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Jewish Spiritual Guide for Substance Abuse Recovery Groups
for the Abayudaya Jewish Communities of Uganda:

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This Capstone aims to explore the impact of substance abuse in the Abayudaya Jewish communities and wider Uganda using anecdotal evidence and existing data. Furthermore, it compiles Biblical and Talmudic texts, along with reflection questions, to address the risks and dangers of substance abuse on individuals and communities. This resource also includes prayers and reflection guides for individual and group use to restore their faith in God and self, as well as hope, renewal, and affirmation of being created in the image of God—B'tzelem Elohim.

The primary purpose of this Capstone is to provide a uniquely Jewish and Ugandan spiritual guide for recovery groups. As well as to facilitate discussions about addiction in Abayudaya communities and to help individuals and groups work toward recovery from substance abuse.

Keywords: Addiction, Jewish spiritual recovery, Substance abuse, Abayudaya Jews of Uganda, Recovery group meetings.

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Chapter 1: Overview of Substance Abuse in the Abayudaya Jewish Communities and Wider Uganda	4
Chapter 2: Sample Workbook for Recovery Groups	22
Chapter 3: Sample Companion Guide for Facilitators	56

Introduction

Substance abuse is a known and escalating problem in Jewish communities in Uganda. However, the major problems are the lack of resources for treatment and rehabilitation for people with addiction, the issue is not discussed openly, and there are no support groups for people in recovery.

In this Capstone, I give an overview of substance abuse in the Abayudaya Jewish communities and wider Uganda and the lack of resources for treatment, rehabilitation, and recovery.

As a resource for recovery group meetings, I have compiled a sample workbook composed of biblical and Talmudic texts and prayers to facilitate conversation and reflection for people in recovery and those who wish to embark on the recovery journey from substance abuse. Although biblical and rabbinical texts don't capture the modern language and understanding of addiction, they present ages-long awareness of the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse to the individual and community.

The sample workbook includes a section of prayers for individuals to use throughout the day to set intentions and stay in tune with God. They are intended to inspire people to face up to substance abuse and envision a better future for themselves.

Finally, included is a sample companion guide with additional information for the group facilitators about the texts and prayers included in the handbook and how they relate to specific aspects of recovery contained in the AA Big Book and other modern recovery literature.

I hope this sample workbook will be the basis for the first of many resources and discussions on addiction for members of the Jewish communities in Uganda. The communities

will need to build on the materials in this workbook and include other resources to address excessive drinking and the emerging use of drugs. These resources may include but are not limited to education sessions by professionals to provide updated information on addiction.; community-wide education on addiction and ways to support family members; education and counseling for the students in Jewish schools on the impact of alcoholism and drug abuse; and financial and logistical help to access treatment and rehabilitation for members of the group who need it.

Chapter 1: Overview of Substance Abuse in the Abayudaya Jewish Communities and Wider Uganda

The small Jewish community in Uganda has been affected by the high level of alcohol consumption and an emerging concern of drug use. No studies have been made yet about the impact of addiction on Uganda's Abayudaya Jewish community. However, through observation and lived experience, one can note that several factors are key contributors to addiction within the communities, which reflect those of wider Uganda. These factors include financial struggles, lack of the available resources to treat the symptoms and the causes of this addiction, and cultural acceptance of drinking alcohol in the community.

The Ugandan Jewish community is about 2000 people. They are known as the Abayudaya. Most live in several villages in Eastern Uganda, a 4-5 hours drive from Kampala. There are also about 15 families in Apac, about the same distance from Kampala to the North. There is a growing number of university graduates who have decided to stay in Kampala, as the city offers them more job opportunities than their villages. The Abayudaya community has a Jewish High School and four Jewish primary schools in different villages. There are professionals like teachers, nurses, doctors, engineers, and agriculturists within the community. Aside from the professionals, many Jews in rural areas are subsistence farmers, and others are employed on farms. Although the community is proud of its educational achievements, it is seriously affected by the countrywide lack of jobs, low pay, and substantial family responsibilities.

In addition to economic struggles, addiction is an ongoing and escalating concern. Alcoholism has long been present among the elders of the community, and, more recently, there

have been more cases, particularly among young men and a small number of young women, of addiction. The addiction problem has been complicated by a lack of money for basic needs, including school fees, unemployment, and cultural and social acceptance of drinking alcohol. Drugs are mostly frowned upon by elders in Ugandan society but are increasingly being used, especially by young men. Although substance abuse is a known problem, it is not openly discussed in the general Ugandan or Jewish communities.

In this unique blend of Jewish and Ugandan cultures, the consumption of alcohol in the Abayudaya community is regarded as a delightful way to celebrate and socialize. Those who indulge in drinking are perceived as friendly individuals. Therefore, anyone who hosts a party or ceremony with alcohol is considered a generous and cheerful person who knows how to throw a good party. Young men feel privileged to be invited to drink with their role models in the community.

Ritual ceremonies like celebrations of a newborn baby, introduction ceremonies (an Abuyadaya custom when the couple's families meet) before weddings, weddings themselves, and funerals all serve alcohol.

In the context of the wider Ugandan community, alcohol is the most widely consumed substance. The World Health Statistics Report ranks Uganda as one of the highest alcohol-consuming countries in Africa and the highest in East Africa. Ugandans above the age of 15 consume 12.21 liters of alcohol per person on average annually. This figure is higher than the African regional average of 6.3 liters and the global average of 6.18 liters.¹

This report states that men consume about 19.93 liters of pure alcohol per person on average annually, while women consume 4.88 liters. This difference in consumption levels

¹ "World Health Statistics 2023: Monitoring Health for the Sdgs, Sustainable Development Goals - World." *ReliefWeb*, 19 May 2023, Pg 98

between men and women is attributed to the long-standing cultural norms, where it is frowned upon for women to drink alcohol or smoke. These gender differences are changing as the country evolves with the rest of the world. Even though men in Uganda indulge in alcohol drinking more than women, Dr. David Kalema, a WHO consultant, notes that “Many people's lives have been destabilized by alcohol.” In an interview in the New Vision newspaper, he says, “We have had many situations of domestic violence, family breakups, and children not going to school, on top of alcohol being the second leading cause of accidental fatalities and injuries...”²

