

Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?

Posted by boruch - 18 Mar 2009 21:25

[battleworn wrote on 18 Mar 2009 16:36:](#)

Think you can do this without the 12 steps groups? Do you think that you can serenely learn the Eibishter's Torah while the yetzer hora disturbs you with the most profane temptations? I wish you the best of luck, but it is at very least, much easier said than done. And it is certainly a lot easier to do it a lot more effectively by joining a 12 step group.

I've kept silent on this issue for a long time for two reasons. First of all, I try very hard to avoid confrontation. I've learned from a lot of experience that debate gets you nowhere at best. So, as much as I have said on this forum, there's just as much that I've refrained from saying.

Second of all, before commenting, I took a lot of time to make sure I really understood the issue properly.

It's plainly obvious, that the 12 step groups are an absolutely amazing thing.

Battleworn, since that first quote was from me, I'll say a few things.

Firstly, I apologize to you Yaakov for having gotten into a vikuach with you on your thread. I certainly meant well, but at the time I did not at all anticipate how it would come across. There is a time, place and way to share a message and the key to making sure that the message is on target is to focus totally on the person with whom you want to share it. I did not realize that then and I realize that more now.

Secondly, since I created a discussion of the steps and the entire system as first practiced by Alcoholics Anonymous, the steps, the sponsors and the groups, I am going to ask you Yaakov for a little patience to allow me to undo some of what I posted earlier.

The first thing I want to share is how that system is changing the way I am posting on this forum.

But before I do that I need to share with you how I have come to see an approach that was after all is said and done, totally conceived by goyim.

The Maharshal in teshuvos (98) said that the author of the sefer hakrisus, the Rash Mikinon, had studied all of the hidden mysteries of Kabbala and yet, when he davened, he davened like a one-day-old baby.

What could a one-day-old baby possibly teach Rash Mikinon that he did not know from Kabbala?

I will tell you how I now understand it. There is knowledge in all its complexity. And then there is behavior. Someone who has all the knowledge of hilchos shechita who has never seen a shechita will have no concept of how to shecht. That is shimush. Learning the behavior.

So knowledge of tefila is in Kabbala, but learning how to behave? Rash Mikinon chose a one-day-baby as his model.

Why?

There are two things about a one-day-old baby.

1) He is totally dependent on his parents and has no hope of taking care of himself.

2) He only has one option of self-expression. He cannot choose how to approach his problems. How to present them. What words and expressions to use. No complications. He just opens his mouth and cries. Straight from the heart, honest and direct.

That's how Rash Mikinon davened. With the same total dependence on Hashem and with the same simplicity as a one-day-old baby.

Now, if we wanted to visualize for ourselves, the behavior of a one-day-old baby we could walk in to any maternity ward anywhere in the World. The baby doesn't have to be Jewish. It could be a Mexican baby, a Vietnamese baby, it makes no difference whatsoever.

That's exactly how I understand the original AA groups and the 12 steps. The alcoholics of AA were, just like the one-day-old baby. They were totally desperate, they knew that Hashem was their last and only hope and they knew how they needed to come humbly to Hashem for His help. They needed an approach so simple that even a drunk could get it.

Now, we Frum Yidden are not short on knowledge of how to Return to Hashem. We may not be Rash Mikinon but we do have Shaarei Teshuva of Rabbeinu Yonah, we do have hilchos teshuva from the Rambam. B"H knowledge we have in plentiful supply. And knowledge of hilchos teshuva we will not find among goyim, Torah bagoyim al taamin. But where are we addicts to learn how an addict who is returning should behave? Certainly not from a one-day-old baby.

I have found that, as a Frum Yid, I can learn the *behavior* with which an addict should return to Hashem from the early founders of AA. I can learn a set of behaviors so simple that even *this* drunk (me) could get it and implement it.

Does it matter whether the AA founders were Jewish? Absolutely not. Whether they were American, Mexican or Vietnamese? Absolutely not.

Certainly the AA founders wrote the steps in English and certainly they were to an extent influenced in some of their external presentation of the steps by their religion and culture. But in essence the 12 steps represent a Path of Return to Hashem so simple that even a drunk could get it. That's why it can work for me too.

And if you want to see the steps working, you need to look no further than the latest change in my style of posting.

