

Giving up self control or strengthening it

Posted by DavidT - 08 Jan 2020 15:33

It seems that one of the main tools for fighting addiction is giving up self-control and admitting that we are powerless. But when it comes to dealing with temptations the main goal is to build self-control...

There are a few ways to look at this:

?1- Addiction and regular lust sufferers are 2 different (maybe opposite?) things. If that's the case, how can one differentiate and know what he or his friend is struggling with?

2- Addiction has many levels and each level needs to be dealt with differently.

3- Giving up self control means, to realize that without G-D we have no control, but we still have bechira and with G-D's help we can strengthen our self control.

Any insights on this? It's very important as we're trying to help ourselves and others to know how to identify struggles and how to work on them.

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it

Posted by Gevura Shebyesod - 08 Jan 2020 15:45

As I (not a 12-stepper) understand it, powerlessness does not mean giving up self-control or Bechira, it means giving up the expectation of results. We still have to make the proper choices, the results however are not in our control.

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by MenachemGYE - 09 Jan 2020 00:15

1- Addiction and regular lust sufferers are 2 different (maybe opposite?) things.

Yes, it's very different. The concept of powerlessness does not apply to non-addicts. And even for addicts, it is only included in the 12 step model of recovery. SMART recovery for example has a different approach.

If that's the case, how can one differentiate and know what he or his friend is struggling with?

Since one of the signs of an addiction is a inability to stop (although it's not a ????? ?????), it makes sense to first try standard methods of stopping. If it works - GREAT! And if it's going nowhere, and the member is ready to try group support, then he'll learn about powerlessness when he joins a 12 step program.

3- Giving up self control means, to realize that without G-D we have no control, but we still have bechira and with G-D's help we can strengthen our self control.

Here's a likkut of definitions of the concept:

Dov [put it this way](#):

Powerlessness simply means that I really, really stink at living without acting out my lust. More to the point, it means that I am really bad at using and enjoying lust. I feel sure I can do it, so I keep trying - but when I do, important areas of my life eventually get screwed up, and I get miserable. My years of sincerely trying to use lust without it ruining my mind, relationships and life, and all that while 'fighting it to finally quit!', prove to me that when I do partake and try to enjoy it, it takes over my day, I take risks, lose self respect and my relationships become progressively uglier.

That's why I finally had to get sober. Not because I have self-will to quit or yir'as Shomayim. No. It was simply because doing it my way was too big a mess.

If I (Dov) could successfully enjoy using porn and acting out my sexual fantasies, I would. Probably so would most guys who are stuck in habitual masturbation and porn use - though they hate admitting it and perhaps consider it apikorsus. Of course, that does not make it untrue... I will not lie to you or to Hashem or to myself - my years of trying to control and enjoy it prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that I feel I need it. That I must have it. That I must control and enjoy it. That I must tame it. But I cannot. For whenever I have tried to, it messed up every aspect of my life more and more. So apparently I do not have power over my lust. I can't use it successfully. That's "Powerless". And it feels pretty sad. Incredibly sad, actually.

In another place [he wrote](#):

I feel that applying 12 steps and some of the 12 step concepts to non-addicts twists both realities, mixing falsehoods into yiddishkeit by distorting yetzer hora/avodas Hashem into feel-good messages, and also makes a mockery of recovery by pretending that it is Torah when it is in reality only derech eretz and about self-honesty.

And in another Q&A on the site it has the following:

Someone wrote:

The 12-Steps speak about how we are powerless. This seems to me to be ANT-TORAH!! It may SEEM like we're powerless, and it may be EXTREMELY difficult (like it is for me) but powerless?? The very first mussar shmooze in the Torah was given by the MASTER HIMSELF to Kayin. Hashem said to him in a few short words - Kayin, you can do it if you WANT TO - I'm not saying it's easy, BUT YOU CAN DO IT. You CAN overcome this.

GYE Responds:

You are asking a good question, but it's based on a common misconception about the concept of Powerless.

Powerless doesn't mean you **can't do anything about it**. Powerless simply means that you can't change the fact you are an addict, in the same way that someone with diabetes can't change that fact either.

Does this mean a person with diabetes is doomed to die? No! But instead of fighting **diabetes**, he needs to learn what WORKS for a diabetic!

So again to sum up: Powerless is referring to the disease and **not** to the person's ability to help themselves.

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by MenachemGYE - 09 Jan 2020 00:29

Another reason to be cautious before promoting the concept of powerlessness (outside the context of a live 12 step meeting) is that it's hard to digest for a frum yid, it's controversial and sometimes misunderstood.

