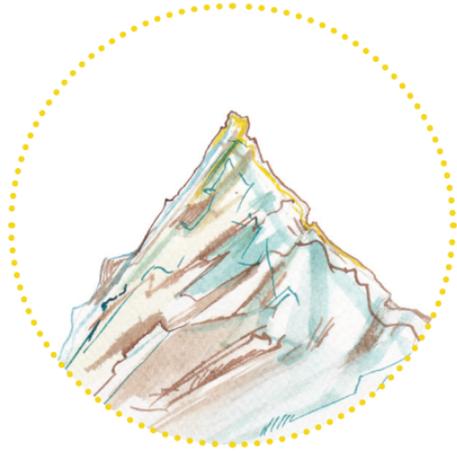




Vladimír Svrček

My victory over anxiety and obsession





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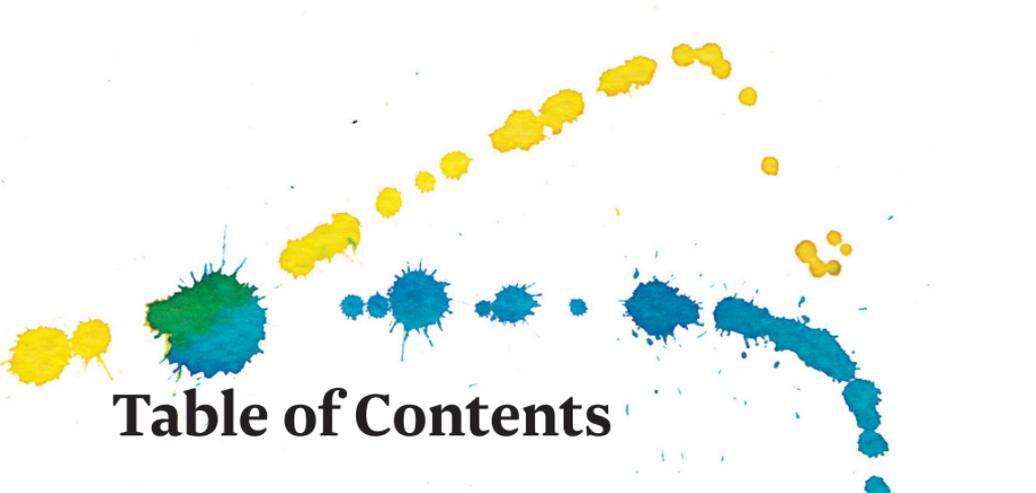


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“Simplicity is nature’s first step, and the last of art.”

PHILIP JAMES BAILEY

*“The road to learning by precept is long, but by example
short and effective.”*

SENECA



Introduction

The objective of this book is to give hope and determination to all those suffering from some kind of mental health problem or disorder and, to show them light in the dark forest. I have experienced that and managed to get my mental problems under control. When a mountain climber ascends a mountain for the first time, he conveys a symbolic message: The mountain can be managed by a man. It's a question of a private decision whether one starts climbing alone or will be accompanied by guides, fellow climbers and helpers. Regardless of which path you may take, the point is that you can conquer the mountain.

This book has been structured in a way so as to capture the story of my life, describing how I experienced and dealt with my mental and life problems, how I developed self-knowledge and how I gained the most decisive experience and knowledge changing my personality. At the same time, I also wanted to clearly describe the most critical processes and methods I applied to myself.

Appreciating the time a reader has and being aware of the volume of scholarly papers and information available on the Internet, I decided to make my writing brief and dense. I share with the readers my personal experience and my view on the issue without theorizing and quoting scholarly literature.

*“Everyone stands alone at the heart of the world,
pierced by a ray of sunlight, and suddenly it’s evening.”*

SALVATORE QUASIMODO

*“If you laugh, the whole world will laugh with you.
If you cry, you will cry alone.”*

BOB MARLEY

“Mental pain is worse than physical pain.”

PUBLILIUS SYRUS



How did it begin?

The elementary school I attended as a child we usually referred to as the “school by the cemetery”. Right next to the school, there was a large cemetery and every day I had to walk along the lane around it on my way to and from school. The lane was several hundred meters long, but for me, it was endless and, unlike other pupils, it took me much longer.

When I was about nine, I realized that while walking along the lane I felt tension, uneasiness and anxiety. My hands were numb, I felt weakness throughout my body, my hands were wet and I was flooded with sweat. My whole body was shaking, my breath was shallow, my heart was pounding and I felt flush all over my body. Many times you could have seen me as a little boy sitting outside his home, quietly crying from fatigue and helplessness.

