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JORDAN B.
PETERSON



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Beyond Order

12 MORE RULES
FOR LIFE

Jordan B. Peterson

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*To my wife, Tammy Maureen Roberts Peterson, whom I have loved deeply for fifty years,
and who is admirable, in my estimation, in all regards, and beyond all reason.*

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A Note from the Author in the Time of the Pandemic

It is a perplexing task to produce a nonfiction book during the global crisis brought about by the spread of COVID-19. It seems absurd, in some sense, even to think about anything else but that illness during this trying time. Nonetheless, binding all the thoughts contained in any current work to the existence of the pandemic—which too shall pass—seems like an error, as the normal problems of life will return at some point (and thankfully) to the forefront. That all means that an author of the present day is inevitably going to make one mistake (concentrating too much on the pandemic, which has an uncertain life span, and producing a book that is instantly dated, in consequence) or another (ignoring the pandemic, which is very much like failing to attend to the proverbial elephant under the rug).

After considering this, as well as discussing the issues with my publishers, I decided to write *Beyond Order: 12 More Rules for Life* according to the plan laid out for it several years ago, and to concentrate on addressing issues not specific to the current time (thus, to risk the second error rather than the first). I suppose it may also be the case that those who have chosen to read this book or listen to the audio version might be relieved to turn their attention to something other than the coronavirus and the devastation it has wrought.

Overture

On the fifth of February 2020, I awoke in an intensive care ward in, of all places, Moscow. I had six-inch tethers attaching me to the sides of the bed because, in my unconscious state, I had been agitated enough to try to remove the catheters from my arm and leave the ICU. I was confused and frustrated not knowing where I was, surrounded by people speaking a foreign language, and in the absence of my daughter, Mikhaila, and her husband, Andrey, who were restricted to short visiting hours and did not have permission to be there with me at my moment of wakening. I was angry, too, about being there, and lunged at my daughter when she did visit several hours later. I felt betrayed, although that was the furthest from the truth. People had been attending to my various needs with great diligence, and in the wake of the tremendous logistic challenges that come about from seeking medical care in a truly foreign country. I do not have any memory of anything that happened to me during the most recent weeks preceding that, and very little between that moment and my having entered a hospital in Toronto, in mid-December. One of the few things I could recall, looking back to the earliest days of the year, was the time I had spent writing this book.

I wrote much and edited almost all of *Beyond Order* during a time when my family was plagued by sequential and overlapping bouts of seriously impaired health, much of which was the subject of public discussion, and for that reason requires some detailed explanation. First, in January 2019, Mikhaila had to seek out a surgeon to replace much of her artificial ankle, implanted about a decade earlier, as the initial installation was never perfect, causing her serious pain and trouble with movement as a consequence, and then came near to failing. I spent a week with her at a hospital in Zurich, Switzerland, for the week of that procedure and her initial recovery.

At the beginning of March, my wife, Tammy, underwent routine surgery in Toronto for a common and eminently treatable kidney cancer. A month and a half after that surgery, which involved the removal of one third of the organ in question, we learned that she was actually suffering from an extremely rare malignancy, which had a one-year fatality rate of close to 100 percent.

Two weeks later, the surgeons involved in her care removed the remaining two thirds of her afflicted kidney, along with a substantial proportion of the related abdominal lymphatic system. The surgery appeared to bring the progression of the cancer to a halt, but produced leakage of fluid (up to four liters, or one gallon, a day) from her now-damaged lymphatic system—a condition known as chylous ascites—which rivaled the original condition in danger. We journeyed to see a medical team in Philadelphia, where within ninety-six hours of the initial injection of a poppy seed oil dye, whose practical purpose was the enhancement of images derived from CAT or MRI scans, the complete cessation of Tammy's fluid loss was achieved. This breakthrough occurred on the very day of our thirtieth wedding anniversary. She recovered rapidly and, to all appearances, completely—a testament to the luck without which none of us can live, and to her own admirable strength and resistance.

Unfortunately, while these events unfolded, my health fell apart. I had begun to take an anti-anxiety agent at the beginning of 2017, after suffering from what appeared to be an autoimmune reaction to something I had consumed during the Christmas holiday period of 2016.* The food reaction made me acutely and continually anxious, as well as freezing cold, no matter what clothes I was wearing or how many blankets I layered upon myself. Further, it lowered my blood pressure so dramatically that whenever I tried to stand I would gray out and be forced into a crouch half a dozen or more times before trying again. I also experienced insomnia that appeared near total. My family physician prescribed a benzodiazepine as well as a drug for sleeping. I took the latter a mere handful of times before ceasing its use entirely; the terrible symptoms I was experiencing, including the insomnia, were almost immediately and entirely eradicated by the benzodiazepine treatment, making the sleep agent unnecessary. I continued the benzodiazepine for almost exactly three years, because

my life did seem unnaturally stressful during that time (the period when my life changed from the quiet existence of a university professor and clinician to the tumultuous reality of a public figure), and because I believed that this drug was—as is often claimed of benzodiazepines—a relatively harmless substance.

Things changed, however, in March 2019, at the onset of my wife's medical battle. My anxiety spiked noticeably after Mikhaila's aforementioned hospitalization, surgery, and recovery. In consequence, I asked my family physician to increase my dose of benzodiazepine, so that I would not be preoccupied by nor preoccupy others with my anxiety. Unfortunately, I experienced a marked increase in negative emotion following the adjustment. I asked to have the dosage raised yet again (by this time, we were attempting to deal with the second of Tammy's surgeries and its complications, and I attributed my even more severe anxiety to that problem), but my anxiety increased even further. I attributed all of this not to a paradoxical reaction to the medication (which it was later diagnosed as), but to the recurrence of a tendency toward depression that had plagued me for years.* In any case, I ceased using the benzodiazepine entirely in May of that year, trying two doses of ketamine within a week, as suggested by a psychiatrist with whom I consulted. Ketamine, a nonstandard anesthetic/psychedelic, sometimes has overwhelming and sudden positive effects on depression. It produced nothing for me but two ninety-minute trips to hell. I felt to my bones as if I had everything to feel guilty and ashamed about, with nothing gained by my positive experiences.

A few days after the second ketamine experience, I began to suffer the effects of acute benzodiazepine withdrawal, which were truly intolerable—anxiety far beyond what I had ever experienced, an uncontrollable restlessness and need to move (formally known as akathisia), overwhelming thoughts of self-destruction, and the complete absence of any happiness whatsoever. A family friend—a physician—enlightened me as to the dangers of sudden benzodiazepine withdrawal. I therefore started to take a benzodiazepine once again—but a smaller dose than I had climbed to previously. Many, but not all, of my symptoms abated. To deal with those that remained, I also began to take an antidepressant that had