People get the alcohol they drink from legal and illegal markets in Uganda. The local market provides legal alcoholic beverages, including wine, spirits, gin, and beer. Also common are unregulated crude alcoholic drinks like waragi, made from sugarcane and banana; homemade mwenge bigere (tonto) from bananas; and malwa, from fermented millet and sorghum grains. These beverages were traditionally homebrewed for home consumption and cultural functions like introduction ceremonies and weddings. Now, they are made in large quantities to sell at local bars. Although the government would consider home-brewed alcohol legal for limited use in one's home, most marketed home-brew liquors are manufactured and sold without health checks and government licenses. Because production and sale regulations have not been strictly enforced, there have been several incidents of death and blindness due to cases of toxic waragi adulterated with methanol.³

These illegal alcohols are cheap and easily accessible. The introduction of "sachets," Waragi alcohol, packaged in small polythene bags as small as 25 ml, has led to an alarming increase in alcohol consumption in the country. These sachets of waragi, with over 40% alcohol volume, have become very popular because of their low price and availability. These “sachets”

² Kiva, Nelson. “Uganda Tops Africa in Alcohol consumption-WHO Report.” *New Vision*, 27 May 2023,

³ Doreen et al, Fatal Methanol Poisoning Caused by Drinking Adulterated Locally Distilled Alcohol: Wakiso District, Uganda, June 2017

are illegal yet still accessible to the public and are mainly consumed by low-income earners and young people, including students⁴

People drink alcohol and use drugs to deal with the stress of poverty and other struggles in life. Moreover, substance abuse has led people into a continuous cycle of poverty. The Chronic Poverty Research Center warns that “excessive alcohol consumption has negative impacts on the achievement of the key human development outcomes on education, health, and nutrition, and is a key driver of chronic poverty.”⁵ Due to addiction, people are caught up in the vicious cycle of poverty, unemployment, diseases, and mental health concerns.

These adverse effects of substance abuse, coupled with a high population growth rate, add a burden to the already stressed health system and the struggling economy of the country.

Uganda is a fast-growing country in East Africa, with a population growth rate of 3% annually. Its population is estimated to be 49,924,252 million by the end of 2024 and 58,380,262 million by 2030.⁶ The country has one of the highest youth populations in the world, with 77% of its people under the age of 35. Although the high population provides many advantages to the nation, such as an extensive labor force and a broader market for goods and services, it also strains natural resources such as land and water and contributes to a high unemployment rate. This leads to a high financial burden for the country.

Although the economy has been progressing towards poverty eradication, about 41% of Ugandans, including those in the Abayudaya Jewish communities, live on less than \$1.90/day⁷

⁴ Laing, Tessa. “The Problem With Sachets Alcohol in Gulu, Uganda.” Movendi International, 5 Apr. 2017,

⁵ Lwanga-Ntale, Charles. “Drinking Into Deeper Poverty. The New Frontier for Chronic Poverty in Uganda.” *Drinking Into Deeper Poverty*, Jan. 2007

⁶ Uganda Population—2024 Worldmeter, www.worldometers.info/world-population/uganda-population

⁷ “Learn Facts about Uganda, Poverty, and Development.” *Opportunity International*, opportunity.org

This makes many people unable to afford education, proper nutrition, and health care, including treatment and rehabilitation of substance abuse.

In addition, the country has a high unemployment rate of 4.28%, with young people under 35 constituting 80% of the unemployed. In Uganda, the skilled employed average gross salary ranges annually from Ugx 7,957,900 to Ugx 140,401,100, about \$2100-\$36,825.

Low-skilled and casual laborers take home about \$1320 per year. About 72% of Uganda's labor force work in agriculture in rural Uganda as subsistence farmers and casual farm workers. The low pay is complicated by the Ugandan average household size of 5⁸. It is common for families to have other relatives, primarily children and elders, living with them. This makes many people unable to afford education, proper nutrition, and health care, including treatment and rehabilitation of substance abuse.

Public health services in Uganda may be provided for free; however, the poor quality of services, lack of medicines in health facilities, overcrowding, hygiene, and limited transport accessibility to health centers continue to lead the public to opt for private and costly providers. Limited private health insurance is provided to some through specific jobs. It is rare for most Ugandans, including the Abuyada, to have health insurance to access private hospitals or get the needed medications and other services prescribed by government hospitals.

Alcohol and Substance Regulations in Uganda:

Uganda has alcohol and drug laws. However, these consumption, age limit, production, and sale laws have not been strictly enforced. Alcohol, including illegally manufactured and sold liquors, is widely available in the country. Despite existing laws, it is unfortunately quite common for young people under the age of 18 to purchase and consume alcohol without

⁸ Uganda National Bureau of Statistics

experiencing any intervention from local bars and other social establishments. This issue is often complicated by parents and other older individuals who send minors to purchase alcohol on their behalf, with no questions asked by liquor stores.

Laws Related to Alcohol

On November 14, 2023, MP Sarah Opendi introduced a new alcohol-related act to the Ugandan Parliament⁹ The Parliament Watch reports, “Hon. Sarah Opendi, was granted leave by Parliament to introduce a privately sponsored Alcohol Control Bill to regulate the manufacture, importation, sale, and consumption of alcoholic drinks. The bill seeks to repeal the current legislation that includes the Liquor Act, the Portable Spirit Act, and the Enguli (Manufacturing and Licensing) Act, all enacted in the 1960s, which have become obsolete to address contemporary challenges of excessive consumption of alcoholic drinks.”¹⁰

The new Alcoholic Drinks Control Bill is to be debated in parliament. If passed into law, among other issues, it will:

1. Regulate the manufacture, importation, sale, advertisement, and consumption of alcoholic drinks. The bill proposes to limit the hours of alcohol sale and consumption to after 5 pm and before 12 am. Anyone found violating these rules would be punished with ten years in jail, and alcohol vendors would pay 20 million(about \$550) or imprisonment for ten years for anyone found selling alcohol before 12 pm or after 6 am.

⁹ “Parliament Watch.” The Alcohol Control Bill, Sept. 2022, parliamentwatch.ug

¹⁰ “Uganda’s Long Walk to Alcohol Regulation: Will the New Bill Bear a Toxic Free Generation? – Parliament Watch.” *Parliamentwatch.ug*, parliamentwatch.ug/blogs/ugandas-long-walk-to-alcohol-regulation-will-the-new-bill-bear-a-toxic-free-generation/. Accessed 28 Feb. 2024.

2. Prohibit the sale of alcoholic drinks to persons under eighteen years and other "specified persons," who include passenger service cars and enforcement officers. Anyone found selling alcohol to persons below 18 years, the bill proposes a punishment of 10 years in jail or payment of 40 million shillings.
3. Provide measures to eliminate illicit trade in alcoholic drinks. Therefore, manufacturing or running an establishment to manufacture and sell alcohol or import alcohol without a government license is liable to 10 years in prison or payment of Ugx 20 million. The Sale of "sachet" is liable to pay Ugx 20 million or five years in jail. The sale of any other alcohol in packages of less than 500ml is also liable to payment of 10 million and five years in jail.
4. Create public awareness of the dangers of excessive consumption of alcoholic drinks and provide for the rehabilitation, counseling, and treatment of people with an addiction.

