

**Searching for a Higher Power:
tion, Recovery, and Spirituality in the Minds of the Rabbis**

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Digest

This thesis is an exploration of the spiritual components of addiction and recovery using modern and rabbinic sources. Sources are culled from the Midrash, Mishnah, Babylonian Talmud, Jerusalem Talmud, and various rabbinic responsa. Three chapters, "Addiction," "Recovery," and "Towards a New Approach to Addiction and Recovery in the Jewish Community," are preceded by an introduction. The first chapter examines addiction, and explores addiction as a spiritual disease. This chapter also offers a thorough understanding of the rabbinic view of addiction. The second chapter explores recovery and postulates the critical role a spiritual renewal has in recovery from addiction. Various rabbinic stories and dicta illustrate the rabbinic understanding of recovery. The final chapter addresses some of the challenges raised by understanding addiction and recovery in spiritual terms, and also offers spiritual sources within the Jewish tradition that offer guidance and solace to modern Jewish addicts. The work of this thesis is the beginning of a new approach to understanding and treating addiction—a spiritual ailment requiring spiritual solutions—within the Jewish community.

Dedication

To my husband, my true love, and my dedicated partner,

Ari Yonah Vernon.

*I look at you and know, it's because of you that
I am becoming the person I always wanted to be.*

I love you, always.

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to God for the strength, insight, and faith that guided every step of this thesis. The *Gates of Repentance Ne'ilah* service says, "How can we find words to thank You for Your goodness, and how can words alone be fitting thanks? And so we make this pledge: We will thank You with our lives." I will always work on this pledge, and let my life be thanks for all Your gifts and daily sustenance.

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My friend Marci Bloch gave me the book *The Spirituality of Imperfection* two years before I started work on this thesis. She has been pointing out the perfect thesis topic ever since! It turns out that *The Spirituality of Imperfection* was as critical a component of this thesis as Marci's friendship has been to my life.

I "survived" the process of creating this thesis because of the nurturing and support of my parents, Lietzie Belford and Bill and Vicki Belford, and my brother, David Belford. Their unconditional love and acceptance of all I do and attempt is one of the most precious gifts of my life, and I am incapable of expressing the depth of my gratitude or my love.

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Introduction

Addiction is a serious and significant problems affecting modern society. It seems that new addictions are always being “discovered,” and we have learned that people can not only be addicted to drugs or alcohol, but also to food, shopping, gambling, sex, the Internet, love, work, relationships. . . . The list is endless. Sadly, addiction affects not only the addict, but also the addict’s family and larger community. This poses a serious challenge to society, and to the Jewish community in particular. We are left asking ourselves, “What does Judaism teach us about addiction and recovery? What exactly is the relationship between spirituality and addiction and recovery? How can Jewish sources and spirituality help Jews maintain sobriety?”

These questions are the genesis of this thesis. Based on rabbinic literature as well as modern sources, this thesis is an exploration of addiction and recovery through spirituality. It first attempts to understand addiction as a spiritual disease. The rabbinic view of what we call addiction is also thoroughly explored. It then explores recovery, and the critical role spirituality has in recovery. In order to do this, the program of the primary means of recovery—Twelve-Step groups—is analyzed and mined for some essential spiritual tools for recovery. Rabbinic stories that share anecdotes of addiction and recovery deepen our understanding of spirituality in recovery. Finally, the challenges raised by viewing addiction as a spiritual disease are used as a guide toward a new approach to addiction and recovery in the Jewish community, the culmination of this thesis.

As the thesis progresses, it addresses a number of important challenges, such as

the basic challenge of using rabbinic texts that do not reflect the understanding of addiction that we have today. It will also address the difficulties of determining the presence of addiction in rabbinic texts, as well as the challenge of differentiating between substance abuse and actual addiction. Various standardized measures are applied to the rabbinic texts in order to ensure academic integrity. These are detailed throughout the thesis.

The actual texts upon which this thesis is based are rabbinic texts. The texts that are analyzed draw from the following sources:

- **Midrash:** Hebrew for "investigation" or "drawing out." Midrash is a method of biblical interpretation. The author of the midrash closely and creatively reads a word or words of the Hebrew Bible to extrapolate meaning or law that go beyond the plain meaning of the original biblical text. This thesis quotes midrash from a collection called Genesis Rabbah, which are interpretations of selections from the biblical book of Genesis. These were written ca., 5th-6th century CE by rabbis living in Israel.
- **Mishnah:** Hebrew for "to repeat." The Mishnah is a book of Jewish law compiled and edited around 200 C.E. in Israel. The Mishnah is made up of sixty-three tractates, and is thought to be edited by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (Judah the Prince).
- **Talmud:** Hebrew for "study." The record of rabbinic teachings that spans a period of more than 600 years, from the first century C.E. through the sixth and seventh centuries C.E. It is written in both Hebrew and Aramaic, and follows the

same order as the Mishnah. The Talmud is the foundational text for rabbinic Judaism. This thesis quotes the Babylonian Talmud, which was compiled in what is now Iraq in the 6th Century, and the Jerusalem Talmud, which was compiled in the land of Israel in the 5th Century.

- **Responsa:** In Hebrew, responsa are known as “*sh’elot u’tshuvot*,” or “questions and answers.” Starting around the 7th century, various leaders in outlying Jewish communities began to pose legal questions to known rabbinic authorities in Babylon. As the Jewish community spread over time, legal questions were sent to rabbinic authorities throughout the diaspora. This practice has continued until today, and the resulting responsa provide a spectrum of behaviors, stories, and viewpoints. The responsa quoted in this thesis are from *Hatam Sofer* (Moses Sofer, 18th-19th centuries), *Ginat HaVeradim* (Abram ben Modechai HaLevi, 17th-18th centuries), *Zikaron Yehudah* (Judah ben Asher, 13th-14th centuries), and *Rashba* (Rabbi Solomon ben Aderet, 13th-14th centuries).

Throughout the thesis, the rabbinic texts will be referenced precisely as they were in this introduction (e.g. Babylonian Talmud, *Rashba* responsum, etc.). This thesis has chosen to focus on rabbinic sources because these sources are the foundation for rabbinic Judaism, but are also essential guides for modern Jews. Liberal Reform Jews, in particular, often emphasize Torah’s principles and teachings. The work of this thesis shows that rabbinic writings have important insight, guidance, and suggestions to offer the modern Jew concerned about addiction and recovery. This was a surprising and meaningful discovery.

It is my hope that this thesis will provide the reader with a new depth of understanding about addiction and recovery as spiritual ailments and solutions. Modern Jewry has much to learn from the spiritual recovery movement, as well as from the rabbis, and the work of this thesis is merely a beginning for further understanding.

Chapter One: Addiction

Defining Addiction

Mental health professionals generally define addiction as “a complex, progressive behavior pattern having biological, psychological, sociological, and behavioral components. . . . [There is] overwhelmingly pathological involvement in or attachment to it, subjective compulsion to continue it, and reduced ability to exert personal control over it.”¹ Despite this definition, however, addiction is not an easy problem to understand. Some argue that addiction is “a brain disease, not a moral failing or behavior problem”² This view is supported by studies showing that “the brain changes during an addiction,”³ creating new brain pathways and cellular connections that persist long after the addictive behavior stops. Addicts experience physical symptoms when they partake of the object of their addiction, and withdrawal symptoms when they desist from that same object. These physical symptoms occur whether the object is physically addictive (such as alcohol or cocaine), or not (such as shopping or gambling).⁴ In fact, “when most people say . . .

¹Marcia Cohn Spiegel and Yaacov Kravitz. “Confronting Addiction.” *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook*. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), p. 267.

²Jane E. Brody. “Addiction: A Brain Ailment, Not a Moral Lapse.” *New York Times*. (30 Sept. 2003, online ed.).

³Ibid.

⁴Lance M. Dodes. *The Heart of Addiction*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), p. 72.

addict, they mean a person dependent on alcohol or drugs”⁵ The public perception seems aligned with the evidence that points to addiction being a physical problem.

However, others argue that “addictions are an effort at emotional health. They are attempts, though misdirected . . . [at] maintaining a sense of control over oneself.”⁶

Lance Dodes, a prominent psychiatrist working in the field of addiction, believes that

“virtually every addictive act is preceded by a feeling of helplessness or powerlessness.

Addictive behavior functions to repair this underlying feeling of helplessness . . . because

taking the addictive action creates a sense of being empowered, of regaining control, over one’s emotional experience.”⁷ This belief is echoed in countless sources on addiction and

recovery. For example, Craig Nakken, author of the groundbreaking and controversial

The Addictive Personality, believes that addiction “is an attempt to control and fulfill [a]

desire for happiness.”⁸ Understanding addiction as an emotional problem has led many to

observe that addicts share common psychological or emotional problems, such as “a low

frustration tolerance, sensitivity, a low sense of self worth, and isolation.”⁹ There is no

doubt that an active addict suffers from emotional problems, often made worse by the

addiction. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, a recovering food addict, wrote that she “was proficient

⁵Christopher D. Ringwald. *The Soul of Recovery: Uncovering the Spiritual Dimensions in the Treatment of Addictions*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 9.

⁶Dodes, p. 127.

⁷Dodes, p. 4.

⁸Craig Nakken. *The Addictive Personality: Understanding the Addictive Process and Compulsive Behavior*. (Center City, MN: Hazeldon Press, 1996), p. 1.

⁹James W. West. *The Betty For Center Book of Answers*. (New York: Pocket Books, 1997), p. 13.

when it came to turning anger inward, cultivating depression, and nursing self-doubt."¹⁰

Furthermore, she notes that "the first thing to be destroyed when you are actively addicted is your own self-esteem. The first thing to go is your capacity to feel loved and worth loving."¹¹ These emotional and psychological causes and effects of addiction seem to indicate that addiction is primarily an emotional ailment.

Of course, there is another prominent belief that defines addiction as a spiritual ailment, and holds that "major addiction is the sacred disease of our time."¹² Many believe that addicts are actually misdirected spiritual seekers, and that "behind the craving for drugs or alcohol is the craving for transcendence or wholeness."¹³ According to this belief, therefore, "addiction is an illness in which people believe in and seek spiritual connection through objects and behaviors."¹⁴ Supporting this definition of addiction is the testimony of some addicts who "describe the first drink or drug as their first spiritual experience."¹⁵ This description has led many to postulate that addicts "are generally

¹⁰Margaret Bullitt-Jonas. *Holy Hunger: A Woman's Journey from Food Addiction to Spiritual Fulfillment*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), p. 53.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹²Gerald G. May. *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions*. (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988), p. viii.

¹³Christina Grof and Stanislav Grof. *The Stormy Search for the Self: A Guide to Personal Growth through Transformational Crisis*. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1990), p.100.

¹⁴Nakken, p. 5.

¹⁵Grof, p. 104.

distinguished by a poor connection to their own, or any religious tradition,"¹⁶ and that this lack in spiritual meaning contributes to addiction. In fact, "recovered addicts often recall a void they felt within, one they tried to fill with alcohol or drugs. Many say they once suffered from 'a God-shaped hole.'"¹⁷

These experiences and observations certainly support the view that addiction is a spiritual malady, which has led many religiously inclined people to define addiction as a form of slavery. Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski has written that "whereas there have been various types of slavery in world history, none has been as total and as absolute as the slavery of addiction. Whatever form the addiction may take . . . it totally dominates the individual."¹⁸ Similarly, one Israeli writer has noted that "one nefarious form of slavery is the addiction to drugs. . . . Drug addiction and criminal behavior involving Jews in Israel has become an established phenomenon for the people who were freed from bondage by God."¹⁹ *Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery* puts this slavery imagery in a Jewish historical context, and explains that addicts "stand at the threshold of the Red Sea every day struggling, fighting the urge to return to the slavery of [their] dependency."²⁰

¹⁶Ringwald, p. 125.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁸Abraham J. Twerski. *The Spiritual Self: Reflections on Recovery and God*. (Center City, MN: Hazeldon Press, 2000), p. 8.

¹⁹Yocheved Golani. "Gateway to Hope." *Jewish Law commentary: Examining Halacha, Jewish Issues, and Secular Law*. (Online. 18 Aug. 2003).

²⁰Kerry M. Olitzky and Stuart A. Copans. *Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery: A Personal Guide to Turning from Alcoholism and Other Addictions*. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1991), p. 16.

Viewing addiction as a spiritual problem is not a recent phenomenon; the original founders of Alcoholics Anonymous recognized that they suffered from a “spiritual sickness,” and therefore they emphasized spiritual recovery before physical and emotional recovery.²¹ Considering these beliefs, it seems clear that addiction can be characterized as a spiritual malady.

The three opinions explored above state that addiction is a brain disease, a psychological attempt at control, or a spiritually enslaving attachment. Addiction can be all three. As one recovering addict explains, “addiction is now widely considered to be a threefold illness, at once physical, emotional, and spiritual.”²² Despite certain groups emphasizing one or the other of these three elements, addiction, in fact, permeates all three aspects of an addict’s life. This thesis understands addiction to be a physical, emotional, and spiritual ailment characterized by compulsive, habitual dependence on and use of an object or experience, with far-reaching and often devastating consequences. Due to the scope of this work, particular attention will be paid to the spiritual aspect of addiction.

Addiction as a Spiritual Disease

It is perhaps not difficult for the general public to recognize addiction as a physical disease. A number of studies suggest that addicts have a unique physiology that leads to

²¹*Alcoholics Anonymous: The Story of How Many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism.* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2001), p. 64.

²²Bullitt-Jonas, p. 110.

addiction. As one source notes, "while psychological, cultural, and social factors definitely influence the alcoholic's drinking patterns and behavior, they have no effect on whether or not he becomes alcoholic in the first place. *Physiology, not psychology, determines whether one drinker will become addicted to alcohol and another will not* [authors' emphasis]."²³ Furthermore, the general public is accustomed to understanding diseases physiologically: "I have a bacterial infection," "it's a genetic disorder," and "her behavior is the result of a lithium imbalance" are statements that fill news stories, drug commercials, and daily conversation. It is therefore not difficult to consider addiction in physiological terms.

It is also not difficult to recognize addiction as an emotional disorder. Mental health professionals argue that addiction exists "only when there is a psychological drive to perform the addictive behavior."²⁴ The public, which has largely accepted therapy as a normal part of modern life, is equally amenable to understanding addiction as a psychological disorder. A person might think, "the reason this person does drugs is because she is displacing her unexpressed feelings or actions onto the drugs." In fact, "the scientific explanation [of addiction] has focused on the physical and the emotional components"²⁵ This sort of approach to addiction, then, is not unfamiliar.

²³James R. Milam and Katherine Ketcham. *Under the Influence: A Guide to the Myths and Realities of Alcoholism*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), pp. 34-35.

²⁴Dodes, p. 74.

²⁵Harold E. Doweiko. "Substance Use Disorders as a Symptom of a Spiritual Disease." *Addiction and Spirituality: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Eds. Oliver J. Morgan and Merle Jordan. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), p. 36.

Understanding addiction as a spiritual disease, however, is not familiar. Most people do not share a commonly understood language when it comes to "spiritual sickness," and the expression of spiritual searching and struggle is something that discomforts people today. This is partly due to the fact that it is not easy to even define "spiritual" or "spirituality," a challenge with which theologians from every religion have struggled. One Christian writer attempted to define "spirituality," by saying, "Human beings are spirit in the world, and spirituality is the effort to understand and realize the potential of that extraordinary and paradoxical condition."²⁶ Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, medical director of the Gateway Rehabilitation Center, writes in *The Spiritual Self*, "all of the unique features of a human being in their totality is what constitutes the spirit of a person. When an individual exercises these unique features, he or she is being spiritual. Thus, spirituality is simply the implementation of those distinctive features that separate humans from animals."²⁷ Rabbi Carol Glass, who has written and spoken extensively on the topic of addiction and spirituality, believes that "*K'niat HaLev*, the humbling of the heart . . . is the essence of Jewish spirituality."²⁸ These definitions address both the grandeur and the humility of being a human, somehow far greater than animals but far

²⁶Sandra M. Schneiders. "Spirituality in the Academy." *Modern Christian Spirituality: Methodological and Historical Essays*. Ed. B.C. Hanson. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) as quoted in Morgan, Oliver J. "Addiction and Spirituality in Context." *Addiction and Spirituality: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Eds. Oliver J. Morgan and Merle Jordan. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), p.19.

²⁷Twerski, *The Spiritual Self*, p. 4.

²⁸Carol Glass. "Addiction and Recovery through Jewish Eyes." *Addiction and Spirituality: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Eds. Oliver J. Morgan and Merle Jordan. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), p. 247.

less than gods. Yet, these observations do not address the way addiction is a spiritual disease. It does not seem possible for a person to become spiritually sick.

Howard E. Doweiko, a psychologist in the substance abuse program and Gundersen-Lutheran Medical Center, refutes this belief in his article "Substance Use Disorders as a Symptom of a Spiritual Disease," in which he defines spirituality as "the living expression of the relationship between the individual and the Higher Power."²⁹ Doweiko believes that one's awareness of self necessarily includes an awareness of isolation and incompleteness, which leads to a great deal of pain.³⁰ Addiction can be the result of this awareness and pain. He explains exactly how this "spiritual disease" progresses:

The individual discovers that to live is to continue to suffer pain. This revelation, although it offers the opportunity for spiritual growth, does so at the expense of possibly shattering the individual's sense of "self." No person's worldview emerges unscathed from this moment of ultimate awareness of one's place in the universe One possible outcome is that, rather than accept personal limitations, the person becomes a "spiritual narcissist." If the individual becomes unable to acknowledge the possibility of a Power greater than "self," s/he will have no reason to deny "self" whatever pleasures life might have to offer. In all too many cases, if something is not found to fill the empty heart and soul of the individual, s/he may very well choose to do so with alcohol and drugs.³¹

Of course, not everyone who has this "moment of ultimate awareness" becomes an addict. Doweiko believes the majority of people find a way "to belong to something greater than self,"³² be it the larger community, personal values or ethics, an ideal, or

²⁹Doweiko, p. 36.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 36-37.

³¹Ibid., 39.

³²Ibid.

God. This is Doweiko's understanding of a "Higher Power," which "might be viewed as an anchor point for the individual's spiritual growth."³³ A person who has a weak or no connection to this Higher Power is therefore more susceptible to addiction. This threat is not limited to individuals; Doweiko believes that Western civilization "in its headlong rush to embrace that which is 'new' and 'scientific,' . . . has managed to lose touch with its roots, perhaps its very soul."³⁴ He writes:

In ages past, one might spend years, perhaps an entire lifetime, earning status and searching for a personal meaning to life. In contrast to this process, the present generation flitters from one media-generated illusion to the next, seeking to find gratification through a mindless identification with current materialistic trends. Yet, . . . without spiritual power, the mindless pursuit of materialism can only result in destruction.³⁵

As our society further distances itself from its "roots," more people feel disenfranchised. This phenomenon has been widely observed. After a year of study to "understand the ease with which so many in our Western culture become addicted," author Alice Walker determined that "our children take addictive drugs partly to allay their fears about what begins to look like a severely compromised future They take drugs to feel less lonely in a world that consistently chooses 'profit' over community. But the most fundamental reasons they take drugs, many of them, is the desire to have a religious or spiritual or ecstatic and transformative experience."³⁶ With scarce opportunities for

³³Ibid., p. 41-42

³⁴Ibid., p. 45.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Alice Walker. *Absolute Trust in the Goodness of the Earth: New Poems*. (New York: Random House, 2003), pp. xii-xiii.

meaningful spiritual transformations, it is no surprise that millions of Americans are addicted to drugs and alcohol,³⁷ and that millions more might be addicted to shopping, work, sex, the Internet, love, gambling, or food. It is now quite clear exactly how addiction as a spiritual disease progresses.

While this thesis emphasizes the spiritual aspect of addiction and recovery, the reader must remember that the definition of addiction is of a physical, emotional, *and* spiritual ailment. All three elements are affected by the addiction, and must be addressed if the addict wishes to recover.

Addiction in the Minds of the Rabbis

Of course, our definition emerges from our contemporary understanding of addiction. This thesis is based not only on this modern understanding of addiction, but also on the wisdom and experiences of the foundational texts of rabbinic Judaism. This leads us to wonder how the Rabbis understood addiction. This is not an easy question to answer, because the Rabbis do not share our language, and do not understand "addiction" as we do. In fact, a search through midrash, the Talmud, or responsa for the word "addiction" would yield no results. However, this is not an indication that the Rabbis, or the Jews living at the time they wrote, had no concept of what we know as addiction. They recognized that people's lives could be consumed by compulsive, habitual behavior; they also recognized that people were filled with natural urges that could become extreme. The beginning of our own comprehension of the rabbinic view of addiction rests with

³⁷Ringwald, p. 9.

understanding these "urges."

