

Addiction, Recovery and Jewish Healing

In developing an issue of *The Outstretched Arm* devoted to the disease of addiction (alcohol, drug, sex, food, gambling...), we naturally turned to JACS — Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons, and Significant Others — for Jewish spiritual resources that support recovery. We combed through the wealth of resources which find their home at the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFCFS) in New York City, where JACS is based, right alongside the National Center for Jewish Healing (NCJH).

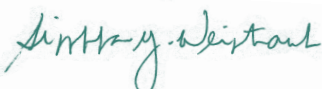
Many individuals seek out illness/problem-specific recovery and support groups (for cancers, mood disorders, heart disease, addiction, and more), because they find help in safe spaces that encourage “fellow-traveling” with others who face similar challenges. But a less positive force that leads many people to seek help from those who share their affliction is the enormous barrier erected by the mainstream community, which — out of fear, pain, or denial — may treat the JACS (or OA, NA, etc.) group as the “Other.”

Despite our generally full participation in the broader society — with its driven qualities of excess consumption and compulsive striving — Jews too often deny that we are affected by many addictions, in an attempt to compartmentalize the problem as “over there” and not “in here.” But in marginalizing those struggling with addictions and seeking recovery and the “Torah of their lives,” we deprive ourselves of their hard-won wisdom which might profoundly enhance our healing work.

In this issue, we provide an opening into the rich trove of Jewish spiritual resources that have been culled and enriched through the recovery work of thousands of Jews struggling with addiction and recovery, as well as brave clergy, such as Rabbi Abraham Twerski, and professionals who support their efforts. We provide a glimpse of a Jewish perspective on the Twelve Steps, spiritual signs of risk for addiction, helping perspectives for family and friends, snapshots of personal stories, and links to resources and more in-depth materials found through the JACS and NCJH websites.

Join us! As Rabbi Tarfon teaches in *Pirke Avot 2:16*, “You don't have to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it entirely.”

B'Shalom,



RABBI SIMKHA Y. WEINTRAUB, LCSW
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A COCOON OF DENIAL

“We never talked about his drinking and drugging to anybody — not to friends and certainly not to family. I became part of the problem, too. I'd call from work to find out what state he was in, and he'd always lie about how much he'd had to drink. After I confronted him with empty whiskey bottles I pulled out of our garbage, he dumped them down the block from then on. I knew things weren't right, but I didn't have a clue about what I should do. It was like living in a cocoon. He was wrapped around the bottle, and I was wrapped around him.”

— Interview with a JACS member,
Jewish Sisters in Sobriety
(New York, New York: JBFCFS, Inc., 2007)



The OUTSTRETCHED ARM

VOLUME 8 • ISSUE 1 • SUMMER 2008/5768

The Outstretched Arm is published by the National Center for Jewish Healing, Rita J. Kaplan Jewish Connections Programs of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, Inc.

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The Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services (JBFCFS) is one of the nation's premier mental health and social service agencies. JBFCFS offers the best-trained professionals and the most advanced mental health care and social services to help individuals live better at every stage of life. For more than 125 years, we've been providing help to New Yorkers on a wide range of issues — from family violence and struggles with mental illness to day-to-day challenges. And every year, across all five boroughs, more than 50,000 people rely on us for help through our 160 programs.



Jewish Board of Family
and Children's Services, Inc.



My Brother, Seth z''l (excerpted)

SARA JAMISON, MA, LCSW

I have yet to write about Seth, *zichrono l'vracha*, may his memory be for a blessing. I couldn't bring myself to do it. It's easier to write when you can reflect on a person's full life. How do you eulogize someone and make sense of a life that ended abruptly and tragically at age 36?

Of course there is magical thinking: If I don't eulogize Seth, I can still believe that he will appear, bright eyed, with a flashing smile, and ask in his warm engaging way, "Hey, what's up?" I can imagine that he will share stories about Positano, Italy, arguably his favorite place on the planet.

If I don't eulogize him, I won't have to juxtapose these happy images with the horrific one of him, alone, in a hotel room in Canada, where he was found dead after overdosing on cocaine and heroin. I won't have to think about his son Jacob, who knew his father for less than one year.