Laws Related to Drugs

The National Drug Policy and Authority (NDPA) Act was introduced in 1993 and aimed at regulating the possession and use of drugs. Although drugs are illegal in Uganda, unfortunately, the laws are not adequately imposed. Due to widespread corruption and lack of awareness by the public on the dangers of drug abuse, drugs are sold without restrictions. This is a significant concern for the Jewish community and the larger Uganda.

Due to public concern, in 2015, the parliament enacted a new Narcotic Drug and Psychotropic Substance (NDPS) Act, making it more stringent than the NDPA of 1993. The NDPA included heavy sentences for drug possession. The Narcotics Law penalizes possession of

illegal drugs with prison sentences of up to 15 years. Trafficking of drugs is punishable with a life sentence.

The Uganda Harm Reduction Network, which advocates “for practical interventions aimed at supporting and addressing issues of people who use and inject drugs (PWUIDs), especially youth, warns that these laws were passed without human rights considerations. Even with these laws, there is still an increase in public consumption and importation of illegal drugs into the country.

The Most Commonly Consumed and Trafficked Drugs in Uganda are:

Heroin and cocaine, which are not grown or produced in Africa. They are becoming widely used by both high and low-income incomers. They are administered by injection, smoking, sniffing, and snorting.

In 2014, Heroin and Opioids were not considered a significant issue in Uganda (UNODC assessment report, 2014). However, use has risen since 2017, mainly in the cities and slums. It is worsened by the fact that anyone can access any drugs, including opioids, from pharmacies without prescription.

Cannabis plants have traditionally been used by people for generations as a treatment for cough, headache, and other illnesses. Now, it is sold mainly as cigarettes on the streets.

Khat is used in Eastern Africa, especially for celebrations at weddings and funerals. Its chewable leaves are abused for its active ingredients of cathine and cathinone. It is commonly sold by Somalis in Uganda.

Kuber is a smokeless tobacco that is sniffed or put under the tongue. It is imported from India. Just like other drugs, Kuber is banned by the Ugandan government but still accessible on the streets and from Indian businesses.

Aviation fuel, petrol, and glue fumes are consumed mainly by street kids who live in slums and on city streets.¹¹

Why People Drink/Use Drugs in Uganda as also Reflected in the Jewish Communities.

Cultural and social acceptance of drinking in communities: Alcohol consumption is widely accepted by most social and religious in Uganda. Alcohol is used in some Ugandan cultures as part of the bride price or dowry a groom pays to the bride's family, alongside cattle and other goods. Social functions like funerals, weddings, and circumcision ceremonies are, in most families, marked with excessive drinking. Drinking alcohol has been considered a social activity for many generations. One who drinks and dances is viewed as a sharing and joyous person. Numerous songs have been written about the joys of drinking, including the famous song, "There is no alcohol in heaven, so let us drink it now." These songs are played in bars and by anyone with an excuse for drinking. Many people pull money together to buy alcohol and share it with those who do not have money. A study on alcohol dependency in male adults in Butabika Hospital notes that those who do not have enough money can still drink because of the social acceptance and encouragement of drinking. They write, "From a community point of view, we learned from our respondents that those who drank alcohol would often pool resources to buy and drink in a group, whereby a large amount of alcohol would be bought as a social drink locally known as "*Lubele*." The word *Lubele* is derived from the word *Ebbele*, which means "a mother's breast." Pooling resources and drinking in a group made alcohol more affordable, encouraging people to drink as much as they wanted."¹²

¹¹ *Assessment Report Uganda*, www.unodc.org/documents/drug-prevention-and-treatment/2018_Uganda_Rapid_Assessment_Report_FINAL.pdf. Accessed 6 Jan. 2024. p.18

¹² Naamara and Muhwezi, "Factors Associated With Alcohol Dependence Among Adult Male Clients in Butabika Hospital, Uganda"

Christians usually cite Jesus turning water into wine as permission to drink. Muslim and born-again Christians who drink do so in hiding because of their religious restrictions. Moreover, for the Jews, both their Jewish ritual and Ugandan cultural celebrations encourage drinking.

Unemployment and loss of hope: The Daily Monitor newspaper interviewed a 35-year-old university graduate who was found drinking in the morning in a local bar. In the interview, the graduate stated that he and his six friends drink with his drink to "kill" stress because of economic hardships." They said they all have searched for employment and have not been lucky. He continued that they only drink cheap alcohol. They drink together and chat to forget their problems." (Mukombozi). They said they all have searched for employment and have not been lucky. Their sentiments echo many of the situations that youth in the Abayudaya community face. Such as being unable to find employment because of the scarcity of jobs. Some drop out of school because they cannot afford the cost of higher education. More young people are now getting caught up in drinking alcohol and using drugs as a way to spend their time and relieve the stress of the realities of their lives.

Trauma: A study was conducted in Northern Uganda, a region that has been affected by civil war, to ascertain the relationship between war trauma, childhood maltreatment, and problems related to alcohol use. The study was conducted on post-war families, targeting 304 men and 365 women. They found that 46 % of men and 1% of women had symptoms of alcohol use disorder. During the civil war, young men in the region were abducted as young as 15 years by the Lord's Resistance Army rebels and forced to carry out violent acts on their families and neighbors. The study reported, "We found that alcohol consumption moderated the dose-effect relationship between trauma exposure and symptoms of depression and PTSD. Significant

interactions indicated that men who reported more alcohol-related problems experienced less increase in symptoms of PTSD and depression with increasing trauma exposure.”¹³

The study indicated a relationship between alcohol abuse and trauma. Here, people drink to cope with their traumatic experiences, a kind of self-medication. We are aware as well that some people who grow up in abusive families or who are in abusive relationships tend to lean towards the consumption of alcohol or drugs to relieve their burdens. For street children who run away from abusive families and those orphaned and with no proper guardianship, drugs become their means of survival on the streets. A police officer reported the following in a study conducted on early childhood substance abuse in Mbale district.

*"Some children tell me they run away from home because of abuse. Parents were beating them, and they say they can't take it anymore. Then we have kids from families that have a stepmother, and they can't live together, and maybe she is denying them food, and they decided to run away.[...]. [In the street] they have really hardened. They can't go [from the street]; they will die there. But using substances helps them cope with the conditions."*¹⁴

Although there are no reported cases of children from the Abayudaya Jewish communities who live on the streets, there are incidences of child abuse, heavy punishments, and the overworking of kids in the villages. Most of the time, these abuses are normalized as discipline for their kids.