When I wrote that piece above I had not gone beyond working steps 1 through 3, and most importantly, I had not read the primary text of Alcoholics Anonymous, commonly referred to as the AA Big Book (it's available online, in PDF and as a Palm DOC). In SA, the working assumption from the beginning has been that whatever is true for alcohol and liquor is true for lust. They commonly read directly from the Big Book, replacing the words alcohol and liquor with the word lust, and replacing the word alcoholic with sexaholic.

Today, having read the AA Big Book and working currently on all 12 steps, these excerpts from page 65 and on best capture how I have learned about self-will and it's impact on my life as a whole and even my posts on this forum:

"The first requirement is that we be convinced that any life run on self-will can hardly be a success. On that basis we are almost always in collision with something or somebody, even though our motives are good. Most people try to live by self-propulsion. Each person is like an actor who wants to run the whole show; is forever trying to arrange the lights, the ballet, the scenery and the rest of the players in his own way. If his arrangements would only stay put, if only people would do as he wished, the show would be great. Everybody, including himself, would be pleased. Life would be wonderful...

What usually happens? The show doesn't come off very well...

He decides to exert himself more. He becomes, on the next occasion, still more demanding or gracious, as the case may be. Still the play does not suit him...

Is he not, even in his best moments, a producer of confusion rather than harmony?"

Until now, in my posts on the forum *I have always been most mindful and have focused on how I wanted to post*, even though, and as much as, to a certain extent I have also tried to bear in mind, after the fact, people's reaction to my posts.

Being brutally honest with myself, as the AA founders say they were, much as I had taken notice of how people responded, I was still not getting beyond the description above in the Big Book. As the Big Book describes, my relationships, as my posts on the forum, were often self-serving and defined on my own terms, even when I thought I was being helpful.

Now I realize the difference and B'Ezras Hashem I will do whatever I need to in order to post with much more patience and with much more thought and attention to how others need to hear the message.

[battleworn wrote on 18 Mar 2009 16:36:](#)

But listen to this: To me it's seems clear that going to R' Tvi Meir *instead* of the 12 groups, is **at least a 100 times as amazing**. So why don't I push R' Tvi Meir, like some people push the groups?

The answer is, because I try not to project myself on to other people. In my humble opinion this truly wonderful forum could use a little more open-mindedness (I'm not talking at all about Rabeinu Guard) Just because ploni didn't have emunah before he went to the groups, it doesn't mean that everyone is like that. Just because Almoni suffered abuse, it doesn't mean that we all did. Etc... Personally, I don't believe that the groups are appropriate for ykv at all (The fundamental differences between him and boruch are quite obvious to me) But I know I could be wrong.

Battleworn, now that I have read the primary text on the 12 steps I can finally express what I had been unsuccessfully trying to say. Obviously different people are inspired in different ways and obviously you cannot stuff everyone in the same mold. But that is not the issue at all. What I was trying to share with Yaakov is something I later found in the AA Big Book describing the experience in the late 1930s of the newcomers who joined AA and worked the steps, p85,

"And we have ceased fighting anything or anyone--even lust. For by this time sanity will have returned. We will seldom be interested in lust. If tempted, we recoil from it as from a hot flame. We react sanely and normally, and we will find that this has happened automatically. We will see that our new attitude toward lust has been given us without any thought or effort on our

part. It just comes! That is the miracle of it. We are not fighting it, neither are we avoiding temptation."

So that's the claim printed in 1939. Is it true? Well, as I explained earlier on this thread, *before I had seen the piece in the Big Book*, I was most certainly *fighting* my addiction, I had been for 36 years. And losing. Then *before I had seen the piece in the Big Book* came SA and the day I called my sponsor. He told me to stop *fighting*, to surrender to my Higher Power and in a moment of temptation just work steps 1-3.

Of course, as many people on this forum have written the last thing on their minds in a moment of temptation is 12 steps, let alone the presence of mind to use them. And I was originally no different.

But I have since found that when I made my recovery the single most important thing in my life and I joined SA, when I took part in a weekly Back to Basics Step meeting that works through all 12 steps in 4 weeks in addition to a regular meeting, when I met and learned from people with 15 years of sobriety and more, when I was working the steps together with everyone else, much as soldiers march in step and find it easier to march together, doing the steps became the most natural thing in the World. And *before I had seen the piece in the Big Book* I experienced what I posted earlier in this thread. That I no longer needed to fight.