In the NY times bestseller, Unbroken Brain, recovering addict Maia Szalavitz writes:

Further, the 12-step idea of powerlessness is disempowering. Research [W. R. Miller et al., "What Predicts Relapse? Prospective Testing of Antecedent Models," supplement, Addiction 91 (December 1996): S155–72.] shows that the more someone believes in the idea that addiction is a disease over which he is powerless, the worse and more frequent a person's relapses tend to be. While some people can interpret "being powerless" in a benign way, others decide that it means they have no control not just over drugs but also over multiple spheres in their lives...

And [recently](#), pickamoniker, one of our esteemed members here on GYE wrote:

I have been in SA for a number of years, and there is a big thing there (and here to some extent) of being "powerless" over the addiction. Now I don't pretend to know what each individual means when using that word, but for me it always meant that I have no control over the addiction and was a subtle way of me abdicating responsibility for my own sobriety (maybe recovery too). What this led to is when the going got tough, and I mean really tough, like yesterday, it was one additional factor in me "giving in". Now to be clear, I am not blaming SA, GYE or anyone else for my addiction, slow recovery or anything else. My recovery is solely my responsibility. If something is not working for me it is my responsibility to identify that thing and change my approach if necessary. However the fact is that I did get "comfortable" in my cycle of addiction for a long time and I did use the "excuse" of being powerless as part of that cycle.

I now believe that difficult as it is to remain sober (and believe me, I am not underestimating the difficulty that it can present), it is my choice whether I want to be sober or not and it is my responsibility (to myself, not to anyone else) to take the necessary actions to implement that decision. I'm not for one second saying that this means I will never fall again. Quite the opposite, I have no idea whether I will or will not. It simply means that if I want to then it is possible and doable; whether I actually do it in the end or not is not something I can tell in advance (and maybe that is what is meant by being powerless, but it's not the message I got). It's a little bit like running a marathon (or maybe triathlon, iron man?). If I chose to run a marathon this time next year, no doubt it is doable. It would be difficult to train for, and there is a good chance I would give up half way through. But it is an achievable goal should it be something I choose to do. Of course I can't just turn up and expect to run the marathon without training. I would need to put in concerted and regular effort and go through a whole lot of pain. But to me to say I am "powerless" over the process would simply not be helpful (or true) for me.

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by sbj - 09 Jan 2020 03:39

From my experience I can say it pays to disregard the notion that addiction is a sickness and we're therefor 'powerless' over our actions, and doomed for life with this 'disease'. Newer, science backed approaches which are in line with the Torah view are picking up steam here. Why not get acquainted with them? There are other very helpful resources available, you can PM me for details.

An approach of responsibility and openness to explore will imho get you much farther than staying within the limits of a negative, dis-empowering approach. Using logic and experiment, and depend on Heavenly assistance FOR THAT, may prove more fruitful than blindly following outdated - although widespread & still going strong - beliefs.

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by Hashem Help Me - 09 Jan 2020 03:59

[sbj wrote on 09 Jan 2020 03:39:](#)

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by DavidT - 09 Jan 2020 14:57

[sbj wrote on 09 Jan 2020 03:39:](#)

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You bring out an interesting point but if I may I will rephrase it on a more realistic way.

The fact that addiction is a sickness has been studied and proven by the medical world and many torah authorities & scholars too. According to the torah way it's called a sickness of the soul "*Chole Hanefesh*".

What is problematic is when people diagnose and label themselves as an addict, especially when they want to use this as an excuse not to try to overcome their urges.

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by MenachemGYE - 09 Jan 2020 21:46

DavidT, not all experts agree though... see this link for
example: <http://www.thecleanslate.org/addiction-is-not-a-disease-quotes-from-experts/>

The Rambam in Hilchos Deios (1:1-2) mentions the concept of ??? ???? but in a way that it applies to those any problematic midos (he gives an example of tayva, but also of anger, greed, cruelty etc.) and he also mentions that it *can be cured*. See also Sharei Teshuva (2:3), and Rabbeinu bechayei, Kad Hakemach (Chilul Hashem), where he uses the illness metaphor for any aveira, and then describes the cure. So I don't think such sources are relevant.

Here's a comprehensive review by one of the foremost experts on the topic:

The physiological effects of tolerance and withdrawal as well as science and society's movement away from an explanation of addiction as morally reprehensible behavior have led to addictions being understood within a medical model. This perspective has also been promoted in the materials describing the 12 steps and 12 traditions of AA that talk about the disease of alcoholism, which they liken to a chronic allergic reaction (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1952).

Others believe alcoholism is a disease that is not completely physiologically based (Miller & Kurtz, 1994; Sheehan & Owen, 1999). The disease model has been instrumental in shifting society's view of alcohol dependence from one of moral deviance and sinful behavior to one that promotes understanding and treatment.