Poverty: Some people in Uganda live in absolute poverty, worsened by prolonged drought, diseases, and huge extended families.

¹³Skylstad, Vilde, et al. “‘As Soon as They Can Hold a Glass, They Begin Taking Alcohol’: A Qualitative Study on Early Childhood Substance Use in Mbale District, Uganda.” *BMC Public Health*, vol. 22, no. 1, Apr. 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13140-w>.

¹⁴Ibid

Below, a parent describes, in a study on Early Childhood Substance Abuse, why parents of young children drink and give alcohol to their young:

“They drink because of hunger and [for the children] to not disturb you because there is nothing [to offer them]. Every child drinks, and they end up sleeping. [...] It is to cool the hunger. We don’t want them to drink... We know that it’s bad, but a kilo of posho [staple food] costs a lot of money and if you have 11 children, how will you feed them? (FGD 8, younger men)”¹⁵

Overview of available addiction treatment and rehabilitation programs in Uganda:

For a population of about 48.5 million people, Butabika National Referral Mental Health Hospital is Uganda’s only government-owned drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation center. It is located in the capital city of Kampala. Uganda has more than ten registered private treatment and rehabilitation centers, most in Central and Western Uganda.

Butabika National Referral Mental Hospital was established in 1955 and is currently the only government-owned National Referral Mental Health Institution in the Country. The Hospital provides general and specialized mental health treatment for mental health patients, including an Alcohol and Drug Unit (ADU) that treats and rehabilitates patients with alcohol and drug-related issues. The ADU admits and treats both inpatients and outpatients. It is also a teaching hospital for various mental health specialists.

The hospital is about 12 km east of Kampala City and is the second biggest hospital in Uganda. The hospital is about 224.49 Kilometers From Uganda’s Jewish community center in

¹⁵ Ibid

Mbale. More than six Jewish communities are located an hour from Nabugoye village, with the main synagogue in eastern Uganda, a 4 to 5-hour drive from Kampala.

As the only public mental health facility in the country that provides “free” services to the public, the hospital, including its ADU, has become very crowded and inaccessible. In the public wing, patients live in a dormitory with shared bunk beds. Many patients are put on a waiting list for admission. In an article entitled, “In Uganda, Addiction Treatment Is a Privilege Few Can Afford,” Hasfa Lukwata, Uganda’s acting commissioner for mental health, said, “The country’s mental health hospital is so full that staff can only accept extreme cases.”¹⁶

In addition to its public partially free addiction treatment and rehab section, ADU also has a private wing that charges about Ugx 2,250,000 (approximately \$591) per month to patients who can afford and prefer private accommodations. The private patients are entitled to private rooms with a caretaker, meals, and specialized care. The fee includes detoxification, medications, therapy, accommodation, meals, and organ screening. This cost is in addition to other personal requirements expected from private and public admitted patients, including clothing, sandals, juice, blankets, bedsheets, and soap.

The author of this paper spoke with one of the head nurses, but he preferred to remain anonymous and tentative about what he related to.¹⁷ He mentioned that the institution is suspicious of people writing negatively about the hospital, which helps many people in need. The nurse explained that the unit does organ screening to ascertain any damages to the liver and Kidney and psychiatric evaluation before admitting any patient. They accept patients referred to them by other hospitals and private clients who can pay.

¹⁶ Global Press Journal. “In Uganda, Addiction Treatment Is a Privilege Few Can Afford.” *Global Press Journal*, 8 Oct. 2020

¹⁷ The interview with the head nurse was conducted at Butabika Hospital

Patients in the public wing get free accommodation, meals, and other services related to their recovery. However, they have to buy their medications. Patients admitted privately get a private room with a caretaker and regular meals. All are put on a clinic detoxification program upon admission and are usually discharged after three months.

They have group and individual sessions with psychiatrists and counselors and recreational activities. They have spiritual fellowship and reflections on Fridays and Saturdays, although no priests or religious leaders are involved. Patients also work privately with social workers and counselors.

The Hospital's challenges include the overwhelming number of patients as the only government-owned Hospital with an alcohol and drug unit(ADU). The hospital also faces a challenge of stigma from the public. In an article published by the Observer New Outlet on 28 September 2017, Dr. Brian Mutamba, a psychiatrist at Butabika, states, "Stigma affects the institution and our patients who come here because it is branded as a hospital for the 'mad'; this has, however, not affected our work," he said. "We do not want [patients] to stay at Butabika Hospital because we do not have much space; however, we expect the community to help those coming back after rehabilitation," he said."¹⁸

There are more than 15 privately registered alcohol and substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation centers in the country, most in the Central and Western regions. The writer of this paper contacted a few private substance treatment and rehabilitation centers on the following topics: services provided, success rate, the background of their patients, and the challenges they face. Most reported similar services, including screening of liver and kidney, psychological evaluation and detoxification, group and individual therapy, spiritual recreation activities, family sessions, meditation, and spiritual fellowship.

¹⁸ Lyatuu, Justus. "Why Drug Addicts Shun Butabika." *The Observer - Uganda*, 28 Sept. 2017

One of the private treatment and rehab centers is the African Retreat Centre. It has two facilities, one in Kampala, central Uganda, and the other in Mbarara, western Uganda. Mr. Joshua Byaruhanga manages its Mbarara branch. The writer contacted Mr. Bwaruhanga, who has worked for ARC for over seven years. He noted that the facility runs both mental health and substance disorder treatment programs. He says, “Addiction is an equal opportunity disease,” so the program does not discriminate in admissions. They welcome patients from every background. The program has an AA program built within it, and after the program ends, they recommend those in recovery to AA programs in their respective areas. He mentioned that AA programs are available in most districts in Uganda, including Jinja Gulu and Tororo. Still, he admitted that the AA in Mbale, where most of the Abayudaya live, has been inaccessible.

The African Retreat Center’s complete recovery program is usually a 3-month residential program and two weeks of outpatient follow-up stages. It includes screening and assessment, medically monitored detoxification, bio-psycho-social assessment, one-on-one sessions, intensive psychotherapy, group therapy, trauma-informed care, relapse prevention planning, 12 steps fellowship program, random urine tests, occupational therapy, physical fitness training, other therapies on assessment, individual therapy and spiritual fellowships.