Are there other methods that are so effective in turning a losing fight into no battle at all? I can only tell you of one method like that, doing the 12 steps by working them with a sponsor and active 12 step group meeting attendance. If anyone else has another method with the same results, I would certainly be interested to hear about it. Not because I am looking for another method. The 12 steps are helping me change in many areas and I would not trade them in. But recovery from addiction is extremely important to me and I am interested in all things Recovery.

Now you raise a legitimate question, Battleworn. Are the groups for everyone? Is the SA 12 step program which is directly and totally modeled on the complete AA 12 step program for everyone? The best way to know the answer to that is to read the first 164 pages of the [Big Book](#). You can download it as a [PDF](#) or put it on your Palm OS device from this [link](#).

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?

Posted by Ykv_schwartz - 31 Mar 2009 07:01

[eme wrote on 31 Mar 2009 05:10:](#)

Is it necessary to attend meetings to follow the 12 steps?

I have done the 12 steps without the groups. So the answer is no. You do not need to go. However, those who went to the groups will tell that you will gain a lot by going to the groups. In fact they will probably tell me that I have no say about 12 steps (both for good or bad) because I have never attended the groups.

From what I understand, by going to the groups you gain in two main areas.

Number one, you will get a better understanding of the steps. This is because it will be explained by those who went through it already. This is also because you are more focused on the 12 steps. When doing it on your own, you may end up losing focus on it and therefore have never really done it properly.

Number two, the groups themselves can have a strong impact on your development. You get an opportunity of sharing your emotions with others like yourself. You will hear real stories from people who may have been in worse situations than yourself. This social network can be very powerful. The accountability concept is used for real. You can see how shomer has grown from the group setting.

But like I stated above, it is possible to grow from the 12 steps without the groups. Whether I did it the proper way or not, makes no difference. It gave me a framework for growth. So even if you decide that groups is not for you, for whatever reason, 12 steps can still be your address. I would advise, though, looking at the Jewish version of the 12 steps. It is more direct for a yid trying to reconnect.

I would like to hear from others, like boruch and shomer. What do you guys feel about what I said? Did I summarize the advantages of groups properly? In your opinion, did I say something wrong? Is there anything you have to add? Please embellish where I wasn't. Please include stories that will help *eme* and others decide what to do.

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?
Posted by battleworn - 31 Mar 2009 10:39

I just want to update what I wrote about hearing R' Tvi Meir's Shmusen, by phone. In addition to the Yerushalayim #(658-1000) there are also two U.S. #'s (718) 506-1001 and (845) 915-1919

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?
Posted by the.guard - 31 Mar 2009 11:57

Eme, thank you very much for bringing this important question up. I will try and answer you in today's Chizuk e-mail...

Yaakov, I think you summed up well what the benefits of the groups are. **But** I disagree with you that someone can do the steps properly without the groups, and in today's e-mail (#444) I think you will see why.

Besides, even **if** you, Yaakov, feel you succeeded in using the steps without the groups, **no one** can take your example. You are unique in at least six areas that almost no one else with this struggle is. You are...

- 1) hyper-focused
- 2) intensely determined
- 3) very intelligent
- 4) intensely spiritual
- 5) extremely disciplined by nature
- 6) you feel no nisyonos for the last 50-60 days as you work on this area with a passion

but even he feels the groups is his only hope). Anyone who is less disciplined than you, or feels constant nisyonos even AS they work the steps, would not succeed as you have. And on top of all this, the 12-Steps for you were only a "helpful frame-work". They were not a whole new way of living for you. Almost no other struggler I know can fit into your category (Boruch is close

So Eme, although you may benefit from reading the AA book and learning about the steps in depth, I don't believe you will really be able to work the steps into your life without the groups. It's like learning Hilchos Shchitah without ever having seen a Shchitah. That's why "Shimush" is vital for any Rav before he can pasken... And today's e-mail will focus on this in a clearer way.

You can also see Chizuk e-mail 442 on [this page](#) (scroll down) to see Shomer's story and understand a bit better what I am saying.

And - sorry for repeating this again - make sure to read TODAY'S CHIZUK E-MAIL.

