

Fell after 1 1/2 years

Posted by workingmyprogram - 14 Dec 2011 14:18

After about 1 1/2 years of sobriety, I just fell last night. The details aren't necessary, but I feel pretty bad about it. The worst part about it is, that I told my wife and I really don't think it was a good idea. As a matter of fact, my sponsor and close friend in SA told me that it wasn't. I just couldn't help myself, I felt so horrible that I couldn't even talk to her without crying, I was tired of living a lie and pretending that nothing was going on. But now I am seeing it was selfish. Because I am struggling with a disease doesn't mean that I have to make her suffer. But all in all, I know that it was just a slip and the solution lies in the steps, so I am going to get back up. I have no choice. I know that my marriage will heal over time as long as I continue on the path of recovery and keep making an honest and wholehearted effort to work on myself. If I was one of my own sponsors, I would tell myself not to worry about it, just to move forward and love yourself, forgive yourself, so that's what I need to do.

I guess I'm here because I just need some encouragement. I know Hashem still loves me, I abandoned the "mean and angry Higher Power" a while ago for one that loves me unconditionally. I also really love my wife so much and our relationship is the most important thing I have in my life. I'm tired of putting it at risk. So now I start over and humbly admit that I'm a sexaholic. And I also admit that I need the encouragement and support of not only my wife, myself, and Higher Power, but also of you guys. I hope there is someone out there that can see that just because you had a slip, it doesn't mean you lost everything. Nor do you have to go on a binge. I still love myself and I know that G-d still loves me. I am going to be good to myself and realize that the solution to my disease lies not in beating myself or having self-hatred, but rather in working the steps and loving myself. Do any of you guys relate to what I'm saying? Thank you for letting me share.

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years

Posted by Blind Beggar - 14 Dec 2011 14:33

I feel really bad for you. I am sober for 9 months and I would feel like such a loser if I fell now. It's one thing to fall after 9 weeks but 9 months is a long time and 18 months is forever. Bards will say fall small and we all know that a binge is worse than a fall. If you continue to work your program you will succeed. I know someone in SA who has been sober for about 15 years in blocks of a year or two - that is still an awesome achievement when you consider that without a program we usually last a few days or a week maximum.

I don't know anything about wives including my own so I'll leave that to the experts.

Hatzlocho!

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years
Posted by Dov - 14 Dec 2011 16:39

Dear workingmyprogram (whatever your real name is),

Yes I relate to what you wrote, as I have had many slips over the years. I agree with everything you wrote and empathize. I am powerless, too, like you.

So here is my feedback, be"H:

You are simply and painfully discovering that there are real consequences to our acting out. My wife taught me something about that. She helped me see that it is not the fact that she found out about what I did, that caused the damage to our marriage - but it is what I did *when I did it*, that caused the damage. The relationship was breached and poisoned when I acted out, whether she ever found out or not. I have shared this idea with many people since then.

So there really is very little reason not to share the truth with her. Yes, there is a reason not to...but it is a smaller reason that I always believed. Perspective is important here, as usual. My having acted out so eclipses the issue of getting caught, that it's not even funny.

That is a very important attitude for me to have. It is part of my relationship with G-d and my own conscience. If my wife being unhappy with me is too important to me, it means that I am not taking the seriousness of my acting out *seriously* enough. This is an important thing to learn, and now is the time.

I have a relationship with my G-d, and my recovery is a huge part of it. My sobriety is like breathing and any other aspect of my physical health - it affects everything. And that relationship with my very own Eternal Best Friend comes *before* the one I have with my wife.

And it comes **far** before the one I have with my sponsor and any guys in recovery, yidden, or anybody else. My spouse is my partner in this trip, and nobody else is. I need to make it as real as my recovery is.

So, *should* you have told your wife? I do not pretend to know the answer. But I *will* suggest that your sobriety and recovery is inexorably tied to her, whether you like it, or not. Would there be no real painful consequences to our acting out - just our own 'mental' or 'personal' ones - then I'd venture to say that we would eventually not take sobriety seriously, at all!

So I cannot cry for you. You are actually very fortunate that **you have what to lose**, here in this life. That is a **huge** gift. So many guys have - or *imagine* that they have - nothing to lose...and they do not often get sober, R"l. A life wasted, if you ask me...

You are obviously a decent, good man, and walking the uphill path of recovery says a **lot** about you. It also says a lot about your marriage, so far, and about your wife who loves you so much. I sincerely hope you keep walking it.

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years
Posted by obormottel - 14 Dec 2011 17:49

Dear friend,

you and I know that feeling down after a fall is tachabulois haYetzer, and while there should be a process of "charoto, azivas hacheit, and kabolo al l'habo" it must be limited to the three minutes we spend saying tachanun (or so:)

However, you got the "vidui" part accomplished, and according to Rambam at least, that's the entire tshuvo, so hold your head up and move forward.

