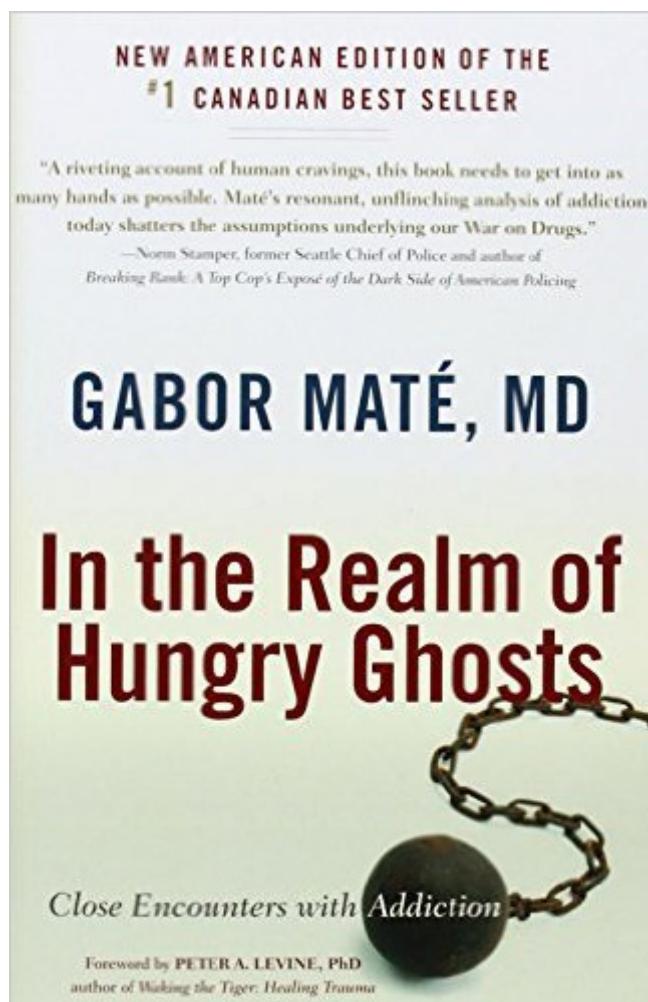


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# In The Realm Of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters With Addiction



## Synopsis

Based on Gabor Maté's two decades of experience as a medical doctor and his groundbreaking work with the severely addicted on Vancouver's skid row, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* radically reenvisiones this much misunderstood field by taking a holistic approach. Dr. Maté presents addiction not as a discrete phenomenon confined to an unfortunate or weak-willed few, but as a continuum that runs throughout (and perhaps underpins) our society; not a medical "condition" distinct from the lives it affects, rather the result of a complex interplay among personal history, emotional, and neurological development, brain chemistry, and the drugs (and behaviors) of addiction. Simplifying a wide array of brain and addiction research findings from around the globe, the book avoids glib self-help remedies, instead promoting a thorough and compassionate self-understanding as the first key to healing and wellness. *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* argues persuasively against contemporary health, social, and criminal justice policies toward addiction and those impacted by it. The mix of personal stories—including the author's candid discussion of his own "high-status" addictive tendencies—and science with positive solutions makes the book equally useful for lay readers and professionals.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In all innocence I picked up Gabor Mate's book and in no time I was stunned to find that I was reading about myself. No, I am neither a drug addict nor alcoholic, but I have several other addictions I have been ashamed of my whole life. By the time I finished reading this insightful,

compassionate, detailed book, I knew finally who I was, how I got that way and what I could do about it. I honestly have no idea how anyone could read this book and give less than 5 stars. First of all, the 3-star reviewer totally missed several important points concerning Mate's actions at home and on the job. Money was given to his staff, not as a bribe, but as an incentive for him to stop being late and to give himself a little spiritual humbling. As for Mate's own addictions, I feel so much safer to be in the hands of a man who is frank and transparent with me and says, "Let's try this," rather than one who is distantly perfect and ultimately unknowable, who is given to uttering commands and pronouncements. I know who I would trust more. Mate may suffer from ADD (which I also do) but let me assure you that his prose is every bit as fluid, clear and inspired as the prose you are presently reading. More, his writing is a joy to read. The book itself is very well presented, almost like a mystery story with as happy an ending as one can expect after several murders have been committed in the beginning! The book starts with the stories, the life histories and personality details of his patients. It goes on to then give the medical and psychological and political facts about addictive behavior, and the last chapters are devoted to help, healing and hope. It could not be more beautifully structured!

Those who are looking for a brief look at addiction ought to look elsewhere; whatever else can be said about Gabor Mate's *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, it represents a lengthy, multi-faceted look at the reality of addiction. Mate is a Canadian physician who practices medicine in one of Canada's poorest and most socially challenged neighbourhoods: Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Drawing upon his years of experience working with addicts, as well as his expertise in the fields of stress management and attention deficit disorder, Mate has produced a book that capably examines addiction from a wide variety of vantage points. That having been said, it is only fair to acknowledge that I, for one, was not equally enamoured of the book's every section. Mate is at his strongest as a narrator; I was truly gripped by the lengthy sections of the book in which Mate is content simply to share the experiences--the oftentimes harrowing experiences--of the clients with whom he works. I was equally impressed with his refreshingly accessible account of the implications of new discoveries in the field of brain science, as scientists try to explain the processes that create and perpetuate addiction.. In addition, the book's final section--on "the ecology of healing"-- contained some genuinely fresh insights and some genuinely practical suggestions. These sections most certainly justify the book's purchase. I found other sections of the book less satisfactory. Although I share Mate's antipathy toward the "war on drugs", I found his own policy prescriptions less than fully convincing. (Then again, I'm glad to have had an opportunity to grapple with his recommendations).

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