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?
Posted by Ykv_schwartz - 31 Mar 2009 12:47

Guard,

You misunderstood me on one minor point. I was not suggesting a person forget about groups and do 12 steps alone because I gained from them. I acknowledged the advantages of groups over doing it alone, as you restated. My point was that even if someone does not feel the groups is right for him, for whatever reason (whether it be practical concerns or other), he should realize that he CAN gain from the 12 steps. We already established in the last past 7 pages of this thread the importance of going to groups and how EVERYONE (or close to everyone, depending on a machlokes achronim) can gain. And that there is more to gain than to lose. I am not arguing that. But a person should not think that there is nothing to gain from the steps without the groups. This is what I thought eme was asking. So the truth is, we should ask eme what he meant. And so I turn my attention to eme now.

eme,

Please clarify why you are asking what you asked. Is your dillema whether you should go to 12

steps without the groups? If that is the case, I advise you to listen to the wise advise of the elders of GUE and go to the groups. Or is your dilemma the following: being that you feel that groups are not right for you (for whatever reason), you are wondering whether there is a purpose of working through the 12 steps. If that is the case, you can follow me as an example of someone who succeeded with the 12 steps. On top of that I am offering my assistance in that regard. However, I should add that even if this is the case, perhaps you want to reconsider. Take a second look at the possibility of going to groups.

Back to Guard,

I know there was discussion about the difference of promoting vs attracting. I have to agree with Baruch that we are not attracting enough the idea of the groups. I did not really know about the groups until boruch came along and discussed them at such great length. The site discusses the 12 steps and how they are consistent with the Torah. The site gives the Torah version. But does not mention that this requires a **group**. Even the story that you link to, does not really elaborate on the groups as much as the steps themselves. The reader (at least this reader) gets the impression that 12 steps is something you do on your own. I thought the meetings was like a class for people who do not like to read and introspect. They need someone else to explain to them what this means. After reading boruch's post, I began to understand this more.

I am telling you this from experience. I heard about the 12 steps from GUE and then from jewishsexuality.com. I read about it a lot, and by the way jewishsexuality has lots of info. But I never realized this is something you do in a group. Yes, you have small links at the bottom of the page, but who sees those. And more so, there are no links to actually find the groups. There are no links to sa.org, which I discovered a few days ago. People should be aware that these groups are all over country (U.S. that is). People should be told how to find them. If this is such a vital need for recovery, we need to offer more info. Just a thought.

[guardureyes wrote on 31 Mar 2009 11:57:](#)

even **if** you, Yaakov, feel you succeeded in using the steps without the groups,

Succeeded? When did I ever say this? I am only 50-60 days clean, after a 3 month relapse. I would hardly call that successful. I chose my original wording carefully. I said I **gained** and

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?
Posted by the.guard - 31 Mar 2009 14:00

Yes, thanks to Boruch I have realized that there are major problems with the way our site presents the 12-Steps. You will think I am nuts, but I believe today that we should actually REMOVE the steps from our site in their current form - and even more so, we should REMOVE the 12 TORAH steps that I took from Jewishsexuality.com.

Why?!

Read today's Chizuk e-mail and I believe you will agree.

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?
Posted by boruch - 31 Mar 2009 16:50

[guardureyes wrote on 31 Mar 2009 14:00:](#)

Yes, thanks to Boruch I have realized that there are major problems with the way our site presents the 12-Steps. You will think I am nuts, but I believe today that we should actually REMOVE the steps from our site in their current form - and even more so, we should REMOVE the 12 TORAH steps that I took from Jewishsexuality.com.

Why?!

Read today's Chizuk e-mail and I believe you will agree.

Melachti naasis al yedei acheirim... Thank you Guard...

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?

Posted by boruch - 31 Mar 2009 18:19

[Ykv schwartz wrote on 31 Mar 2009 07:01:](#)

I would like to hear from others, like boruch and shomer. What do you guys feel about what I said? Did I summarize the advantages of groups properly? In your opinion, did I say something wrong? Is there anything you have to add? Please embellish where I wasn't. Please include stories that will help eme and others decide what to do.

Eme, Yaakov,

Here is my experience.