Mr. Byaruhanga emphasized that when they do spiritual fellowships, the language they use is “Higher Power” because people are from different religions and have diverse understandings of God. He listed some of the materials used in the program: Alcoholics Anonymous (Big Book), Narcotics Anonymous, and the Al-Anon program manuals. Some Ugandan books are in their native languages, like *Abasinzi Rukyensa*. They also use recovery movies, one-on-one therapy, group therapies, recovery walks, recovery sports (indoor and outdoor), motivational speakers, recovery coaching, and spiritual

interventions. Other materials used include writing boards, markers, projectors, smart TVs, sand, and pets for therapy.

The program is private; it is not affiliated with the government or any religious sect in Uganda. However, because most individuals cannot afford treatment, they work with other organizations of interest, hospitals, police, prisons, churches, and other non-government organizations that help facilitate individuals to their treatment program.

The program costs more than UGX 10,000,000, about \$2,632 in Kampala, and 7,500,000, about \$1960 for its Mbarara branch. These fees do not include additional medications. The costs are in addition to other personal requirements expected from the patients, including clothing, sandals, juice, blankets, bedsheets, and soap. The patients also provide transportation to and from the facility.

The treatment centers face numerous challenges. Mr. Byaruhanga notes that one of the issues is *"family dynamics"*, as some families support treatment and others do not. Some family members claim that this kind of treatment and rehabilitation is not part of their culture. In addition, other families would instead seek traditional healers or religious leaders for someone with signs of mental illness.

Stigma towards mental health treatment is one of the big challenges. Mr Byaruhanga mentioned that the name rehabilitation has been attached to stigma. Their program now uses the term "treatment facility" instead of rehab, as it seems more acceptable and familiar for people. He wants to see more nationwide awareness programs from government and private organizations about addiction and mental health issues. He says people still do not understand that addiction is a disease; they associate it with witchcraft and dead ancestors being angry or as punishment by God.

Another significant challenge, according to Mr Byaruhanga, is the cost of the program, which is expensive for most families. He says people who come to the program are those whose families can afford it or who are connected to organizations that sponsor them. This leaves the majority of the people who are suffering from addiction not treated. Although the program takes specific insurance, it is rare for people to have insurance in Uganda.

He states that, on occasion, patients are abandoned at the facility because their families cannot finish the payment or because organizations and individual sponsors pull out of the program. When this occurs, ARC remains in debt as an organization. Most of the other private facilities share the challenges noted by Mr. Byaruhanga. The high costs of the programs, stigma from the communities on mental health, and limited support in communities for the people in recovery usually lead to relapse.

Other private residential treatment and rehabilitation centers in Uganda include Life Back Foundation, Hope and Beyond, Serenity Center Uganda, Bwebajja Dundu Central Uganda, The Rehab Clinic, Spine Rd, Kampala Central Uganda, Keza Psychological Center, Mbarara, Western Uganda, Reclaim Health Rehabilitation Center, Kisubi, Central Uganda, Alpha Rehabilitation Center. Ndinda Kampala, Central Region, East African Centre for Addiction Services, Aisu Rd, Kampala, Ring of Hope, Jinja, Eastern Uganda, Salve International Rehab in Jinja, Esther Uganda, Safe Places Uganda Treatment Center, Central Uganda and Kampala Youth Recovery Foundation, Central Uganda.

AA meetings throughout Uganda

Most residential treatment and rehabilitation centers have AA or Twelve Step Programs built into their facilities. They also offer AA meetings to their patients after discharge. However,

people in recovery who live far from these centers must find meetings and ongoing support in their own communities. All treatment and rehabilitation facilities expect communities and families to welcome and rehabilitate people back into their lives. Most of the AA meetings are in central and western Uganda. Mbale district, where most Abayudaya live, has a population of 441,300 people, but only one AA meeting at St Augustine Church on Tororo Rd. The only AA meeting in Mbale convenes on the 2nd Wednesday of the month, and individuals may feel pressured to conform to Christianity. For the Jewish communities, access to treatment and rehabilitation services is limited as treatment and rehabilitation centers are unaffordable for most families and are primarily located in other regions of the country, and so are support groups.

Chapter 2: Sample Workbook

Introduction

This workbook is intended to be studied as a spiritual guide by group members in recovery and those who seek to begin the journey of recovery from alcohol and drug abuse in the Abayudaya Jewish communities in Uganda. The workbook is a compilation of biblical and rabbinic primary texts and commentaries, as well as prayers, that can be used as a basis for reflection on addiction issues and journeys of recovery.

This workbook responds to the communities' local situation and provides a uniquely Jewish focus as a resource for recovery groups.

This workbook can be used by the members of a recovery group, either alone or with the leadership of a group facilitator. (There is a special section to provide group facilitators with an overview of the primary texts and some references to modern literature on addiction and recovery resources literature.) The group members will use the workbook to support each other and their communities. The goal is for group members to develop trust and comfort to discuss issues of addiction openly and hold themselves and each other accountable for modifying behaviors.

The groups will use a selection of Jewish texts and guiding questions to reflect on the wide range of emotions people in recovery feel. They will reflect as well on the reasons why people drink alcohol and use drugs. The groups will also reflect on the impacts of substance abuse in their communities.

In the meetings, group members will study the texts together and discuss the guiding questions as a whole group or in small circles, depending on their numbers. They will also use

the prayers and corresponding guiding questions to reflect on their spiritual journey individually and as a group.

Ultimately, the hope is that this workbook will serve as a spiritual guide for those in recovery to restore their faith in God, themselves, and their community as they reflect on their own ways forward. This workbook is designed for groups with ongoing gatherings, at which members assess progress and redefine goals in an open and non-judgmental way.

Group members will establish confidentiality agreements among themselves.

The workbook has the following sections:

- 1) Biblical and rabbinic texts and commentaries with reflection questions for group members to study.
- 2) Prayers to set intentions for the opening and closing of the meetings and for personal use by group members outside the group to reflect on their days.

Chapter 3: Sample Workbook for Recovery Groups

Biblical Texts

Genesis: 9:20-25: Noah's drunkenness brings him shame and punishment to his son.