Rabbi Eugene B. Borowitz, one of the foremost modern liberal theologians, offers this summary of the rabbinic understanding of "urge," or *yetzer*:

[The Rabbis had] the tough-minded understanding that people are very much more the creatures of their will-to-do-evil, their *yetzer hara*, rather than their will-to-do-good, their *yetzer tov*. . . . Without compromising their belief in our essential purity, they thought us so beset by our will-to-do-evil that the practice of [repentance] had to be the daily counterpart of our life of [commandments]. Various rabbis said. . . that the will-to-do-evil never ceased trying to overpower us; that it had endless wiles. . . ; that despite our useful strategies for defeating it, none could insure against its deceit; that all we could hope for was temporary victories over it; . . . that its goal was our death; and that after tempting us mercilessly in this world it would then testify against us in the next.³⁸

This description of the *yetzer hara*, or the will-to-do-evil, sounds remarkably similar to a description of addictive, compulsive behavior. Just as each person has a *yetzer hara*, so too are the "dynamics of full-fledged addiction . . . actively at work within every human being."³⁹ In addition, the Rabbis believed that the *yetzer hara* was always at work.

Similarly, "the process of recovery [from addiction] is lifelong,"⁴⁰ because the pull of addiction is lifelong and is always at work. Another commonality is that the *yetzer hara* has "endless wiles;" so, too, "the addictive process is very seductive."⁴¹ Addiction shares many of the attributes of the *yetzer hara*, the will-to-do-evil. It has even been noted that

³⁸Eugene B. Borowitz. *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), pp. 163-164.

³⁹May, p. 3.

⁴⁰Olitzky and Copans, p. 85.

⁴¹Nakken, p. 15.

“substance abuse confronts a person with her or his dark side, the capacity for . . . evil.”⁴²

This strongly indicates the close relationship between addiction and *yetzer hara*.

There are textual sources that support this position. For example, Rabbi Asi relates the following observation: “Rabbi Asi said, ‘*Yetzer hara*—in the beginning it is similar to the thread of a cobweb and in the end it is similar to a wagon rope’”(Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 99b). Rabbi Asi notes that when a person begins following his or her *yetzer hara*, or will-to-do-evil, it is not difficult to stop, since the *yetzer hara* at that point is as fragile as a thread in a cobweb. As time passes, however, it becomes very difficult to stop acting on the *yetzer hara*, which has become as strong and firm as a wagon rope. This is the same as the pattern of addictive behavior. At first, the addiction is not firmly in place; it is as fragile as a cobweb. As time passes, and the addictive behavior increases, its pull becomes much stronger. This applies to a moderate social drinker, who only occasionally imbibes alcohol. This moderate drinker can easily stop drinking, since he or she is not addicted to the alcohol. As time passes, however, and the drinker increases his or her use of alcohol, the addiction grows stronger. The moderate drinker becomes an alcohol abuser, and eventually, if the behavior continues, an alcoholic. The “wagon rope” of the addiction becomes strong indeed.

However, the Rabbis did not believe that *yetzer hara* was actually completely bad. A well-known midrash from Genesis Rabbah (9:7) lays the groundwork for this belief:

Rabbi Nahum said in the name of Rabbi Shmuel, “Behold it was very good”—this speaks of *yetzer tov*. ‘And behold, it was very good’—this speaks of *yetzer hara*.” Can *yetzer hara* really be very good?! Yes,

⁴²Ringwald, p. 135.

because were it not for *yetzer hara*, no one would build a house, or marry, or have children, or do business. This is what Solomon was referring to when he said, 'I have also noted that all labor and skillful enterprise come from men's envy of each other' (Ecclesiastes 4:4).

According to the dominant view, *yetzer hara* is not inherently bad. Because of a person's natural urge for sex, children are born; because of a person's natural urge to be successful, business is conducted. These inclinations are labeled *yetzer hara*, or will-to-do-evil, but if they are held in check by the *yetzer tov*, they can produce good things. Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, a modern mystic and scholar, writes, "Even our ineluctable urge to do evil is not evil, but only misdirected. . . . Left to itself, without direction, it would destroy the world. With direction and struggle, the same energy is a powerful force for healing and life."⁴³ This description is remarkably similar to the modern understanding of addiction, which holds that "addiction taps into the most fundamental of human processes. Whether the need is to be high, to be sexual, to eat, or even to work, the addictive process can turn creative, life-giving energy into a destructive demoralizing compulsivity."⁴⁴ Hence, in both the rabbinic and the modern view, the person who has sex with her husband is able to remain in control of her actions, because she is acting from a natural, life-giving energy. The man who cooks and enjoys a sumptuous meal is also acting out of a natural inclination, and is tapping into a powerful force for life. These examples are of people who remain free from the grasp of an unyielding *yetzer hara*, the

⁴³Lawrence Kushner. *The Book of Words: Talking Spiritual Life, Living Spiritual Talk*. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1993), p. 127.

⁴⁴Patrick Carnes. *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*. (Center City, NM: Hazeldon, 2001), p. 8.

will-to-do-evil, or addiction, by moderating their actions and intentions. However, when the woman's sexual behaviors, or the man's feasting, change in intention and frequency, the *yetzer hara* takes hold and is in control. These people may become addicts.

This balance between *yetzer tov* and *yetzer hara* was essential in the minds of the Rabbis because they recognized that either inclination could lead to compulsive behavior. For example, there is a story of a man who wanted to donate money to charity; we can presume he was listening to his *yetzer tov*, his will-to-do-good. However, his *yetzer hara* did not keep the *yetzer tov* in balance, and his natural desire to keep himself secure failed to moderate his natural desire to help others. As a result, he gave away all of his belongings until he was himself destitute and in need of charity (Jerusalem Talmud, *Pe'ah* 3a).

With this example in mind, it seems as though the Rabbis saw "addiction" as a state when a person's natural inclinations, for either good or bad, were unbalanced. This led to far-reaching and devastating consequences as the person compulsively acted on the inclinations, until the physical, emotional, and spiritual health were compromised; the result is that this person becomes an addict.

There are other elements that enhance our understanding of the Rabbis' view of addiction. One of these elements is *bulmus*. *Bulmus* is first mentioned in Mishnah *Yoma*, chapter 8. The first mishnah of this chapter states, "On Yom Kippur it is forbidden to eat, drink, bathe, anoint, wear leather shoes, or engage in sexual relations." Following this mishnah is the caveat, "If someone is seized by a *bulmus* [on Yom Kippur], feed him even impure foods, until his eyes brighten. If someone is bitten by a dog [on Yom

Kippur], give him something to drink. . . .” Understood in context, *bulmus* seems to be a sudden sickness that overwhelms the sufferer with a need to eat, and over which the sufferer has as much control as being bitten by a dog. In his commentary to this mishnah, Rashi, the famous biblical and talmudic French commentator (11th century), explains that *bulmus* is a “sick person who has been seized by hunger, and his eyes are dim and he is in danger of dying.” Rashi’s comment supports the idea that a *bulmus* is a physical sickness that overwhelms the sufferer. The proper treatment for an attack of *bulmus* is to feed the sufferer until “his eyes brighten.” In the commentary (Babylonian Talmud *Yoma* 83a) to this mishnah, the Rabbis discuss exactly what this means. “Our Rabbis ask, ‘How will we determine when “his eyes brighten”? It is when he can distinguish between good and bad [food]’.” Adin Steinsaltz, a modern Talmud commentator, notes that when someone is “within a *bulmus*, he will eat anything that is given to him, and he cannot differentiate [between something that tastes good and something that tastes rotten].” In this context, it seems clear that a *bulmus* is a physical disease that can be treated without any long-term consequences. Thus, this does not seem to be a form of “addiction.”

However, the rabbis change their use of *bulmus*. The midrash Genesis Rabbah 51:9, states, “Rabbi Nahman bar Hanin said, ‘the end of anyone who is lusting after a sexual *bulmus* (*bulmus shel arayot*), is that he will be fed from his own flesh.” This same text is repeated elsewhere in Genesis Rabbah (41:7), and indicates that a person can be seized by a *bulmus* of a sexual nature. Instead of hungering for food, this sufferer hungers for sex. Also, this sort of *bulmus* does not stop; the sufferer cannot be healed from the *bulmus shel arayot* by engaging in sexual relations. As opposed to the *bulmus* of Mishnah *Yoma*,

which is cured by eating, the *bulmus shel arayot* can only be cured if the sufferer is fed from his own flesh. In addition, later responsa refer to a person who has a *bulmus* for harlotry (*Hatam Sofer*, Responsum 4:3), or a *bulmus* for making money (*Ginat HaVeradim*, Responsum 1:2). All of these variations suggest that *bulmus* is not a physical sickness, but an internal desire or craving for some external object or event, be it food, sex, or money. This craving reminds us of the contemporary understanding that "addicts seek serenity through an object or event. This is the beginning of the addictive cycle."⁴⁵ Perhaps a *bulmus* is not precisely an addiction, but it does seem to be an intense craving over which the person has no control, and therefore approximates an addiction.

The Rabbis actually recognized that there were many objects or experiences which seemed to defy control, perhaps because of a natural urge, *yetzer*, that was unbalanced. In the Babylonian Talmud *Yoma* 74b, Rav Yosef observes that there are people "who eat but are never satisfied." No matter how much a person ate, he or she was never filled. This is suggestive of compulsive eating. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, a recovering food addict, wrote of one her binges, "I've gained eleven pounds in four days and I'm still eating. Last night it was a whole batch of pancakes. . . . And then, three or four hours later, another batch."⁴⁶ Bullitt-Jonas learned that "compulsive eating is thoroughly nonsensual. . . . [It] had very little to do with providing fuel for [the] body. . . . It had everything to do with desperately trying to communicate. . . ."⁴⁷ The experience of an overeater is that the

⁴⁵Nakken, p. 23.

⁴⁶Bullitt-Jonas, p. 83

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

act of eating never satisfies, because it is not a physical hunger that the food addresses. The rabbinic observation of this phenomenon indicates that they observed and recognized compulsive behavior, or what we would call addictions.

Similarly, in the Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 107a, Rav Yehudah observes that “man has a small organ [i.e. genitalia], which, when you satisfy it, it is hungry.”⁴⁸ In other words, the more a man engages in sexual relations, the more he wants to continue having sexual relations. Again, this is remarkably similar to a contemporary description of sex addiction. Dr. Patrick Carnes, the clinical director of sexual disorder services at The Meadows rehabilitation center, writes that “sexual addiction has been described as ‘the athlete’s foot of the mind.’ It never goes away. It is always asking to be scratched, promising relief. To scratch, however, is to cause pain and intensify the itch.”⁴⁹ As with a food addict, the sexual act of a sex addict does not satisfy because the need is not a sexual need. This is another example of the Rabbis recognizing and observing compulsive, habitual behavior.

It is clear, then, that the Rabbis recognized problematic behavior and patterns that we would categorize as addictive. Addictions are not particular to the post-modern era. Rather, they have existed throughout history. The Rabbis recognized these addictions and described them. Their understanding of what they observed is remarkably similar to our contemporary understanding of addiction. In fact, their view is completely in line with

⁴⁸This quote is taken from a larger story of King David’s sexual attraction to Batsheva. The complete story is translated the appendix.

⁴⁹Carnes, p. 3.

the definition of addiction suggested earlier: addiction is a physical, emotional, and spiritual ailment characterized by compulsive, habitual dependence on and use of an object or experience, with far-reaching and often devastating consequences.

The Challenge of Using Rabbinic Sources

The connection between our contemporary understanding of addiction and the rabbinic understanding is not perfectly aligned. The Rabbis contextualized most of their writings in the religious world in which they lived, and theirs was a halachic system, characterized by a concern for Jewish law. The Mishnah, Talmud, and rabbinic responsa share stories or bring examples that we can identify as highlighting addiction, but they often do so because they are concerned with the legal impact of the addict's behavior. A prime example is the rabbinic understanding of gambling addiction.

A contemporary understanding of gambling addiction can be found in *Gambling Addiction: The Problem, the Pain, and the Path to Recovery* by John M. Eades. Eades writes that gambling addiction shares many similarities with other addictions, namely a craving and a compulsion to continue the activity, a loss of control over the activity, and continuing the activity despite negative consequences.⁵⁰ He explores the stages of gambling addiction, the ways gambling addiction changes a person's emotional states, and offers suggestions for recovery. This approach is in keeping with Eades' and our own cultural milieu, informed by a contemporary understanding of addiction. Rabbinic texts

⁵⁰John M. Eades. *Gambling Addiction: The Problem, the Pain, and the Path to Recovery*. (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2003), p. 21

take a very different approach.

Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 3:3 says, “these are the [categories of people] who are disqualified [from serving as witnesses]: those who gamble [literally, play with dice], those who loan with interest, those who race pigeons, etc. . . .” This text is not concerned with the internal reasons or personal consequences of the gambler’s actions; rather, it is concerned about the status this person holds in a legal system. The Rabbis recognized that habitual gamblers had a problem, but they did not address that problem on a personal level. Rabbi Eliezer Diamond, scholar of rabbinic literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary, notes that discussion of this mishnah continues in the Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 24b), and says that “the text ultimately . . . remov[es] the stigma of theft from games of chance but continu[es] to denounce gambling as a way of life.”⁵¹

As time passed, and the Rabbis recognized the severity of addictive gambling, they “tried to rein in such behavior. One method used was the oath. Gamblers would either take a *shevua* (straightforward oath forbidding them to gamble) or a *neder* (declaration that if they gambled, particular foods or activities would be forbidden to them). [But] many people who took vows were unable to keep them.”⁵²

This phenomenon can be seen in a number of rabbinic responsa, such as in *Rashba*’s Responsa 1:180. The following question and response shows the limits of working with rabbinic texts:

⁵¹Eliezer Diamond. “Wheel of Fortune: A Rabbinic Perspective on Gambling.” *JTS Magazine*. (Winter 1998, Volume 7, Number 2), p. 10.

⁵²*Ibid.*

Another question [was asked]: A wise person, a teacher, who preached before the people, taught illogical lessons, and played with dice [i.e. gambled]. He made an oath [with a *shevua*; see Diamond's description, above] that he would never gamble again, but he transgressed his oath. Then he said before the public that any oath that is not sworn over a possession is not a valid oath. Because of this, many of the community have transgressed, and made their oaths with lies and falsehoods, and they are saying that every vow not made over a possession is not really a oath. . . . Before this [happened], everyone was very cautious lest they transgress their oaths. . . . They were very strict about this matter before the law of this fellow came to them. What is the law? The answer: Every person who does this and teaches this way should be excommunicated. For this [so-called wise person] leads people to stray from a good path to a bad path, and he sins and causes others to sin, and he is among the students of Jereboam. Heaven forbid—he is not a scholar or teacher but an evil person and a dolt. Every person who listen to him and believes his word causes himself to slip. . . . For the essence is not the possession, but rather the oath . . . !

This responsum recognizes the consequences of gambling addiction. However, it does not detail the stages of the scholar's addictive behaviors, or explore his internal emotional distress. It illustrates Diamond's observation that the man tried to control his compulsive behaviors by taking an oath, which subsequently failed. However, the responsum is primarily concerned with the legal implications of the teacher's ruling regarding vows. The response to the legal question reveals that the man deserves no sympathy, not because he is enmeshed in an addiction over which he has no control, but because his actions have led to such legal confusion. The responsum's primary concern is with the way this gambler's behavior impacts the legal system and community in which he lives. It is not concerned with exploring his addiction or guiding him to recovery.

This text cautions us to recognize that our approach to addiction is very different from the Rabbis' approach. While noticing this difference, it is important to remember that "earlier generations were not less intelligent than we are today. They only lacked the

information and technology that surrounds us in the present world.”⁵³ Eades approaches gambling addiction with the benefit of decades of studies and research of addiction. The Rabbis do not share our knowledge of addiction, but this does not mean that their stories and examples are not valuable and meaningful for our discussion. They show great concern about what we identify as addiction, and reveal insights—albeit in their own cultural context—that can offer us guidance. As this thesis continues, it is important to remember that the Rabbis simply do not understand addiction with the same psycho-social understanding that we have today.

Painful Characteristics and Consequences of Addiction

When the Rabbis observed addiction, they did so through the lens of their own cultural milieu and therefore focused on the legal impact of the addiction. However, they were aware of the painful human elements of addiction. These elements—the devastating and all-pervasive nature of addiction—cannot be accurately portrayed in any definition. The following description, taken from *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook*, offers a much more complete picture:

You are a teenager, or a middle-aged housewife, or a successful businessman, or a retired professional. You have just messed up, or have successfully completed your latest project, or have met an exciting new person, or have lost someone or something very important to you. You feel emotionally out of balance, so you drink or take drugs or eat or gamble or log onto the Internet. You take a substance that alters your brain chemistry, or you get your body to manufacture those chemicals in response to the way you think or act. You become an addict when you can no longer stop yourself from going down that path. You become an addict

⁵³Doweiko, p.35.

when you do one of these things more than or longer than you planned, when there is a compulsion to continue it, when you try to cut down and you can't, and when you continue to abuse the substance or experience despite your knowledge that it is going to cause you significant difficulty with school, work, your emotions, or your family.⁵⁴

This description is simple, but illustrates that addiction can affect any person, regardless of age, gender, income, or race; it can take the form of abusing any kind of substance or experience; it takes over every facet of the addict's life; and it has disastrous consequences.

Perhaps one of the most painful aspects of an addiction is the addict's earnest desire—but complete inability—to stop acting on the addictive urge. Eventually, the addict finds him or herself prisoner to the following pattern of behavior: First is mental preoccupation with and an obsessive search for the object/experience of the addiction. Next is the ritualization of the addict's routines leading up to the addictive act. Third is the compulsive behavior of the addiction. In the fourth and last stage, there is a feeling of despair and “utter hopelessness. . . about [the addict's] behavior and powerlessness.”⁵⁵ The addict follows this behavioral ritual, or “negative form of worship”⁵⁶ even though a part of the addict wants to stop. One addict explained that “a person who stands at the brink of addictive behavior is listening intently to conflicting inner voices: voices that urge her on and hold her back.”⁵⁷ Considering these conflicting inner voices, it is not surprising

⁵⁴Spiegel and Kravitz, p. 267.

⁵⁵Carnes, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁶Nakken, p. 44.

⁵⁷Bullitt-Jonas, p. 64.

that "addiction divides the self."⁵⁸ This division of self is evident in Jewish sources, particularly the memoirs of Leone Modena, "the sixteenth to seventeenth Italian rabbi, scholar, and compulsive gambler."⁵⁹ His memoirs are "full of stern resolutions not to gamble followed by binges of financially and sometimes professionally ruinous card playing."⁶⁰ This particular element of addictive behavior has been well-documented throughout history.

As the addiction grows more serious and repeated attempts at recovery fail, addiction "starts to produce shame," which thoroughly erodes any vestiges of self.⁶¹ This contributes to the addictive cycle, in which the very pain caused by acting on the addiction leads to a repeated and stronger urge to partake in the addiction in order to numb the pain.⁶² As time passes and the addiction worsens, the addiction "is in total control,"⁶³ the addict's will and self-esteem have been thoroughly attacked,⁶⁴ and soon the addict realizes that what he or she is "doing with [the addiction] is a matter of life or death."⁶⁵ At this point, "the addicted person's life will literally start to break down under the tremendous

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 70.

⁵⁹Diamond, p. 11.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Nakken, pp. 28-29.

⁶²Ibid., p. 24.

⁶³Ibid., p. 55.

⁶⁴May, p. 42.

⁶⁵Bullitt-Jonas, p. 30.

stress caused by ever-increasing pain, anger, and fear that results from continually acting out.”⁶⁶ This life breakdown not only has a devastating impact on the addict, but also on his/her family and greater community.