When you work as a Group you have the Power of the Group, just as soldiers find it easier to march when they march in step, so is it easier to Recover as a Group. This is one of the powerful elements in eino domeh merubim ho'oseh mitzvo and BeRov Om. For this reason many Gedolim from the Ramchal to the Chofetz Chaim encouraged chevras to work on specific inyonim.

That said, **the single most important purpose of the Group is that the root of addiction is self-absorption and the foundation of Recovery is getting beyond self-centeredness in relationships and reconnecting with family, friends and peers in a giving way.**

It is no simple task for the addict, whose addiction has heightened his self-absorption and disconnectedness, to start to reconnect to those with whom he already has relationships with in a new way.

The most effective way of doing this is by joining a new group of people in a fellowship that goes beyond themselves and serves a higher purpose, the purpose of recovery. Creating new relationships around something more idealistic with people who have gone through the same trials and tribulations, who understand the addict on his own terms is a vital and almost irreplaceable link in the Recovery.

As open as I have seemed on this Forum on many issues, on certain very personal issues I have kept my cards very close to my chest. I have engaged in more than a little bravado on these forums (often as a mechayev to myself) and I have not bared much weakness (also a deliberate choice).

However, Yaakov, in response to your request for personal stories I am going to break that pattern for the first time.

I am going to limit the details here to a certain degree to protect my anonymity, but I can tell you that I have always been the quintessential loner. As much as I would be superficially sociable, and knew many many people, my relationships across the board were never more than skin deep, they were totally lacking commitment. Underneath I have always been a loner, through and through.

Today, I am a transformed man. I had a conversation recently with one of my children who told me, Totty you are a different man, just a month ago I would talk to you and you just did not understand at all what I was saying, and now you understand me so well.

Today, I am different in all my relationships. I am involved for the first time, I am more open and I am becoming more of a pleasure to be with (it's a strange thing to say, but what can I tell you, it is true).

And I am convinced that this is only the beginning.

I had at an earlier time in my life been involved in avodas hakodesh (I will not go into details on

this) and it did not work out. I knew at the time that it was because although on the surface I appeared to be doing a good job, in reality I was lacking in emotional commitment and caring. Of course I did not realize at the time the full scope of the problem.

I had always dreamed that one day that would change. As the years have passed that has remained my dream as much as I seemed no nearer to it all those years later than I was the day I left.

Today, for the first time, I feel a shift in the right direction. It is still early days, and there is much footwork to be done, more remains to be done than has been done already, and I need tremendous siyyata dishmaya.

That said, I sense a shift, a significant shift that started by my getting beyond myself and joining the fellowship and connecting with people face to face in a whole new way.

Now you don't need to worry if you are not as pathological a loner as I was, because that's not a requirement to be able to benefit. Let's face it without self-centredness we do not get addicted. What I will tell you is that in my experience, if the Groups can work in this way for me, they can work for anyone and they can certainly work for you too.

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?
Posted by boruch - 31 Mar 2009 18:59

[eme wrote on 31 Mar 2009 05:10:](#)

Is it necessary to attend meetings to follow the 12 steps?

Is it necessary to attend a Yeshiva or Kollel to learn full-time?

If you are the Chazon Ish, you are better off learning on your own.

Is it necessary to attend meetings to follow the 12 steps?

Having read a lot and having had some sort of exposure to many on this forum, I still cannot conceive of anyone who can work the AA System on his own to a degree that it would even meaningfully compare with working it within a 12 Step Group.

The AA 12 Step system is:

- 1) Working the Steps under the direct, individual and face to face guidance of a sponsor who has successfully used the Steps to gain significant sobriety.

- 2) Working the Steps as a Group, as members share how the Steps are working for them.

- 3) Ultimately working the Steps to both individually and as a Group bring others into the Fellowship, so that they too can gain what you gained.

I am trying to think just how any of this could be achieved without the fellowship to any meaningful degree, and what can I tell you, you are asking the wrong guy, I just cannot come up with any shortcuts, I am not smart enough to give you any suggestions.

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?
Posted by the.guard - 31 Mar 2009 19:21

Diamonds and Pearls of wisdom are being spilled on this forum by Boruch and Shomer lately... will anyone bend down to pick them up?

