

SMART Recovery and Torah

Posted by MenachemGYE - 17 Jan 2020 11:39

Question: I'm frum and SMART recovery seems like a program that can work for me. One hesitation I have is that SMART is referred to sometimes as a **secular** program! Is it compatible with Torah?

Answer:

When they use the term secular they mean that unlike some other program *it does not have opinion on religion*. That means the program is suitable for anybody, regardless of their spiritual beliefs.

In addition, I've studied SMART recovery program in depth and haven't found anything controversial from a Torah standpoint and common sense.

There is only one concept in the program (The philosophy of unconditional acceptance), which when used by a Yid would be done a little differently than they way they present it.

For example, when it comes to what they refer to as "Unconditional life-acceptance (ULA)", it described like this:

You can judge life in the same way, as being completely unfair or totally terrible. When you find yourself thinking, "Life sucks! It couldn't be more awful!" Remind yourself of the good things that have happened in your life. If you can accept that there are many things you can't control, it may help you to better accept what life throws at you, even if you don't like it.

However, when done by a Yid, we'd remind ourselves that everything in life comes from Hashem.

Similarly, the concept of Unconditional self-acceptance (USA), is described by them as follows:

Unconditional self-acceptance is the idea that you have worth, just as you are. This explains what separates “you”— your character, traits, personality, strengths, and weaknesses — from your behaviors. This is why SMART doesn’t use labels. You may have addictive behaviors, but you are *not* an addict. While this might seem like a game of words, it’s important to recognize how powerful words and labels are.

The same labels that you may carry internally — “failure”, “disappointment,” or “loser” — led to your unhealthy behaviors. Attaching new labels won’t help.

If you can’t accept yourself, can you really expect others to? Even if they do, would you believe them?

Accepting yourself may be difficult. You may have caused others and yourself extreme harm and pain. You may have ruined the lives of others, plunged your family into debt, brought diseases into trusting relationships, or squandered your life savings. Who can forgive that? Not everyone can, but you can forgive yourself and accept that you are a worthwhile person despite your past behaviors. Be patient with and kind to yourself. Be honest about what you’ve done. Accept that you can’t change the past, but you can create your future.

You may be tempted to compare yourself to others or hold yourself up to some arbitrary standard. There is no standard or universal measure of your value. You stand alone in your self-worth. Comparing yourself to others is as meaningless as judging one color against another: Is red good or bad? Is blue more valuable than green?

According to Torah, you can't say "there is no standard or universal measure of your value", and this idea they way the present is based on Albert Ellis's Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) which believes in moral relativism etc. A frum Jew can still accept themselves in a way encouraged by Torah sources - ????

Aside from this minor point, which even in SMART is only a small detail of their program, I did not find anything else that is even slightly controversial.

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Re: SMART Recovery and Torah

Posted by MenachemGYE - 17 Jan 2020 11:47

One more point. The compatibility of REBT (which is one of the pillars of SMART) and Torah did not go unnoticed. In the book The Judaic Foundations of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Ronald Pies writes:

As I delved further into Pirke Avot and other rabbinical commentaries, I discovered that many ideas I had associated with REBT and Albert Ellis were anticipated or mirrored in the rabbinical literature. In particular, I found that Maimonides (Moshe ben Maimon, ca. 1138-1204 CE)—widely regarded as the greatest Jewish philosopher of the medieval period—had espoused a “rationalist” philosophy with extraordinary similarities to the principles of REBT and CBT. Similarly, I found that more “modern” rabbis and sages, such as Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liady (1745-1812) and Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-94) voiced beliefs with strong affinities to those of Albert Ellis, Aaron Beck MD, and other cognitive-behavioral therapists. Increasingly, I came to believe that rabbinical Judaism and CBT/REBT shared the fundamental idea that by means of our intellectual faculties, we can understand, modulate, and “tame” our unruly emotions. It is the task and burden of the present work to demonstrate how this idea is worked out in the history of rabbinical thought.

I want to acknowledge the great debt I owe to the late Dr. Albert Ellis, who, toward the end of his life, was kind enough to send me a number of encouraging letters in which he acknowledged the affinities between some rabbinical beliefs and those of REBT -- even though Dr. Ellis could not endorse the theological belief system of the rabbis.

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Re: SMART Recovery and Torah
Posted by DavidT - 19 Jan 2020 21:00

The main differences between the SMART Recovery and 12 step program are:

SMART Recovery has a scientific foundation, not a spiritual one. (this makes it better for torah values)

SMART Recovery teaches increasing self-reliance, rather than powerlessness. (this can be

related to the concept of clarity in free will "bechira")

SMART Recovery meetings are discussion meetings in which individuals talk with one another, rather than to one another. (dibuk chavirim)

SMART Recover encourages attendance for months to years, but probably not a lifetime. (the Torah belief is that a person can change and be fully healed with hashems help)

SMART Recovery discourages use of labels such as "alcoholic" or "addict". (the person's neshomo is always pure, the sin or blemish is external)

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Re: SMART Recovery and Torah
Posted by DavidT - 24 Jan 2020 14:20

The SMART program has roots in the following concept:

In Pirkei Avos (2:13) Rabbi Shimon says in response to Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai's directive to "Go out and see if you can discover which good path each person should follow,"

--- 'Eizehu Chochom Haroeh Es HaNolad, who is truly a SMART man, one who sees results, consequences.' ---

This applies to everything, but the SMART recovery program is a perfect example of an opportunity that can be seized successfully with forethought, or have unfortunate unintended consequences, that could result from poor or no planning.

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