In Genesis 9:20-25 we read, “Noah, the tiller of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank of the wine and (וישכר) became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a cloth, placed it against both their backs, and, walking backward, they covered their father's nakedness; their faces were turned the other way, so that they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah woke up from his wine and learned what his youngest son had done to him, he said, “Cursed be Canaan; the lowest of slaves Shall he be to his brothers.”¹⁹

ויחל נח איש האדמה ויטע כרם:
 וישת מוהינו וישכר ויתגל בתוך אהלה:
 וירא חם אבי כנען את ערנות אביו ויגד לשני אחיו בחוץ:
 ויקח ים ויפך את השמלה וישלמו על שכם שניהם וילכו אחרנית ויכסו את ערנות אביהם
 ופניהם אחרנית וערנות אביהם לא ראו:
 וינקז נח מייגו וידע את אשר עשה לו בנו הקטן:
 ויאמר ארור כנען עבד עבדים יהיה לאחיו:

When we first hear of Noah in Gen 6:9, he is described as a righteous man walking with God. When we read of him in Gen 9: 20-25, he is drunk and naked. When Noah left the ark after the flood had wiped out the world, he planted a vineyard. He made wine and then drank too much of his wine. Perhaps Noah drank too much because he had just witnessed the apocalyptic destruction of the world by God in the flood.

The rabbis have always compared Noah to Abraham. Unlike Noah, Abraham bargained with God on behalf of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. But Noah just heeded God's warning and boarded the boat,

¹⁹ All Hebrew biblical texts and commentary are from Sefaria. And all their translations will be based on Sefaria.

leaving behind his world as it perished. Levi Yitzchak²⁰ suggests that Noah was too humble to challenge God's decree to destroy the world. He teaches that what enables a true tzadik (a righteous person) is his serving God and also rising to the defense of the world.

On righteousness, Levi Yitzchak teaches, "These are the generations of Noah;" there are two types of righteous people, both of whom serve the Lord. The first category does so with enthusiasm and profound devotion but does so as an individual only, not endeavoring to draw other people, admitted sinners, nearer to their Creator. There is a second category of *tzaddik*, righteous person, who not only serves the Lord himself but who also is instrumental in leading sinners back to their Creator."²¹

Levi Yitzchak identifies Noah with the first category of rightness and Abraham with the second.

Noah, according to his teaching, did not try to bargain with God to save his fellows from being wiped out. So perhaps Noah drank wine excessively because he felt a great sense of loss in the world he left behind, or maybe Noah felt isolated and guilty for not trying harder to save everyone as the rabbis above suggest he should have done.

- Have you ever experienced an overwhelming **sense of loss or isolation**?
- Have you ever experienced **self-blame**? If so, for what?
- Have you ever experienced **survivor's guilt**? If so, for what?
- What are other reasons that you drink alcohol or use drugs?

The Torah also takes us through the consequences of Noah's intoxication. We witness that after Noah drinks the wine from his vineyard excessively, he becomes insensitive to his environment and disgraces himself. As a result, he takes off his clothing in his family tent. The excess drinking brings shame and embarrassment to his family. From a place of shame, he curses his son, Ham, for seeing him naked.

²⁰ Levi Yitzchak (1740–1809) of Berditchev was a Hasidic master, Jewish leader and Torah commentator in his work *Kedushat Levi*

²¹ *Kedushat Levi* commentary on Noah's righteousness, Gen 6:9

Radak²² explains that “drunkenness makes a person as insensitive to what goes on around them as does sleep. Therefore, the Torah describes Noah’s becoming sober as וַיִּשְׁכַּח “waking up” as he was unaware of his surroundings.

- Have you ever “woken up” unaware of what happened while you were still awake but intoxicated?
- What did you feel at that moment? And how did you deal with those feelings?

When Ham saw his father naked, he invited the rest of his brothers to see him as well. By doing so, Ham publicized his father’s embarrassment to more members of the family instead of helping cover him.

- How did Ham contribute to making the situation worse?
- Have you ever felt not helped but instead exploited by someone who has observed you while you were drunk—even someone close to you?
- How did you feel in the moment, and what did you do with those feelings?

Saadia Gaon²³ elaborates on the dangers and curses that might come when one speaks derogatorily about people with problems. He teaches us that acting and speaking with negativity only causes more harm. On the question of why Ham was cursed, Saadia offers an explanation for Ham’s sin in the situation. He comments on Gen 9:22, “...what was Ham’s sin? There are those who think he cut off his father’s limb. But others think differently. They say his sin was “telling” (that he told his brothers). And he did not help him in his doings. We confirm that the language he used was delegatory....”

Saadia elaborates that Ham’s sin was not telling his brothers about their father’s situation; rather, it was the fact that he did not help cover his father’s nakedness at the moment, and when he went to tell his brothers, he used negative language.

²² Radak also known as David Kimchi is a 13th-century Provencal Rabbi, Hebrew grammarian, and Bible scholar also known as David Kimchi

²³ Saadia Gaon (882-942), was a rabbi and medieval Jewish philosopher born in Fayyum Egypt and died in Baghdad

On the same note, the Radak also concludes that Ham, Noah's son, had a choice when he saw his father's nakedness "....The additional impropriety he committed was that he told his brothers about it instead of first covering his father."

When Noah woke up and learned that his son Ham had exposed his intimate moment to the larger family, he cursed him harshly.

Saadia, the Radak implores us to be careful and kind and find meaningful and helpful ways to deal with members of our families and community who struggle with addiction. While shaming the addicted family member may be an option, it is not a constructive response.

- Why is confidentiality important to you?

Noah's intoxication can also help us reflect on self-responsibility. When Noah learns of what happened to him while he was drunk, he becomes angry and harshly curses his youngest son, Ham, for inviting his other sons to see him naked. Noah focuses his anger on his son and does not reflect on his own responsibility in the situation. The Radak comments that Noah failed to set a limit for his drinking. He "וַיִּשְׁכַּר וַיֵּשֶׁב מִן הַיַּיִן וַיִּשְׁכַּר—he drank and became drunk. We should also be sensitive to the feelings and reactions of children who witness their parents disgrace themselves when intoxicated.

- What was Noah's responsibility in the situation?

The Torah also notes that the other two sons of Noah, Shem, and Japhet, took a piece of cloth, placed it against both their backs, and, walking backward, covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they did not see their father's nakedness." (Gen 9:23) The Torah speaks highly of them. When Noah woke up, he blessed them for their discretion. Their actions showed respect for their father. On the other hand, we can read their actions as described vividly in Gen 9:13, as Shem and Japhet's way of not wanting to confront the problem of their father's intoxication. One can read these

actions as their ways of “turning their faces” away from the problem. Their father was drunk and naked, and they didn't want to deal with that.

- Have you ever been reprimanded for confronting a friend or family member with an addiction problem?
- Have you ever provided someone suffering from addiction with what they need so that you don't have to deal with a bigger issue?