This Pesach when I say the words "**Boruch Shomer Havtachaso Le'yisrael**"... I think I'll understand better the words that follow... "**SheHakadosh Baruch Hu Chishev es HaKetz**"... So many years they struggled, they waited, they tried, they searched, they davened.... But for **Boruch** and **Shomer**, Hashem knew when the Ketz would finally come, and he pulled them out from the *tumah* of Mitzrayim in the nick of time.

The 12-Steps are a Bechinah of Yetzias Mitzrayim. ***Afilu Kulanu Chachamim, Kulanu Nevonim, Kulanu Yodim es Hatorah - Mitzva Aleinu Lesaper Bi'yetziyas Mitzrayim.*** Why? Because all the Chachma and Torah won't help you if you don't have the basic foundations of being a "mentch". **And that is Yetziyas Mitzrayim.** Become a mentch again. Stop serving the Egyptians. Let go of their servitude, come to the dessert and follow Hashem. Only after you've done that for a while can you begin to think of coming to Har Sinai and becoming a Jew.

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?
Posted by mevakesh - 31 Mar 2009 20:53

Boruch has certainly expressed very clearly the benefits and necessity of going to meetings while simultaneously working the steps.

In addition to the benefits of working the steps within the context of a fellowship that boruch has described, there are numerous practical benefits to joining a group as well.

1) Emotional Connection: Although these forums and the phone support groups are excellent resources that can and should be utilized to their maximum capacity, there is, in my opinion, no substitute for the emotional connections made within an SA meeting. There is no substitute for sitting in a circle and openly admitting "Hi, my name is Yankel and I am a sex addict. My addiction takes the form of and I have been sober X amount of days". There is no substitute for sharing your struggles face to face with a group and working real solutions. I witnessed a member break down in tears at a recent meeting and although he did not say very much, his message was conveyed loader than mere words have the capacity to express. Go to a meeting, sit down with others that are suffering as you are, share your struggles, be inspired by their successes ... you will not be disappointed.

2) Phone Support: It is common practice within SA to exchange phone numbers among members. The first reaction that SA encourages members to take when they are faced with a challenging situation that they may not be able to handle simply by working the steps is to "make a call". In addition to the meetings, which are in-and-of themselves very powerful indeed, having a network of people to support, encourage and help is another benefit of joining a group. Now instead of only one number to call (boruch's), I now have many numbers of people with whom to call when I am feeling tempted, frustrated or just need a listening ear. If you have any doubts whether this works, I can attest that this is a core component of what keeps us sober on a daily basis.

There are many more practical benefits, but you get the idea ...

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?
Posted by boruch - 31 Mar 2009 22:06

[guardureyes wrote on 31 Mar 2009 11:57:](#)

but even he feels the groups is his only hope)

Actually I never said that at all and if we go apples to apples, it is not true at all that I feel I could not have done it without the groups. I'll explain and I will be a little more open about my issues.

I had a problem with images for 36 years. I was a periodical who consistently fooled myself that my interludes were successful abstinence and that I just had to get the interludes to last longer and I would be fine. I refused to turn to anyone for help, being convinced that I would handle it on my own. What was worse I convinced myself that my problem was not that bad because throughout the years I did my utmost and was largely successful at stopping my obsessions with the images every time I indulged, before I had gone "too far".

In addition as much as I sincerely felt that what I was doing was wrong and it did disturb my conscience, I never suffered from anything remotely like depression or remorse at all. On one occasion after a whole night of periodically viewing images I gave a Shiur and had no problem with it at all. Over a year ago Shomer caught me and it hardly made even a dent, even before he confided that he had the same issue. He told me how he had struggled for years and tried many options and I was impressed by his seriousness, but was very accepting of my own relative apathy, that was just me, I thought.

Then we were both yo-yo-ing in and out of sobriety backwards and forwards for over a year while Shomer was actively doing everything he could including working on his Yiddishkeit and being active daily with readings about problems with addiction, creating a blog on addiction, posting on various sites including this one, while I was happily burying my head in the sand, convincing myself that he had a worse problem than I did (which as a matter of fact, is very likely, although it certainly is no excuse) and just accepting that I meant well and was doing my best without seriously trying anything.

Then in December after a sustained period of relative sobriety my addiction returned with a vengeance. It got progressively worse and worse until I was involved every day and much more consistently than I ever had been.