A Rabbinic Description of the Consequences Caused by Addiction

The progression of the consequences of addiction is frightening. Anyone who has seen an addict struggle with addiction could describe the same destructive consequences, with perhaps more personal and specific examples. In fact, the Rabbis had themselves witnessed this life break-down, as can be seen in Babylonian Talmud, *Pesachim* 49a. This brief description of the consequences of addiction on the addict and his family and community is actually intended as a moralistic teaching, preaching the necessities of living with moderation. Considering that the rabbinic idea of addiction is a result of the gross imbalance between the will-to-do-good, *yetzer tov*, and the will-to-do-evil, *yetzer hara*—in other words, living without moderation—this text is a fitting illustration of the consequences of addiction. The text states:

The Rabbis taught, “Any Torah scholar who eats excessively in every place – in the end he will destroy his home, widow his wife, and orphan his young. His learning will be forgotten, and many arguments will come to him, and his words will not be accepted. He will desecrate the name of heaven and the name of his rabbi and the name of his father. He brings a bad name upon himself, his children, and his children’s children until the end of time.”

This text is an eloquent description of the consequences of addiction. The Rabbis show that they were aware that excessive, habitual behavior could lead to painful,

⁶⁶Nakken, p. 55.

destructive consequences. In this text, they use the example of a scholar whom we might identify as a food addict, or compulsive overeater.⁶⁷ As time passes, the scholar begins to eat at all times and in all places; his life is centered around food, his “drug” of choice, his addiction. The Rabbis do not describe the scholar’s emotional feelings, so we do not know if he felt a “division of self,” an overpowering sense of shame, and a complete erosion of his self-hood. However, we do know that eventually this scholar’s life completely broke down. Because of his addiction, his family life disintegrated, and his wife and children were essentially widowed and orphaned. His work—teaching, learning, and discussing Torah and its laws—also disintegrated as his addiction became the most important aspect of his life. As a result, this caused confusion in the greater community. The addict’s behavior not only affected him, but also his family, later generations, and the greater community.

This text describes a person whom we would describe as a compulsive eater, or food addict. The end of the text, however, indicates that these same behaviors could apply equally well to a compulsive drinker, or alcoholic. The text concludes:

What is [the bad name he will bring]? Abaye says, “they call [his son (according to Rashi)] the son of an oven warmer.” Raba says, “the son of a tavern dancer.” Rav Papa says, “the son of a plate licker.” Rav Shmayah says, “the son of one who folds and crouches” (Babylonian Talmud, *Pesachim* 49a).

The conclusion begins with the question, “what is the bad name he will bring?” In other words, the text is seeking to identify the type of person to whom this description applies.

⁶⁷ A more systematic structure of determining addiction in the rabbinic texts will be introduced later; at this point, we will assume that this text brings the case of an actual addict.

Some of the answers clearly indicate someone who eats excessively, such as “the son of an oven warmer,” a person who always keeps his oven warm so that he can always eat, and “the son of a plate lick,” who eats every last morsel of food on his plate. However, the other two descriptions, “the son of a tavern dancer,” and “the son of one who folds and crouches,” apply to someone who excessively drinks. Rashi remarks that a tavern dancer is someone “who plays and dances so that others will imbibe him with drink;” this person behaves this way so often, presumably in his attempt to constantly drink alcohol, that he brings the consequences detailed above upon himself and his family. Rashi also explains that “one who folds and crouches” describes a person who “takes off his clothes and puts them down and sleeps. This is what drunks do, when they are unable to walk home and sleep in their beds. Instead, they take off their clothes wherever they are, and sleep.” This description clearly describes someone who is very drunk; taken in context, we can understand this to be a description of an alcoholic whose life has started to break down. The conclusion of this descriptive, and proscriptive, text shows that the Rabbis were very aware of the destructive consequences of living a life out-of-balance, out-of-moderation. These are the consequences of addiction.

Impact of Addiction on the Family

Another devastating consequence of addiction, and its accompanying life breakdown, is the impact on the addict’s family, community, and society at large. Marcia Cohn Spiegel and Rabbi Yaacov Kravitz explain that “addiction is a family disease. When a

person suffers from the disease, all of the other members of the family are affected.”⁶⁸ It often takes a serious consequence or intervention for the addict to recognize the depth of his or her problem, but family members often identify addiction much earlier. In fact, addiction is usually first recognized as a problem “when a family member asks for help.”⁶⁹ This facet of addiction deserves special attention because a number of rabbinic sources, particularly responsa, are the result of a family member or the larger close-knit community suffering the painful consequences of the addict’s behavior. This can be seen indirectly in the Babylonian Talmud *Pesachim* text quoted above, which describes the impact of an addict’s behavior on his family and community. The following responsa by the *Rashba* and *Zikaron Yehudah* also show that in ages past, as now, the family members are often the first to recognize a problem. *Rashba* relates the following question (2:286):

There was a man who borrowed money using his wife’s clothing [as collateral], then lost them by gambling. Is the wife allowed to take her clothing from the hand of a lender without payment, and say that the husband took them from her home without her knowledge?

This question arose not because the gambler realized the enormity of his actions, but because his wife recognized the problem. Because of her husband’s compulsive gambling, her life had become unmanageable—she did not even have possession of clothes—and she sought help by approaching her community’s leaders. While her question and situation are couched in legalistic terms, this text nevertheless shows that addiction has an enormous impact on the family. It is indeed a family disease.

⁶⁸Spiegel and Kravitz, p. 269.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

Zikaron Yehudah, Responsa 71, describes the following situation:

Reuben would gamble, and argue with his wife. He would always hit her, until she ran away to her father's house. A group of people came to reconcile them, and they forbade him the pleasure of cohabiting with his wife if he played games (i.e. gambled). This was extracted in the form of a vow. . . . After this, Reuben went out and gambled and transgressed the seal of the vow. His wife saw him doing this, and. . . she wanted to force Reuben to divorce her. . . .

This text is a rabbinic illustration of the modern observation that "addicted persons may. . . be emotionally or physically abusive to their family members."⁷⁰ "Reuben" had entered the phase when his life began to break down, and his family suffered. The severity of his problem may not have been known until his wife actively sought help. Despite her own efforts, and the efforts on the part of the greater community, Reuben was unable to stop gambling. Sadly, this same situation has been repeated throughout history, and remains the terrifying reality for many addicts and their families.

Determining the Presence of Addiction

There is no doubt that addiction is a part of contemporary society. People who are recovering addicts, or who have known an addict, might be more aware and alert in identifying addiction. However, one remaining challenge in the field of addiction is correctly identifying addictive behavior. One test professionals employ to correctly identify addiction is The Short Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (SMAST), which is a short questionnaire geared toward the results of an addict's (in this case, an alcoholic's) behaviors. It includes such questions as "Have you ever gotten into trouble at work

⁷⁰Ibid.

because of your drinking?" and "Do those close to you ever worry or complain about your drinking?"⁷¹ This test indicates that observing a person's actions, and the consequences of those actions, is a reasonable identifier of the presence of addiction.

Another way psychiatrists identify the presence of addiction is to examine the "emotional factors that produce it."⁷² Lance M. Dodes, a psychiatrist specializing in the field of addiction, created a questionnaire, again geared toward alcoholism but which could apply to any addiction, that seeks to uncover the emotional factors underlying addiction. This questionnaire includes questions such as "Do I drink when I feel bad about myself?" and "Does drinking help me feel more in control of my feelings and my life, at least while I am doing it?"⁷³ Hence, uncovering the feelings behind an addictive act is another way of identifying addiction.

Whether examining the behaviors of an addict or his or her underlying feelings, it is important to note that these questionnaires are geared toward the individual to diagnose him/herself. In contrast to the self-diagnosis that these tests facilitate, our task is to diagnose the presence of addiction or addictive behavior in ancient texts without the aid of personal input of the texts' characters. It is generally impossible to discern the underlying emotions of the characters in the rabbinic stories and responsa, which are more concerned with a persons' actions and the consequences of those actions. Therefore, this thesis determines the presence of addiction in the various texts by examining the character's

⁷¹West, pp. 20-21.

⁷²Dodes, p. 121.

⁷³Ibid.

behaviors, and the consequences of those behaviors. The following questions, adapted from the SMAST test, will be applied to each text in order to determine addictive behavior: 1) Can the person control his behaviors (i.e. is the action compulsive, resulting from or acting on an irresistible urge) ("No" indicates addiction)? 2) Does the person, or do people around the person, feel that his behaviors are normal ("No" indicates addiction)? 3) Has the person neglected his obligations or family because of his actions ("Yes" indicates addiction)? 4) Has the person ever gotten into trouble because of his actions ("Yes" indicates addiction)? 5) Have the person's actions ever created problems with other close friends or family members ("Yes" indicates addiction)? These five questions will be applied to the remaining rabbinic texts used in the thesis, in order to determine the presence of addiction. A predominance of the answers to these questions must be answered positively to identify the presence of addiction or addictive behaviors in the texts.

A story related in the Babylonian Talmud, *Ketubot* 62b, offers an exemplary case to which we can apply these questions. The text states:

This is like [the story of] Rav Rahumi who happened to be in front of Rabba in Mahuza. He was in the habit of returning to his home [from the house of study] only on Erev Yom Kippur [a day on which sexual cohabitation is forbidden]. One [Erev Yom Kippur] he was drawn into his studies [and he did not go home]. His wife was looking out for him, and said, "He's coming now. Now he's coming." But he did not come. Her resolve weakened, and a tear fell from her eye. Then, Rav Rahumi went onto the roof, and the roof collapsed, and he died. When is the appropriate time for sexual cohabitation for Torah scholars? Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel, "From Erev Shabbat to Erev Shabbat."

This text describes a man who spent all of his time studying Torah. In the talmudic Babylonian period, it was a common practice for men to spend months, if not years, away

from home in pursuit of studies or work. Yet, this text seems to emphasize that Rav Rahumi's actions were extreme. Of course, the extreme actions do not necessarily determine the presence of addiction. Therefore, the five questions detailed above will be applied to this text. The first question for determining the presence of addiction in the texts is: Can the person control his behaviors? In this text, it is clear that Rav Rahumi "was drawn into his studies," and could not control his actions. The second question is: Do people around Rav Rahumi feel his behavior is normal? Again, it is clear that other scholars felt his behavior was abnormal; the norm is returning to one's home on a weekly basis. Third, Rav Rahumi's Torah studies led him to neglect his family (since he only returned home once a year, a clear example of neglect). Fourth, his behavior created problems with his wife (whose hope for her husband's return was disappointed, leading to sadness). The final question is: Did Rav Rahumi's action cause him trouble? One of the rabbinic views of suffering is that suffering is God's punishment for wrongdoings; therefore, when Rav Rahumi died on the collapsing roof, he was being punished for hurting and neglecting his wife. His death can certainly be viewed as "trouble." In this story, Rav Rahumi is an addict. Today, we might call Rav Rahumi a workaholic.

An interesting element of this story is that Rav Rahumi addiction develops from a desire to study Torah. Generally, a desire to study Torah is viewed as flowing from a person's will-to-do-good, *yetzer tov*, and is thus a positive action. In this case, however, Rav Rahumi's *yetzer tov* is unbalanced by the natural urges of his will-to-do-evil, *yetzer hara*, which would lead him to maintain normal sexual and emotional relations with his wife. As opposed to other scholars who returned home weekly, he returned home only

once a year on a day when sexual relations were forbidden. Rav Rahumi's will-to-do-good and will-to-do-evil were so unbalanced that he became addicted. This text, then, is not only an ideal example for determining addiction; it also highlights the rabbinic approach to addiction, which is created when a person's *yetzer tov* and *yetzer hara* are not moderated. As with the case of the man who became "addicted" to giving to charity, Rav Rahumi becomes addicted through his virulent *yetzer tov* desire to study.

This text is used here as an example for determining addiction. However, it must be noted that it also illustrates the painful consequences of addiction. We do not know whether or not Rav Rahumi internally debated about his actions, or even if a part of him wanted to stop and lead a more balanced life. We can certainly posit, however, that he did not want to hurt his wife or die alone on the roof of a building. In fact, the emotional depth of this story can easily be imagined. We can imagine that Rav Rahumi's wife, who so deeply believed that her husband would return home (would stop his addiction!), felt devastated when she learned her husband died. We can assume that Rav Rahumi regretted his actions, and imagine that his last thoughts were of the relationships he squandered and the people he hurt in his compulsive studying. It was stated above that addiction is a matter of life and death. In fact, "the prognosis for untreated. . . addiction is disability or death."⁷⁴ Rav Rahumi unfortunately died because of his addiction, which, while not directly responsible, certainly led to his premature death. This text illustrates the sad fact that addiction destroys the addict and the addict's family.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 269.

Differentiating Between Abuse and Addiction

Another problem when addressing addiction is differentiating between substance abuse and substance addiction. The *Krames Health and Safety Education Pamphlet on Addiction* identifies different stages of addiction. First is occasional social use of the substance/experience; next is increased use and misuse; next is habitual use, or abuse; the final step is compulsive use, or addiction.⁷⁵ This pamphlet specifically identifies abuse by three criteria: an inability to quit using the substance/experience, despite a desire to do so; increased use of the substance/experience, even when alone; trying to hide or feeling embarrassed about using the substance. In contrast, addiction is characterized by the need to use the substance/experience to get through the day; feeling anxious or angry when prevented from using; planning day's activities around the addiction; and physical withdrawal symptoms when one cannot use. According to this pamphlet, frequency and dependence differentiate between abuse and addiction.

Lance M. Dodes differentiates between abuse and addiction according to the underlying emotional impetus of the action. He writes that a person is a drug abuser when he or she "harmfully but nonaddictively use drugs [but] do not ever have to deal with the powerful, unconscious inner drive at the heart of addiction."⁷⁶ Therefore, a true addiction is characterized by this unconscious inner drive. For Dodes, the frequency of use is not an accurate indicator of addiction. Instead, "any single episode may be understood to be an

⁷⁵*Krames Health and Safety Education Pamphlet on Addiction*. (San Bruno, CA: The Stay Well Company, 2001), p. 8.

⁷⁶Dodes, p. 110.

addictive act.”⁷⁷ This last statement is particularly important for the purposes of this thesis, which is based on various texts that usually highlight single episodes in a person’s life. The rabbinic sources do not detail years or stages of an addict’s life; rather, they bring only single illustrative examples from which we may evaluate the presence of addictive behavior. Therefore, it is impossible for us to differentiate between abuse and addiction, based on frequency of use, as the *Krames Pamphlet* suggests. Rather, this thesis views “any single episode” as potential evidence of addiction, as opposed to abuse.

Addiction in the Jewish Community

Sadly, for many years Jews and Jewish professionals believed that addiction—particularly alcoholism, the first wide-spread understood addiction—did not affect Jews. It was very common for Jews and Jewish professionals to believe that “Jews cannot be addicts,” or that “only Gentiles are drunks.” “Over the years, this long legacy of denial among Jews has resulted in unnecessary pain, heartache, and a great deal of alienation from Judaism by those suffering from addiction.”⁷⁸ The following story highlights this phenomenon:

I never thought I was an alcoholic. As a child I would pass out at a Passover Seder. But this was cute, because I was a “happy little drunk.” This happened also at a Sukkot celebration or Simchat Torah or Purim. I remember as a child going around drinking the cups left by adults at a simcha (happy occasion) in shul (synagogue). Didn’t everyone do that? I had one great-uncle who ruined his career as a talented violinist because he began to show up at concerts too drunk to perform. We all thought it

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 124.

⁷⁸Glass, p. 235

was hilarious when we had to fish Uncle Zalman out of the bathtub after he drank too much at my brother's Bar Mitzvah. But Shikkur [a drunk] was always a goy [Gentile]. . . .⁷⁹

The phenomena of Jewish alcoholics was inconceivable for this man and for many other Jewish addicts. This story is only one of many that highlight the deep denial manifest in the Jewish community. When addicts sought help from rabbis, they were regarded with incredulity. It was not until the 1980s that Jews and Jewish professionals began to address this incredulity and denial.

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, then rabbi of Central Synagogue in New York City, was among the first major pulpit rabbis to publicly acknowledge and attempt to understand the phenomenon of alcoholism in the Jewish community.⁸⁰ This process began when a member of his synagogue met with him and informed him that her husband was an alcoholic. She explained that "whenever she told me and her friends that her husband was on a business trip he had actually been drying out in a rehab center."⁸¹ At first, Rabbi Zimmerman "asserted that he couldn't be an alcoholic,"⁸² but he eventually came to acknowledge and understand alcoholism. He relates that he joined the couple on "a six-month voyage of discovery"⁸³ and "received [his] primary lessons about alcoholism and

⁷⁹Olitzky and Copans, pp. iii-iv.

⁸⁰Glass, p. 237.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 5.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid., p. 6.

about the extraordinary number of Jews who are alcoholics."⁸⁴ This was the first step in addressing the denial of addiction in the Jewish community.

Soon after these meetings, Central Synagogue of New York City opened its doors to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. This led to task forces on alcoholism and addiction, and eventually to the creation of JACS (Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically dependent persons, and Significant others), an organization dedicated to "providing spiritual and communal support for addicted Jews and their families."⁸⁵ Slowly, the greater Jewish community has become aware of the reality of addiction in the Jewish community and continues to positively respond to and address addiction. Unfortunately, the delayed response to addiction has led to growing numbers of Jewish alcoholics, drug addicts, food addicts, and gambling addicts. Studies show that while "the rate of alcoholism among Jews appears to be less than that among the general population . . . drug use among Jews was reported to be equal to that of non-Jews."⁸⁶ Rabbi Twerski observes that "among the older [Jewish] population, addiction to tranquilizers, sedatives, and pain pills is quite common; among the young adults and adolescents the problem of marijuana dependency as well as abuse of other street drugs is rampant."⁸⁷ Other professionals assert that gambling addiction is the fastest-growing addiction in the Jewish community. In all its destructive forms, addiction

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵JACS mission statement, as quoted by Glass, p. 239.

⁸⁶Spiegel and Kravitz, p. 266.

⁸⁷Abraham J. Twerski. *The Truth about Chemical Dependency and Jews*. (Gateway Rehabilitation Center, pamphlet no. 8), p. 1.

is as much a problem in the Jewish community as in the larger community. Therefore, addiction, "the most serious public health problem of this generation . . . is indeed a problem that poses a challenge to the Jewish community."⁸⁸ The work of the remainder of this thesis provides a critical tool in addressing the denial of the Jewish community, and offers ways the Jewish community can respond to "the sacred disease of our time."⁸⁹

⁸⁸Abraham J. Twerski. Preface. *Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery: A Personal Guide to Turning from Alcoholism and Other Addictions*. By Kerry M. Olitzky and Stuart A. Copans. (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1991), p. 1.

⁸⁹May, p. viii.

Chapter Two: Recovery

Understanding Recovery

The previous chapter explored a myriad of elements related to and defining addiction, which can be a debilitating and deadly problem not only for the addict, but also for his or her family and larger community. Addictive behavior will continue to worsen until it precipitates a crisis that will lead the addict to change his or her behavior.⁹⁰ If the *active* addict eventually realizes the need for change, he or she will enter into some sort of recovery program and maintain abstinence, and thereby become a *recovering* addict.

Before the creation of different modern recovery programs, it was believed that alcoholism was a “hopeless” and nearly incurable disease.⁹¹ There were very few cases of people who had “recovered” from their addiction, and while many recognized that “an entire psychic change of sufficient magnitude”⁹² could lead to recovery, there was no “sustainable recovery program”⁹³ in existence. In the early 1900's, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals attempted therapy and analysis, but often turned many addicts away because they knew that “medicine and psychiatry were of no avail.”⁹⁴ Carl Jung, one

⁹⁰Twerski, *The Spiritual Self*, p. 45.

⁹¹Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham. *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Journey to Wholeness*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), p. 101.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ringwald, p. 12.

⁹⁴Ibid.

of the preeminent psychoanalysts of the early twentieth century who helped formulate the spiritual aspects of recovery, believed that unless an addict had a "spiritual change or awakening,"⁹⁵ there was no possibility of recovery. It certainly seemed as though addiction was a problem that would only continue to worsen as time passed.

Yet, as one recovering addict noted, "sometimes you need to be hopeless before you find true hope."⁹⁶ Fortunately, the hopelessness surrounding the treatment of addiction led to the creation, in the 1930s, of Alcoholics Anonymous. Two of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill Wilson and Dr. Robert Smith, met in 1935, after each had lived through many years of alcoholism and repeated attempts at abstinence. These two alcoholics, who were desperately attempting sobriety, spent hours talking during their first meeting. Their deep connection and understanding, based on "their shared alcoholism [and] . . . their common imperfection,"⁹⁷ was the beginning of Alcoholics Anonymous. Together, the two men met other alcoholics, and soon developed a series of practices and principles, called the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, that remain the foundation of Alcoholics Anonymous. Their program was immediately popular and very successful. In fact, it was the first recovery program that boasted a recovery rate of 50 percent.⁹⁸ Members of Alcoholics Anonymous believed that anyone who honestly worked their recommended recovery program would become a recovering alcoholic.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Bullitt-Jonas, p. 97.

