

# Slaying the Dragon of Addiction.....GAMBLING Heads I Lose, Tails I Lose

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The 'Guys and Dolls' portrayal of Runyonesque gamblers, once drawn from reality, is now in the realm of pure fiction. However, this misconception persists to the severe detriment of compulsive gamblers, their families, friends and therapists. Frank Sinatra, Marlon Brando and cohorts needed 'action' in a closed city and created it, regardless of constant police pursuit and the ensuing results of discovery. The furtive life style appeared to be thrilling, and to some, desirable. Nevertheless, the glamour-shrouded truth broke through in the song of Sinatra's girl, lamenting her status of the perennial 'also-ran; at the altar. These gamblers of days gone by were readily identified by their dress, demeanor, language and the underground nature of their activities. Today, identification of a compulsive gambler is not so simple a task. The Runyonesque mind and ghosts should have been replaced on the cultural mindscape by the various personalities of Walter Matthau, Jack Klugman, Omar Sharif, Eddie Fisher, Robert Morley, Pete Rose, Art Schlichter, famous quarterback, and Chet Forte, the originator of 'Monday Night Football'. All these guys were compulsive gambling losers of cherished things like reputations, fortunes, and careers. Gambling, whether you perceive it or not, has left the underground and has taken its place all across the land.

Gambling today is in the open and wholly accepted, thanks in part to the short-sightedness of state governments which have entered partnerships with horse racing and casino operations. The lottery business is booming in states too numerous to list. *(It must be noted that some states have financed Compulsive Gambling Councils to set policy, implement education, treatment, and assistance to compulsive gamblers and their families. The State of New Jersey funds upwards of one million dollars per year to the NJ Council on Compulsive Gambling for such activities. I have been a member of the Board of Directors of this Council since 1991, its secretary and a volunteer hotline counselor on 1-800-GAMBLER)* The American Psychiatric Association has rendered a general description of a person suffering from the disease of pathological gambling in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM IV): 'The essential features of this disease are a chronic and progressive failure to resist impulses to gamble, and gambling behavior that compromises, disrupts, or damages personal, family or vocational pursuits. The gambling preoccupation, urge, and activity increases during periods of stress. Problems that arise as a result of the gambling lead to an intensification of the gambling behavior. The results of this behavior can include extensive indebtedness and consequent default on debts and other financial responsibilities, disrupted or destroyed familial relationships, inattention to work, and illegal activities spawned to pay for gambling'.

The compulsive gambler does not gamble *for* money but *with* money. The alcoholic ingests alcohol; the drug addict takes in drugs in one fashion or another, and the compulsive gambler makes money disappear as if he swallowed it; however, money is not the abused substance. Just as the alcoholic does not drink to possess drink, the compulsive gambler does not gamble to have money; he uses the money to obtain the same high that the alcoholic achieves from drink and the addict achieves through drugs. The misconception is that money is the object, when, in actuality, it is simply the mode

of transportation to the substance which gets him high. Gambling is the psychological substance that has no physical entry into the organism. When gambling is abused, the gambler becomes compulsive. The immediate and great flow of adrenaline seems to be harmless enough in the beginning. William James declared that it is only by risking our person from one hour to another that we live at all. Transferring that thought to all risk-taking categories: from emotional risks, such as love, to physical risks, such as mountain-climbing, is not difficult at all. Indeed, upon further understanding, it is easy to see that this theory can, as easily, also be readily applied to 'money gambling'. The small wager permits the novice to experience the spark of adrenaline which makes him feel more alive; yet the desperate compulsive gambler must wager his life, liberty or sanity to obtain the same high. There are three roads open to the compulsive gambler, who sometimes takes all of them: insanity, prison or death. Dr. Robert Custer was the foremost authority on compulsive gambling in the United States. His work contributed to the inclusion of pathological gambling as a disease in the DSM in 1981 and the foundation of in-patient rehabilitation facilities in several Veterans Hospitals. He found that the compulsive gambler undergoes three phases, whether or not there is recovery:

**The winning phase:** He or she gambles occasionally for excitement and wins sometimes frequently; bets more and more times and for larger amounts, fantasizes about winning; wins big at times and is capable of unreasonable optimism.

**The losing phase:** He or she gambles alone and brags about wins; thinks constantly about gambling, and can't stop borrowing. He or she is careless about his or her family, and demonstrates personality changes. His or her home life becomes unhappy. There is heavy borrowing and an inability to pay debts.

**The desperation phase:** He or she looks for bailouts and his or her reputation is affected. He or she is alienated from family and friends. There is a marked increase in the amount and time spent gambling. He or she blames others, becomes remorseful, and commits illegal acts. The end result is hopelessness, which could include suicide thoughts and attempts, arrests, divorce, alcohol, emotional breakdowns and symptoms of withdrawal.

The dynamics of an addiction can remain fathomless to the un-addicted. Diligent counselors, therapists, family members and friends may find the key to an understanding. Feeling the emotions of an addict and living in his or her mind may aid in understanding....but not necessarily, for most addicts do not understand the addiction themselves. This is one of the reasons that so few are able to attempt to become abstinent, and if abstinent, to remain that way. The insidious nature of denial is powerless against the 'Dragon Within'. If a person denies the existence of a problem, it usually cannot be resolved. One must own it to get rid of it. It is extremely difficult for a person to recover alone, for personal willpower is never enough. Every week in the United States, over 500,000 self-help group meetings will be held and these will be attended by upwards of 15 million people who seek recovery from their affliction or addiction. These are the people who seek help, not the number of those who will ultimately be successful in eliminating the undesired behavior. Nor is it the number of Americans who have an addiction and do not seek help. We will never know just how large the problem is. Abstinence is not easily gained, and the select few that gain it may be likened to heroes. In New Jersey, there are approximately 600,000-800,000 compulsive gamblers and about 600-800 of them attend *Gamblers Anonymous* meetings and remain abstinent.