Dov pretty much said it: thank G-d you have what to lose and to ache about, otherwise so many of us never realize we live in dungeon.

Keep working the program, and thanks so much for sharing: it allowed me to glimpse into my own feelings in case I fall, Hashem yishmereinu, and into my own relationship with my wife.

Hatzlocho.

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years
Posted by workingmyprogram - 14 Dec 2011 20:30

Thank you. I wrote that post this morning at about 5:30 am after waking up from a nightmare. I spoke to my wife about some more and she said that she still loves me, she just needs me to NOT fall apart right now. I had many good opportunities to act out today and thanks G-d I didnt. I do feel that the answer to recovery lie in the steps, and that the steps can't really be fulfilled unless there is a foundation of self love. After all, if I don't love myself I cant imagine a higher power that loves me, and then how could I take step 3, where I give everything over to his care? So I am working on self love and using this as an opportunity to NOT beat myself up, as I would have done in the past. Part of my problem is that I was never taught that you can be loved without being perfect. For me being perfect=being loved. Well now in recovery I get the chance to feel differently. I am still a good person and still someone who is deserving of love, despite my behaviors yesterday. This morning I looked at my 3 year old son in the car and thought to myself how much I loved him. And then I asked myself if he was perfect. The answer is obviously no. So how can I love him? Because love sees past imperfections. That's why they say love is blind. It's ego and lust that see imperfections and won't let us love that which isnt perfect. So today, in recovery, I get an amazing opportunity to practice this new belief that was given to me as a gift from my HP, to love and forgive myself despite my imperfections. It seems to me that all the beating ourselves up does is make us feel so down and ashamed that we need to beat ourselves up to feel better. I know that I'm still a good person, as good now as I was a day ago. And I will continue to love myself and my Higher Power, who is my one true judge and understands exactly what I'm going through.

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years
Posted by kidushashem - 14 Dec 2011 21:04

Hi my friend,

I just want to add to everything here that regardless of whether you should/shouldn't have told your wife, now that you did, you will gain from it. I've seen posts from many people who said that when they told their wives it was terrible, but after going through some recovery, everything got so much better.

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years
Posted by Dov - 14 Dec 2011 21:58

[workingmyprogram wrote on 14 Dec 2011 20:30:](#)

After all, if I don't love myself I can't imagine a higher power that loves me, and then how could I take step 3, where I give everything over to his care? So I am working on self love and using this as an opportunity to NOT beat myself up, as I would have done in the past. Part of my problem is that I was never taught that you can be loved without being perfect.

I get 99% of what you write - except one part: the need to love yourself. I just do not get it. I do not see any value in loving myself - only in admitting that G-d could love me. And to me, fully accepting the fact that I am lovable, has nothing to do with whether I love myself.

The fact that I know that were I to be in danger of dying, I'd do anything, anything to save myself - is proof that I do, in fact have self-love. That is proof enough.

For me, any more of that will make my relationship with my G-d narcissistic. In other words, I do not need to know that He thinks I am beautiful and wonderful - I need to know that He sees great value in me. That He loves me and is willing to care for me totally. Why that is, I feel is **His** business, not mine.

NU. A different perspective is nice to share, no?

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years
Posted by Dov - 14 Dec 2011 22:04

Just more doubling!

For me, the fact that He made the world for me is proof that He loves me. Why He chooses to

love me is none of my business and I will never understand what He sees in me. This is the meaning of what Chaza"l say that a love that is dependent upon a factor will fail. But a love that is not dependent on a factor will last forever. The second kind is certainly G-d's love for *me*. It does not make sense to us *at all* , should not make sense at all, and does not need to make sense to any person - least of all, to me.

That's how I see it so far, and things are be"H, OK.

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years
Posted by workingmyprogram - 15 Dec 2011 00:40

dov, i appreciate your perspective and you could very well be right, but I have to say that I disagree with you. I used to see an amazing therapist who was an old holocaust survivor. I regard him as a true chacham, someone who apparently the Square Rebbe would go to for advice. He told me 2 things about self love: 1) that your love for yourself needs to be unconditional. And 2) that you need to have a love affair with G-d, other people, and yourself. Since then I have done a lot of research regarding self love and it seems that according to many experts, Dr Twerski included, low self esteem is the root of all addiction. To quote "I have never met a good alcoholic with good self esteem" Now you might argue that having good self esteem and having self love are two different things, but you would be hard pressed to prove that point.