⁹⁷Kurtz, p. 96.

⁹⁸Ringwald, p. 15.

The creation of Alcoholics Anonymous led to a new understanding of addiction. The scientific community began to study addiction and treatment, and numerous studies have been done that analyze addiction in different segments of the population, the success rates of various recovery programs, and the physiological underpinnings of addiction. These studies created new suggestions and approaches for treatment. While there are millions of addicts in the United States, there are also thousands of recovery programs, including local Twelve-Step groups that address alcoholism, compulsive shopping, cocaine addiction, love addiction, overeating, and other addictions; state-sponsored halfway houses for addicted criminals; famous treatment facilities; and individual counseling. There is a growing number of books on the topic of addiction and recovery. The past decades have certainly witnessed a profound change in our understanding of addiction. From originally being understood as a "hopeless disease," addiction is now understood as a serious, debilitating problem for which there is much hope.

However, the topic of recovery from addiction raises a number of important questions. We must ask, what is recovery? How is a successful recovery measured? What is the value of recovery? What is a sustainable plan of recovery? What are the actual programs that help people "recover"? And, perhaps most important for this thesis, how is spirituality a component of recovery? These are all essential questions that will be addressed below.

Defining, Measuring, and Valuing Recovery

Recovery is commonly understood as abstaining from the addictive behavior, but it is

actually much more complex and far more demanding. A professional defined recovery as "the continued acceptance of addiction and the continuous monitoring of the addictive [behavior] in whatever form it may take."⁹⁹ Recovery does rely on "total abstinence of the abused object or event," but each addict needs to define "the addictive behaviors each individual uses in the process of acting out."¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, "to recover, the addict must . . . slowly exchange the addictive way of life for a new lifestyle."¹⁰¹ Therefore, an alcoholic who is "in recovery," must not only abstain from drinking any alcoholic beverage; he or she must also learn to approach every aspect of life in a new way. One recovering alcoholic wrote, "the ultimate issue was not merely to stop the physical act of drinking, but to face the very meaning of life."¹⁰² Clearly, recovery is a very difficult, but not impossible, undertaking. Furthermore, a successful recovery is not necessarily defined by abstinence. Christopher Ringwald, who has written extensively on measuring the success rates of various recovery programs, realizes that recovery is not an easy thing to measure or quantify. He writes that, "a sizeable proportion of alcoholics and addicts do recovery after treatment. . . . [But] proven results come in many areas—employment, family, health, and criminality. Abstinence is not the only measure of success Many [addicts] relapse only to sober up again . . . [and] the period of abstinence before a relapse

⁹⁹Nakken, p. 18.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 98.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁰²Linda Schierse Leonard. *Witness to the Fire: Creativity and the Veil of Addiction*. (Boston: Shambala Publications, Inc., 1989), p. xiii.

counts as an improvement over their pretreatment days."¹⁰³ It is clear, then, that recovery is a complex and multi-layered effort. The ideal is complete abstinence, but the reality is that even a small improvement is a very positive sign.

This thesis assumes that recovery is valuable. Indeed, recovery is not only valuable; it is indispensable. As was noted above, the prognosis for untreated addiction is disability or death. In fact, up to 4.7 percent of all deaths are alcohol related; in some communities, this number is as high as 17 percent.¹⁰⁴ These numbers represent millions of individuals who die prematurely each year from a preventable, treatable, problem. Recovery is the only solution to the problem of addiction, and the only way to save an active addict's life. The desire to preserve life is one of Judaism's central beliefs, as can be seen in the Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 4:5, which states that "whoever saves one life . . . it is as if he saved the entire world." This dictate alone addresses the inherent necessity of recovery, whose very goal is to save the addict's life. Furthermore, when one considers the impact of addiction on the addict's family, as well as the larger community, the necessity of recovery is even more clear. Recovery is essential, and it is therefore not surprising that a great many organizations and people have created recovery programs.

Programs for Recovery

There are many sustainable programs for recovery. The most efficacious and therefore popular is the one created by Alcoholics Anonymous, and adapted for many other various

¹⁰³Ringwald, p. 10.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 80.

addictions. This plan is guided by twelve steps that lead the addict from active addiction to the "new lifestyle" that recovery demands. The Twelve Steps "are a group of principles, spiritual in their nature, which, if practiced as a way of life, can expel the obsession . . . and enable the sufferer to become happily and usefully whole."¹⁰⁵ The Twelve Steps are:

Step One: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step Two: [We] came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Step Three: [We] made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him [book's emphasis].

Step Four: [We] made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

Step Five: [We] admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Step Six: [We] were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

Step Seven: [We] humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

Step Eight: [We] made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

Step Nine: [We] made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

Step Ten: [We] continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Step Eleven: [We] sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him [book's emphasis], praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Step Twelve: Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.¹⁰⁶

These twelve steps are practiced within a Twelve-Step fellowship, or mutual-aid group, made up of fellow addicts who share from their common experience and draw support

¹⁰⁵*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2002), p. 15.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 5-8.

from one another. The twelve step program encourages "people to make a shift in their source of power and strength."¹⁰⁷ Considering the emphasis on the addict's relationship to God, it is not surprising that the Twelve Steps "are aimed at fostering a spiritual awakening that will keep the [addict] sober on a daily basis."¹⁰⁸

The twelve step groups address the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of addiction. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas observes that Overeaters Anonymous (the twelve-step mutual-aid group adapted for food addicts) taught her "that physical recovery must come first It's only when we put the food down that a deeper level of healing can arise."¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, "physical recovery was important . . . but we needed emotional recovery, too. . . . Emotional recovery takes place within community. . . . Overeaters Anonymous gave me an experience of community."¹¹⁰ Finally, the twelve steps address the spiritual, because "the program is all about spirituality. . . . Always the twelve-step program gave one simple, potent message: however we imagined the holy, however we conceived of the sacred, God wanted to help us to stop our compulsive [addiction]. . . . [The twelve steps] challenged us to begin to put our trust in that Power."¹¹¹ The exact relationship between recovery and spirituality, particularly of the twelve-step program, will be explored later. At this point, it is enough to remark that the Twelve Steps are "a concrete, proven path out

¹⁰⁷Dodes, p. 227.

¹⁰⁸Ringwald, p. 15.

¹⁰⁹Bullitt-Jonas, p. 120.

¹¹⁰Ibid., pp. 127, 129.

¹¹¹Ibid., pp. 133, 135.

of the quagmire"¹¹² of addiction, and remains one of the most viable, sustainable plans for recovery. In fact, it is estimated that by 2002 over two million people are recovering using the Twelve Steps.¹¹³

The Twelve Step program, of course, has its critics, many of whom have developed various other sustainable programs of recovery. One of the main critiques of the Twelve Step program is that its message of turning over one's power creates many obstacles for people who have "an awareness of oppression."¹¹⁴ Rabbi Carol Glass notes that steps three, six, and seven "seem to advocate the relinquishing of free will and the abdication of personal responsibility for directing one's life,"¹¹⁵ which is anathema for people who have been oppressed. This is nowhere more common than for women and minorities, whose experiences of powerlessness and victimization often contribute to addiction.¹¹⁶ Charlotte Kasl observed that "the parallels to patriarchal norms [within the Twelve Step programs] were disturbing."¹¹⁷ In response, Kasl created a list of seven "Fundamentals of Empowerment," which includes the ideas that "empowerment is based on love, not fear," "empowerment encourages questioning and choices," and "empowerment teaches us to

¹¹²Carnes, p. 7.

¹¹³*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 15.

¹¹⁴Glass, p. 244.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹¹⁶Ringwald, p. 55.

¹¹⁷Charlotte Kasl. "Many Roads, One Journey: One Woman's Path to Truth." *Addiction and Spirituality: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Eds. Oliver J. Morgan and Merle Jordan. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), p. 111.

trust our wisdom."¹¹⁸ These ideas about empowerment enabled an addict who was particularly sensitive to messages of powerlessness, to find healing. Kasl also created "Sixteen Steps for Discovery and Empowerment" as an alternative recovery program for addicts. These steps include: "We affirm we have the power to take charge of our lives and stop being dependent on substances or other people for our self-esteem and security;" "we come to believe that (choose one) God/Goddess/Universe/Great Spirit/Higher Power awakens the healing wisdom within us when we open ourselves to that power;" and "we make a decision to find our authentic selves and trust in the healing power of truth."¹¹⁹ While the connections between these sixteen steps and the Twelve Steps are clear, these steps provide a welcome alternative to addicts for whom the Twelve Step program, because of its message of powerlessness, does not work. It is also worth noting that these steps include a strong element of spirituality infused with an awareness of oppression and disempowerment.

Another critique of the Twelve-Step program comes from psychiatrists who feel that the program does not adequately explain "why people with addictive behaviors continue to repeat them in the face of their awful consequences."¹²⁰ As a result, psychiatrists recommend individual therapy to effectively understand and treat the addiction. Lance M. Dodes believes that the Twelve Step programs "tend to be uninterested and unhelpful in

¹¹⁸Ibid., pp. 127-128.

¹¹⁹Ibid., pp. 130-131.

¹²⁰Dodes, p. 2.

understanding the individual emotional factors that determine addictive behavior."¹²¹

While he recognizes that the Twelve-Step program works for "some people,"¹²² he believes that they are "unpalatable" to a majority of addicts.¹²³ Instead, Dr. Dodes believes that "since addictions are psychological problems, it makes sense that people who are trained and knowledgeable about human psychology are in an especially strong position to help."¹²⁴ Hence, the proper treatment for addiction is to pay attention to the addiction and its behavior, understand the psychology behind it, and then address those underlying emotional needs.¹²⁵ Dr. Dodes recognizes that "twelve-step programs can be a supportive adjunct to professional therapy,"¹²⁶ but he--along with many psychiatrists and mental health professionals--believe the ideal way to treat addiction is with therapy.

The final major critique of the Twelve-Step program is its emphasis on spirituality. As a result, a number of secular recovery programs have formed. One of these is Secular Organizations for Sobriety (SOS), which started in 1986 under the leadership of James Christopher. Christopher, a recovered alcoholic, was "uncomfortable with the emphasis on a higher power and . . . a religious atmosphere"¹²⁷ found in the Twelve Step

¹²¹Dodes, p. 225.

¹²²Ibid., p. 228.

¹²³Ibid., p. 226.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 230.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 229.

¹²⁷Ringwald, p. 148.

fellowships. As a result, he explored secular humanism and cognitive-behavioral theories of addiction. These ideas laid the foundation for Secular Organizations for Sobriety, which are "secular . . . sober and . . . self-help."¹²⁸ SOS seems to "take the best of Alcoholics Anonymous [the original Twelve-Step program]—the one day at a time, the daily commitment to sobriety, keeping it your first priority—without the worst,"¹²⁹ which for SOS members includes the "religious trappings: moments of silence, recitation of the Lord's Prayer, mentions of God and higher power, and an emphasis on spiritual awakenings."¹³⁰ SOS is certainly a growing alternative to the Twelve-Step approach, with an estimate membership of 100,000 in 1999.¹³¹ It offers another sustainable program of recovery.

There are, of course, many different types of recovery programs. Some are more popular and successful than others, with Twelve Step programs both the most successful and popular. A number of studies have shown that "attendance at Alcoholics Anonymous was strongly predictive of abstinence."¹³² In fact, many people who are active in some of the alternative program described above are also involved in a Twelve Step program, which makes understanding the success rates of the alternatives difficult to measure. Furthermore, the Twelve Step program and its successes have had the greatest influence

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 149.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 151.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 150.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 148.

¹³²Ibid., p. 11.

on the growing understanding of the connection between spirituality and recovery. It is to this topic that this thesis now turns.

Spirituality and Recovery

A spiritual renewal is a critical component of recovery from addiction. A person can physical abstain from the addictive behaviors, and even emotionally understand the motivations that led to the addiction, but unless an addict addresses his or her spirituality, recovery will not continue.

The previous chapter explored the realm of spirituality and addiction. It began by discussing various understandings of "spirituality," and offered the main idea that spirituality is the bridge between our "animal" natures and our "divine" natures. Spirituality develops because life is painful, and imperfect, and "suggests that there is something wrong—with me, with you, with the world—but there is nothing wrong with that, because that is the nature of our reality."¹³³ Furthermore, spirituality is understood today "as a quest for ultimate reality, meaning, truth, or a deity."¹³⁴ Spirituality, as the following parable shows, is a necessary component of whole living:

Spirituality is like mortar in the fireplace. Just as the mortar makes the chimney a chimney, allowing it to stand straight and tall, beautiful in its wholeness, the spiritual is what makes us wholly human. It holds our experiences together, shapes them into a whole, gives them meaning, allows them—and us—to be whole. Without the spiritual, however physically brave or healthy or strong we may be, however mentally smart or clever or brilliant we may be, however emotionally integrated or mature

¹³³Kurtz and Ketcham, p. 28.

¹³⁴Ringwald, p. 5.

we may be, we are somehow not all there.¹³⁵

It is clear that spirituality teaches us "how to live."¹³⁶ Sadly, addiction can develop when there is a problem with a person's spirituality, their "mortar." Many psychologists recognized this problem. Carl Jung, in a letter to Bill Wilson, wrote that "the craving for alcohol was the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union for God."¹³⁷ Many recovering addicts have experienced Jung's theories personally. Linda Leonard, a recovering alcoholic, understood that "the underlying meaning of [her] addiction [was]. . . the spiritual life for which I was always searching."¹³⁸ Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, a recovering food addict, writes that "even though it was certainly not well-articulated at the time, there was something in me that knew I was in deep spiritual trouble, that something was deeply wrong spiritually."¹³⁹ As was previously shown, addiction develops because of a lack of spirituality, a "spiritual narcissism."¹⁴⁰ Therefore, if addiction is a spiritual ailment, it necessitates a spiritual solution. The "idea of 'spiritus contra spiritum,' the employment of the Divine Spirit against the ravages of 'spirit,' or liquor, has become the basis of many

¹³⁵Kurtz and Ketcham, p. 146.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 18.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 113.

¹³⁸Leonard, p. xviii.

¹³⁹Bullitt-Jonas, p. 98.

¹⁴⁰Doweiko, p. 39.

treatment programs."¹⁴¹ It is certainly the basis of the Twelve-Step program, which discovered that "the spiritual was essential—it was, in other words, what it really takes to fix the drunks."¹⁴² In fact, the early founders of Alcoholics Anonymous believed that alcoholics would die lest they find a "spiritual basis for living;"¹⁴³ This belief persists in modern Alcoholics Anonymous and other Twelve-Step fellowships, which "continue to view the lack or distortion of spirituality as the cause of addiction and an improved spiritual life as the solution."¹⁴⁴

The development of a spiritual life has proven to be the essential element in recovery from addiction. The truth about recovery for many addicts is that "without a personal transformation . . . spiritual in nature, little happens over the long-term."¹⁴⁵ This reality has been observed by many professionals working in the field of addiction, who emphasize the "pivotal role of spirituality in recovery."¹⁴⁶ Many recovering addicts and mental health professionals believe that "any sincere battle with a particular addiction is likely to bring . . . some kind of spiritual confrontation."¹⁴⁷ Unless the addict recognizes and addresses this spiritual confrontation, recovery cannot take place. However, those

¹⁴¹Grof, p. 104.

¹⁴²Kurtz and Ketcham, p. 110.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁴⁴Ringwald, p. 16.

¹⁴⁵Ringwald, p. 40.

¹⁴⁶Twerski, *The Spiritual Self*, p. xiv.

¹⁴⁷May, p. 135.

who support this kind of recovery believe that it is the only way of reaching the goal of "recovery [and] closeness to God."¹⁴⁸

The confirmation of this element of recovery is found in recovering addicts' personal stories and anecdotes. Christina Grof, a recovering alcoholic and co-author of *The Stormy Search for Self*, shared this story of addiction and recovery:

I gave up every shred of my defenses and admitted defeat. . . . I was undeniably a drunk. . . . The work we did in treatment took me to the bottom with a crash. . . . I felt as though every aspect of my life were slipping away, including myself. There was nothing left to hold on to, and even if there had been, I no longer had the strength to grasp it. I had no choice but to give up. Some larger force was obviously in charge. [Over time] I felt a new connection with myself and with the world around me, and became deeply aware of a higher source. . . . Whatever the route, many people who have known the depths of alcoholism or drug addiction, have hit bottom, and have emerged into a new life to develop some kind of relationship with a Higher Power. . . .¹⁴⁹

This personal story highlights Grof's recovery in spiritual terms. She hit what many addicts call "rock bottom," the point at which the acknowledgment of the addiction eclipses any denial and self-deception. This was a painful experience, but despite—or, perhaps, because of—the pain, it eventually led Grof to open herself to a Higher Power. This new connection marked the beginning of Grof's recovery.

Margaret Bullitt-Jonas recorded her story in *Holy Hunger: A Woman's Journey from Food Addiction to Spiritual Fulfillment*. She writes:

The faith that now upholds my life springs from whatever it was that led me into abstinence, urging me to face life as it is, to seek what is really real. If I told my story over again, I might tell it differently this time. It

¹⁴⁸Olitzky and Copans, p. 72.

¹⁴⁹Grof, pp. 102-103, 108.

would be a story laced with grace [which many Christians view as God's manifestation of love]. The story of a woman who ran from God for a good chunk of her life but who finally consented to being sought by the Lover of her soul. . . . In the years since coming into [recovery], I have gradually come to know a [Higher] Power.¹⁵⁰

Bullitt-Jonas' book is dedicated to uncovering and exploring the many facets of her eating disorder. However, in her final reckoning, Bullitt-Jonas described her struggle in spiritual terms. Her addiction was characterized by running away from God; her recovery is characterized by such a close connection to God that she calls the "Lover of her soul." The short paragraph excerpted above illuminates the possibilities inherent in a spiritual recovery from addiction.

Both Grof and Bullitt-Jonas participated in Twelve-Step fellowships, groups of people who share the same addiction and also a desire to be free from the addiction. They were, like "most of the millions of Americans treated for substance abuse. . . , encouraged to develop a spiritual life."¹⁵¹ In fact, "most of the more than 11,000 treatment programs in the country introduce their clients to some form of spirituality, usually based on the Twelve Step program."¹⁵² The Twelve-Step approach has indeed become central to the spiritual path of recovery; this is because "the twelve steps are designed to engineer a spiritual experience in modern man."¹⁵³ (The Twelve Steps were delineated in the previous section.) However, most recovering addicts and addiction specialists agree that

¹⁵⁰Bullitt-Jonas, pp. 248, 250.

¹⁵¹Ringwald, p. 4.

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 33.

the Twelve Steps aim to teach various spiritual lessons, which can roughly be grouped into four different categories. These categories are humility, honesty, dedication to community, and integrity, each of which are important elements in an recovering addict's attempts to create a relationship with God.

Humility as a Spiritual Tool for Recovery from Addiction

Perhaps of all elements of recovery, humility is the most essential. The goal of steps one, two, three, six and seven is to reinforce a person's humility, or sense that the addict is not God. One of the addict's main problems is that he or she is convinced of his or her own absolute control. Howard Doweiko described the addict as a "spiritual narcissist," who is "unable to acknowledge the possibility of a Power greater than self."¹⁵⁴ He writes, "the individual's initial choice to indulge in recreational chemical use reflects his or her decision to give in to the delusion that there is nothing as important as the desires of the 'self.' In so doing, the individual elects to follow a course of action in which one seeks to impose his or her own will on the universe."¹⁵⁵ In other words, the addict believes that he or she is a god, with power to control everything around him or her. At first, addiction reinforces this illusion of ultimate control; eventually, however, "addiction will prove to us that we are not gods. Then we will realize that we are our own worst enemies. At that point . . . we will turn to God."¹⁵⁶ This "recognition that the [addict] is not the deity" is

¹⁵⁴Doweiko, p. 39.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁵⁶May, p. 20.

