

Torah AND the 12-Steps

Posted by Dov - 08 Jun 2009 21:53

HeiligeH PinteleH Yid, Aaron4, Hoping, etc, etc.,

What I am about to share is for me, not necessarily for you. You may feel completely differently or flat-out disagree and **Kol Hakavod, precious brothers!**

This drash/mussar section of the thread is enlightening and really beautiful, as others have posted. **However, in the spirit of "veHachayos Ratzo Vashov"**, I need to take a deep breath and back up at times like this. I need to remember that (beautiful and true) Torah insights into what the YH is doing, what we are doing, how we do it, etc., never helped me get sober when I was acting out. They are just a luxury we can "afford" in sobriety. They still, are not my mainstay, just a chizzuk and part of my "pay'rosayhem ba'olam hazeh", perhaps...but...

Sof Davar, when a "nisayon" occurs for me, what saves me is **plain and poshut** the Ribono Shel Olam. Not **my** tefillah, nor my efforts against the YH. They may be hishtadlus, like going to work, battle, etc. All I know is that **I** let Him in, calling out to Him in my **worst** moment because **I** do not want to act out and (eventually) die. He does the rest.

In retrospect there is glory in recovery and I *can* appreciate the beauty of what has happened, yes. But in the moment (*and before it*) I can't afford to think of myself as doing any tikkunim, fulfilling a mitzvah/prophecy/whatever. The most frustrating days for my acting out used to be (bedavka) aseres yemei teshuvah, sefira (especially *yesod* days!). These things put the struggle on my plate. When I struggle within a **Torah** context it just proves too complicated for me and I struggle. When I struggle, I get in trouble. And "trouble" is *really* bad for my health.

I do not think of myself, in sobriety or in acting out, as reflecting anything good or bad about this generation or the Jewish people. I am a holy yid like you and any other yid, who is also just another addict in recovery. In that respect I am very much like the goy sitting next to me at the meeting, who may be my sponsor or sponsee.

Sorry if anyone finds this offending or upsetting. It is not the truth, just what works for me so far. It may change tomorrow! Still, today I need to be honest about what works and what doesn't, so far, for me. Much love and admiration for each of you - Dov

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps

Posted by MosheF - 24 Jun 2009 14:16

I'm going to add my two cents to this important debate, as a member of the 12 step program, I believe that regardless of who is correct in this debate I have no choice but to continue working the steps unless a better solution is found in yiddishkeit (unless of course following this program is considered avoda zora (iv'e heard that), then I would have to stop going). For too many years I have acted out because I didn't believe in this program and refused to attend meetings.

However, what bothers me most about 12 step vs. Yiddishkeit is the fact that I am learning how to be a yid 24/7, how to have emunah peshuta, how to daven, believe in hashgacha pratis etc. from non-Jews, from a program created by Christians using their concepts. I wouldn't send my kids to the local church group to learn basics in yiddishkeit even if we share mutual ideas and they won't impose their god on my kids.

I wish there was a solution in yiddishkeit but to the best of my knowledge there is none. There is hardly mention of the concept of addiction or a solution in chazal or mussar seforim. This begs for an explanation that I don't have. Dr. Twersky responds to one such question here <http://www.guardureyes.com/GUE/Tips/12StepsQuest.asp> "Whereas forbidden sexual activity certainly occurred, I doubt that the phenomenon of sexual addiction was ever brought to the attention of the authors of sifrei mussar." I have a hard time accepting this answer because Chazal understood the human psychology and yetzer hora extremely well and they didn't have to be told about a phenomenon to write about it!

It may also be true that all of the 12 steps can be found in the torah, the only thing I believe clearly is not in the torah is to admit your shortcomings (aveiros) to another human being (and your group). Vidduy is between you and Hashem and nowhere that I am aware of does it say you should admit your aveirus on yom kippur to another human being. I assume this was taken from other religious where confessions are practiced or it may simply be a physiological benefit.

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps

Posted by battleworn - 24 Jun 2009 14:17

It never occurred to me that there are any ingredients in the 12 steps that are inconsistent with

Torah

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Reb Dov, did you understand that someone was suggesting otherwise?