Another way to view it is follows: I dont know if you have children, but lets say you did. When you look at your child I'm sure you feel love. Why? Because you are focusing on the good in him and love is nothing but a true recognition of the good in others. Seeing the G-dliness in others. So if that's true, than how can you not love yourself? If you dont, its becuae you have a false view of yourself, one in which you are not seeing your good qualities, because if you did, self love would be the result. So in a sense, self love is just the natural by product that comes out when you accept the reality of yourself: that you are a beautiful neshama, created betzelem Elokim!

Last but not least, the few times that I have felt self love, I felt more connected to Hashem then ever before.

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years

Posted by Dov - 15 Dec 2011 05:11

OK, so it is important to you, fine.

I see my ikkar self love as this: my incredibly powerful will to survive. And I learned that from my mother - also a Holocaust survivor.

I **hated** myself in active addiction. It took me a year and a half *sober and working the steps* (always imperfectly) till I noticed that when i saw my face in a bathroom mirror (calm down, chassidim! Yes, a mirror!) I discovered to my shock - that i was not disgusted! I was always a bit hesitant to look into my own eyes - disgusted at who I was and what I had seen and where I had been...but of all things, guess what got me to feel OK seeing my own face? Working my 4th step! *Completely unplanned, soon after I started facing all my character defects, there was a change inside me.* I started to accept that if I had all these defects of character - **didn't G-d know that all along?** Was He stupid - and only loved me because His "love was blind"? Was He somehow 'unaware' of the limitations I had, that *I* had finally faced?

Can't be. He watched me do everything, saw the insides of my heart as much as I ever saw the actions I was doing, from the day I was born...ho'odom yir'oh l'einayim, *vaHashem yir'oh laleivov.*

I realized that He must know all my ugliness and weakness, too! And yet I knew that He led me to recovery even though I was masturbating my brains out! He must have loved me enough *even while I was masturabting* to lead me to recovery **through the masturbation itself!** He used it as a tool to help me - the pain of it brought me to recovery. Wow.

If I needed self-esteem in order to get sober, then i'd never have made it to that year and a half mark to do my 4th step, in the first place! I had to stay sober by not giving up on myself, by believing that I was too young to die.

So is this "loving myself" or "working on my self-esteem"? I think not. It is **accepting myself**, that's all.

So I have no faith at all that self-esteem problems are 'the root of addiction'. Personally, I think immaturity and self-absorption are far nearer the mark. And I believe that Pride - the silly expectation that such a great specimen as myself **ought** to be near-perfect (is there a greater pride than *that* mishega'as?) - is far, far more commonly the cause of depression for people like us than "poor self-esteem" is? So actually, the **last** thing i need is to pump myself up! *He* does a far better job of that that I can, anyhow...no worries.

I'd rather let go of myself, my self-esteem, and my worries, start being at least a *shtik'le* 'G-d's man, and leave the pumping up of my self-concept to Him, on *His* schedule and not on mine! Drop it. And He *does* pump me up - by making this life great to live; to know I am part of His great Plan, and He helps me to get **right sized** - not *bigger* nor *prettier*.

Semantics? Nahh.

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years
Posted by Blind Beggar - 15 Dec 2011 10:24

Thanks Dov for an(other) amazing post.

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years
Posted by workingmyprogram - 16 Dec 2011 15:55

Dov,

I also agree that you don't need self esteem to be physically sober. Nor do you really need any of the steps. After all, there are a lot of dry drinks out there who may have been physically sober for years but are still a mess. My favorite line out of the white book is written by Roy K (the founder if SA). he explains that despite having years of physical sobriety he was still a rageaholic. It was then that he realized that "sober is not well". So granted you may be able to be "sober" without self esteem, but I doubt you can be "well". So it's this "wellness" that I'm saying requires self esteem in order to achieve. Would you agree that an essential aspect of

"wellness" is to be able to fulfill the mitzvah of loving others as yourself? What about loving Hashem with all you heart? What about serving Hashem out of joy? Let s assume you concede these are all a part of what a Jew would consider to be a healthy sobriety, or as we're referring to it "wellness". Now not to put you on the spot, but have you been able to fulfill these three ideals properly despite not loving yourself? Do you think that you would be able to better fulfill these ideals if you had self love? After all, many people claim that they were not able to love others until they learned to love themselves.