"the starting point of almost any spirituality," including the spirituality of the Twelve Steps.¹⁵⁷ This recognition is often accompanied by the addict's painful awareness of self-limitation, and indeed powerlessness over the addiction. Hence, the first step of every Twelve-Step program acknowledges that "we are powerless over [the addiction]—that our lives had become unmanageable." This is the experience Christina Grof described above. She—and every recovering addict—makes the painful discovery of powerlessness, of lack of control, of being merely human and not a god. In fact, "the addict's recovery depends upon an acknowledgment of his powerlessness over the unmanageable depths to which he has fallen through his disease."¹⁵⁸ This acknowledgment can be debilitating, and nearly impossible for the addict to make; however, it is a requisite for recovery, since openly admitting addiction "calls forth the spiritual reality of humility."¹⁵⁹

This acknowledgment and recognition of personal limitations through the out-of-control addiction naturally leads addicts to a Power that *does* have control. This Higher Power, the term commonly used in recovery circles, is a necessary component of recognizing one's own limitations. "To combat [the addict's] illusion of control, it is necessary for the individual to establish a relationship between the 'self' and a Higher Power."¹⁶⁰ This "Higher Power" is freely defined by the addict, and can either be a deity or some other "higher" entity. Instead of "God" as a Higher Power, some addicts use their

¹⁵⁷Ringwald, p. 26.

¹⁵⁸Leonard, p. xv.

¹⁵⁹Kurtz and Ketcham, p. 1.

¹⁶⁰Doweiko, p. 47.

Twelve Step fellowship, a connection with nature, or the ideals of truth and love.¹⁶¹ It has been found that "even without a deity, prayer, meditation . . . and spirituality can move people from the center of their universe such that they live differently." However a "Higher Power" is defined, the addict is reminded that he or she is not the Higher Power. This is the quality of humility that is an essential component to the addict's spiritual recovery.

Honesty as a Spiritual Tool for Recovery from Addiction

It clearly takes a great deal of honesty for the addict to admit his or her own powerlessness. It also requires courage, since the addict is often in denial of the addiction. Unfortunately, "the arch-foe of spirituality has been recognized to be 'denial,' the self-deception that rejects self."¹⁶² Therefore, when the addict admits powerlessness, he or she is not only admitting personal limitations; he or she is also being honest, perhaps for the first time in years. Addiction is always accompanied by deception. One addict expressed that her addiction "made a liar out of me, a consummate fake."¹⁶³ This is because "the lifestyle of addiction . . . invariably requires a person to lie, deceive, cover up."¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, lying "indicates that the person is willing to pay the ultimate long-term price

¹⁶¹Ringwald, p. 223.

¹⁶²Kurtz and Ketcham, p. 19.

¹⁶³Bullitt-Jonas, p. 31.

¹⁶⁴Twerski, *The Spiritual Self*, p. 52.

for the short-term gain," which is the very nature of addiction.¹⁶⁵ Rabbi Twerski shares the following anecdote of an addict who relapsed into use of drugs:

I started my decline even when I was clean. Although I wasn't using, I had started lying. I borrowed money, telling people I had a job beginning next week and would pay them back. I had no job. It was a lie, and that is when my relapse began.¹⁶⁶

Therefore, "in a spiritual recovery, both the use of chemicals [or other addictive behaviors] and lying are abandoned."¹⁶⁷ Honesty requires admitting one's own limitations, and also taking responsibility for one's actions. This is the thrust of the Twelve-Step emphasis on spirituality, which asks addicts to make a "moral [self-] inventory," admit one's past mistakes, and make amends for whatever harm the addict caused. Honesty, therefore, is "recognized as the best defense against . . . the addictive process."¹⁶⁸ In fact, *Alcoholics Anonymous* claims that "those who do not recover are. . . usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves."¹⁶⁹ Additionally, honesty is not just an essential part of recovery, but is a "central theme in all traditions of spirituality."¹⁷⁰ A spiritual recovery demands honesty just as it demands humility. Both are two of the main spiritual tools of a spiritual recovery.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., p. 52-53.

¹⁶⁷Ibid. p, 54.

¹⁶⁸Doweiko, p. 44.

¹⁶⁹*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 58.

¹⁷⁰Kurtz and Ketcham, p. 62.

Community as a Spiritual Tool to Recovery from Addiction

Another of the active addict's major problems is that he or she becomes isolated from other people. People who are not addicts are often able to find intimate relationships with other people. The addict, however, becomes unable to achieve intimacy with another person. It has been noted that the "normal ways of achieving intimacy involve reaching out to life. . . . In addiction, this reaching motion is almost totally inward to the point of withdrawing."¹⁷¹ Furthermore, the addict becomes so entrenched in addictive behavioral patterns that he or she begins to treat people as objects.¹⁷² When an addict enters recovery, the renewed commitment to a larger community is one of the most important elements to a spiritual and sober life.

The addict who participates in a Twelve Step group, for example Alcoholics Anonymous, finds a *fellowship* of like-minded people who have experienced first-hand the terrors and damage of addiction. Participation in this fellowship requires the addict not only to depend on others when he or she needs help, but also to be dependable for others who might need support. This is an "experiences of mutuality [that] is the foundation of the very existence of Alcoholics Anonymous"¹⁷³ and other Twelve Step fellowships. One recovering alcoholic explained, "My Higher Power raised me, called me forth, from my alcoholism, but I need the other drunks in Alcoholics Anonymous to unwrap me, to let me

¹⁷¹Nakken, p. 11.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁷³Kurtz and Ketcham, p. 83.

loose and keep me loose from [the alcohol].”¹⁷⁴ The addict might be able to recover from the addiction with the help of a Higher Power, and by internalizing a commitment to humility and honesty. However, it was quickly discovered that these elements were not enough to continue sobriety. As Dr. Robert Smith noted, “the spiritual approach was as useless as any other if you soaked it up like a sponge and kept it to yourself.”¹⁷⁵ This is why the last of the Twelve Steps reminds the recovering addict “to carry this message to [other addicts].” It is reminding the inward-reaching addict that he or she must reach out to others. This spiritual tool is marked by action—acting within the community, remaining committed to other members of the community, and immersing oneself within the community. It can be observed in the many ways recovering addicts support one another. Rabbi Twerski observed this phenomenon, and said, “when recovering alcoholics are awakened on a frigid night because some drunk wants help, they crawl out of bed and travel along icy roads to the caller’s home.”¹⁷⁶ Recovering addicts have found that “the criterion of spirituality is not subjective feeling but the reality of our relationships with others, the reality of community.”¹⁷⁷ Community has proven to be an invaluable spiritual tool for addicts seeking a spiritual recovery.

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁷⁶Twerski, *The Spiritual Self*, p. xiii.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 80.

Integrity as a Spiritual Tool to Recovery from Addiction

When an addict begins the process of spiritual recovery, he or she learns that "spirituality is, above all, a way of life. Spirituality permeates to the very core of our human being, affecting the way we perceive the world around us, the way we feel about that world, and the choices we make."¹⁷⁸ This is the meaning of integrity for a recovering addict. The addict's entire persona must be committed to recovery; this is the only solution to the "division of self" so many addicts experience when they are actively addicted.

Integrity is the goal of step ten, which cautions the addict to "continue to take personal inventory." This is, in many ways, a repetition of step four, which also advises the addict to take a "searching and fearless moral inventory." The same action is suggested twice because the addict cannot slip into complacency; instead, he or she must remain aware of his or her actions in order to act with integrity. At the beginning of the recovery process, the addict had to analyze his or her actions as an addict. As time passes, and the addict has some time in recovery, he or she needs to analyze his or her actions as a recovering addict. In essence, the addict is asking, "am I continuing to act with integrity, now that I have so much new knowledge and a spiritual awakening?" Margaret Bullitt-Jonas recognized this as an essential element of recovery. She remarks:

After spending a certain amount of time in twelve-step meetings, almost anyone can master the language. We may learn to speak eloquently about the value of "surrender to a Higher Power." We may be able to rattle off glibly the tools of the program and explain their use. . . . And yet if we take no action, if we don't use the tools about which we speak, if we don't

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 68.

put into practice the principles that we espouse, full recovery will remain elusive. When it comes to addiction, it's easy to kid ourselves and to settle for talk. That's why I learned in Overeaters Anonymous to mistrust so-called fat serenity, the pipe dream of being spiritually healthy and at peace, even though we continue to overeat as compulsively and chaotically as ever.¹⁷⁹

The Twelve Steps end with the commitment that recovering addicts will "practice these principles in all our affairs." This is the essence of recovery, the antithesis of "fat serenity," and the meaning of integrity. When the recovering addict internalizes the spirituality of recovery, he or she also learns to embody the values of humility, integrity, and commitment to community. Recovering addicts learn that "spirituality is a reality that must touch all of one's life or it touches none of one's life."¹⁸⁰ Spirituality can become the addict's "mortar," if he or she acts with integrity.

Spirituality, Not Religion

One of the most well-known quips among Twelve Step groups is "religion is for people who are trying to stay out of hell. Spirituality is for people who have been there." None of the spiritual tools outlined above require participation in an organized religious community, though many recovering addicts do return to religion with renewed passion and involvement. The spirituality of the Twelve Steps is not "dependent on religion," and any person can fully participate in all aspects of this spirituality without belief in God.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹Bullitt-Jonas, pp. 119-120.

¹⁸⁰Kurtz and Ketcham, p. 145.

¹⁸¹Twerski, *The Spiritual Self*, p. xiv.

While the Twelve Step program "insists on the necessity of 'the spiritual' for recovery, [it] has always presented its program as 'spiritual rather than religious.'"¹⁸² Many participants in a Twelve Step group often recall that their relief when they learn that the program does not require the acceptance of any particular religious doctrine or world view.¹⁸³ The authors of *The Spirituality of Imperfection* made the following observation:

The typical newcomer to Alcoholics Anonymous hears in 'the spiritual' another name for religion—a program for perfection, a fellowship of those who claim to be, or at least hope to become, 'holy.' Such a way of life holds little appeal for a down-and-out drunk But in meeting after meeting . . . an new image of spirituality takes root. This isn't a program of perfection but a way of life that accepts imperfection as imperfection.¹⁸⁴

This natural skepticism of religion, which addicts see as a "program for perfection," informs the Twelve-Step program's own open-endedness. It explains why, within the Twelve Steps, the word "God" is so often followed by "as we understood Him." In fact, "the whole story of Alcoholics Anonymous might be summed up as an ongoing quest for a nonconventional spirituality."¹⁸⁵ The Twelve-Step program deliberately remains separate from religion, and does not concretize its own vision of spirituality. It simply offers a program for recovery, of which spirituality is the main component.

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 5

¹⁸³Bullitt-Jonas, p. 134.

¹⁸⁴Kurtz and Ketcham, pp. 110-111.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 111.

Twelve-Step Spirituality and Judaism

Despite the Twelve-Step program's intentional distance from organized religion, there are many areas in which the Twelve-Step plan overlaps with religious principles. Various organized religions have adapted the Twelve Steps¹⁸⁶, and Judaism is no exception. The book *Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery*, by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky and Dr. Stuart A. Copans, is the primary Jewish lens through which to view the Jewish perspective on the Twelve Step program. It asserts that "many Jewish voices are heard in each step."¹⁸⁷ Throughout the book, it aligns various steps with different Jewish approaches to repentance. For example, it connects the addict's admission of powerlessness over the addiction with "the confessional prayers of the High Holidays."¹⁸⁸ It "translates" some of the steps into Jewish language, such as describing step four, a "fearless moral inventory," as "a *cheshbon hanefesh*, an accounting of the soul."¹⁸⁹ It also addresses some of the reservations that Jews might feel when first encountering the Twelve Steps. An example is its recognition that some Jews might hear step two—"a Power . . . that could restore us to sanity"—"as 'salvation' in a Christian sense."¹⁹⁰ It counters this feeling with the reminder that "for Jews, belief in God is a struggle. . . . Just start by deciding that you will try to

¹⁸⁶Ringwald, p. 218.

¹⁸⁷Olitzky and Copans, p. iii.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p. 23.

believe.”¹⁹¹ This book recognizes that certain steps might be difficult for modern Jews, but encourages them to continue walking the path of the Twelve Steps, which can also be a Jewish path. *Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery* assures Jewish addicts that the Twelve Steps are consistent with Jewish tradition and can and should be accessed by any seeking Jewish addict.

Another example of the connection between Jewish tradition and the Twelve-Step program of spirituality is found in Rabbi Carol Glass’ article “Addiction and Recovery Through Jewish Eyes.” This article describes “two versions of the prescribed way for a Jew to do *teshuvah* [repentance], that is, the method for Jews to change and redress unethical behavior, thereby achieving a return to acceptable conduct and spiritual wholeness.”¹⁹² These two versions are Maimonides’ (the twelfth-century Jewish legal scholar and philosopher) laws of repentance and Rabbenu Yonah of Gerona’s “gates,” or steps, for repentance. Both of these versions—like the Twelve Step program—are very carefully constructed programs that guide the person seeking *teshuvah*, or repentance. For example, Maimonides’ steps include “confession before God,” “abandonment of sin,” “change of thought,” “reparation,” and “self-restraint.”¹⁹³ Rabbenu Yonah suggests “forsaking the sin,” “behave with humility,” taking a “moral inventory,” and “turn others away from transgression.”¹⁹⁴ Just a cursory look at these rabbinic steps to repentance

¹⁹¹Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁹²Glass, p. 243.

¹⁹³Ibid., p. 242-243.

¹⁹⁴Ibid.

reveal obvious similarities to the twelve steps. In her more thorough comparison, Rabbi Glass makes the following discovery:

It is evident that the Twelve Steps and the concept of *teshuvah* are spiritually as well as tactically compatible. Both offer directives for behavioral improvement. Both include reliance on God (or a Higher Power), the taking of a moral inventory, confession to others and to God, appropriate reparations, and evidence of changed behavior. Both systems also imply that unacceptable behavior is the result of spiritual emptiness.¹⁹⁵

It is interesting to note that while Rabbi Olitzky and Dr. Copans believe that modern Jews may have the greatest amount of difficulty accepting step two, Rabbi Glass asserts that the message of step two, which "guides one to become a believer," is assumed to be a given in Rabbinic Judaism.¹⁹⁶ While talking about and believing in a God may be a struggle for many modern Jews, Rabbi Glass recognizes that this was not always the case, particularly for rabbinic Jews.

A relationship with God, or a personal Higher Power, has been shown to be an essential part of the spiritual recovery. As Rabbi Glass notes, this relationship is assumed to be a given for rabbinic Jews. However, the precise rabbinic understanding of recovery must be explored. The following rabbinic teachings and stories not only reveal the ancient "program for recovery;" they also provide modern Jews with additional guidance in forging a Jewish spiritual recovery.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., 244.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 245.

Recovery in the Minds of the Rabbis

The previous chapter explored the source of addiction in the minds of the Rabbis. It showed that the Rabbis generally believed addictive behavior stemmed from an unbalanced will-to-do-good, *yetzer tov*, and will-to-do-evil, *yetzer hara*. When a particular *yetzer*, the natural inclination or urge, was not controlled by its polar opposite, compulsive and habitual behavior developed. The Rabbis recognized that this imbalance could cause problems with any event or substance: food, drink, gambling, studying, or even giving money to charity. Since they believed this behavior resulted from an imbalance between the *yetzer tov* and *yetzer hara*, they naturally argued for living a life in moderation; in fact, this was their suggestion for addressing and preventing addiction.

In the previous chapter, we explored two statements from the Babylonian Talmud that highlighted the Rabbis' awareness of compulsive behavior in two specific contexts. Both of these statements actually conclude with suggestions of acting with moderation. For example, *Yoma* 74b contains Rav Yosef's observation that there are people who eat but are never satisfied. In response, "Abaye said, 'Therefore, one who has a meal should only eat during the day.'" At first glance, this advice might indicate a lack of understanding of compulsive behavior. For someone who is in the midst of an eating binge, this response might seem groundless. However, a recovering food addict observed that "in the early stages of recovery, the addict must focus all her energy and attention on physical recovery. The enormous challenge in the first weeks of Overeaters Anonymous was unambiguous and unequivocal: not to overeat, no matter what."¹⁹⁷ This unequivocal challenge perfectly

¹⁹⁷Bullitt-Jonas, p. 110.

echoes Abaye's advice that a person should only eat a meal at the meal's time. He, too, is advising the food addict not to overeat, no matter what.

Another textual example of a rabbinic suggestion for moderation can be found in Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 107a. This text, as quoted in the previous chapter, shares Rav Yehudah's observation that when a man satisfies his sexual drives, he remains "hungry," and continues to have sexual desires. He concludes this observation by stating that "when [a man] makes [his genitalia] hungry, he is satisfied." In other words, Rav Yehudah is also preaching abstinence from overindulgent sexual expression. He is not suggesting that a person completely abstain from sexual activity, but rather that a person should not give in to every sexual desire. He wants people to maintain a balance between satisfying every sexual inclination, and completely abstaining from every sexual urge. In other words, he is advising moderation. This is difficult advice for a sex-addict to comprehend, particularly because the average sex addict believes that "sex is the most important need."¹⁹⁸ Even when a sex-addict enters a recovery program, he or she realizes—like Abaye—that "celibacy does not resolve the problem. . . . Like the overeater, recovery [for the sex addict] does not mean the elimination of fundamental human processes."¹⁹⁹ Instead, sex-addicts need to "determine when their behavior is addictive," and abstain from that specific behavior.²⁰⁰ They cannot indulge every sexual inclination; instead, they must keep some of their desires—the addictive sexual behaviors—"hungry."

¹⁹⁸Carnes, p. 152.

¹⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 189.

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*

This perfectly aligns with Abaye's suggestions. It seems, then, that the rabbinic emphasis on moderation is a powerful tool for recovery from addiction. For the Rabbis, moderation reinstated a healthy balance between the *yetzer tov* and the *yetzer hara*. We can infer that this reinstatement of balance is a return, a recovery, from addictive behavior.

For many, however, the advice to moderate behavior seems to be lacking, particularly for an alcoholic or drug addict who cannot consume the substances in moderation. Furthermore, if we understand addiction to be a physical, emotional, and spiritual disease, we also see the need for recovery to take place on all three levels. Moderation, however, only addresses physical recovery. While many addicts recognize physical recovery to be the most important first step, it cannot be the last step. The Rabbis recognized this, as well, as the following stories reveal.

Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira made a Purim feast together, and they got very drunk. Rabbah arose and slew Rabbi Zeirah. The next day, Rabbah prayed for mercy, and Rabbi Zeira was given life. The next year, Rabbi Zeira said to Rabbah, "Master! Let us make a Purim feast together!" Rabbah said, "a miracle does not occur each and every hour!"
(Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah* 7b)

This story is immediately preceded by Rabba's dictate that, on Purim, people should drink "until they cannot distinguish between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai." In context, then, the disastrous situation can be recognized as an opposition to Rabba's blanket dictum. Furthermore, later generations were not completely comfortable with the "miraculous" events in this story, and qualified Rabbi Zeira's supposed revivification by claiming that he had only been injured, but not murdered. We, too, can recognize the hyperbolic elements in this story. However, for our purposes, this story can be understood as an example of addiction and recovery.

In the previous chapter on addiction, a brief discussion on differentiating between abuse and addiction determined that "any single episode can be understood to be an addictive act."²⁰¹ This story might be understood as one event in Rabbah's life, however, this thesis views any single event as evidence of addictive behavior. The previous chapter also outlined five different questions that can determine the presence of addictive behavior in a rabbinic text. These questions will now be applied to this text. First, could Rabbah control his behaviors? This question is not simple to answer, because the text does not detail Rabbah's actual drinking, only the fact of his drunkenness. However, we can infer that he was unable to control himself while he was drunk, since his slaying of Rabbi Zeira appears to be unintentional. It was not, however, a compulsive behavior.

The next question seeks to determine if Rabbah or the people around Rabbah, felt that his behavior was normal. As previously stated, this story immediately follows the dictate that a person should become drunk on Purim. This, then, seems to indicate that Rabbah's drunkenness was viewed as perfectly normal. However, the story is brought in order to deliberately show how disastrous this "normal" behavior could be. Therefore, in answer to this question, it would appear that Rabbah's actions were not normal.

The third question is, does the person neglect his obligations or family because of his actions? While the text does not detail Rabbah's relationship with his family, it does show that his drunkenness causes him to lose the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, and to control his actions. Sadly, this leads him to harm those for whom he cares.

The fourth question asks whether the person has ever gotten into trouble because of his

²⁰¹Dodes, p. 124.

actions. This story very clearly shows the trouble Rabbah causes when he drinks. In fact, he commits such an egregious offense that it takes a miracle to correct it! Perhaps more than any of the other questions, the answer to this question clearly indicates that Rabbah's actions were not in control and could be classified as addictive behaviors.