I realized that I also experienced similar feelings in other places – in the church and everywhere, where there was a cross with Jesus Christ or any other religious symbol.

My parents were religious and made me regularly attend mass. My mother wanted me to become a priest and I – as an obedient child – thought that I had to fulfill her wish. So every Sunday morning I went to church. My mother sometimes asked me: “*What*



was the mass about?" to check whether I had indeed attended the service. And I obediently told her what was the priest talking about and what people we knew I had seen at church. Because I did not feel well in the church and felt anxiety, I soon started to go 'behind the church'. When I was about twelve, I completely stopped going to church.

At elementary school I attended classes of religion because my mother wanted me to. At that time, it was an optional subject. Probably under the influence of those classes and the words of my mother, I viewed Jesus Christ as an authority who could see me at any moment and who would punish me for any unsound behavior or thought.

As a child, I slept in the bedroom with my parents. There was a huge picture of Jesus Christ hanging above the bed. I saw it every day and it seared deeply into my young mind. Whenever I saw or recalled it, I felt a great deal of awe and fear of the possible punishment for some unsound action or thought.

My mother had thick black hair and a strong, even robust body. She was a hardworking, strong woman. She worked as a laundress in a nursery. We were four siblings and she was the absolute authority for us, making all the decisions. Outwardly she appeared as a strong and decisive woman, who did not show her feelings and emotions. I do not remember her ever comforting or caressing me. As a child I experienced her toughness and lack of sensitivity most painfully during the following incident.

I longed to have a dog. The Geršić family living on a side street had had puppies, so I begged my mother to get one of them. It was a female dog, a German Shepherd. I called her Zora. I liked her very much and I always looked forward to spending time with her after classes. I would play with her for hours and go for long walks to the nearby forest. I remember to this day her shining eyes and,

whenever she noticed me, how her whole body was trembling with joy. It was like a balm to my sore soul. One day when I returned from school, the backyard was empty – Zora wasn't there. Her house was empty and the ground around it was carefully swept. It appeared to me that there were some spots around, perhaps blood. I ran to my mother crying and asked her what had happened. She just told me: *"We had to give Zora away, because she costs a lot of money and we cannot afford it."* No remorse, no emotions.

Mother was a fair person, not preferring any of her children over another. When I finished high school and wanted to go to college, she said: *"I did not allow your brothers to go to college, so I cannot let you go either. How would they feel about it? If you want to study, go and study part-time."*

My father was a short man with a round belly, narrow shoulders and thinning hair graying since he was young. He was always smiling, full of jokes. He was jovial and easygoing. When he was laughing at something from his heart up through a full mouth, my mother used to ask: *"Why are you laughing so unnecessarily?"* She was his opposite: always serious and worried. My father loved to overindulge life, cigarettes and alcohol. Not that he was an alcoholic – he was just a hedonist, a gourmet. On Sundays after lunch he used to go down to the cellar and draw a liter of wine from the barrel to the bottle, took two packs of cigarettes from the drawer, get on the bike and go play cards with his friends. He worked as a manual worker in a chemical factory manufacturing fertilizers. I remember that very well, because since I was sixteen, he used to take me each holiday to work as a volunteer at his workplace. I worked day, afternoon and even night shifts. Of course it was illegal, but he had the consent of his foreman and got paid for my work, so officially I never worked there. I gave all the money I had earned this way to my mother, and she bought clothes for me for the next school year.



To this day I remember my father saying when we once got home after the night shift: *“You better learn, so you do not have to work your entire life so hard like me. Now you know what it is like to be a worker”*. And I really saw what it was like. I worked on the shifts along with adult men. I was beating out chunks of fertilizer from metal forms with a hammer, throwing them with a heavy shovel into the mill. It was hot there like in a desert at noon and the strong smell of chemicals spread everywhere. All my clothes, hair and skin were soaked with that smell; it could not be simply removed by water or soap. Even two months after finishing my voluntary work my body still smelled of fertilizers. Perhaps my father’s statement along with my own experience had a real influence on me, because I really studied my entire life – I learned new things and I did not have time left for manual work.

The problem



Over time I began to realize that the mechanism that works in my mind – the image of Jesus Christ, or any other similar religious symbol, triggers an intrusive and haunting thought in my mind. Whenever I think of an indecent word or something immoral, the effigy of Jesus Christ emerges in my mind condemning it, triggering my fear of the assumed punishment.

However, my mind enables me to get rid of immoral thoughts by performing certain activities. It is like when a sinner confesses sins to the priest and the priest orders him to pray e.g. the “Lord’s prayer” ten times to redress these sins. This successive repetition of the given activity becomes a ritual. The essence of it is that