My mother liked to say, "Seth lived life on the edge and slipped off." To me, Seth's edge seemed reckless. When my attempts to reach him failed, I gave up. The advice I received was that I was either confronting or enabling him. The one piece of advice I never got, but wish I had, would have been to try and maintain a connection. As long as he was no longer hurting me, I wish that I had found a way to do this, rather than leaving him alone to feel even more damaged and isolated.

I have learned that shame flourishes in silence. It lessens when we address it with courage and compassion. We all have times when we feel wounded, not good enough. Judaism teaches that we were created that way, that we fail because we are human; and our remorse is meant to help us become stronger and better people. But we can't get to that place if we are stuck in a place of shame: feeling that we ARE bad, rather than that we sometimes DO bad. Sadly, those are not the messages we receive from society: We are taught to strive for perfection, to compete and be number one.

My experience is that we feel best about ourselves when we give to other people, when we live authentic lives and do not act according to an externally driven ideal. One of my favorite Chasidic teachings is about Rav Zusya. When Zusya arrives in heaven, G-d doesn't ask him, "Why weren't you Moses?" G-d asks, "Why weren't you Zusya?"

Now I am more aware that addictions and other diseases we fear aren't contagious. I have tried to acquire more knowledge about addictions. I have learned from JACS and clients in 12 Step programs to acknowledge our limitations, to take full responsibility for our actions, to accept life on life's terms and to make amends to the people we have hurt.

No human being goes through life without experiencing pain, suffering, loss and shame. I hope that Seth's story challenges us all to meet our vulnerability with compassion, to engage our potential, to take the deepest pain and hurt and transform it into greater passion for *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).

Sara Jamison, MA, LCSW, is a psychotherapist active in Jewish healing work in Stamford, CT. Visit www.ncjh.org for a complete narrative.

Seven Spiritual Warning Signs of Addiction

Appreciating spiritual warning signs of addiction helps us be aware, resourceful, and effective in helping ourselves and others reach for recovery. On the JACS and NCJH websites, www.jacsweb.org and www.ncjh.org, one can access lists of *psychosocial* warning signs. Here are seven *spiritual* warning signs.

These signs may strike a chord with us, whether or not we consider ourselves to have an “official” addiction.

**“Zeh Hayom Asah Adonai:
This is the day Adonai has made;
let us exult and rejoice in it” (Psalm 118:24-29)**

ON EMPTINESS AND DEPLETION

If we lack or lose the capacity to experience joy in life, our risk increases for turning to addictive, compulsive behavior to fill this void.

**“HaSameach B’Helko:
One who is content with his/her portion.”**

ON DISCONTENTMENT

The inability or refusal to accept realistic limits is a key factor in encouraging addictive behavior. As Ben Zoma teaches, in *Pirke Avot 4:1*, the one who is *truly* rich is one who is “content with his/her portion.”

**“Ha Lomed Mikol-Adam:
One who learns from all.”**

ON TURNING A DEAF EAR TO OTHERS

An almost universal sign of addiction is the refusal to accept others’ concern and warnings. We often refer to this problem as “denial.” Our tradition offers that a wise person is “one who learns from all people.” (*Ben Zoma in Pirke Avot 4:1*)

**“HaKovesh Eht-Yitzro:
One who controls one’s passions.”**

ON UNFETTERED URGES

Equating “strength” with doing whatever we feel like doing at any given moment is a sure recipe for excess and a potentially lethal approach to life,

for ourselves and for those around us. Another of Ben Zoma’s teachings (*Pirke Avot 4:1*) is that real strength comes from being able to control our passions and utilize them constructively.

**“Pikuah/Hatzalat Nefesh:
Recognizing and Repairing Health Risks.”**

ON RISKING ONE’S HEALTH

When we act in ways that consistently jeopardize our own health and/or that of others, we have opened the door to addictive behaviors. The protection of life is such a major value in Jewish tradition that it may override almost any other commandment.