The final question strongly supports this classification. It asks: Have the person's actions ever created problems with other close friends? Again, the answer is an unequivocal "yes." Rabbah kills his friend Rabbi Zeira; while he is forgiven (as evidenced by Rabbi Zeira's second invitation to feast), he still creates serious problems with his actions. When one considers all of the answers to these questions, it seems clear that this story can be understood in terms of addiction. The text also shows recovery from addiction.

A year after Rabbi Zeira's miraculous revivification, he once again asks Rabbah to "make a Purim feast" and engage in serious drinking. Rabbah, the man whom we have determined to have an addictive relationship to alcohol, does not accept Rabbi Zeira's invitation. Instead, he abstains. It seems as though the events of the past year have taught him that he cannot control his behavior when he is drunk; therefore, he realizes that, when confronted with the same set of circumstances, he cannot repeat them. Rabbah's abstinence in this situation is an act of recovery.

There are various elements that are a part of his recovery. First, he addresses the physical problem, and simply stops drinking. As one mental health professional explains, "in the context of what we can do to break addiction . . . it all comes down to quitting it,

not engaging in the next addictive behavior, not indulging in the next temptation."²⁰² This is precisely the action that Rabbah takes. He just "quits." Anyone who has struggled with addiction will understand that while "just quitting" may seem simple, it is not easy; stopping the physical addiction takes constant vigilance and determination, and it generally cannot be done alone. This is why "simple" abstinence is "a sign of authentic spiritual growth;"²⁰³ it entails the recognition that the addict is powerless and is somehow in need of a Higher Power for help and guidance. Many recovering addicts, in fact, call their recovery "miraculous," because they recognized that, on their own, they could not stop the addictive behavior. Perhaps, then, Rabbah was referring not to Rabbi Zeira's revivification but to his own abstinence and recovery, when he said "a miracle does not happen at every moment." Rabbah knew that his recovery was miraculous, and he treasured it.

As was already stated, physical abstinence is a sign of spiritual growth. This story, in fact, contains a strong message for addicts seeking spiritual recovery. Rabbi Glass noted that the Rabbis assumed belief in God; this assumption applies to Rabbah, as well. However, this story shows God's personal providence in Rabbah's life. God miraculously resolves the problems Rabbah's drinking created, and both Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira benefit. Furthermore, this story shows that Rabbah realized, perhaps for the first time, that God, "a Power greater than [he], could restore [him] to sanity." God entered Rabbah's world in a very real sense, and restores to sanity the craziness Rabbah has created. Rabbah

²⁰²May, p. 177.

²⁰³Ibid.

was able to let this miraculous entrance change his life. He has a physical recovery, but he does so through a spiritual awakening. He grows in humility, and remembers that there is a Higher Power who is much greater, more powerful, and more merciful than he. He becomes more honest, and is able to answer Rabbi Zeira's second invitation with openness and candor. Finally, he acts with integrity, and realizes that the miracle he witnessed had to inform not just his sobriety, but every aspect of his life. This story is a powerful illustration that the Rabbis recognized spirituality to be a powerful tool in the addict's struggle to recover.

Another powerful story of addiction, and an attempt at recovery, can be found in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Avodah Zara* 17a.

They said of Rabbi Eleazar ben Dordiya, that he did not let even one prostitute rest without coming to her. One time he heard that there was one prostitute in a city by the sea, and she required a purse of *dinar* [coins] in order to lie with her. Ben Dordiya took up a purse of *dinar*, and set out. He crossed over seven rivers. At the time when they began their sexual union, she blew out a breath and said, "Just as this breath can never return to its source, so too Eleazar ben Dordiya will never be received in repentance." He went and sat between two hills and mountains, and said, "Hills and mountains, ask for mercy on my behalf!" They replied, "we cannot ask on your behalf, for we ask on behalf of ourselves," as it says, "for the mountains may move and the hills be shaken [but My loyalty shall never move from you, nor My covenant of friendship be shaken, said the Lord, who takes you back in love]" (Isaiah 54:10). He said, "Heaven and earth, ask for mercy on my behalf!" They replied, "we cannot ask on your behalf, for we ask on behalf of ourselves," as it says, "though the heavens should melt away like smoke, and the earth wear out like a garment [. . . My victory will stand forever, My triumph will remain unbroken]" (Isaiah 51:6). He said, "Sun and moon, ask for mercy on my behalf!" They replied, "we cannot ask on your behalf, for we ask on behalf of ourselves," as it says, "the moon will be ashamed and the sun will be abashed [For the Lord of Hosts will reign. . . and the Presence will be revealed. . .]" (Isaiah 24:23). He said, "Stars and constellations, ask for mercy on my behalf!" They replied, "we cannot ask on your behalf, for we ask on behalf of ourselves," as it says, "all the hosts of heaven shall wither" (Isaiah 34:4).

Eleazar ben Dordiya said, "Then this matter depends only on me!" He rested his head between his knees, and burst forth in tears until his soul departed. A *bat kol*, a heavenly voice, came out and proclaimed, "Rabbi Eleazar ben Dordiya is invited to life in the world to come!" Here was a case of a sin [other than heresy] when [the sinner] died. In this case, too, because he was so deeply attached to pleasure, it is as if he had committed heresy. Rabbi cried [when he heard this] and said, "One can achieve eternity [i.e. eternal life] after many years, and one can achieve eternity in just one hour." Rabbi also said, "It is the law that not only will one who repents be accepted, but also that we will call him Rabbi."

This is a talmudic text that powerfully illustrates one man "hitting bottom" with his addiction. In many respects, it also shows a kind of recovery from addiction. However, before these elements can be explored, it is necessary to first point out the original context of this story. As was explained in the previous chapter, many of the rabbinic stories that address addiction do so because of some connection to a legal matter. This text is not an exception; it is introduced as part of a discussion on whether or not people die when they renounce sins besides heresy. The Rabbis begin with the supposition that when one renounces heresy, they necessarily die. Another story, about a woman who renounces sins other than heresy, is offered, but is dismissed because the sinning woman also committed heresy. The story of Rabbi Eleazar ben Dordiya is then offered as another example. This explains the statement, "Here was a case of a sin [other than heresy] when [the sinner] died." Rabbi Eleazar ben Dordiya's story is therefore included because it illustrates this claim. However, the claim is refuted by the assertion that his actions are so serious that it is "as if he committed heresy," and his death is another example of a person who dies when they renounce heresy. When this text is viewed out of its original context, however, it reveals many insights into addiction and recovery.

First, the presence of addiction must be determined. The fact that this text emphasizes

that Eleazar ben Dordiya has seen *every* prostitute constitutes enough evidence of an addiction. Furthermore, this text shows that Eleazar ben Dordiya is not in control of his actions to seek prostitutes; others feel that his actions are not normal, as is evidenced by the need to cross seven rivers—indicating a long, expensive, and arduous journey—to see a certain prostitute; and he gets into trouble—he risks eternal life—because of his actions. The text does not reveal any evidence of Eleazar ben Dordiya's family, so we cannot determine if he neglected his family, or if his family members or close friends had problems with his behavior. However, the other answers reveal beyond a doubt that Eleazar ben Dordiya was an addict, in particular, a sex addict. This deduction is strengthened by a comparison of Eleazar ben Dordiya's story with the following contemporary depiction of a sex addict:

A hard rain made it difficult for Steven to see out the windows of his car. His search was already hindered by the fact that in this weather the prostitutes would be huddling in doorways, insted of strutting openly as on most night. But he had to find one. Almost every night, he had to find one. He had been cruising for prostitutes for years and knew many by name, and even a little about them as people. He favored some over others, because of how they looked, or because they did what he wished. . . . Steven took little pleasure from his search.²⁰⁴

If Eleazar ben Dordiya's actions had been detailed in the *Avodah Zara* text, they might have resembled Steven's. We know that Eleazar ben Dordiya had visited every prostitute he had ever heard of; we can presume that he had been doing this for years, and that he knew many prostitutes by name. We might even guess that he favored some over others. The text itself informs us that, in the end, Eleazar ben Dordiya took very little pleasure from his compulsive behavior. The comparison between a contemporary sex addict and

²⁰⁴Dodes, p. 211.

Rabbi Eleazar ben Dordiya reveal that, in our post-modern understanding of sexual addiction, Eleazar ben Dordiya is a sex addict.

This story also reveals many of the spiritual facets of addiction and recovery. First, the text states that Eleazar ben Dordiya was so “attached to pleasure, it is as if he had committed heresy.” For the Rabbis, heresy was one of the worst offenses a person could commit. It was not so dissimilar from committing idolatry, or *avodah Zara*, the very tractate in which this text is found. The Rabbis, then seem to be equating addiction to heresy, or perhaps even the sin of idolatry. Today, some religious mental health professionals working in the field of addiction continue to view addiction as a form of idolatry! For example, Gerald May wrote, “spiritually, addiction is a deep-seated form of idolatry. The objects of our addictions become false gods.”²⁰⁵ This insight, coming equally from the Rabbis and contemporary mental health professionals, bolsters the claim that there is a connection between addiction and spirituality. Just as a person who committed heresy or idol worship in the time of the Rabbis was seen as distancing him or herself from the greater Jewish community and from God, a person who is addicted today removes him or herself from the greater community and from “God’s love.”²⁰⁶

Recovery from addiction, therefore, would be characterized by a return to the greater community and to God. Both of these elements are present in this text. After hearing the story of Eleazar ben Dordiya, Rabbi, the recognized rabbinic authority of his time, declared that he—or any other person who repents—is “accepted” into the community.

²⁰⁵May, p. 13.

²⁰⁶Ibid.

Furthermore, the repentant person is welcomed with respect, and called "Rabbi." This indicates that a return to, participation in, and commitment to the larger community is part of recovery from addiction. This idea also supports the previously detailed Twelve-Step idea that community is a tool for spiritual recovery from addiction. Spiritual recovery, however, is also characterized by a return to God. Eleazar ben Dordiya begins this return from the moment he asks the hills and mountains to intercede with God on his behalf. He is searching for God, and a way to repent and turn away from his addictive behavior. While the story indicates that he dies before returning to God, it also relates that he *is* welcomed by God. The text states, "a heavenly voice proclaimed that Eleazar ben Dordiya is invited to life in the world to come." This sort of life was reserved not for sinners, but for the righteous. This shows that Eleazar ben Dordiya was accepted and forgiven by God. The heavenly voice countermands the prostitute's voice, which claimed that, because of his sex addiction, Eleazar ben Dordiya would never be forgiven or accepted. Fortunately, the prostitute's voice is negated by the heavenly voice. In fact, many addicts have discovered that they can be forgiven and accepted, no matter how devastating and disastrous their addiction. One recovering addict learned that "all twelve-step programs seek to help its members realize that we're already loved unconditionally, that we don't have to do something special to deserve to be loved, that we can fall down and make mistakes, that we can confess that we've blown it and receive forgiveness, that we can begin again."²⁰⁷ This love, acceptance, and forgiveness comes from other members in the addict's community, and from a Higher Power. The same is true in this text, which

²⁰⁷Bullitt-Jonas, p. 122.

shows Eleazar ben Dordiya being loved, accepted, and forgiven by other members of his community as well as by God.

This text, in fact, contains a very powerful underlying message for addicts seeking a spiritual recovery. The text shows Eleazar ben Dordiya's attempt to seek mercy, using the earth, sky, stars, sun, hills, etc., as intercessors. Each of these attempts fail, and each is accompanied by a prophetic quote by way of explanation. While the *Avodah Zara* text only quotes part of the prophetic verses, I included the remainder of the verses (with the exception of the last text, Isaiah 34:4, which simply continued the beginning of the verse without changing topics). The majority of prophetic verses quoted in the rabbinic story speak of the limitations of earthly matter: the hills, mountains, sky, earth, sun, and moon will all eventually "be shaken," "melt away," "wear out," and "be ashamed." These things, and by extension, all things found on earth, are not lasting and cannot bring support or mercy to human beings. The continuation of these verses, however, reveal that human beings can find this lasting support and mercy. The verses teach that God's loyalty will never move from humanity. God will take us back in love. God's triumph will never break. And God's Presence will be revealed. These verses offer a powerful message to the recovering addict, who is depending on a Higher Power to help him or her maintain sobriety. An active addict, as has been illustrated, attempted to put his or her faith in an earthly object; this approach failed miserably. A recovering addict, however, listens to the message of the prophetic verses, and is putting his or her faith in a Higher Power, in God. For a modern Jew who might struggle with belief in God,²⁰⁸ this text can be a powerful

²⁰⁸Olitzky and Copans, p. 30.

aid.

As illustrated, this text offers many insights into the nature of spiritual recovery. Sadly, however, it also shows that Eleazar ben Dordiya does not actually recover from his addiction; instead, it tells the story of his death. He grows so heartbroken and destitute that his soul departs. This is Eleazar ben Dordiya's lowest moment, the "rock bottom" that so often propels addicts onto a path of recovery. Eleazar ben Dordiya recognizes his own powerlessness at this moment, as well as the devastating consequences his addiction has wrought. He does not have a chance at recovery. However, it is possible to understand his death figuratively. Many addicts record an experience of an "ego death." This ego death is simultaneously an ending of one life and the beginning of a new life, as described in this passage from *The Stormy Search for Self*:

During the ego death, whether it occurs in an episode of spontaneous spiritual awakening or at the bottom of an individual's drinking career, everything that one is or was—all relationships and reference points, all rationalizations and protections—collapse, and the person is left naked, with nothing but the core of his or her being. From this state of absolute, terrifying surrender, there is nowhere to go but up. As part of the rebirth that follows this devastating death, one easily opens to a spiritually oriented existence. . . . Life becomes manageable, with help from a higher power, and one develops a new attitude toward handling life's ups and downs as they appear. Many people are surprised to find a constant, unending benevolent source within that offers them strength and guidance.²⁰⁹

When we view Eleazar ben Dordiya's death as an ego death, we recognize that the only thing that departed was Eleazar ben Dordiya's addiction. He learned that there was a constant, unending benevolent source that accepted, loved, and forgave his past actions.

²⁰⁹Grof, p. 106-107.

He is reborn to a new life, which the text calls "life in the world to come." Regardless of whether or not Eleazar ben Dordiya actually died or just experienced a death of his ego, his acknowledgment of his addiction would lead to a more hopeful, restful, and addiction-free future, either in this world or the world-to-come.

One final text offers yet another illustration of addiction and recovery. Babylonian Talmud *Menachot* 44a relates the following colorful story:

There is a story of a man who was strictly observant of the law of *tzitzit* [the fringes on the corners of one's square garments]. He heard that there was a prostitute in a city by the sea who demanded 400 gold coins as payment for lying with her. He sent her 400 gold coins and set a time to be with her. When his time came, he went and sat by the entrance. Her maid entered and said to her, "The same man who sent you 400 gold coins has come, and is sitting by the entrance." She said, "Please, come in." Seven beds spread out before him, six [filled] with silver and one with gold, and between each one was a ladder of silver, and the highest [of the ladders] was of gold. The prostitute ascended and sat on top of the highest ladder, naked. When he [began to] ascend to sit naked next to her, his four *tzitzit* slapped him on his face. He was startled and he sat down on the floor. She also was startled and sat on the floor. She said to him, "By the Capitol of Rome! I will not let you rest until you tell me what blemish you saw in me." He said to her, "By God, I have never seen a woman as beautiful as you. But the Lord our God commanded one commandment, and that is the commandment of *tzitzit*. For it is written, 'I am the Lord your God,' [Numbers 15:41] two times. [The meaning of this repetition of 'the Lord your God' is] 'I am the One who, in the future, will demand payment, and I am the One who, in the future, will give rewards.' Now the [four *tzitzit*] appear to me as four witnesses [to my actions, which will be judged by God in the future]." She said to him, "I will not let you rest until you tell me your name, the name of your city, the name of your teacher, and the name of the school where you learn Torah." He wrote all this information down and gave it to her. She stood and divided all of her belongings. [She gave] a third to the government, a third to the poor, and she kept a third to herself, including those same beds [with which she originally enticed the man]. She then went to the academy of Rabbi Hiya. She said to him, "Rabbi, teach me and make me a convert." He said to her, "My daughter, has one of my students caught your eye?" She took out the note and gave it to him. He said to her, "Go and take ownership of what you've purchased! The same beds that you once offered him illicitly,

now offer him licitly. This is the reward of this world, and as for [the reward in] the world to come, I cannot say how much it will be [i.e. the reward is immeasurable]!”

In the context of tractate *Menachot*, this story is used to illustrate the rewards of following Torah commandments, which are often commanded with little guarantee of a visible reward in this world, but with an “immeasurable” reward in the world to come. The story describes a man who follows a Torah commandment—the wearing of *tzitzit*, or fringes, on the corners of one’s garments—and is rewarded for doing so. The *tzitzit* serve as potential witnesses to his actions and thereby prevent him from sinning. The story ends as Rabbi Hiya explains that the couple’s reward in this world for the man’s observance is marriage and permissible sexual union, and implies that in the world to come, the reward will be immeasurable. The story, in its own context, is an illustration of the value of following commandments.

This story is another example of addiction and recovery. The similarities between the setting of this story and the previous story are immediately obvious. In both stories, two men hear of a prostitute who lives “in a city by the sea.” Both men spend a great deal of money and donate a great deal of time to pursue the respective prostitutes. Both men also have sudden moments of clarity. It was clearly shown that the man in the previous story exhibited addictive behaviors. The same conclusion can be drawn in this story.

The unnamed man in this story, whom we will refer to as Ploni Tzitzit, is not described as visiting every prostitute of whom he ever heard, unlike Rabbi Eleazar ben Dordiya. It could therefore be concluded that this story is a one-time event in Ploni Tzitzit’s life, and that he is not a sex addict. However, as was already discussed, single incidents can be

seen as evidence of addiction. Furthermore, it is very clear that Ploni Tzitzit is not in control of his behaviors, which is one of the indicators of addiction in the rabbinic texts. While the story does not reveal any problems, neglect, or trouble that Ploni Tzitzit had with other friends or family members, his efforts to be with the prostitute are certainly seen as extreme, as evidenced by the repetition of the amount of money—400 gold coins!—he had to pay. Therefore, while the presence of addiction is not as clear in this text as with some of the other rabbinic texts, we can safely conclude that it is pertinent to our discussion of addiction. It also offers further insight into the spiritual recovery that is required for the active addict.

The story begins with a series of details that one might understand as the storyteller's simply introduction to the plot. When these details are more closely examined, however, the four phases of the addiction cycle of the sex addict are revealed. First, Ploni Tzitzit is *preoccupied*. He hears about the prostitute and decides—beyond all logic—that he is willing to spend excessive amounts of money to visit her. He sends her money and sets a time. Then, he sits and waits for her before finally being admitted to her chambers. The amount of time that passes between his first hearing of the prostitute and his actual visit indicate preoccupation. These brief descriptions outline a long period of Ploni Tzitzit's planning and preoccupation. The next step in the addiction cycle is *ritualization*. This step is characterized by "special routines that lead up to the sexual behavior. The ritual intensifies the preoccupation, adding arousal and excitement."²¹⁰ When Ploni Tzitzit enters the prostitute's chambers, the ritualization begins. Seven beds are lavishly prepared

²¹⁰ Dodes, p. 20.

and presented. Steps lead up to each bed, rising ever higher, to the "golden bed." It is upon this higher ladder that the prostitute sits, waiting. While Ploni Tzitzit may not have initiated this special presentation, they are certainly part of the sexual act and are indeed ritualized. They also increase Ploni Tzitzit's arousal and excitement. As Ploni Tzitzit begins ascending the steps to engage in the sexual act, he is in the midst of the addiction cycle.

The story relates that at this moment, right before Ploni Tzitzit would engage in the third step, the *compulsive sexual behavior*,²¹¹ he has a moment of clarity. The *tzitzit* that he wears, symbols of the one commandment which he scrupulously observes, literally slap him in the face and take Ploni Tzitzit out of the addiction cycle. At that moment he recognizes that he is not in control, and that he is powerless over his addiction. He does not complete the addiction cycle and engage in the compulsive sexual behavior, or feel the *despair* of the fourth and final step. Instead, he stops the addictive behavior. Ploni Tzitzit's recovery begins.

