in those charming sepia, stuck-together pages of yesteryear, it was – I know now – the same impulse that led me to the chapel of the lavvy for masturbatory distraction and temporary connection and relief.

God help the trainee perverts of today as they stand Kleenex in hand on the brink of a Niagara of every conceivable kink, accessible with any smart device they can cram into their clammy palms. Porn is a clear example of how our culture is feeding the disease of addiction. The natural impulse to have sex becomes a compulsion to masturbate. The attraction to connect is culturally translated by pornography into a numb and lonely staring strum at broken digital ghosts. The most physically creative thing we have, reduced to a dumb shuffle that'd embarrass a monkey.

Of course if you'd told me at fourteen that we were a decade away from a porn paradise I would've toppled back in Damascene spasms at the prospect and scoffed at any pious talk of it being corrosive.

Because I had no code for life, no awareness that what I was doing was problematic. In fact porn, such as it was then, hedge-snatched, stained and shared rags, was the solution I'd discovered to the problem of being me. And it is a strong medicine.

I'm writing this on a laptop and I'm forty-one years old and the temptation to look at porn is still there. So how am I, in this moment, the moment which all enlightened folk agree is the only moment we actually have, going to avoid looking at porn? Here is the process. I recognize that I have looked at porn before and I know what the results were then. It was distracting and numbing, which is good, but it didn't provide any real comfort – if I'm honest I felt a bit worse. The 12 Steps along with the support of others who understand how I think and feel, whether that's the trivial urge to use porn or suicidal thoughts are the only method I know of for disrupting detrimental habits.

40 As a side note it's worth mentioning that this is not a moral argument, for example if you love looking at porn and don't have a problem with it, then I have no opinion on that or advice to offer. In fact, if you're happy with your wanking or boozing or drug use, or self-esteem or relationships or eating, you probably don't need this book. If there's not a problem, there's not a problem, as they say in 12 Step organizations. For me, today, on this planet I thankfully aspire to more than brief interludes of numbness through food, sex and the acquisition of delightful tight trousers with unpronounceable names; particularly as I now know they are all ciphers, poor facsimiles of the thing I'm actually seeking.

I know, then, that looking at porn won't make me feel any better. That to look at porn, even though I have this knowledge, would be a pointless re-tread of a well-worn path. But, as with heroin, chocolate bars or relationships with inappropriate partners, knowing it won't

work has not stopped me indulging. As if I have a negative faith in a self-destructive doctrine that life cannot be better than it is now, that I don't deserve better, that I am worthless and dirty so who cares what I do to cope?

Once I topple, go active, decide to pursue my nominated object of addiction, I inwardly switch to a circuit of behaviour that is distinct from my better nature. The Jekyll and Hyde story is an apposite allegory and most addicts identify with the radical transition that occurs once they are triggered. There's no point you (in this instance in the role of a Victorian flower girl) pleading with Mr Hyde not to ravage you and kick over your begonias, telling him that he will 'regret it in the morning' because Mr Hyde doesn't give a fuck on a stick. Far safer to ask Dr Jekyll to stop messing around with alchemy, when he is clearly dangerously unqualified, before he's taken that first drink. I don't know what he got his doctorate in. I bet it's one of those ones where the university just gave him a mortarboard and cape for turning up and giving a lecture.

41

Once I go, I've gone. There have been many instances in my life where in the midst of some self-generated chaos I've been granted the benefit of hindsight whilst the event is still unfolding. It often takes the form of a mental bird's-eye view, I seem to float up out of me, a yard or two above the carnage I've created and look down at other me thinking, 'Oh look, there I am, I'm actually persevering with this mayhem. It's almost certainly a terrible idea. Oh well too late now, I might as well jump back in with him and finish this shit off.' This is not diminished responsibility; I am responsible for all the things I've done. It's just I wasn't *this* me while I was doing them.

My life is about preserving the conditions where it is less likely that I will quantum leap into the other guy.

To overcome that troubling and cyclical mentality, I had to believe that my life could be better. Whether that's better than a life as a drug addict fourteen years ago, or better now today by not looking at pornography. The consequences of my addiction were more palpable and severe when I was using drugs. The pace of deterioration too was, in retrospect, worrying. Most days were tarnished with a volatile emotional episode, physical injury, conflict, arrest, humiliation or violence. I was very fortunate and will remain forever grateful that people intervened in my enthusiastic rush to the gutter. In this book you will read much that might make you think, 'I'm not as bad as him', or, 'he's still a nutter', but the transformation I have experienced as the result of these steps is the important thing and is cause for great hope in anyone suffering from addiction. This idea of hope we shall explore in the next chapter. For now let's summarize what we've discussed.