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps

Posted by boruch - 24 Jun 2009 14:21

[battleworn wrote on 24 Jun 2009 14:14:](#)

That's fine! Again, my question was if the words of the big book are an absolute to you or not.
And I understand that the answer is no.

The Big Book says,

"Upon therapy for the alcoholic himself, we surely have no monopoly."

(BB xxi, Foreword to Second Edition)

"We have no monopoly on God; we merely have an approach that worked with us. "

(BB p.95, Working With Others)

and there is nothing in anything I have written that is not in accordance with that.

Is the Big Book absolute? Only the yud-gimmel ikkorei emunah are absolute. That said, I am not aware of anything in the first 164 pages that is untrue. The experience of millions has tended to re-enforce that conviction. So I personally tend to assume that whatever is in the Big Book is probably true and the reason is probably hashgocho protis for the yidden that would be saved through it.

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps

Posted by boruch - 24 Jun 2009 14:35

[MosheF wrote on 24 Jun 2009 14:16:](#)

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In general, as explained in Rambam Hilchos Teshuva anyone who does aveiros in public has to admit them in public and anyone who does them in private should not disclose them to others. However as explained in Bill W's "12 Steps and 12 traditions" on Step 5 experience showed again and again that any *addict* who did not admit to at least one human being did not stay sober. The reasons why an addict needs to admit are explained there in 12 and 12. But what is relevant is that it is obvious to anyone that if experience has shown that an addict has to admit to at least one other person to stay sober there is no question whatsoever that al pi Torah it is mandatory.

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps

Posted by battleworn - 24 Jun 2009 14:40

I'm going to add my two cents to this important debate, as a member of the 12 step program, I believe that regardless of who is correct in this debate I have no choice but to continue working the steps unless a better solution is found in yiddishkeit (unless of course following this program is considered avoda zora (iv'e heard that), then I would have to stop going). For too many years I have acted out because I didn't believe in this program and refused to attend meetings.

Dear moshF, welcome home this is where you belong. By all means keep going. As far as avoda zora is concerned, I was actually wondering about the factions that make the group their "higher power" if that actually may be avoda zora. But I hope you're not with those guys.

However, what bothers me most about 12 step vs. Yiddishkeit is the fact that I am learning how to be a yid 24/7, how to have emunah peshuta, how to daven, believe in hashgacha pratis etc. from non-Jews, from a program created by Christians using their concepts. I wouldn't send my kids to the local church group to learn basics in yiddishkeit even if we share mutual ideas and they won't impose their god on my kids.

If it was piku'ach nefesh you would!

I wish there was a solution in yiddishkeit but to the best of my knowledge there is none. There is hardly mention of the concept of addiction or a solution in chazal or mussar seforim. This begs for an explanation that I don't have. Dr. Twersky responds to one such question here www.guardureyes.com/GUE/Tips/12StepsQuest.asp "Whereas forbidden sexual activity certainly occurred, I doubt that the phenomenon of sexual addiction was ever brought to the attention of the authors of sifrei mussar." I have a hard time accepting this answer because Chazal understood the human psychology and yetzer hora extremely well and they didn't have to be told about a phenomenon to write about it!

This is just my personal take on the matter: When Amora'im said "???? ??? ??????? " they were refering to things like this. Because for sure the secrets were hidden in the Torah but it wasn't revealed. I believe that in our generation it was largely revealed, but it still needs to be organized and spread around. The handbooks are a beginning, did you see them?

It may also be true that all of the 12 steps can be found in the torah, the only thing I believe clearly is not in the torah is to admit your shortcomings (aveiros) to another human being (and your group). Vidduy is between you and Hashem and nowhere that I am aware of does it say you should admit your aveirus on yom kippur to another human being. I assume this was taken from other religious where confessions are practiced or it may simply be a physiological benefit.

Among "chaburo" of "ovdim" it's been common practice for at least a few hundred years. I think R' Elimelech mentions it.