Genesis 19:30-36: Lot's incest with his two daughters

In Genesis 19:30-36, we read:

Lot went up from Zoar and settled in the hill country with his two daughters, for he was afraid to dwell in Zoar; he and his two daughters lived in a cave. And the older one said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to consort with us in the way of all the world. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father.” That night, they made their father drink wine, and the older one went in and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. The next day, the older one said to the younger, “See, I lay with Father last night; let us make him drink wine tonight also, and you go and lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father.” That night, they also made their father drink wine, and the younger one went and lay with him; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose. Thus, the two daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father.”

וַיַּעַל לוֹט מִצּוֹר וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּהָר וּשְׁתֵּי בָנָתָיו עִמּוֹ כִּי יָרָא לְשִׁכַּת בְּצוֹעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמַעְרָה הוּא וּשְׁתֵּי בָנָתָיו:
וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְעִירָה אָבִינוּ זָקֵן וְאִישׁ אֵין בְּאֶרֶץ לְבֹא עָלֵינוּ כְּדָרָה כָּל־הָאָרֶץ:
לָכֵן נִשְׁקָה אֶת־אָבִינוּ יָיִן וְנִשְׁכְּבָה עִמּוֹ וְנִתְּנָה מֵאָבִינוּ זָרַע:
וַתִּשְׁקֶינָה אֶת־אָבִיהֶן יָיִן בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא וַתָּבֹא הַבְּכִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־אָבִיהָ וְלֹא־יָדָע בְּשִׁכְבָּהּ וּבְקִוְיָהּ:
וַיְהִי מִמָּחָרֹת וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְעִירָה הֵן־שִׁכַּבְתִּי אִמָּשׁ אֶת־אָבִי
נִשְׁקָנוּ יָיִן גַּם־הַלַּיְלָה וּבֹאִי שִׁכְבִּי עִמּוֹ וְנִתְּנָה מֵאָבִינוּ זָרַע:
וַתִּשְׁקֶינָה גַם בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא אֶת־אָבִיהֶן יָיִן וַתָּקֶם הַצְעִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב עִמּוֹ וְלֹא־יָדָע בְּשִׁכְבָּהּ וּבְקִוְיָהּ:
וַתִּהְיֶינָה שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת־לוֹט מֵאָבִיהֶן:

Lot is like Noah; his world has been destroyed. He had been warned that his city of Sodom would be razed. He was unable to convince his daughters and sons-in-law to leave with him. As he and his wife left, they were aware that their home and some of their family members were dying as the whole city

burned to the ground. His wife looked back at the city despite the warning not to, and consequently, she was turned into a pillar of salt. Lot was left with only his two remaining daughters.

Although God's messengers promised to reserve the city of Zoar for him to dwell in, Lot chose to settle in the hilly country. The Torah states that Lot was afraid of living in the city of Zoar because he thought it would be burnt down, too. He and his daughters lived in an isolated cave without clear knowledge of the outside world.

Unlike Noah, who drinks himself, Lot does not choose to get intoxicated. His daughters cause him to drink wine until he passes out. His daughters fear that there might be no other man left on earth after the destruction of their world. In their minds, to continue their father's lineage, they must procreate with him. They take turns sleeping with him on different nights while he is intoxicated. The Torah reports that without his awareness, both his daughters became pregnant. Lot's daughters, isolated and desperate, took advantage of their father. They caused him to drink until he was unaware of what was happening around him. They also relied on his intoxication to escape their own shame in the moment of lying with their father.

Rashi²⁴ comments that they were desperate and saw no other way for humanity to continue than lying with their father to procreate. Rashi teaches, “אִישׁ אֵין בָּאָרֶץ —and there is not a man in the earth—They thought that the whole world had been destroyed as in the time of the generation of the floods. (Genesis Rabbah 51:8).”²⁵ Although Rashi's comment does not excuse the behavior of Lot's daughters, it provides some kind of explanation for their causing Lot's intoxication. Rashi provides Lot's daughters with a positive explanation for getting their father drunk and sleeping with him, but it is unacceptable in our society today.

²⁴ Rabbi Shlomo Ben (1040-1105) best known by the acronym Rashi was a medieval French Torah and Talmud commentator.

²⁵ Rashi's commentary on Gen 19:30

Lot trusted his daughters. We are aware that one can be forced/enticed into intoxication by friends and family members that they love and trust for their own gains. People might take advantage of an intoxicated person in many other ways as well: To steal from them, to make them sign documents that they would not otherwise sign while sober, to make them agree to grant favors, to blackmail them afterward, among others.

- Have you ever been pressured into intoxication by your peers or people you love and trust?
- Did the people who pressured you into drinking offer you positive reasons for drinking?
- What did you choose to do?
- Have you ever been taken advantage of when intoxicated by someone you trust?
- How did it make you feel when you became aware of the situation? And what did you do about it?

The pressure to drink or do drugs could also be a form of peer pressure. One is willing to drink alcohol or do drugs to fit in or feel a sense of belonging in a social setting. Many social gatherings, like weddings, B'nai Mitzvahs, baby naming, etc, provide easy access to alcohol. It has become increasingly hard for people who are trying to quit drinking to feel safe in our communal celebrations.

- Do you find it hard to attend Jewish/Ugandan celebrations where alcohol is served?
- How do you handle yourself in these situations?
- How can the Jewish community make your attendance easier for you?

Rashi ponders where Lot's daughters got the wine in their cave, enough to cause their father to drink and pass out. Citing Midrash Tanchuma, Beshalach 12:7, Rashi suggests that God provided the wine for them for exactly this purpose. He writes, “תשקין וגו' —and they made their father drink, etc. — Wine was at hand for them in the cave out of a set purpose that they might bring forth two nations.”

Rashi's question reflects a similar concern among members of the Ugandan Jewish communities. How can people get access to/afford to buy alcohol and drugs if expensive and consumable?

- How has drinking/using drugs affected you financially?
- What do you do to get alcohol or drugs?
- What sacrifices have you made to afford alcohol/drugs?

Leviticus 10:8-11: God instructs the Levites through the ages against intoxication before entering the tent of meeting.

In Leviticus 10:8-11, we read: And יהוה spoke to Aaron, saying: Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die. This is a law for all time throughout the ages, And to distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the impure and the pure; teach the Israelites all the laws which יהוה has spoken to them through Moses.