I understand that the derech of twelve step groups is to essentially flatten ourselves, and I'm not saying that leveling pride is not necessary, after all we all have a yetzer harrah that needs to be put in check. But we also have a yetzer tov, a neshamah created Betzelem Elokim. And as many jewish wise men have acknlowged, including rav nachman (see the book azamrah) as well rav Twersky, recognizing and bulding up this beautiful part of us will not lead us to sin, but rather away from it. So I dont see how acknowledging and appreciating this fact is gaavah, or "pumping ourselves up". I can almost guarantee that the gaavah that was responsible for your previous acting out was a gaavah generated by the yetzer harrah, the opposite of what I've been talking about until now. And you might find if you take a look at it that this gaavah was produced as a compensation method for your low feelings of self worth. I know that's been the case for me and many others who I've spoken too (it only took 20 years and tens of thousands of dollars in therapy bills to figure this out, lol). So I really think there is no reason for us to be scared that if we feel self self love that we will become Baalei gaavah and go back to acting out. Rather we might find the opposite to be true, that self love is actually killing the gaavah. Not only that, but once we get in touch with the power of our neshama, we might even feel a tremendous Hakaros Hatov to Hashem for creating us with such a powerful tool to get closer to him.

It seems that the yetzer will concede anything to us, even let us be sober, but when it comes to being sober AND having self esteem, that's where he puts his foot down. He knows that this combination will really put him out for the count, and he'll do anything to prevent it. I think that's why it has become so fashionable to walk into a 12 step meeting and hear so many people with sobriety spend the meeting beating themselves up. What's happening is that they are rightfully viewing gaavah as having led them down the path of addiction, and by beating themselves up they are putting their gaavah in it's place. But the problem is that it seems to go beyond just squashing their gaavah, but they end up squashing their good parts too. To the point that they begin identifying themselves with their shortcomings and can become blinded to the beauty of their nashama, their tzelem Elokim. What we need to realize is that the gaavah that caused us to do aveiras has nothing to do with self love, and in fact if we would have had self love we never would have had that gaava to begin with because all gaavah is a method to overcompensate for feelings of low self worth. So let's not fall into the yetzer's trap and get confused when we see the big book talk about leveling our pride and admitting our shortcomings, this in no way means that we can't love ourselves by recognizing the positive within us. Self love and gaavah are two completely different things, one being good and constructive and the other being the opposite!

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years

Posted by gibbor120 - 16 Dec 2011 18:41

WMP and dov, I agree with both of you! I'm still working on my understanding of this, but here's the way I see it right now.

I think you guys are indeed arguing semantics. Dr sorotzkin says essentially exactly what WMP is saying. People with low self-esteem also have as a counterbalance a feeling of superiority. He illustrates this with a case he had of a fellow who had the lowest self-esteem he's ever seen. One day the patient admitted that he sometimes feels greater than G-d. The Dr wasn't surprised in the least. The lowest self-esteem needs a counter balance of the greatest feelings of grandiosity.

As far as what dov writes about accepting himself and realizing that G-d loves him no matter what. That is the foundation of **true** self-esteem. I have seen this written by (I think) R Twerski and R Zelig Pliskin. My true value is in the fact that Hashem created me, not in what I can do. I think I am finally starting to understand it and I think that's what dov is talking about.

If my self esteem comes from the fact that I always get up on time for shul, what if I'm late one day. If it's because I'm a great basketball player, what if I have a bad game? If it's because I'm a great baal tefillah, what if I mess up a tune? If it's because I'm smart, what if I meet someone smarter than me?

It's this type of false self-esteem that creates pride (the kind dov is weary of). We love ourselves because of x, y, or z. We try to be better to make ourselves **feel** better. The driving force is really that we feel awful about ourselves (low self-esteem). Once we have self-acceptance (what dov mentioned) we can look at ourselves honestly and not feel prideful about our achievements (or awful about our failures). When we don't accept ourselves, we don't accept our achievements either, so we are driven to achieve more... to boost our self-esteem, but it doesn't work. We need to accept ourselves "just the way we are", then *and only then* do we have a shot at **true** self-esteem.

So I think you are both right... that's my 2 cents anyway.

BTW I highly recommend all of Dr Sorotzkins stuff. You can find it here drsorotzkin.com/ . The

stuff on perfectionism is especially relevant to this discussion.

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years
Posted by workingmyprogram - 18 Dec 2011 08:06

I also love Dr Sorotzkis stuff. Rabbi Yiroel Roll is also very in tune with the need to have self esteem. His book Serenity is all about this. Highly recommended. Remember, we're not shooting for sobriety, because as Roy K says "Sober is not well", what were shooting for is wellness, and this requires self esteem.

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Re: Fell after 1 1/2 years
Posted by YairA - 20 Dec 2011 06:18

Just a side point.. Baruch Hashem you told your wife. Maybe now you think it was a bad idea or you would have rather not, but the bottom line is that you did. Meaning, Hashem wants you in the exact situation you are in right now for whatever reason. We may not know why, but it is our job to believe that it is from Hashem's loving guiding hand and everything will be for the best. Ein od Milvado.

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