42

- Do you have a problem? Is there some activity – drinking, eating, spending money, gambling, watching porn, destructive relationships, promiscuity, in fact any behaviour that is impairing your ability to enjoy life (and life can be enjoyable), that you are engaging in and are struggling to stop?
- If the answer is no, well done, carry on, you should have plenty of time on your hands to help others less fortunate and generally serve the planet and its people.
- If you're not sure, take a moment. Sit quietly in a place where you won't be disturbed. Close your eyes. Move your attention to your breathing, the rhythm of the breath; each inhalation a new beginning, each exhalation a new ending. Do you feel anxious? Afraid? Disturbed? Is your mind constantly shuffling through thoughts, restless? Is it difficult to sit and do nothing? Do you ever do this or are you, as I was for many years, constantly

involved in activity or distraction? What happens when you sit alone with your breath, your breath that will one day cease? For me it usually begins as an uneasy experience, even now after years of meditation (and by now I'm sure you'll have spotted that I'm trying to trick you into meditating). I have to practise stillness to be comfortable with it, to be comfortable being 'born again' in each new moment. To see that there is no way into the kingdom of heaven except through 'I', through Self, through the experience of thought, feeling, action. The constant witness. A common meditation is to envisage the moment before death, to accept that this place of consciousness in which we sit, that which we call 'I', is the place from which we will experience death. In your mind gently, without pushing, repeat a word that comes to you. It could be 'flower' or 'peace' or 'West Ham' – ideally a word that you associate with serenity or nothing at all. I mean it won't be helpful to sit there inwardly repeating the word 'Hitler' or 'Fuck off' – it's the wrong attitude. Be comfortable. Be relaxed. Release the tension from your face and shoulders and after a while ask yourself, the inner voice, the part of you that has always been there, when you were a kid, when your heart was broken, every time you've ever felt unloved, alone or lost, this voice, this continuing perspective that is in fact the thing that lets you know that you are you and not just some bundle of organs and limbs, the thing with which your memories are threaded together, the bulb which shines your aspirations onto the screen of knowing. Ask this thing, 'Am I serving you?' 'Am I happy?' 'Do I have a problem?'

43

If the answer is yes, then proceed.

Before You Start: You are going to like working this program a lot. I'll tell you why. It is made for you by you, using a formula that will not exclude or undermine any of your current beliefs.

Step 1 Exercises: Are you a bit fucked?

Here are some questions to ask yourself. They are a good way of getting clarity around your condition, addiction, call it what you will. Hey, it's only language man!

- **What do I want to change?** *Is it drinking? Is it being unable to put my phone down for an hour? Is it self-harm? Is it going out with inappropriate men? Is it thinking negative thoughts about myself? Is it lying? Heroin? Come on, how many examples do you need? I can't do this for you, you know!*
- **What pain or fear do I associate with change in this area?** *I won't fit in? There'll be no joy in life? I won't cope without it? People won't like me? What is it?!*
- **What pleasure am I getting out of not changing?** *Cakes are delicious? Cutting myself relieves me? This activity takes me out of myself?*
- **What will it cost me if this doesn't change?** *My husband will leave? I'll go to prison? I'll get fat? I'll continue to be miserable?*
- **What are the benefits I could gain by having this changed?** *My relationship/health/work will improve?*
- **How has this problem placed my important relationships in jeopardy?** *Friends don't wanna know me? My girlfriend feels used/not respected?*
- **Have I lost respect/reputation due to this problem?** *Come on, do you still need the examples?*

- Has this problem made my home life unhappy? *This is obvious! You can do this yourself.*
- Has this problem caused any type of illness? *Again, just use common sense.*
- Do I turn to the type of person that enables me to practise this behaviour or to companions who enable me?
These questions really get under the skin, huh?
- What part of the problem do the people who care about me object to most?
- What type of abuse has happened to me and others due to this problem? *Have I neglected my kids? Nagged my husband too much? Or slept with someone I shouldn't have?*
- What have I done in the past to try to fix, control or change this area of my life? *Diets? Setting targets? Moving house? Buying a new hat?*
- What are the feelings, emotions and conditions I have tried to alter or control with this problem? *Sadness? Loneliness? Fear? Work worries? Unhappiness with partner?*
- Right now, if this is such an important area in my life, why haven't I changed?
- Am I willing to do whatever it takes to have this changed, healed or transformed?

45

If the answer is yes, then write out, go on, get a pen and paper (what do you mean you're on the train, reading this on your phone? Stop making excuses) and write out:

'I admit I am powerless over (whatever you are working the steps on) and that my life in this area is unmanageable. I cannot, on my own, with my present understanding, consistently manage this problem.'

Recovery: Freedom from our addictions, by Russell Brand is published in Hardback, e-book and audiobook on 21st September 2017. Buy your copy here.