My rock-bottom came on January 19th. By that time I had been spending hours on end every day gazing at images, despite filters and accountability software and whatever else. By January 19th though, I had been clean for a couple of days. I had a couple of near misses when I was almost caught by a Rov, but that was a story in its own right, I had beefed up our accountability

system, I had confided in my therapist and that day I discovered Shomer's posts on this forum and was truly impressed. I felt for the first time that I was actually taking my addiction seriously and that I was finally beyond it.

That night I was alone and working, I got distracted and in no time I was engrossed as never before. At some point I caught myself and saw on my watch that it was time for evening seder and for the first time when presented with the conflict, instead of half-heartedly lying to myself that I would go in just another minute, as I consistently did in the past, I actually wanted very very much to go to seder, not to escape my addiction, but to be a part of the learning. I realized that at that point in time I was powerless and I just watched as I was taken over and time ran out and seder was over as much as I had really wanted to go.

Later, when the madness left me and I had returned to my senses, I realized that I had totally lost control. Here I had really wanted to go to seder without excuses and I had not been able to. Despite the fact that I had told my therapist. Despite the fact that I was almost caught. Despite the fact that we had improved our accountability system. Despite the fact that I was serious for the first time. Despite the fact that I had been so inspired that afternoon by Shomer's posts. Despite the fact I had been convinced that I had said goodbye to my addiction forever.

And I was seized by a passion. This had gone far too far. A red line had been crossed, and for the first time, without any excuses it was clear to me that, that night, my addiction had clearly and obviously licked me. I was not going to take that lying down and I made a decision. There was no way that I would ever let that happen again.

I made a decision. I knew that I had one weapon with which I could destroy my addiction for good. I knew what I had to do and so I enlisted my biggest yetzer hora, my pride, to destroy my lesser yetzer hora, my addiction, once and for all. I decided right then and there to post on this forum and publicly and dramatically crush my addiction, do a permanent azivas hachet and a real teshuva, right here on these forums.

So could I have done it without the groups? It depends what "it" is. I had given up pornography for life, forever, no ifs ands or buts. I was determined to do a genuine and lasting Teshuva with all 20 ikkarim of Rabbeinu Yonah, including a total transformation of my avodas Hashem. And I am convinced that I did not need the groups for that.

So if the narrow goal was to get beyond the images, to do a full Teshuva on the images and to

transform my avodas Hashem, no, I believe that I would have kept that up without relapses, ad meiah ve'esrim. Of course I may be delusional, but whether I am right or not about that I certainly never said that I could not do "that" without the groups.

Here, though, is what I would never have even dreamed of without the groups, never mind have implemented:

1) I had given up pornography, but it would never even have occurred to me to give up the excessive and unnatural cravings of the taava itself, what SA calls lust. BeChasdei Hashem Yisborach I found SA and I gave up lust, the "right" to lust and the "expectation" of lust forever, I have finally given up on all the obsession and compulsion that used to be such an integral part of my physical desire.

2) I had a concept of tikkun hamiddos, but I thought, that as R' Yisroel Salanter said, it takes a lifetime to change a midda and everything I had tried for over 20 years of learning mussar seemed to back that up. Of course R' Yisroel was certainly 1000% right, he knew what he was talking about. But that was not my issue, nor is it the issue with us addicts. In fact one of the most widespread misconceptions is that this has much relevance to anyone today.

Here is why.

We have our natural middos and those take a lifetime to change and improve. However, those middos that we have are supposed to be balanced, as the Rambam says in Hilchos Deios in the Derech Yeshoro, the Derech Hamemutza. We live, however, in a society that between stresses, selfishness and poisonous attitudes ensures that the biggest middos issue of our dor is not that we have not improved beyond the default nature of our natural middos, our problem is that the natural middos we have are totally unbalanced and have run amok.

For years I was trying to work on my middos instead of realizing that I would do very, very well with my middos as they are naturally today, if only I would learn derech yeshoro, if only I would learn to be a mensch and not behave as if I were less than a beheimo. And I can tell you from personal experience that joining the fellowship is the most foolproof, most effective and fastest way to gain menschlichkeit that I have ever encountered.