However, there are many criticisms of this use of a disease model for understanding alcoholism (Donovan & Marlatt, 1988; Lewis, 2015; Miller & Rollnick, 1991). It is also interesting to note that proponents of the disease model for alcoholism will not always use the same explanation for drugs of abuse and have some difficulty when the concept is extended to behaviors like gambling. Even though brain regions, neurochemistry, and physiology are clearly implicated in the initiation and maintenance of addictive behaviors, these behaviors and the end state of addiction have multiple determinants.

It is probably best to consider addiction as a chronic condition rather than a physical disease. However, the term "brain disease" has become a common way to describe addictions because of the neurobiological component (Volkow et al., 2016).

Source: DiClemente, Carlo C.. *Addiction and Change, Second Edition (2018): How Addictions Develop and Addicted People Recover (Guilford Substance Abuse)* (p. 3). Guilford Publications.

Since it's so complicated, the science based SMART Recovery program has this [balanced position](#):

SMART Recovery tools can help you regardless of whether or not you believe addiction is a disease.

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by sbj - 10 Jan 2020 08:49

[Hashem Help Me wrote on 09 Jan 2020 03:59:](#)

[sbj wrote on 09 Jan 2020 03:39:](#)

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Would you mind sharing those resources here so we can all see them?

I've sent you an email with details.

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by sbj - 10 Jan 2020 09:17

[DavidT wrote on 09 Jan 2020 14:57:](#)

[sbj wrote on 09 Jan 2020 03:39:](#)

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The fact that addiction is a sickness has been studied and proven by the medical world and many torah authorities & scholars too. According to the torah way it's called a sickness of the soul "*Chole Hanefesh*".

According to what I've seen published over the recent years with the great advancements in brain science, I've got a different picture. More and more experts came out devaluing the 'sickness' notion. I actually haven't seen any real 'studies' in favor of that. It was more a belief than anything else.

To me it seems that the 12 steps approach just managed to become mainstream thinking, maybe because its concepts were based on religious thinking popular at that time and/ or due to lack of other methods. It was probably the only (popular) answer then, and since the medical community hasn't come up with answers of their own, they just used this. I think the same can be said for Rabbis who went with it.

Now, obviously the steps have positive, helpful aspects, but the 'sickness' belief weighs it down, and can counter the effects of its helpful parts.

More recently new holistic, empowering approaches emerged; were tested & proven and subsequently gained great support. To my knowledge, there are no indications in today's science labs pointing in favor of the steps. Maybe it's time to let go of this limiting belief and give plain simple, unbiased common sense a try.

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by cordnoy - 10 Jan 2020 13:35

[sbj wrote on 10 Jan 2020 09:17:](#)

[DavidT wrote on 09 Jan 2020 14:57:](#)

[sbj wrote on 09 Jan 2020 03:39:](#)

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Actually, SA is built on common sense. I have been to many meetings and have spoken to many fellows in and out of the groups. I haven't seen one who was "weighed down" by the powerlessness concept. Those who didn't understand (myself) or who disagreed (myself, many times) simply moved on to the bulk of the project, and that is workin' on oneself to calm his emotions and fixin' his bad attributes. Pure common sense. It was always the fellows outside of those closed doors who harped on the religion aspect of its origin or its introduction.

I am not a card carryin' member of SA and I know plenty of its shortcomings and in one locality there are concerns that need to be addressed, I think.

Regardless, long live the power of the keyboard.

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by DavidT - 10 Jan 2020 14:12

Wow. This is one of the most eye opening forum topics I've seen. I'll reread it a few times...

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by mggsbms - 10 Jan 2020 15:24

[DavidT wrote on 10 Jan 2020 14:12:](#)

Wow. This is one of the most eye opening forum topics I've seen. I'll reread it a few times...

Yeh great stuff all around!

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by mggsbms - 15 Jan 2020 03:45

There is an interesting study recently published that recovery programs like SMART are just as effective as the 12 steps. www.vox.com/science-and-health/2018/3/5/17071690/alcoholics-anonymous-aa-smart-lifering-study

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Re: Giving up self control or strengthening it
Posted by ColinColin - 16 Jan 2020 04:00

My experience is that I would act out sometimes from lust, other times from feeling really emotionally hurt and needing a "high" to escape the pain.

For me I have avoided acting out when I use will power, but not **only** will power.

Also effective for me has been mindfulness, basically compartmentalising my urge to act out in an imaginary box, or visualising it as a cloud, which can drift away. Without me needed to act on the urge.

But other times when in the grip of lust, only sheer bloody-minded will power works.

So it is a mix of techniques.

Sometimes I use the memory of the horrible feeling I get just after acting out. That has worked before.

Other times I distract myself when I have the urge, I do something else which makes me happy.

I find distraction works best when I am emotionally hurt, as my real drive is to escape emotional pain.

Will power works best when I am simply gripped by lust.

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