

How can I make this Ellul different from every other Ellul?

Posted by boruch - 28 Aug 2009 12:32

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I was addicted to sexual thoughts, fantasy, pornography and masturbation. Ellul after Ellul I would every year launch a full scale attack on my addiction and year after year sooner or later I fell and failed. There were times I stopped in Ellul and did not even make it through Ellul. I would stop again for Rosh Hashana and sometimes not make it through aseres yemei teshuva to Yom Kippur. I would stop on Yom Kippur and not make it through Succos. Sometimes I did not even start getting stopped until Rosh Hashana came around. Sometimes I held out from sometime in Ellul for a month or even a little more. But one way or another, come Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan I was back again to my addiction as if Ellul had never come.

I had tried mussar seforim. Shaarei Teshuva, Chovos Halevovos, Maalos Hamiddos, Orchos Tzaddikim, Sefer Charedim, Mesilas Yeshorim, Yesod Veshoreish Ho'avoda, Nefesh HaChaim, Cheshbon Hanefesh and Sifrei Maharal. I learned these seforim with absolute desperation and determination and tried to implement them and follow their instructions but always I failed to get anything that would last beyond Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan. I listened to HoRav Avigdor Miller's tapes and learned his seforim. I had a Rebbe who gave excellent mussar and I almost never missed any of his Shiurim. I cried out to Hahsem every Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and I was absolutely determined to make that year the last of my addiction but all to no apparent avail.

Then on January 20th of this year I posted my teshuva here on GUE. Bechasdei Hashem I have been sexually sober, one day at a time, since then. What did I find in GUE that I did not find in all the mussar seforim?

Even more puzzling, 10 days after I joined GUE, I joined a face to face meeting of Sexaholics Anonymous (SA). It was there that I discovered not just how to avoid pornography and masturbation but how to recover from fantasy and lust to the extent that on a daily basis they no longer interest me at all. Through SA's 12-Step program I was able to join Overeaters Anonymous (OA) and lose 40 lb in 4 months. Through SA's 12-Step program I was able to join Debtors Anonymous (DA) and today for the first time in over 20 years of marriage my wife and I have stopped borrowing money, we have a monthly spending plan that is in the Black for three months and we have stopped incurring overdraft fees after having racked up over a thousand dollars in overdraft fees in the year before we began our recovery.

What did I find through SA, OA and DA that I did not find in all the mussar seforim?

Looking back, I now realize that *what* I had found through GUE, SA, OA and DA was *everything I had learned in the mussar seforim that I had been unable to get to work against my addiction*. So *why* did it take GUE, SA, OA and DA for me to discover it?

The question of "Torah vs Steps" has been much discussed on this forum. At certain points I have added my own two cents to those discussions. I now believe from my own experience and from my experience working with other Frum Jews that there is no "Torah vs Steps" at all.

Rav Avigdor Miller Zt"l was once asked whether it was OK to read Dale Carnegie's "How to win friends and influence people". He asked in return whether it was OK to read a Driver's manual.

How about AA's 12 Step program? At face value, unlike a Driver's Manual and unlike Carnegie's book, neither of which deal with religion, the AA/SA program is about religion. Here are some quotes from Alcoholics Anonymous literature that seem to prove that the program is religious (bold lettering mine):

[AA p.9, Bill's Story \]](#)

[They had told of a simple \[b\]religious\[/b\] idea and a practical program of action.\[/quote\]](#)

[\[quote= wrote:](#)

Of necessity there will have to be discussion of matters medical, psychiatric, social, and **religious**.

[\[quote="12&12 p.16, Foreword\]](#)

The basic principles of A.A., as they are known today, were borrowed mainly from the fields of [b]religion[/b] and medicine[/quote]

So at first sight it does seem that AA/SA is a religious approach which opens up the question of "Torah vs. Steps".

However a closer look at the AA program shows that it has no opinions at all on the behavior of the non-addict. That makes all in the difference in the World and we will soon see why.

There is a very striking example of AAs avoidance of judgment of non-alcoholic behavior. There have been various religious and moral movements that have encouraged abstinence from alcohol for all. AA is not one of them. AA has always avoided any opinion on drinking for non-alcoholics. AA has only said that the real alcoholic has to abstain totally. Why this difference? If it is moral for non-alcoholics to drink why is it not moral for real alcoholics to drink?

Of course that is a trick question. AA does not judge the [i]morality[/i] of the real alcoholic drinking. AA talks about *recovery* and says that, moral or not, the real alcoholic cannot stay sober if he drinks again.