**“Al Tifrosh min haTzibbur:
Don’t separate yourself from the Community”**

ON ISOLATION

Hillel (*Pirke Avot 2:4*) alerts us to the major risk posed by isolation from friends, family, and associates. We are social animals, and isolation increases shame, fear and despair.

**“B’tzelem Elokim:
In the image of God (Genesis 1:27)”**

ON DISRESPECTING OUR BODIES

One of the Torah’s first teachings is that we humans are created “in the image of God.” When we lose the awareness, we become vulnerable to treating our bodies as disposable objects — “*Trash it, it’s a rental*” — not as vessels that carry a spark of the divine.

Jonathan Katz, LCSW, Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW,
Susan J. Rosenthal, LCSW, © 2008

Relevant and Inspiring Jewish Sources Paired with The Twelve Steps

Based on excerpts from *Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery*, Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Stuart A. Copans, M.D. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1991)
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STEP ONE

Honesty

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable. “Lo, how we stand before You, desolate and empty!”

— *High Holiday Liturgy*

STEP TWO

Hope

Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. “Man’s *yetzer* (impulse, temptation) gains upon him every day... and if it were not that God helps him resist the temptation, man would be powerless.”

— *Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah, 52b*

STEP THREE

Faith

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him. “... I place my spirit in God’s care, when I wake as when I sleep. The Eternal is with me, I shall not fear, body and spirit in God’s keep.”

— *Adon Olam, Siddur*

STEP FOUR

Courage

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. “How does on confess? (He or she) says, ‘Please God!’ I have intentionally sinned ... and I have sinned unintentionally and I regret it.”

— *Moses Maimonides’ Mishnah Torah. Hil. Teshuvah.*

STEP FIVE

Integrity

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. “... He should conceal nothing out of shame. By speaking these matters, by giving voice to his potential to do evil, he will break the hold of the inclination to do evil so that it will have far less power to entice him on other occasions.”

— *Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717-1786)*

STEP SIX

Willingness

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. “Be gracious to me, O God in the measure of Your faithfulness; in the measure of Your great mercy, erase my transgressions. Wash me through and through outside and purify me inside...”

— *Psalms 51:3-6, 8*

STEP SEVEN

Humility

Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. “Make a habit of praying before God from the depths of your heart, using your own words, in whatever language you know best. Ask God to make you truly worthy of Divine service. This is the essence of prayer.”

— *Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, (1772-1810) Likutay Etzot HaShem*

STEP EIGHT

Love

Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. “My hope is that God, in God’s abundant kindness will enable me to return to Him in love. Especially do I pray that God enables me to mend whatever wrong I may have committed...and that God grace me with the opportunity to repay my debts.”

— *Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935); 1st Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Palestine*

STEP NINE

Discipline

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. “Yom Kippur forgives only for sins between man and God. Offenses committed against another person are not forgiven until the offender seeks direct forgiveness from the one he has harmed.”

— *Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law), Orach Hayim 606:1*

STEP TEN

Perseverance

Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. “It is not your

obligation to fully complete the task (of repair) but neither are you free to turn away from it.”

— *Pirke Avot 2:16*

STEP ELEVEN

Illumination

Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for God’s will for us and the power to carry that out. “In prayer, you gather the strength of dedication for life, allowing this life to become the fulfillment of the Divine will, the furthering of Holy purpose...”

— *Joseph Albo, Sefer Ha-Ikkarim (Spain, 14-15th century)*

STEP TWELVE

Service

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs. “If someone comes to you for assistance and all you say to him is, ‘God will help you,’ you have become a disloyal servant of God. It is for you to understand that God has sent you to aid the needy and not to refer him back to God.”

— *Lelover Rebbe (1746-1814)*

TISHA B’AV IN RECOVERY

I have polluted Your temple
Where my soul resides,
With food and drink,
With pills and passion;
I have filled my mouth with words
Of hate and jealousy,
And my heart with feelings
Of fear and despair.
I have denied my illness,
And given into craving;
I am helpless,
Without Your power and Your love.
Rebuild my walls of hope,
Restore my resolution,
Lead me, step by step,
Into Your Holy Place,
That I may enter into recovery
Filled with Your presence,
Hour by hour,
One day at a time.