When the addiction reaches the desperation stage, it does not merely affect the addict's being, it becomes his or her very being. Personal willpower is never enough. Every thought revolves around the addiction. Why doesn't the threat of AIDS prevent the exchange of needles among intravenous drug users? Why doesn't the threat of liver damage stop the drinker? Why doesn't the threat of financial devastation stop the compulsive gambler? After all these horrors have become realities, why doesn't the addict stop? How many times has an addict said that it wouldn't happen to him or her, and finally it does, then he or she will pull out of it. The environment takes its effect on a child good or bad, at the age of three. Freud said that a child at the age of three is a marvelous creature. It can speak a foreign language (as any language is foreign to a child), and can do math....'Mommy, I want two dollies', 'Daddy, I want two wagons'. At the age of three a child's direction is usually set. For the rest of his or her life he or she is living up to imprints, negative or positive, which were established by the mother, father, sister, brother, nanny, teacher and/or his or her peers. If the imprints are positive, such as "You are handsome/beautiful, intelligent, well-disciplined, will be successful", the chances are that life will be good to the child-adult. If the imprints are negative, such as 'You are a whore like your mother, a drunken bum like your father, stupid a dunce, you'll never amount to anything', the chances are the child-adult will lose. (By the way, as consulting hypnotists, when working with addicts, be prepared to hear cursing and not just from street people but also from the highest credentialed people that could walk into your office. It seems that the thoughts of their addiction and recitation of the instances of what it has done to them, inwardly steams up the clients and using swear words seems to sufficiently express and describe their emotions and feelings. In fact I welcome it, as it gives me further insights...I do not promote it, nor use the same words....maybe once in a while to establish stronger rapport, but not as a rule) He or she may hate his father and breed an addiction for spite. He or she may adopt the characteristics of the imprint and become an alcoholic, drug addict or compulsive gambler, or a rapist, wife/child-beater, uneducated or uneducable. Maybe he or she wants to get even, or the addiction may result from his desire to please his loved one, perhaps by using the loved one's destructive behavior as a model for his or her own. The predisposition has been formed and the addiction-habit-sickness doesn't necessarily have to be identical with the environmental dictates.

To a three year old, Batman appears and is one hundred feet tall. Let an adult stand next to Hulk Hogan or Andre the Giant, and look at him, and then multiply that ten times. Whatever Batman says creates fear, love, hate, etc. The child looks at the parent like the 100-foot Batman; however, if Batman is 'bad', he turns into a 'Dragon'...the eventual addiction. The more powerful and impressive the Dragon, the more powerful the 'new Dragon' is. The 'new Dragon' is the mental environment and every component part of this environment is also the continuation and resulting effects of environmental imprints....hence come the addictions, habits, phobias, etc. Although Pavlov's theory of hypnosis and sleep has been refuted, his theory of conditioning is interwoven with the fundamental principles of post-hypnotic suggestions, waking hypnosis and everyday building-up and tearing down of confidence, image, and thought processes. The conditioning is continual. The steady person accepts the happenings, crises, environment and frustration therein (delays, thwarting, and conflicts) from childhood through adulthood for what they are....tests and realities of life to be overcome. The

person who has not developed this ability (for he or she had been hurt so badly as a child and has been truly unable to work out of his or her negative imprints and ensuing personality) must be deconditioned and personally take responsibility for his reconditioning. The negative imprints, needs and cravings of addiction must be eradicated from memory, and new habits for health must be implanted for a positive attitude aligned within freedom of choice. Elimination and abstinence may immediately convince the unsuspecting consulting hypnotist or therapist that permanence has been gained. However, this is highly unlikely without long and continued treatment. In 1903, Bramwell treated 'dipsomaniacs' and 'morphine maniacs' for approximately 30 sessions. Although hypnotism aims to be an inexpensive method of treatment and release for the client to himself or herself, a minimum of 13 sessions is most useful. I personally advise my clients up front that I shall not accept an addictions case unless the client commits to 13 sessions. I only obtain an oral commitment and not a formal contract as I know that some clients drop out before the conclusion of 13 sessions and I will not permit a contract to force a client to come for sessions against his or her personal will due to a contractual monetary commitment. This is my own personal choice and am not suggesting that you follow suit. All of my sessions are interactive from the very first session, as there can be no 'catharsis', a purging of emotions, obtained through just whispering 'sweet nothings' in a client's ear. There are many techniques that are designed to desensitize the negative happenings in a person's life....that is separating and eliminating the negative emotions that are attached to a negative happening. 'Take the teeth out of the tiger' so that the bite is no longer there. As you may have read in my past articles, I am a firm believer of 'triggers' and give my clients several triggers to eliminate cravings, urges, needs and desires to pursue their addictions and also triggers to make them plain feel good about themselves. Create you won personal triggers. Experience on yourself. Take the time to try out what you are doing for your client. Practice what you preach. Feel it, and mean it. Let your sincerity and desire to facilitate abstinence shine through brightly. Be the hypnotist that you should be. What has taken a lifetime to nurture can be overcome in one session on rare occasion, but the character breakdown of the addict dictates repeated sessions over a long period of time. The client should be taught to eliminate his character defects, for any retention of defects causes relapse. A spiritual awakening bolsters permanence and this can be sought in applicable self-help groups. For the gambler, there is no better complement to individual sessions than Gamblers Anonymous.

**CAVEAT:** In strict compliance with the Ethics & Standards of our profession, always advise your clients who demonstrate symptoms of medical issues or psychological disorders to avail themselves of the best allopathic medical and psychological professional services that they can obtain. Request a written referral when warranted. Hypnotism is complementary to these traditional disciplines.