AA states:

[AA xiii, Foreword to First Edition\]](#)

[To show other alcoholics \[i\]precisely how we have recovered\[/i\] is the main purpose of this book.\[/quote\]](#)

[Alcoholics Anonymous is not about \[i\]morality\[/i\] it is about \[i\]recovery\[/i\], it is about what works to keep the alcoholic sober.](#)

[If so, how does religion get involved? The answer appears frequently in AA literature. AA says that selfishness and self-centered behavior is what condemns the addict to relapse. Most people are neither 100% selfish nor 100% idealistic. Most people are somewhere in between.](#)

An addict, however, who indulges in outright selfishness, even if only some of the time, will, sooner or later, as much as most of the time he knows that he absolutely cannot afford to relapse, in a moment of emotional pain and crisis, he will be unable to distinguish true from false and he will go right back to his drug and relapse totally. That is the problem of addiction.

What is AA's solution? The addict must avoid selfishness at all costs and instead of looking to satisfy his own self-will he must [i]constantly[/i] seek G-d's will. That way, crisis or no crisis, he will never get confused and drink again. One thing the addict knows once he has accepted AA's prescription is that G-d does not want addicts to go back to their drug. If an addict wants to recover he must constantly seek G-d's will, and of course constantly seeking G-d's will is very religious, that's what the Mesilas Yeshorim in Perek 18 calls Chasidus. That's where AA is religious.

This begins in AA's third Step

[quote= wrote:

we were at step three... Selfishness--self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles...

First of all, we had to quit playing God. It didn't work. Next, we decided that hereafter in this drama of life, God was going to be our Director. He is the Principal; we are His agents.

Avoiding selfishness continues on a full-time basis in AA's tenth step

AA p 84 Into Action]

This... brings us to Step Ten... Our next function is to grow in understanding and effectiveness. [b]This is not an overnight matter. It should continue for our lifetime. Continue to watch for selfishness[/b][/quote]

[And living with G-d as the Boss every moment of the day comes to full fruition in AA's eleventh step](#)

[\[quote= wrote:](#)

Step Eleven... We **constantly** remind ourselves we are no longer running the show

How about selfishness for the non-alcoholic? Just like drinking for the non-alcoholic is no concern of AA, so too with selfishness. Most non-alcoholics will take a few drinks and then stop and nothing terrible will happen. So too with selfishness. Most people are disciplined and trained to some extent. Even in their more selfish moments non-alcoholics will generally behave within reason, and even if in selfish moments they behave badly they will not spin out of control in a self-destructive cycle. As long as these non-addicts can use their more idealistic moments to improve they can become very religious and very good people.

Not so the addict. The experience of millions of addicts who have adopted the AA program is that living with selfishness even part of the time is a recipe for certain relapse and assured disaster. The experience of millions of addicts is that recovery can only be achieved by shifting to G-d's will instead of self-will.

That's nothing to do with religion it is simply a fact of addiction and recovery. That's a fact that I never knew when I learned the musar seforim. Yes, I knew all about Chasidus of the Mesilas Yeshorim. But I always thought that before I worry about Chasidus in perek 18 of Mesilas Yeshorim I first have to get Zehirus in perek 2 of Mesilas Yeshorim and avoid the outright aveiros I am doing in my addiction. Meantime I was still operating on selfishness and I was doomed to relapse repeatedly. And all the while I was thinking, First things first, first keep Shulchan Oruch then get to midas Chasidus. I never realized that was all very true and fine for the non-addict, but for the addict it was a sentence to a lifetime of addiction.

Until bechasdei Hashem I found the AA program which taught me that if I wanted to avoid relapse, for practical purposes I have to replace self-will with G-d's will. In teaching me that key fact, the AA/SA program is exactly like a Driver's manual or a Carnegie book. It is *information* about *addiction*, not *opinion* on *religion*.

So this Ellul I know that in order to keep from addiction I have to especially focus on what the musar seforim say about chasidus because if it's not about being mamlich Hashem to the utmost of my ability today I am in danger of relapse. That's a hachono to Rosh Hashono and a kabolos ol malchus shomayim that I never knew would not only save me from my addiction but give me the potential to become the oved Hashem I always wanted to be.

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Re: How can I make this Ellul different from every other Ellul?  
Posted by cleareyes613@gmail.com - 28 Aug 2009 14:50

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Boruch - great title, great post. You have tremendous insight with this addiction. Please share with us some more!!!

I had the same elul experiences as long as I can remember. Sometimes I would start earlier, sometimes later. Fall before Rosh Hashanna, after Rosh Hashanna, before Yom Kipper. I don't know if I ever made it to Succos. But this Elul is already different. Why? Because I have GYE. My Elul is already different. But the real answer to your question is another question. "How can I make this Tishrei different than every other Tishrei?" (Isn't that the point of Elul?) We need to stick with cure. I guarantee anyone who stays with GYE thru Tishrei past yom kippur will experience the elul they always wanted and more importantly have the year and become the person they always wanted!!