By Tamar D. Earnest, MD, July, 2007
Jewish Sisters in Sobriety, pg. 81

Tisha B’Av is an annual day of fasting and mourning for the destruction of the 1st and 2nd temples and other calamities in Jewish history.





At the Edge with Our Son

MICHAEL & IRIS

Shalom Center, Temple Chai, Phoenix, AZ • March 2008

As parents of two intelligent, artistic, sensitive, wonderful children, never in our wildest dreams 20 years ago ... could we have imagined we'd ever say, "My son is a heroin addict"!

On one hand, we knew he had some issues with anger, depression and we had him in counseling at an early age. On the other hand, he seemed to be doing OK: did well in high school, joined the Temple Youth Group, was in the H.S. Jazz Band, etc. Then we found out about his involvement with drugs and he was in and out of various hospitals/treatment programs for several years. And for awhile, he had several years of sobriety. The death of his grandfather, the loss of someone who loved him unconditionally, hurt him terribly and he began using again. This hurt and pain led him to a heroin habit. After a few years of that, we were ready to give up hope.

When our temple helped get the Phoenix JACS group started, we attended regularly. In addition, we regularly attend our Temple's Kabbalat Shabbat services. And we are still going to JACS meetings. The opportunity to support each other, sharing our experience, strength and hope, is invaluable.

Back to our son: Somehow throughout all the overdoses, treatments, love & prayers, something clicked. Our son came out of treatment, went to a halfway house, started to really work his Steps ... attending meetings daily, working at a place that's quite supportive of his efforts to keep sober, reaching out to others. These efforts are working.

This week we had the privilege of seeing our son get up at his noon AA meeting and receive his 1-year sobriety chip. That is our miracle, today.



For Family, Friends, Professionals and Community

WHAT HELPS?

- **Communicate** in a way that expresses concern about specific changes in attitudes and behaviors
- **Be firm and consistent** about your boundaries and role
- **Remain hopeful** (expect initial denial, and periodic relapse even with treatment)
- **Seek education, support and guidance**
- **Take care of yourself** (including spiritual nourishment & support group for yourself)

THINGS THAT HURT:

- **Blaming** yourself for the addict's problem
- **Thinking and acting as though you can control/ "fix" the addict**
- **Ignoring** your own and other loved ones needs
- **Delaying** efforts to seek help, out of fear of exposure/ shame
- **Withdrawing, turning away and giving up hope/ giving in to despair**

WHAT CLERGY AND CARING COMMUNITY CAN OFFER:

- **Promote** community awareness and responsiveness by spreading the word through sermons, workshops, prevention programs, publications
- **Include an open support group** for family, friends, people in recovery in regular programming such as *shabbatonim*, retreats, *limud* etc.
- **Learn how to:** identify the problem; raise the issue with affected community members; be knowledgeable about treatment and recovery resources such as detox, rehab, out-patient counseling and Twelve Step and other mutual support programs; make effective referrals



Excerpt from *T'Shuvah**

RABBI MARK BOROVIKZ

Co-Director, Beit T'Shuvah – Residential Treatment and Prevention Center
www.beittshuvahla.org

What didn't we learn in Hebrew School about *T'Shuvah*? It's so important and complex that "I'm Sorry" is the easiest part! There are four key steps. First: **Chesbon HaNefesh**, accounting of the Soul. Good as well as bad deeds, because in our tradition, we build on the good. Second is, "I'm sorry," and "I've learned how not to repeat the harm I caused." This is the **New Response**, using our pain and guilt to repair the world and ourselves.

Third comes **Personal Restoration**, what Rabbi Joseph Soleveitchik calls **Taharah**, making clean. The Talmud says "if you're a gambler, break your dice!" Fourth is what Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz calls **Tikkun**, transforming our negative past deeds into acts of holiness. Dr. Bob and Bill W. transformed their drunkenness into a program that allows millions to function as happy, sober individuals. Harriet Rossetto transformed her despair and inability to follow through into starting and building *Beit T'Shuvah*.