First, Ploni Tzitzit recognizes he is powerless; he accepts the first step of the Twelve Step program. Next, he is reminded of a power greater than himself. This can be seen in the *tzitzit* slapping him in the face. The *tzitzit* are reminders of God, who commanded the wearing of *tzitzit* in the biblical passage Ploni Tzitzit quotes to the prostitute. He recites, "I am the Lord your God," and thereby, as the second step counsels, comes to believe in a Power greater than himself. He also exhibits the four spiritual tools for recovery from addiction that were previously detailed. First, he acts with humility. When Ploni Tzitzit is

²¹¹Ibid.

in the midst of the addiction cycle, he ascends to the highest bed; when he accepts his powerlessness, he sits on the floor. This is a vivid illustration of his new-found humility. He is also honest, and truthfully answers the prostitute's questions. He reasserts his connection with his community and also evinces the quality of integrity, when he writes down his own name, his teacher's name, and the name of the academy. These answers return Ploni Tzitzit's mind set to his larger community, and they also reveal that he has stopped the duality that active addiction requires. He does not keep the world of his addiction separate from the world of his learning; instead, he recognizes that his recovery demands integrity and acts accordingly. This talmudic story is a powerful illustration of addiction and spiritual recovery, and offers important guidance for contemporary addicts. Additionally, it has a "happy ending," which is testimony to the power of hope in the work of addiction and recovery.

As has been shown, the Rabbis and their texts offer a number of important observations, anecdotes, and guides in the consideration of addiction and recovery, particularly when one considers addiction to be a spiritual disease, and recovery a spiritual balm. The challenge these texts--and the recent developments in our understanding of addiction--pose to the Jewish community is to find an appropriate way to understand and address addiction today.

Chapter Three: Toward a New Approach to Addiction and Recovery in the Jewish Community

The Challenges Raised by Viewing Addiction as a Spiritual Disease

This thesis has demonstrated that addiction is the result of spiritual sickness, and that spiritual renewal is therefore a necessary part of recovery. However, if one views addiction as a spiritual disease, one must question precisely how the spiritual well-being of society became sick. In other words, if addiction is viewed as a spiritual disease, it must necessarily follow that religion—the conveyer of spirituality in society—has somehow failed. Furthermore, in particular to this thesis, the growing number of Jewish addicts indicates that Judaism—the conveyer of Jewish spirituality to Jews—is somehow insufficient to prevent addiction.

This conclusion is painful for many rabbis, cantors, and other Jewish professionals to consider. It also raises a host of other philosophical challenges. The Twelve-Step program staunchly asserts that religion is very different from spirituality; in fact, many people involved in the Twelve Steps are suspicious of organized religion, which they often equate with a pursuit of absolutism, perfection, and conventionality.²¹² Spirituality, they assert, is ordinary, unconventional, and necessarily imperfect. Christopher Ringwald has observed that Twelve-Step spirituality “is distinct from religion in that it is aware of its

²¹²Kurtz and Ketcham, pp. 110-111.

own imperfection."²¹³ Abraham J. Twerski acknowledges that "some of the principles of religion find greater expression in Alcoholics Anonymous"²¹⁴ and other Twelve-Step programs. These findings indicate that religion has become disassociated with the spiritual principles at its core. Therefore, one can conclude that Judaism, too, is separated from spirituality.

Another challenge arises from the observation that many addicts are spiritually "immature."²¹⁵ Reports indicate that addicts "consistently report a judging, vindictive God,"²¹⁶ and that many people, who, when they enter recovery, are "spiritually or religiously illiterate."²¹⁷ A spiritual recovery, then is actually a "spiritual maturation. . . [that] consists of moving from the God of. . . childhood to a God of [personal] understanding." The Twelve-Step approach allows addicts to let go of a God who judges, and find a personal Higher Power who forgives, loves, and—most important—helps. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas recorded another recovering food addict's "disarming description"²¹⁸ of her Higher Power:

People generally think of God as some kind of enormous, impersonal force. . . . You know, the omnipotent God out there in the cosmos who makes the planets turn. I can't relate to a God like that. So I made up one of my own. Her name is Donna. She's divorced. She's got two kids.

²¹³Ringwald, p. 214.

²¹⁴Twerski, *The Spiritual Self*, p. xiv.

²¹⁵Ringwald, p. 225.

²¹⁶*Ibid.*

²¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 232.

²¹⁸Bullitt-Jonas, p. 134.

She's very down home. When I go shopping for groceries, it's Donna I talk to as I walk down the aisles. And let me tell you, it's Donna who's keeping me abstinent.²¹⁹

While religious theologians might cringe at this portrayal of God, and some will argue that there are many varying ideas about God, the challenge that many addicts pose to religion is how their "childhood image of God" was allowed to persist. A God with a white beard, who sits on his throne high in the sky, and judges our every action, will not be helpful to an addict who is searching for a God that is supportive, loving, and present. Many Jewish children end their formal Jewish studies after their B'nai Mitzvah, and as they grow older they are not engaged by a different, more meaningful, conceptions of God. This is a failure of the Jewish community. It seems as though the Jewish community inadvertently stopped meaningful exploration of our relationships with God.

These challenges and painful conclusions signal that, while the Jewish community is no longer in denial about the presence of addiction, it has for the large part failed in providing the spiritual foundation that can prevent addiction. Undoubtedly, there are a number of very important groups—most notably JACS—that continue to contribute to prevention through awareness. Yet, for the most part, rabbis, cantors, and other Jewish professionals are not actively involved in addressing addiction within their synagogues or building the spiritual communities necessary to treat and prevent addiction. Fortunately, there are many voices offering thoughtful and necessary suggestions for improvement.

²¹⁹Ibid.

Spiritual Ways The Jewish Community Can Respond to Addiction

Rabbi Twerski, whose own seminary and medical education, and involvement with the Gateway Rehabilitation Center, place him in a unique position to offer meaningful advice, makes the following suggestions:

Recognition of the realities of life is of paramount importance, and must be faced squarely by the clerical and lay leadership, as well as the Jewish community at large. Yeshivas and seminaries must begin to introduce courses dealing with chemical dependency. Jewish communal professionals must become knowledgeable in the field. Community education programs must begin to feature programs of substance abuse. All individuals involved in Jewish communal life must learn to recognize the problem of chemical dependency, and become familiar with the resources so essential to treatment. . . .²²⁰

These suggestions for concrete changes address the need for continuing recognition and acknowledgment of addiction within the Jewish community. Rabbis and other religious leaders are in a unique position to address the spiritual aspects of an addict's recovery.

Marcia Cohn Spiegel and Rabbi Yaacov Kravitz are both experts on the field of addiction in the Jewish community. They believe that "the pastoral care giver is the professional best able to address the spiritual aspects of addiction. His or her task is to frame the problem of addiction in a spiritual context and to help the addict replace an addictive pattern with spiritually oriented thought patterns and behaviors."²²¹ They offer various suggestions to this "reframing" process, such as helping the addict view recovery as *teshuvah*, repentance; observing *mitzvot*, which they define "as a deed connecting us to our

²²⁰Twerski, *The Truth About Chemical Dependency and Jews*, p. 2.

²²¹Spiegel and Kravitz, p. 274.

Higher Power;"²²² and understanding the Twelve Steps through a Jewish lens. They remind Jewish professionals of the following:

The Jewish pastoral caregiver can contribute to spiritual healing from addiction and be inspired and transformed by the encounter with individuals walking the twisted path toward recovery. When recovering addicts return to Judaism, they often do so with a renewed eagerness to learn, study, and participate. . . . Their courage and their enthusiasm in embracing Jewish life can be inspiring. Pastoral caregivers who recognize, support, and encourage recovery from addiction may find that the unanticipated benefit of this work is to strengthen their own practice, faith, and belief in Judaism and to expand their own spiritual life.²²³

These Jewish professionals and addiction specialists offer valuable guidance and insight into addressing the problem of addiction and recovery in the Jewish community. JACS is also a valuable source for Jewish communities seeking help in addressing addiction. JACS formed in 1985, and continues to grow. Its goal is to "supplement and complement existing self-help programs and attempt to assist Jews and their families in integrating Jewish tradition and heritage with the recovery process."²²⁴ For Jewish professionals who might be unsure how to begin preventing and addressing addiction, JACS offers a number of suggestions. For example, JACS offers publications, programs for schools and synagogues, videos, and professional training. One of its pamphlets notes, "recovery and renewal are implicit in our Jewish heritage. So is compassion. The path to ending denial starts with us, how we incorporate knowledge and what Jewish values we

²²²Ibid., p. 275.

²²³Ibid., p. 281.

²²⁴JACS mission statement, as quoted by Samuel Rothberg, "JACS: A Jewish Response to Alcoholism." *Reform Judaism* (Fall 1987, Volume 16, Number 1), p. 22.

transmit to those who need our help.”²²⁵ A synagogue that welcomes JACS into its community will be enriched with a growing sub-community dedicated to meaningful, Jewish living, as well as with a positive action that seeks to address addiction.

Christopher Ringwald offers additional suggestions for religious groups seeking to prevent addiction in his book *The Soul of Recovery*. Ringwald believes that the recovery movement and its spirituality has “renewed religion,” and has many lessons for mainline religions.²²⁶ Therefore, “shrewd” Jewish professionals should welcome Alcoholics Anonymous and other Twelve-Step groups into their synagogues.²²⁷ This advice is also offered by Jewish professionals, who lament the continuing lack of Twelve-Step meetings in many synagogues.²²⁸ In fact, one community rabbi noted, “of the hundreds of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups meeting each and every day of the week in South Florida, only three of them occur in a synagogue or temple. Because of its non-participation, the Jewish community has abrogated its responsibility of the Jewish substance abuser.”²²⁹ Welcoming Twelve-Step groups not only aids in the recovery of addicts, but can also assist in prevention, by communicating and educating about the reality of addiction in the Jewish community.

Ringwald also suggests that religions should “enliven basic teachings with real

²²⁵“What the Jewish Community Can Do.” *Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons, and Significant Others Website*. (Online. 2 July 2003), p. 1.

²²⁶Ringwald, p. 234.

²²⁷Ibid., p. 231.

²²⁸“What the Jewish Community Can Do,” p. 2.

²²⁹Rothberg, p. 22.

experience"²³⁰ and personal stories. He notes that the "central and universal activity" in Twelve Step groups is "telling one's story."²³¹ This sharing brings hope, knowledge, strength, and truth to all members of the Twelve Step group. Sharing stories can be a natural expression for the Jewish community, the "People of the Book." In fact, many stories that are relevant to addiction, recovery, and spirituality can already be found in the book *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Journey Toward Wholeness*. Written by Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection* distills and outlines the spirituality of the Twelve-Step program, and essentially asserts that storytelling—both of personal stories and stories of the past—is an essential tool in healing. Surprisingly, the book is filled with Hasidic stories. The following stories are prime examples of stories that can "enliven a basic teaching" about searching for God:

The favorite disciple of Rabbi Pinchas complained to him that it was very difficult in adversity to retain perfect faith in the belief that God provides for every human being. "It actually seems as if God were hiding his face from such an unhappy being," he exclaimed. "It ceases to be hiding," replied Rabbi Pinchas, "if you know it is hiding."

The Medzibozser's grandson, Yechiel Michel, was playing hide and seek with another child. He hid himself for some time, but his playmate did not look for him. Little Yechiel ran to Rabbi Baruch and said amid tears, "He did not look for me!" The Rabbi said, "This is also God's complaint, that we seek Him not."

These stories, and the many other meaningful, accessible Jewish stories, can provide an important and necessary foundation for renewing Jewish spirituality and addressing the spiritual deficit that leads to addiction. In addition, the weekly reading of Torah offers a

²³⁰Ringwald, p. 234.

²³¹Ibid., p. 228.

perfect opportunity for such enlivenment and story-truth-telling, as do adult education classes, text studies, and prayer services that are already established in most synagogues, and can offer space for experiences of real spiritual meaning. These experiences may begin with sharing published, impersonal stories, but can easily expand to allow personal sharing of stories and life-learnings.

Another observation Ringwald offers is that "people often flinch from public revelation of strongly held faith."²³² This might be particularly true in Jewish communities, which have generally internalized the incorrect belief that "Christianity is about faith, and Judaism is about action." Expressions of faith can often astonish, and at times repel, Jews. The recovery movement, however, has "disarmed . . . the general reluctance among other people to discuss such concepts publicly."²³³ If the Jewish community can access this decreased reluctance, it can spur renewed discussion and expressions about faith. It was stated above that many addicts suffer from an "immature spirituality;" therefore, discussions about God, theology, and actual experiences of faith can aid in the spiritual maturation process. In addition, these kinds of discussions, and a general renewal of Jewish spirituality, can be important aspects to the Jewish community's response to addiction as a spiritual disease. As more Jewish professionals are lamenting the dearth of valuable discussion of God and a decrease in communal participation, Jewish recovering addicts can be our guides and examples.

Ringwald's final observation touches on the challenge that the recovery movement

²³²Ibid.

²³³Ibid., p. 235.

poses to society in general. He writes, "The recovery movement crystallizes, for society, the basic challenge: will it be man or God? Will we live for ourselves alone or for something beyond? Will we be god or will we let God be God?"²³⁴ These questions indicate that the spiritual tools so helpful to a recovering addict, most notably humility, are also essential tools for every human being seeking connection with some sort of Higher Power. When society, with the help of religion, acknowledges these questions and begins to answer them, the power of addiction will certainly decline. As Ringwald notes, "what the recovery movement offers society is the chance to say that we are, at the least, not God. And that may be all that is necessary."²³⁵

While viewing addiction as a spiritual disease might raise uncomfortable questions, it also empowers religious professionals to take an active role in preventing and treating addiction. Indeed, religious professionals can and should be at the forefront of addressing addiction. Sadly, as the following story highlights, many Jewish professionals are not yet prepared for the challenge:

For whatever I did or failed to do which contributed to my daughter's alcoholism problem I will always bear the responsibility and perhaps the guilt. But the fact that my daughter is now a devout Catholic and has left the faith of her family, for that I hold the rabbinate responsible. . . . My daughter was an excellent student, and when her grades began to drop we knew something had to be wrong. We eventually discovered she was drinking too much. When she failed her courses she sought help for her problem in an alcoholism clinic. She told her counselor that she felt spiritually empty, and he advised her to see a rabbi. The rabbi she consulted admonished her to control her drinking, and told her that it was a disgrace for a Jew to drink excessively. The rabbi offered no response to

²³⁴Ibid.

²³⁵Ibid.

her feelings of spiritual bankruptcy. Her counselor then told her of a priest who was knowledgeable in alcohol problems. She began to see this priest, and progressed well in her recovery. She is now happily married, eight years sober, and a devout Catholic.²³⁶

Fortunately, many leaders have already addressed the challenges addiction poses, and their work has guided and informed this thesis. Rabbi Abraham Twerski, Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, Marcia Cohn Spiegel, Rabbi Yaacov Kravitz, Rabbi Carol Glass, and many others have begun to pave a path in the ways the Jewish community can prevent and address addiction on a spiritually meaningful level. The task now falls to the rabbis and Jewish professionals who are leading local synagogues and Jewish organizations, which are the true entry points for Jewish seekers. As Jewish leaders become more educated and empowered to take action, there will be fewer stories of rabbis who “admonish alcoholics to control their drinking,” and more stories of rabbis and other professionals who join with addicts in spiritual recovery, healing, and renewal.

²³⁶Twerski, *The Truth About Chemical Dependency and Jews*, p. 1.

Appendix: Textual Sources

Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 99b²³⁷

אמר רבי אסי: יצר הרע, בתחלה דומה לחוט של כוביא ולבסוף
דומה לעבות העגלה.

Rabbi Asi said, "*Yetzer hara*—in the beginning it is similar to the thread of a cobweb and in the end it is similar to a wagon rope."

Genesis Rabbah 9:7

רבי נחמן בר שמואל בר נחמן בשם רב שמואל בר נחמן אמר
הנה טוב מאד זה יצר טוב והנה טוב מאד זה יצר רע, וכי יצר הרע
טוב מאד, אתמהא, אלא שאלולי יצר הרע לא בנה אדם בית ולא נשא
אשה, ולא הוליד ולא נשא ונתן, וכן שלמה אומר (קהלת ד)
כי היא קנאת איש מרעהו.

Rabbi Nahum said in the name of Rabbi Shmuel, "'Behold it was very good'—this speaks of *yetzer tov*. 'And behold, it was very good'—this speaks of *yetzer hara*." Can *yetzer hara* really be very good?! Yes, because were it not for *yetzer hara*, no one would build a house, or marry, or have children, or do business. This is what Solomon was referring to when he said, 'I have also noted that all labor and skillful enterprise come from men's envy of each other' (Ecclesiastes 4:4).

Jerusalem Talmud Pe'ah 3a

מעשה ברבי ישבב שעמד והחליק את כל נכסיו לעניים

There is a story of Rabbi Y'shevav, who stood and handed out all of his belongings to the

²³⁷Texts are arranged following the order they were quoted within the thesis.

poor.

Mishnah Yoma 8:1, 6

יום הכפורים אסור באכילה ובשתיה וברחיצה ובסיכה ובנעילת הסנדל
ובתשמיש המטה.

On Yom Kippur it is forbidden to eat, drink, bathe, anoint, wear leather shoes, or engage
in sexual relations.

מי שאחזו בולמוס, מאכילין אותו אפילו דברים טמאים עד שיאורו עיניו.
מי שנשכו כלב שוטה,

If someone is seized by a *bulmus* [on Yom Kippur], feed him even impure foods, until his
eyes brighten. If someone is bitten by a dog [on Yom Kippur], give him something to
drink.

Rashi's Commentary Mishnah Yoma 8:6

מי שאחזו בולמוס - חולי האוחז מחמת רעבון. עיניו כהות והוא מסוכן
למות.

"If someone is seized by a *bulmus*:" [This is a] sick person who has been seized by hunger,
and his eyes are dim and he is in danger of dying.

Babylonian Talmud Yoma 83a

תנו רבנן: מניין היו יודעין שהאירו עיניו? משיבחין בין טוב לרע.

Our Rabbis ask, "How will we determine when 'his eyes brighten'? It is when he can
distinguish between good and bad [food]."

Genesis Rabbah 51:9

א"ר נחמן בר חנין כל מי שהוא להוט אחר בולמוס של עריות
סוף שמאכילין אותו מבשרו

Rabbi Nahman bar Hanin said, 'the end of anyone who is lusting after a sexual *bulmus* (*bulmus shel arayot*), is that he will be fed from his own flesh.

Hatam Sofer Responsum 4:3

מ"מ מדינא נ"ל דהנושא שטי' דרבנן שקידושי תורה ולא רק
מתקנתא אינו יכול לגרש שלא ינהגו בהמנהג הפקר דאע"ג
דמעיקרא נמי חוית בהפקירא מ"מ איהו אלבשה יצרא עכשיו
תהי' להוטה אחר בולמוס של זנות ותטא רבים וע"כ ישא

"... a *bulmus* for harlotry. ..."

Ginat Haveradim Responsum 1:2

אני או' דאף היכא דלא מטי ליה הנאה מיניה דההוא עובדא כגון
ששחט בסכין פגום והגרים דלית ביה הנאה שאינו מרויח בשביל
הפגימה ההגרמה אפ"ה איכא חשש חימוד ממון וצריך להחמיר
עליו בתשובתו דאמרינן כיון שראינו אותו מזלזל בפגימות או
בשחיטה הרי הוא כמומר אוכל נבלות לתיאבון שאינו רוצי לטרוח
ולבדוק הסכין כי מרוב בולמוס תאותו שהוא רודף אחר הממון

"... a *bulmus* for making money"

Babylonian Talmud Yoma 74b

אמר רב יוסף: מכאן רמז לסומין שאוכלין ואין שבעין. אמר
אביי: הלכך. מאן דאית ליה סעודתא - לא ליכלה אלא ביממא.

Rav Yosef said, "From this we have a clue to the ones who eat but are not satisfied."

Abaye said, "Therefore, one who has a meal should only eat during the day."