Hatzlacha to all. Let's all do this together and elevate this experience to an even higher level. Kisei Hakovod here we come!!!!!!

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Re: How can I make this Ellul different from every other Ellul?  
Posted by boruch - 28 Aug 2009 16:21

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[cleareyes613 wrote on 28 Aug 2009 14:50:](#)

Please share with us some more!!!

Cleareyes,

Thank you for your kind words of chizzuk. The truth is that there is more. The single yesod of the whole AA/SA program is replacing G-d's will for self-will. But the question becomes how to make this happen.

One possibility that would seem to come to mind would be, for example, working the sefer Mesilas Yeshorim from the hakdomo, through perakim 1-18. But there is a serious problem with that.

The Mesilas Yeshorim writes that everyone can get to Nekiyus - cleanliness from aveiros but Perishus is not for everyone, never mind Chasidus. He was writing for Yidden in his dor who were far more religious than Yidden in ours. More problematically he was writing for non-addicts. Perishus on *anything* can be an almost insurmountable challenge for any addict. An addict in active addiction is often in full instant-gratification mode on all enjoyments, even those on which he is not fully addicted. So if Perishus is difficult for the non-addict, it is not too hard to imagine how difficult it would be for an addict. For all but a select few it is probably close to impossible for the addict to use Mesilas Yeshorim to get to Chasidus.

So what we would really need is a crash course on the Chasidus of the Mesilas Yeshorim for addicts. This may sound slightly similar to the goal of the Chasidus of the Baal Shem, to have a basic form of Chasidus that works for the hammon am, for the most poshute yid. The problem is that we need a Chasidus that is *both* a **practical program of action** for the guf and *also* a program of **lachsoy machshovos** for the *neshomo* in which the ikar is the simple and essential "All for the Boss". And this program has to be something that even an addict could implement.

When I first came onto GUE back in January of this year I was originally working with Rabbenu Yona Shaarei Teshuva and various maamorei Chazal. At that point I was totally flying blind on both *what* to stop (I thought I needed to stop the pornography and masturbation but had no concept that the real addiction was the lust) and *how* to stop (I thought it was all about determination and willpower). I did not even have the first understanding of addiction itself. All I knew was that I had used everything at my disposal that I knew how and that I was desperately being mispallel that I should succeed for life (or at least until 120 as I wrote then).

Today I have come to believe that the Eibishter saw how clueless I was and He saw that

somewhere within me there was a pintele Yid trying to be chozer bitshuva to ovinu shebashomayim. I have come to believe that berov rachamov vechasodov He chose me, not because I deserve it but because He had rachmonos on me to allow me to put the 36 years of my addiction to good use by sharing my story with others.

I have come to believe that is also why He directed me lemaalo miderech hateva with multiple "coincidences" to a very specific SA group at a very specific period of their growth which enabled me to share a system of adopting a very simple, practical and basic level of Chasidus - so simple and basic that even a goyyishe shikker could get started with in just 4 weeks. No previous religious background, knowledge or idealism required, no prior emuna required, in fact nothing at all required except a determination to go to any length to get sober.

Even greater than the chesed Hashem has done for my eating and financial problems and even more critical to my recovery is this ability Hashem gave me to share with fellow addicts a foolproof system for addiction-free living that takes nothing more than a readiness to do whatever it takes. That's what I got from the 12 Steps of SA.

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Re: How can I make this Ellul different from every other Ellul?  
Posted by hoping - 28 Aug 2009 16:39

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This is absolutely the most amazing, on the mark post that I have read in a long time. Thank You Boruch!

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Re: How can I make this Ellul different from every other Ellul?  
Posted by Pintele Yid - 28 Aug 2009 17:29

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[boruch wrote on 28 Aug 2009 12:32:](#)

So this Ellul I know that in order to keep from addiction I have to especially focus on what the musar seforim say about chasidus because if it's not about being mamlich Hashem to the utmost of my ability today I am in danger of relapse. That's a hachono to Rosh Hashono and a

kabolos ol malchus shomayim that I never knew would not only save me from my addiction but give me the potential to become the oved Hashem I always wanted to be.

Heiliga Boruch,

I am getting a feeling from your post that an addict who has successfully developed a crystal clear understanding of the path ahead, and has implemented this understanding, has a much stronger Keshar with Hakodosh Boruch Hu then a non-addict can ever achieve.

This might be the meeting of Bamokom Shababeilu Tshuva Oimdim.....

Pintele Yid

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Re: How can I make this Ellul different from every other Ellul?  
Posted by the.guard - 29 Aug 2009 19:07

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**ACE!**

(Another Chizuk E-mail)

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