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps

Posted by jack - 24 Jun 2009 14:48

here is my answer to you.the torah was not meant as healing for sickness.it was meant as a spiritual guide to make us better in morality and ethics, more than any other system that exists.when it says hafoch bo vahafoch bo d'kule bo, in my humble opinion, this does NOT refer to sickness.that means everything moral and ethical is in it, and absolutely nowhere else.but you want to learn how to be a brain surgeon? you wont find it. you have to go to medical school.in the yeshivos they dont teach brain surgery.and in the yeshivos they dont teach about addictions. One person told me that he went to a BIG godol and asked him about addictions. He said 'just stop'. This is no surprise, or a fault, chas vshalom. It is because they dont learn about addictions in yeshiva- for that you go to a doctor. And many times the psak of a rabbi will be 'what does the doctor say?' imagine that! the rabbi asks what does the doctor say! and on that he bases his psak.so, don't be surprised that addictions and sicknesses are not dealt with in the torah, because that's not what the torah is there for.

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps

Posted by boruch - 24 Jun 2009 14:56

[battleworn wrote on 24 Jun 2009 14:40:](#)

I was actually wondering about the factions that make the group their "higher power" if that actually may be avoda zora.

Group as Higher Power is not idolatry. It just means that the addict has to surrender that the group as a whole is wiser than he is and follow their instructions and not his own desires.

[battleworn wrote on 24 Jun 2009 14:40:](#)

This is just my personal take on the matter: When Amora'im said "???? ??? ??????" they were referring to things like this. Because for sure the secrets were hidden in the Torah but it wasn't revealed. I believe that in our generation it was largely revealed, but it still needs to be organized and spread around. The handbooks are a beginning, did you see them?

I believe that there is no problem whatsoever with the original and early Orthodox AA. I believe that all the problems are an outgrowth of modern and later AA.

The venue of the meetings is neither here nor there and in my opinion is just an excuse to make a big deal over nothing whatsoever. Bemokom tzorech there is no question that classrooms or the like are a permissible venue for a meeting. In my opinion anyone who suggests otherwise is knowingly or unknowingly subscribing to chassidus of the Chosid shotteh.

The problem with some of the ideas and attitudes of modern and later AA is a problem that can be fixed.

That said there is nothing at all wrong with looking for a Torah approach as long as no-one is held hostage waiting for such an approach to be formulated and to get significant enough results. So for those who want to exclusively use the religious non-AA methods described on this site, I would say if you believe that is what you should be doing then go ahead with maximum hatzlocho.

I today have a very good inkling of what my own Torah approach would be, however for myself I will not trust it at all and will not even discuss it until I have the significant amount of experience referred to earlier in this thread.

Those of us that like myself were persuaded of the need to use the 12 Steps, can in my opinion do so lechatchila ulechol hadeios if they follow a traditionalist model such as the Back to Basics model that I got from my sponsor.

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps

Posted by the.guard - 24 Jun 2009 15:00

Dear Moshe, welcome to the great discussion!

There is hardly mention of the concept of addiction or a solution in chazal or mussar seforim. This begs for an explanation that I don't have. Dr. Twersky responds to one such question here www.guardureyes.com/GUE/Tips/12StepsQuest.asp "Whereas forbidden sexual activity certainly occurred, I doubt that the phenomenon of sexual addiction was ever brought to the attention of the authors of sifrei mussar." I have a hard time accepting this answer because Chazal understood the human psychology and yetzer hora extremely well and they didn't have to be told about a phenomenon to write about it!

Please read the Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh [here](#). It seems like he's talking about addiction to me! He directly addresses the complete powerlessness that a person who is involved with lust will

experience. But he suggests an answer to this problem in a way that only suited his day and age. He suggests that the only way to succeed is by completely stopping to see and think about sexual matters. However, if the Ohr Hachayim had lived in our generation where this is almost impossible, and where the entire world's sewage is available with a click of the mouse, he may

And he also does touch upon the **core** of the 12-Steps, which is that it is ONLY Hashem who can fight for us, not our own will power... This Ohr Hachayim will blow you away. Definitely worth a read!

have come up with a 12-Step program, who knows?