We are all capable and spiritually fit enough to undertake this process. As the great Rabbi Hillel said, "If not now, when?"

*returning/renewal



Highlights from JACS and Jewish Healing Programs

New Book: *Jewish Sisters in Sobriety*

Compelling first-person memoirs from addicted Jewish women and their loved ones. Also provides recovery resources. November, 2007, 190 pages, \$15.00 JACS (Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons and Significant Others), a program of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, Inc. (JBFCs). For more information or to order, call 212.399.2685 ext 216 or visit www.jacsweb.org.

JACS Retreats and Spirituality Days, Teen and Young People's Network

JACS Retreats and Spirituality Days are gatherings that help adults and teens strengthen their recovery through Jewish traditions, rituals, service and community. Planned and led by JACS members, rabbis and recovery specialists to encourage sharing, celebrating life and providing practical tools. Significant others and family members are welcome. The Teen and Young People's Network is a support system for 18 to 26 year olds in recovery or in need of recovery,

providing weekend retreats, holiday celebrations, social activities, outreach and volunteer service. See postings on www.jacsweb.org or contact: Sharon Darack, JACS Program Director, 212 397-4197 ext. 226 or sdarack@jbfcs.org

Highlights from Healing Center Programs/Networks

- The Chemical Dependency Program of the Jewish Healing Network of Chicago;
- JCFS: The Living Room, JFS of Bergen County, NJ;
- The Shalom Center, Temple Chai, Phoenix, AZ;
- The Center for Life Enrichment, JF&CS, Scottsdale, AZ;
- and • JACS/JBFCs, NY, to name a few, offer a variety of Jewish programming that support recovery, including JACS 12-step groups, Recovery Holiday Programs, educational outreach, referral, retreats and Spirituality Days. Locate your local Jewish healing center at <http://ncjh.org/centers.php> or find a program through www.jacsweb.org.

If you or someone you know has a problem with alcohol or drugs call JACS at (212) 397-4197.



The **JBFCs National Center for Jewish Healing (NCJH)** helps communities better meet the spiritual needs of Jews living with illness and loss. Working closely with a network of Jewish healing centers and programs, nationally and internationally, we develop Jewish healing resources, programs and leadership. We also offer publications, consultation, training and referrals to community resources.

The **JBFCs JACS (Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons and Significant Others)** is the first Jewish peer-led recovery program for adults and teens. JACS serves Jews locally and internationally who suffer from addiction and co-dependence. JACS runs retreats, workshops, meetings, telephone and online discussion opportunities, a Speakers Bureau, and professional training to both support recovery and raise community awareness.

NCJH/JBFCs and JACS/ JBFCs are 501(c)3 organizations. All donations are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO MAKE A DONATION:

Visit: www.ncjh.org, www.jacsweb.org or www.jcprogrms.org

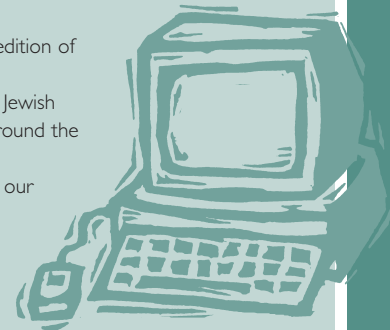
Call: NCJH at (212) 399-2320 ext. 209

JACS at (212) 397-4197

NEW ON-LINE RESOURCES!

VISIT WWW.NCJH.ORG FOR:

- Resources which accompany this edition of *The Outstretched Arm*
- Best Practices Sampler 2008 from Jewish Healing/Spiritual Care Programs around the country
- Publications order forms, including our newest book – *Jewish Spiritual Companion for Medical Treatments*
- Updated list of Healing Centers and other resources



VISIT WWW.JACSWEB.ORG FOR:

- An on-line library of resources
- Upcoming programs, retreats and educational opportunities
- Referral resources
- Publications and order forms, including new publications

As this publication contains a representation of God's name, please treat it with proper care and respect.

If you receive a duplicate of this newsletter, please send it along to a friend.

JBFCs Rita J. Kaplan Jewish Connections Programs

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