Babylonian Talmud Tractate Sanhedrin 107a

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: לעולם אל יביא אדם עצמו לידי נסיון.
שהרי דוד מלך ישראל הביא עצמו לידי נסיון ונכשל. אמר לפניו:
רבונו של עולם, מפני מה אומרים, אלהי אברהם אלהי יצחק ואלהי
יעקב ואין אומרים אלהי דוד? - אמר: אינהו מינסו לי, ואת לא
מינסית לי. אמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם, בחנני ונסני. שנאמר
(תהלים כ"ו) בחנני ה' ונסני וגו'. אמר: מינסנא לך, ועבידנא
מילתא בהדך, דלדידהו לא הודעתיהו ואילו אנא קא מודענא
לך. דמנסנא לך בדבר ערות. מיד (שמואל ב' י"א) ויהי לעת
הערב ויקם דוד מעל משכבו וגו' אמר רב יהודה: שהפך משכבו
של לילה למשכבו של יום. ונתעלמה ממנו הלכה: אבר קטן יש
באדם, משביעו - רעב, ומרעיבו - שבע. (שמואל ב' י"א)
ויתהלך על גג ביתהמלך וירא אשה רוחצת מעל הגג והאשה
טובתמראה מאד, בת שבע הוה קא חייפא רישא תותי חלתא.
אתא שטן אידמי ליה כציפרתא, פתק ביה גירא, פתקה לחלתא.
איגליה וחזייה. מיד (שמואל ב' י"א) וישלח דוד וידרש לאשה

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: A person should never bring a trial upon himself,
for here David the King of Israel brought a trial upon himself, and he failed. David said to
God, "Master of the Universe, why is it said, 'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of
Jacob,' but not 'God of David.'?" God said, "They have been tested by me, but you have
not been tested by me." David said to God, "Master of the Universe, probe me, test me, as
it says, 'probe me, Lord, test me' (Psalms 26:2)." God said, "I'll test you now, and I'll do
another thing. I did not tell them [they were to be tested], but I am telling you that I'm
going to test you with something sexual in nature. Immediately, "Late one afternoon,
David arose from his couch" (II Samuael 11:2). Rav Yehudah said, "His night couch and

his day couch were switched [and he was engaging in sexual acts in the daytime in order to combat the sexual test with which God would test him], and he forgot the [following] rule that man has a small organ [i.e., genitalia], which, when you satisfy it, it is hungry; but, when [a man] makes [his genitalia] hungry, he is satisfied.” “[David] strolled on the roof of the royal palace, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful” (II Samuel 11:2). Batsheva had uncovered her hair behind a screen, when Satan appeared to David like a bird, and David shot [the bird] with an arrow, which pierced the screen. She was revealed and he saw her. Immediately, “David sent someone to make inquires about the woman. . .” (II Samuel 11:3 ff).

Mishnah Sanhedrin 3:3

ואלו הן הפסולין. המשחק בקוביא, והמלוה ברבית, ומפריחי יונים

These are the [categories of people] who are disqualified [from serving as witnesses]:

those who amble [literally, play with dice], those who loan with interest, those who race pigeons, etc. . . .

Rashba Responsa 1:180

שאלת עוד חכם או תלמיד, קידרוש לפני העם ומורה הוראות שלא כהוגן ושחק בקוביא. ונשבע שלא ישחק עוד זמן ידוע ועבר על שבועתו ואמר בפני רבים שכל שבועה שאינה בנקיטת חפץ אינה שבועה ובשכיל זה שבו רוב הקהל לישבע בשקר וכזב, ואומרים כי כל שבועה שאינה בנקיטת חפץ אינה שבועה ומותר לישבע בחזקת השם, לשקר כל שאינו נוטל חפץ. וקודם זה היה ירא כל אחד מעבור על שבועתו כל שחזיר את השם. וכל מי שהיה עובר היה /מפחד/ מתפחד וירא ומתענה. והיה מחמירין על זה קודם בואו אליהם דינא דההוא גברא. מה דינא?

תשובה: דין כל מי שקושה ומורה כן תהא אחריתו להכרית. שזה מטה את הרבים מדרך טובה לדרך רע, חוטא וקחטיא ומתלמידיו של ירבעם הוא. חס ושלום אינו חכם ולא תלמיד, אלא אגיל וכסיל. וכל מי ששומע לו ומאמין בדבריו קעיד על עצמו שלא קרא ולא שנה ולא שמש תלמידי חכמים. שלא נקיט חפץ עיבר אלא השבועה.

Another question [was asked]: A wise person, a teacher, who preached before the people,

taught illogical lessons, and played with dice [i.e., gambled]. He vowed [with a *shevua*; see Diamond's description, above] that he would never gamble again, but he transgressed his vow. Then he said before the public that any vow that is not sworn over a possession is not a valid vow. Because of this, many of the community have transgressed, and made their vows with lies and falsehoods, and they are saying that every vow not made over a possession is not really a vow. . . . Before this [happened], everyone was very cautious lest they transgress their vows. . . . They were very strict about this matter before the law of this fellow came to them. What is the law? The answer: Every person who does this and teaches this way should be excommunicated. For this [so-called wise person] leads people to stray from a good path to a bad path, and he sins and causes others to sin, and he is among the students of Jereboam. Heaven forbid—he is not a scholar or teacher but an evil person and a dolt. Every person who listen to him and believes his word causes himself to slip. . . . For the essence is not the possession, but rather the vow. . . !

Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 49a

תנו רבנן: כל תלמיד חכם המרבה סעודתו בכל מקום - סוף מחריב את ביתו, ומאלמן את אשתו, ומייתם את גוזליו, ותלמודו משתכח ממנו, ומחלוקות רבות באות עליו, ודבריו אינם נשמעים ומחלל שם שמים ושם רבו ושם אביו, וגורם שם רע לו ולבניו ולבני בניו עד סוף כל הדורות. מאי היא? - אמר אביי: קרו ליה בר מחים תנור. רבא אמר: בר מרקיד בי כובי. רב פפא אמר: בר מלחך פינכיר. שמעיה אמר: בר מן רבע.

The Rabbis taught, "Any Torah scholar who eats excessively in every place – in the end he will destroy his home, widow his wife, and orphan his young. His learning will be

forgotten, and many arguments will come to him, and his words will not be accepted. He will desecrate the name of heaven and the name of his rabbi and the name of his father. He brings a bad name upon himself, his children, and his children's children until the end of time." What is [the bad name he will bring]? Abaye says, "they call [his son (according to Rashi)] the son of an oven warmer." Raba says, "the son of a tavern dancer." Rav Papa says, "the son of a plate licker." Rav Shmayah says, "the son of one who folds and crouches."

Rashi's Commentary on Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 49a

מרקיד בי כובי - כדרך הליצנים. שמשחקין ומרקדין בחנויות להשקותן בשכרן.

"A tavern dancer:" [Someone who acts] like a clown, who plays and dances so that others will imbibe him with drink.

מך רבע - מקפל לבושו ורובץ וישן. דרך המשתכרין מספיק לילך אינו לביתו ולשכב על מטתו. אלא מקפל לבושו תחתיו וישן.

"One who folds and crouches:" [A person who] takes off his clothes and puts them down and sleeps. This is what drunks do, when they are unable to walk home and sleep in their beds. Instead, they take off their clothes wherever they are, and sleep.

Rashba Responsa 2:286

עוד שאלת: מי שלוח מעות על כסות אשתו, ואכרם בקוביא. מהו שתוכל האשה להוציא כסותה מיד המלוה, בלא כלום, ולומר: שהבעל הוציאו מביתה, שלא מדעתה?

There was a man who borrowed money using his wife's clothes [as collateral], then lost them by gambling. Is the wife allowed to take her clothing from the hand of a lender without payment, and say that the husband took them from her home without her

knowledge?

Zikaron Yehudah Responsa 71

ע"ה ילמדנו רבינו כד ה"ר ראובן ה"ר שחך לקוביא ומחקוטט עם אשתו ומכה אותה תמיד עד שברחה לבית אביה ובאו אנשים לעשות שלום ביניהם ועשו עמו חלנה בענין זה שאסר ע"ה הנאת תשמיש מאשתו עליו, אם שמא יצחק לשום צחוק בעולם עד זמן ידוע, ואיסור זה הוציאו בלשון נדר וכל מיני קיום שבעולם גם (כי) נשבע שאם שמא יצחק מכאן ועד תומן הידוע שיגרש את אשתו פלונית בגט כשר מוסיף על איסורו גם התנה שלא תשה לו שום התרה בעולם לזאת השבועה גם התנה שלא יוכל לצאת מן העיר או סביב לה ט"ו פרסאות רק במאמר אשתו, ואם שמא יעבור קבל ע"ה מה שקבל על השחוק ובעת האיסור והשבועה הודיעהו שלא היה אשתו יכולה לחזור אליו עד עבור ימי מספר מפני שהיתה צריכה לתקן ענינה בבית אביה ובתוך אלו הימים נפלה קטטה חדשה ביניהם ואמר ראובן לחמיו ולאנשים אשר היו עמו בעת האיסור והשבועה מאחר שאשתי אינה חוזרת עמי, ולא נתקן ענינינו כראוי אני מבקש מכם שתחזירו לי אותו הכתב על השבועה והאיסור ושיהא בטל לגמרי מה עשה חמיו לקח טופס מהאיסור והשבועה כמו שהיה כתוב והחתים עליו עדים כשרים, ואח"כ החזיר הנוף לראובן וקרע אותה אחר זה דרך ראובן ושחך או עבר התחום הנה ואח"כ באה אשתו ומראה אותו טופס, וטוענת כי אביה לא ה"י יכול לבטל השבועה הנה והשבועה שנעשית אי אפשר שאינה נעשית וע"כ היא רוצה מביד שיכופו את ראובן לגרשה

Reuben would gamble, and argue with his wife. He would always hit her, until she ran away to her father's house. A group of people came to reconcile them, and they forbade him the pleasure of cohabiting with his wife if he played games (i.e. gambled). This was extracted in the form of a vow. . . . After this, Reuben went out and gambled and transgressed the seal of the vow. His wife saw him doing this, and . . . she wanted to force Reuben to divorce her. . . .

Babylonian Talmud Ketubot 62b

כי הא דרב רחומי הוה שכיח קמיה דרבא במחווא, הוה רגיל דהוה אתי לביתיה כל מעלי יומא דכיפורי. יומא חד משכתייה שמעתא, הוה מסכיא דביתיהו השתא אתי השתא אתי, לא אתא, חלש דעתה אחית דמעטא מעינה, הוה יתיב באיגרא. אפחית איגרא מתותיה ונח נפשיה. עונה של תלמידי חכמים אימת? אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: מע"ש לע"ש.

This is like [the story of] Rav Rahumi who happened to be in front of Rabba in Mahuza.

He was in the habit of returning to his home [from the house of study] only on Erev Yom

Kippur [a day on which sexual cohabitation is forbidden]. One [Erev Yom Kippur] he

was drawn into his studies [and he did not go home]. His wife was looking out for him, and said, "He's coming now. Now he's coming." But he did not come. Her resolve weakened, and a tear fell from her eye. Then, Rav Rahumi went onto the roof, and the roof collapsed, and he died. When is the appropriate time for sexual cohabitation for Torah scholars? Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel, "From Erev Shabbat to Erev Shabbat."

Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5

שכל המאבד נפש אחת מישראל. מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו אבד
עולם מלא.

Whoever saves one life . . . it is as if he saved the entire world.

Babylonian Talmud Megillah 7b

אמר רבא: מיחייב איניש לבסומי עד דלא ידע בין ארור הזמן לברוך
מרדכי. בפוריא רבה ורבי זירא עבדו סעודת פורים בהדי הדדי.
איבסום. קם רבה שחטיה לרבי זירא. למחר בעי רחמי ואחייה.
לשנה אמר ליה: ניתי מר ונעביד סעודת פורים בהדי הדדי
אמר ליה: לא בכל שעתא ושעתא מתרחיש ניסא.

Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira made a Purim feast together, and they got very drunk. Rabbah arose and slew Rabbi Zeira. The next day, Rabbah prayed for mercy, and Rabbi Zeira was given life. The next year, Rabbi Zeira said to Rabbah, "Master! Let us make a Purim feast together!" Rabbah said, "a miracle does not occur each and every hour!"

Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zara 17a

והתניא: אמרו עליו על ר"א בן דורדיא. שלא הניח זונה אחת בעולם
שלא בא עליה. פעם אחת שמע שיש זונה אחת בכרכי הים והיתה

נוטלת כיס דינרין בשכרה. נטל כיס דינרין והלך ועבר עליה שבעה
 נהרות. בשעת הרגל דבר הפיחה. אמרה: כשם שהפיחה זו אינה חוזרת
 למקומה. כך אלעזר בן דורדיא אין מקבלין אותו בתשובה. הלך וישב
 בין שני הרים וגבעות. אמר: הרים וגבעות בקשו עלי רחמים. אמרו לו:
 עד שאנו מבקשים עליך נבקש על עצמנו. שנאמר: (ישעיהו נד) כי
 ההרים ימושו והגבעות תמוטינה. אמר: שמים וארץ בקשו עלי רחמים.
 אמרו: עד שאנו מבקשים עליך נבקש על עצמנו. שנאמר: (ישעיהו נא)
 כי שמים כעשן נמלחו והארץ כבגד תבלה. אמר: חמה ולבנה בקשו
 עלי רחמים. אמרו לו: עד שאנו מבקשים עליך נבקש על עצמנו. שנאמר:
 (ישעיהו כד) וחפרה הלבנה ובושה החמה. אמר: כוכבים ומזלות בקשו
 עלי רחמים. אמרו לו: עד שאנו מבקשים עליך נבקש על עצמנו. שנאמר:
 (ישעיהו לד) ונמקו כל צבא השמים. אמר: אין הדבר תלוי אלא בי.
 הניח ראשו בין ברכיו וגעה בבכיה עד שיצתה נשמתו. יצתה בת קול
 ואמרה: ר"א בן דורדיא מזומן לחיי העולם הבא. והא הכא
 בעבירה הוה ומית התם נמי. כיון דאביק בה טובא כמינות דמיא. בכה
 רבי ואמר: יש קונה עולמו בכמה שנים. ויש קונה עולמו בשעה אחת.
 ואמר רבי: לא דיין לבעלי תשובה שמקבלין אותן. אלא שקורין
 אותן רבי.

They said of Rabbi Eleazar ben Dordiya, that he did not let even one prostitute rest without
 coming to her. One time he heard that there was one prostitute in a city by the sea, and she
 required a purse of *dinar* [coins] in order to lie with her. Ben Dordiya took up a purse of
dinar, and set out. He crossed over seven rivers. At the time when they began their sexual
 union, she blew out a breath and said, "Just as this breath can never return to its source, so
 too Eleazar ben Dordiya will never be received in repentance." He went and sat between
 two hills and mountains, and said, "Hills and mountains, ask for mercy on my behalf!"
 They replied, "we cannot ask on your behalf, for we ask on behalf of ourselves," as it says,
 "for the mountains may move and the hills be shaken [but My loyalty shall never move
 from you, nor My covenant of friendship be shaken, said the Lord, who takes you back in

love]" (Isaiah 54:10). He said, "Heaven and earth, ask for mercy on my behalf!" They replied, "we cannot ask on your behalf, for we ask on behalf of ourselves," as it says, "though the heavens should melt away like smoke, and the earth wear out like a garment [. . . My victory will stand forever, My triumph will remain unbroken]" (Isaiah 51:6). He said, "Sun and moon, ask for mercy on my behalf!" They replied, "we cannot ask on your behalf, for we ask on behalf of ourselves," as it says, "the moon will be ashamed and the sun will be abashed [For the Lord of Hosts will reign. . . and the Presence will be revealed. . .]" (Isaiah 24:23). He said, "Stars and constellations, ask for mercy on my behalf!" They replied, "we cannot ask on your behalf, for we ask on behalf of ourselves," as it says, "all the hosts of heaven shall wither" (Isaiah 34:4). Eleazar ben Dordiya said, "Then this matter depends only on me!" He rested his head between his knees, and burst forth in tears until his soul departed. A *bat kol*, a heavenly voice, came out and proclaimed, "Rabbi Eleazar ben Dordiya is invited to life in the world to come!" Here was a case of a sin [other than heresy] when [the sinner] died. In this case, too, because he was so deeply attached to pleasure, it is as if he had committed heresy. Rabbi cried [when he heard this] and said, "One can achieve eternity [i.e. eternal life] after many years, and one can achieve eternity in just one hour." Rabbi also said, "It is the law that not only will one who repents be accepted, but also that we will call him Rabbi."

Babylonian Talmud Menachot 44a

תניא. א"ר נתן: אין לך כל מצוה קלה שכתובה בתורה. שאין מתן
 שכרה בעה"ז, ולעה"ב איני יודע כמה. צא ולמד ממצות ציצית -
 מעשה באדם אחר שהיה זהיר במצות ציצית. שמע שיש זונה בכרכי

הים שנוטלת ד' מאות זהובים בשכרה, שיגר לה ארבע מאות זהובים
 וקבע לה זמן. כשהגיע זמנו, בא וישב על הפתח. נכנסה שפחתה
 ואמרה לה: אותו אדם ששיגר לך ד' מאות זהובים בא וישב על הפתח.
 אמרה היא: כנס, נכנס. הציעה לו ז' מטות, שש של כסף ואחת של זהב.
 ובין כל אחת ואחת סולם של כסף ועליונה של זהב, עלתה וישבה על
 גבי עליונה כשהיא ערומה, ואף הוא עלה לישב ערום כנגדה, באו ד'
 ציציותיו וטפחו לו על פניו, נשמט וישב לו ע"ג קרקע, ואף היא
 נשמטה וישבה ע"ג קרקע. אמרה לו: גפה של רומי, שאיני מניחתך
 עד שתאמר לי מה מום ראית בי. אמר לה: העבודה, שלא ראיתי
 אשה יפה כמותך, אלא מצוה אחת ציונו ה' אלהינו וציצית שמה,
 וכתוב בה (במדבר ט"ו) אני ה' אלהיכם שתי פעמים, אני הוא
 שעתיד ליפרע ואני הוא שעתיד לשלם שכר, עכשיו נדמו עלי כד'
 עדים. אמרה לו: איני מניחך עד שתאמר לי מה שמך ומה שם עירך
 ומה שם רבך ומה שם מדרשך שאתה למד בו תורה, כתב ונתן בידה.
 עמדה וחילקה כל נכסיה, שליש למלכות ושליש לעניים ושליש
 נטלה בידה, חוץ מאותן מצעות, ובאת לבית מדרשו של ר' חייא.
 אמרה לו: רבי, צוה עלי ויעשוני גיורת, אמר לה: בתי, שמא עיניך נתן
 באחד מן התלמידים? הוציאה כתב מידה ונתנה לו, אמר לה: לכי זכי
 במקחך, אותן מצעות שהציעה לו באיסור הציעה לו בהיתר,
 זה מתן שכרו בעה"ז, ולעה"ב איני יודע כמה.

There is a story of a man who was strictly observant of the law of *tzitzit* [the fringes on the corners of one's square garments]. He heard that there was a prostitute in a city by the sea who demanded 400 gold coins as payment for lying with her. He sent her 400 gold coins and set a time to be with her. When his time came, he went and sat by the entrance. Her maid entered and said to her, "The same man who sent you 400 gold coins has come, and is sitting by the entrance." She said, "Please, come in." Seven beds spread out before him, six [filled] with silver and one with gold, and between each one was a ladder of silver, and the highest [of the ladders] was of gold. The prostitute ascended and sat on top

of the highest ladder, naked. When he [began to] ascend to sit naked next to her, his four *tzitzit* slapped him on his face. He was startled and he sat down on the floor. She also was startled and sat on the floor. She said to him, "By the Capitol of Rome! I will not let you rest until you tell me what blemish you saw in me." He said to her, "By God, I have never seen a woman as beautiful as you. But the Lord our God commanded one commandment, and that is the commandment of *tzitzit*. For it is written, 'I am the Lord your God,' [Numbers 15:41] two times. [The meaning of this repetition of 'the Lord your God' is] 'I am the One who, in the future, will demand payment, and I am the One who, in the future, will give rewards.' Now the [four *tzitzit*] appear to me as four witnesses [to my actions, which will be judged by God in the future]." She said to him, "I will not let you rest until you tell me your name, the name of your city, the name of your teacher, and the name of the school where you learn Torah." He wrote all this information down and gave it to her. She stood and divided all of her belongings. [She gave] a third to the government, a third to the poor, and she kept a third to herself, including those same beds [with which she originally enticed the man]. She then went to the academy of Rabbi Hiya. She said to him, "Rabbi, teach me and make me a convert." He said to her, "My daughter, has one of my students caught your eye?" She took out the note and gave it to him. He said to her, "Go and take ownership of what you've purchased! The same beds that you once offered him illicitly, now offer him licitly. This is the reward of this world, and as for [the reward in] the world to come, I cannot say how much it will be [i.e., the reward is immeasurable]!"

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