Joining the fellowship gets straight to the core of how to behave like a mensch in a totally new environment, learning alongside others, and I for one could have learned, read, analyzed hundreds of times and even tried to practice the Steps from the Big Book, which by the way I would never have done anyway without the groups, and I could have become an 'armchair expert' on the steps, but I would not have become much of a mensch without having had to interact with others in the group, without having to have gone through joining as a plain newcomer and without having to grow into the groups alongside others who were more senior and more experienced. That was a new and very humbling experience and it made something of the beginnings of a mensch out of me.

For me this was even more pronounced because I was very self-conscious of joining a group with Frum Yidden, and to a certain extent I was also concerned with my anonymity and so I had chosen to join a non-Jewish group. I was unable to impress any of them with my learning and determination because almost to a man, they appreciate humility and patience much more than they appreciate learning and determination.

Of course, it is a very good thing that SA is about anonymity, that it is about principles and not personalities, because if we are talking about personalities, if we are talking about me, I am not yet an example of a mensch by any stretch. That said I have made progress in a very short time that went well beyond my wildest expectations. I could never have done that without the groups.

3) I would never in a thousand years have broken out of a self-centered and self-righteous existence that I had for years been excusing with chayecho kodmin, torah hi velilmod ani tzorich, talmud torah keneged kulom and other examples of Torah and Maamarei Chazal that I was using out of context to justify my lack of basic menschlichkeit.

Again beChasdei Hashem I found the groups and discovered how to help others on a consistent and ongoing basis, for them and not for me, as opposed to once in a yovel putting other people first in my mind.

So, it all depends on what the "it" is.

Being honest and putting modesty aside, I do not for a minute believe that I would be doing any less than what I have seen Yaakov post about on this forum (obviously I don't know what he has not told us), albeit in my own way, even if I had never gone to the groups at all and without

working the Steps at all, on any level whatsoever.

But without the groups my Recovery would be a very poor shadow of what it is now. I truly believe that the Eibishter saw that I was at least a "bo letaher" if nothing else and in His Chesed, without any merit on my part, He had Rachmonus and directed me toward a Derech Yeshoro unlike anything I have ever known or experienced.

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?
Posted by the.guard - 31 Mar 2009 22:32

Blown away. :o

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?
Posted by battleworn - 19 Apr 2009 10:55

Hi Guys! I've been away for quite a while, and now I'm back. (This is probably the only day that I'll be here this week, but ly'H I'll be back next week.) Boruch, your last post here is very powerful and very enlightening to say the least.

Please correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems to me that one of the most basic benefits of the groups has not been given enough emphasis over here.

First a hakdomoh: One of the greatest obstacles that stop a person from changing, is the notion that it can be done without a lot of investment. We live in the generation of instant results, and we come to expect that whatever needs to happen should happen quickly. (This is a big sugya and this is not the place to elaborate on it) Furthermore, we tend to forget that our whole purpose on this world is to change and improve. We tend to look at any weakness that we have as an "inconvenience" that needs to be gotten out of our way (or ignored) while in reality it's Hashem's personal message to us telling us exactly what He sent us to this world for.

So what happens is, that it usually doesn't even occur to a person to really spend time, energy and "focus" on improvement and particularly on recovery. Hashem tells us "T'na b'ni libcha li"

-give me your HEART, it means your whole heart. When Hashem makes it obvious to you what you have to work on, it logically follows that it should be the main focus of your life. But we usually don't get the message. Yes, we try, we may even post on the forum, but often we are not willing or not able to really invest concerted effort. We may even be moser nefesh (as in the story with the freezing cold mikvah) and we may even be contemplating suicide - chas ve'sholom.

But we can only be successful when we except the mission that Hashem has given us, instead of trying to dodge it. And that means to patiently -with yishuv hadaas- invest our "focus", our time and our effort on that mission.

For most people, it may very well be impossible to do that without a group that's concentrating on exactly that. Joining a group is a commitment and at the same time provides an ideal framework for serious focused persistent work.

[This yesod (and the value of working as a group) is one of the many great yesodos that I learned from R' Tvi Meir. After hearing him speak about it a few times, my whole way of thinking began to change. I don't think this short post gets the message across, but at-least I tried.]

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Re: Think you can do it without the 12-Steps?
Posted by the.guard - 19 Apr 2009 12:19

Wow Battleworn, that's beautiful!

I need your help with something, please send me an e-mail...

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