It may also be true that all of the 12 steps can be found in the torah, the only thing I believe clearly is not in the torah is to admit your shortcomings (aveiros) to another human being (and your group). Vidduy is between you and Hashem and nowhere that I am aware of does it say you should admit your aveirus on yom kippur to another human being. I assume this was taken from other religious where confessions are practiced or it may simply be a physiological benefit.

The Tzetel Katan of the great Chassidic master, R' Elimelech of Lizentzk states:

One should relate before one's teacher, who instructs him in the way of HaShem, or even before a good friend, all of one's thoughts that are contrary to the Holy Torah that the Yetzer HaRah causes to arise in his mind or heart. [Whether they occur] when he is learning Torah, praying, sitting in his bed, or during the day. And one should not withhold anything because of shame. He will find that by relating these things, he will gain the power to break the strength of the Yetzer HaRah so that it will no longer be able to overcome him other times. This is in addition to the good advice that he will receive from his friend in the ways of Hashem. And this is a wonderful remedy.

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps

Posted by battleworn - 24 Jun 2009 15:04

here is my answer to you.the torah was not meant as healing for sickness.it was meant as a spiritual guide to make us better in morality and ethics, more than any other system that exists.when it says hafoch bo vahafoch bo d'kule bo, in my humble opinion, this does NOT refer to sickness.that means everything moral and ethical is in it, and absolutely nowhere else.but

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Reb Jack shlito"h (I honestly feel that you deserve that title and more). I have a question on your mehalech. There are quite a lot of people here on the forum that there's lives never even came close to being unmanageable. The only reason they tried so hard to stop and searched for help is because they knew that what they were doing is forbidden. So I ask you, if it's only a sickness why bother stopping?

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps

Posted by the.guard - 24 Jun 2009 15:12

There are various levels of addiction. For those who want to stop because it's "wrong" and because it's a "Yetzer Hara" issue, then maybe more Torah and Mussar will be able to help them stop, really. And even if not, there are 13 tools in the handbooks before coming to the 12-Steps at all.

But, if it has become a sickness, as today's chizuk e-mail talks about (#512), then we will need the 12-Steps as the best medicine currently known to mankind for this sickness. You ask, why stop if it's a sickness? That's like asking "why get cured from cancer?" This sickness will destroy us. And although Hashem may not judge us for our "disease", he will judge us for why we didn't go for "treatment"!

Recovery is 100% our responsibility.

As the 12-Step books say:

- will power alone, is not effective in dealing with the complex problem of sex addiction

- powerless **does not** mean helpless.
- powerless is **never an excuse** to continue
- we are **responsible** for our recovery

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps
Posted by jack - 24 Jun 2009 15:55

r guard is on the money, as always. If something is forbidden and we do it anyway, then our lives, by definition, are unmanageable. Doing something against the Torah is going against the essence of what G-d wants a human being to be. Having a sickness does NOT release us from responsibility to heal that sickness, as some people erroneously think. Having a sickness means we MUST seek treatment - there are no excuses. We will be held accountable for not seeking treatment! Success? WE hope so. But Hashem wants us to try, to put our efforts in. The yetzer hara starts out like a spiders web, the more we feed it, the thicker it grows. By the time the addiction sets in, it is like a thick rope. By that time, we need more than just learning and mussar - we need what is available in the velt at that time, and at this time, it is the group support and the 12 steps. They are an ingenious tool, just like doing a heart transplant on someone who suffers from heart disease.

As far as the titles, I'm not a rabbi or the son of a rabbi, and i am FAR from perfect. I went through he-- in my life and I am 50 and still trying to overcome and undo the effects from those bad times. Finding GUE was another step in that direction.

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps
Posted by boruch - 24 Jun 2009 16:32

[guardureyes wrote on 24 Jun 2009 15:12:](#)

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Recovery is 100% our responsibility.

What you write is true but **since the "Sickness Concept" is so widely misunderstood and misused, some historical background sheds a lot of light.**

Here is what the concept was really originally intended for:

[Bill W, A.A. COMES OF AGE, pp. 69-70](#)**In my first conversation with Dr. Bob, I bore down heavily on the medical hopelessness of his case, freely using Dr. Silkworth's words describing the alcoholic's dilemma, the wrote:**

[/size]

Bill W called this method of using the disease to help the addict hit rock bottom, the **nutcracker**:

[Bill W, A.A. COMES OF AGE, p. 8](#)**We know that the newcomer has to wrote:**

nutcracker of the-obsession-plus-the allergy as a tool of such power that it can shatter his ego. Only thus can he be convinced that on his own unaided resources he has little or no chance.**[/b]**

The question of moral responsibility was raised by religious leaders long ago and here is an excerpt from a 1960 speech by AA founder Bill W (emphasis and bolding mine):

[Bill W, speech to NCCA, in The Blue Book, Vol. XII, 1960](#)

[New York, New York](#)**Sickness Concept Versus Responsibility**

[\[size=10pt\]Early in AA's history, very natural questions arose among theologians. There was a Mr. Link who had written a popular treatise called wrote:](#)

we AAs did not use the concept of sickness to absolve our members from moral responsibility. On the contrary, we used the fact of fatal illness to clamp the heaviest kind of moral responsibility on to the sufferer.[/b]The further point was made that **in his early days of drinking the alcoholic often was no doubt guilty of irresponsibility and gluttony**. But once the time of compulsive drinking, veritable lunacy, had arrived, he couldn't very well be held accountable for his conduct. He then had a lunacy that condemned him to drink in spite of all he could do; he had developed a bodily sensitivity to alcohol that guaranteed his final madness and death. When this state of affairs was pointed out to him, **he was placed immediately under the heaviest kind of pressure to accept AA's moral and spiritual program of regeneration — namely, our Twelve Steps**. Fortunately, Mr. Link was satisfied with this view of the use that we were making of the alcoholic's illness. I am glad to report that nearly all theologians who have since thought about this matter have also agreed with that early position.

While it is most obvious that free choice in the matter of alcohol has virtually disappeared in most cases, we AAs do point out that **plenty of free will is left in other areas. It certainly takes a large amount of willingness, and a great exertion of the will to accept and practice the AA program.**[/size]

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps
Posted by boruch - 24 Jun 2009 16:55

[jack wrote on 24 Jun 2009 15:55:](#)

Success? WE hope so.

Success is guaranteed if we are honest and thorough,

[quote="BB pp. 54-56"][size=10pt] In this book you will read the experience of a man who thought he was an atheist. His story is so interesting that some of it should be told now. His change of heart was dramatic, convincing, and moving...

One night, when confined in a hospital, he was approached by an alcoholic who had known a spiritual experience. Our friend's gorge rose as he bitterly cried out: "If there is a God, He certainly hasn't done anything for me!" But later, alone in his room, he asked himself this question: "Is it possible that all the religious people I have known are wrong?" While pondering the answer he felt as though he lived in hell. Then, like a thunderbolt, a great thought came. It crowded out all else:

"Who are you to say there is no God?"

This man recounts that he tumbled out of bed to his knees. In a few seconds he was overwhelmed by a conviction of the Presence of God. It poured over and through him with the certainty and majesty of a great tide at flood. The barriers he had built through the years were swept away. He stood in the Presence of Infinite Power and Love. He had stepped from bridge to shore. For the first time, he lived in conscious companionship with his Creator...

His alcoholic problem was taken away. That very night, years ago, it disappeared. Save for a few brief moments of temptation the thought of drink has never returned; and at such times a great revulsion has risen up in him. Seemingly he could not drink even if he would. God had restored his sanity.

What is this but a miracle of healing? Yet its elements are simple...

[b]To this man, the revelation was sudden. Some of us grow into it more slowly. But He has come to all who have honestly sought Him. [/b][size][b]/quote]

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps
Posted by Dov - 24 Jun 2009 17:24

[battleworn wrote on 24 Jun 2009 15:04:](#)

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spiritual guide to make us better in morality and ethics, more than any other system that exists. when it says *hafoch bo vahafoch bo d'kule bo*, in my humble opinion, this does NOT refer to sickness. that means everything moral and ethical is in it, and absolutely nowhere else. but you want to learn how to be a brain surgeon? you won't find it. you have to go to medical school. in the yeshivos they don't teach brain surgery. and in the yeshivos they don't teach about addictions. One person told me that he went to a BIG *godol* and asked him about addictions. He said 'just stop'. This is no surprise, or a fault, *chas vshalom*. It is because they don't learn about addictions in yeshiva- for that you go to a doctor. And many times the *psak* of a rabbi will be 'what does the doctor say?' imagine that! the rabbi asks what does the doctor say! and on that he bases his *psak*. so, don't be surprised that addictions and sicknesses are not dealt with in the torah, because that's not what the torah is there for.

Reb Jack shlita"n (I honestly feel that you deserve that title and more). I have a question on your *mehalech*. There are quite a lot of people here on the forum that there's lives never even came close to being unmanageable. The only reason they tried so hard to stop and searched for help is because they knew that what they were doing is forbidden. So I ask you, if it's only a sickness why bother stopping?

Dear Battleworn,

It is ironic and touching for me to read your last phrase, "*if it's only a sickness, why bother stopping*". In my opinion, you have captured a great part of the limitation of this whole venue and hit on the tension between "hard core" addicts and those who are here because of what they'd honestly report were "religious reasons".

This is why it struck a cord, amigo:

I once complained to an SA mentor that I was so upset that I had slipped and sought out inappropriate images and *desperately* did not want to act out to the point of *zera levatola*! The SA old-timer, quite the curmudgeon (who was frequently in "tear-the-newbie-to-pieces" mode) answered: "So, you don't want to *sin*. Well, that's not what this (SA) is about at all. And it's not what it's about for you, either, is it? Let me ask you: Did you come to SA because you didn't want to sin, or was that really not enough? Isn't the reason you finally came only because you finally saw this would kill you?" And it was.

I need, as an honest yid, to admit to Hashem, my eternal Best friend, and to you, that I would never have made it to recovery if it was about Torah, Yiddishkeit, morality, boredom, being sick-and-tired, or whatever. It was about saving my life. Selfish enlightened self-interest.

That having been said, it would be simply a lie for me to *firzuch* in recovery as though I am a

heiligh: morally moved to be a good guy and not act out. Being deceitful in this way, *even though it sounds like kedusha* and very proper (*to a non-addict*) would mean the death of me, as *any* deceit will.

It seems to me this is where the tension ultimately lies. Some of us are not approaching it as an addiction. It is a moral failing for them. They are not doing the ratzon Hashem and it drives them crazy. Others are driven by the imperious urge of self-preservation - a hidden power of naked honesty reached only by vividly realizing (or seeing) life really slipping away.

So, with respect to recovery and my experience of the 12 steps I'd phrase it exactly the other way:

"If I'm *just trying to be a good person, not sin, or even do Hashem's will*, then why bother with the 12 steps?" What could possibly drive me from looking in my gemora for a solution, if it's about goodness? I kept looking there until I found that my problem was that I was actually (terminally and progressively) mentally, physically, and spiritually ill. W/respect and love,

Dov

PS. I still believe that the solutions for learning to live a life in which I won't get uncomfortable enough that I *need* to use lust is certainly in the Torah. It is just that the *approach*: starting with step one and the venue of a group, powerlessness, and openly speaking about the goofy ideas I get in meetings, need not be based on Torah teshuva concepts, because it is an illness. Yes, reb Boruch/Battleworn, as it *is* the refuah it is surely *mandated* by it, though, and surely my own responsibility. If I'm not **for myself**, who will be?

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Re: Torah AND the 12-Steps

Posted by battleworn - 24 Jun 2009 17:50

You ask, why stop if it's a sickness? That's like asking "why get cured from cancer?" This sickness will destroy us. And although Hashem may not judge us for our "disease", he will judge us for why we didn't go for "treatment"!

O'k so if I understand you correctly, you're saying that he is sinning, but because he's sick, the only way to stop sinning is to treat the sickness. In that case, I don't see how this explains why Chazal don't discuss it. All milchemes hayetzer works this way. We always need tachbulos to fight the y'h and we can usually find all of them in Tenach and/or Chazal. It is the "job" of the Torah to teach us these tricks.

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