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר
 יִינוּ וְשָׁכָר אֶל־תִּשְׁתּוּ | אֲתָהּ | וּבְנֵיךָ אִתְּךָ בְּבָאֲכֶם אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְלֹא תָמָתוּ חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם
 וְלִהְבִּדִיל בֵּין הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבֵין הַחֵל וּבֵין הַטָּמֵא וּבֵין הַטָּהוֹר
 וְלְהוֹרֹת אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת כָּל־הַחֻקִּים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֲלֵיהֶם בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה

In this passage, God directly speaks to Aaron with instructions against intoxication from wine and other liquids when entering the tent of the meeting. The warning comes immediately after the mysterious death of Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu. To avoid further death, God instructs Aaron and his remaining sons, the house of priests, saying, “Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting.” (Lev 10:9)

According to Midrash Tanchuma, R. Mani of Sha'av and R. Joshua of Sikhnin, in the name of R. Levi, comment that one of the reasons Nadav and Avihu died was that they were drunk:

“Aaron's sons died because of four things, and the sentence of death is recorded in connection with all of them.”²⁶

The four things include:

- 1) “Because they entered and had drunk wine, and it says, “Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die. This is a law for all time throughout the ages (Lev 10:9)
- 2) Because they entered without washing hands and feet, and it says, “and let Aaron and his sons wash their hands and feet [in water drawn] from it. When they enter the Tent of Meeting they shall wash with water, that they may not die; or when they approach the altar to serve, to turn into smoke an offering by fire to יהוה.” (Exod 30:20-21)
- 3) Because they entered while lacking the proper clothes. And what did they lack? R. Levi said: "They were lacking a robe, and a sentence of death is recorded in connection with that lack where it is stated....” Aaron shall wear it while officiating so that the sound of it is heard when he comes into the sanctuary before יהוה and when he goes out—that he may not die.”(Exod. 28:35)
- 4) And because they had no children and a sentence of death is recorded in connection with that lack, where it is stated,” But Nadab and Abihu died by the will of יהוה, when they offered alien fire before יהוה in the wilderness of Sinai; and they left no sons. So it was Eleazar and Ithamar who served as priests in the lifetime of their father, Aaron.” (Numbers 3:4). Abba Hanan says because they had no wives and rabbi, R. Levi said They had a lot of arrogance and were saying: "Which woman is worthy of us?”²⁷

²⁶ Midrash Tanchuma Buber, Acharei mot 7:3

²⁷ Ibid

The Midrash makes a clear connection between Nadav and Abihu's death and the prohibition God gives after their death for the priests to refrain from drinking before performing their priestly duties. According to the Torah, the two sons of Aaron offered their incense before God on אֵשׁ זָרָה —an alien fire (Lev 10:1). If we reflect on the Midrash's reasoning that they died because they were drunk, then it is clear that their decision-making capacities were impaired by intoxication from wine. This led them to offer incense on an alien fire and, as the Midrash suggests, not washing their hands and feet and not putting on the proper clothing required for their priestly duties, among others.

- Have you ever arrived at work drunk or high on drugs?
 - Did you think being intoxicated would affect your ability to work?
 - Did it affect your ability to work
 - How did it affect your relationships at work?
- Have you ever drunk alcohol or taken drugs while at work?
 - How did intoxication affect your ability to work, and how did you react?
 - Have you ever had to drink during a business-related meal?
 - How did the alcohol affect your actions with your co-workers or clients?

Rabeinu Bahya²⁸ comments on the prohibition that the priests should not drink wine to the point of intoxication before entering the tent of meeting $\text{לֹא יִשְׁכָּר אֶל־תֵּשֶׁבֶת}$ (Lev 10:9), saying, “If the word שִׁכָּר —intoxication— includes all intoxicating liquids, why did the Torah have to single out “wine?” He distinguishes between drunkenness due to consumption of wine, which is punishable by death, and intoxication with other liquids, which, while forbidden, is not punishable by death at the hands of heaven.”

- Do you distinguish between different kinds of alcohol/drugs?
- What reason do you have for choosing one over the other?

²⁸ Rabbeinu Bahya, also known as Rabbi Bahya Ben Asher, was the Tanakh commentator in Spain between 1255 and 1340.

Bahya suggests above that drunkenness due to the consumption of wine is punishable by death, as witnessed with Nadav and Avihu.

- Have you ever experienced severe consequences from your consumption of alcohol or drugs?
- What happened, and how did you deal with it?
- Were you surprised by the consequences?

Rabeinu Bahya adds that "The letter 'vav' ו before להורות—to instruct others (Lev 10:11)—is an indication that those who have to make decisions have to apply to themselves similar restrictions to the priests who serve in the Temple. He says, "It is incumbent upon the people who have to make these various rulings mentioned here, i.e., the judges, to abstain from alcoholic drinking before performing their duties." Bahya is teaching us that the prohibition to not drink at work applies to priests as well as to judges and instructors and all people who make decisions for others.

We are all always making decisions —everyday decisions for ourselves and others. Whether it's crossing the street, what we eat, how we speak to others, and how we conduct ourselves at work and in our relationships. Intoxication takes away one's ability to make intellectual and spiritual decisions. While intoxicated, we might treat a serious situation lightly and everything equally well or equally bad. It doesn't matter how learned; one is incapable of making appropriate decisions when intoxicated.

Rabbeinu Bahya also teaches that intoxication induces three phenomena: "It induces sleep, where one is not aware of God; It causes grossness of spirit: where "one does not consider that some things are holy whereas others are not but treat all of them as being on a comparable spiritual level, making no distinctions." Finally, Bahya states that intoxication clouds our minds."²⁹ We are expected to distinguish between sacred and profane.

- Are there relationships or things that you consider to be holy? What are they?

²⁹ Rabbeinu Bahya on Leviticus 9:10-11

- How do you treat them when you're aware versus when you are intoxicated?
- Have you ever made a decision under the influence of drugs or alcohol that you regret?
- How did you/ are you dealing with the consequences of your regrettable decision?

Deuteronomy 21:18-21: The Fate of a Gluttonous and Drunkard Son

If there is a man with a stubborn and rebellious son who does not heed his father and mother's voice, they chastise him, but he does not listen to them. His father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the public place of his community. They shall say to the elders of his town, "This son of ours is disloyal and defiant; he does not heed us. He is a glutton and a drunkard." Thereupon, his town's council shall stone him to death. Thus, you will sweep out evil from your midst: all Israel will hear and be afraid.

כִּי־יִהְיֶה לְאִישׁ בֶּן סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֵה אִיגָּנוּ שְׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹל אָבִיו וּבְקוֹל אִמּוֹ וַיַּסְּרוּ אוֹתוֹ וְלֹא יִשְׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם
וַתִּפְּשׁוּ בוֹ אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ וְהוֹצִיאוּ אוֹתוֹ אֶל־זִקְנֵי עִירוֹ וְאֶל־שַׁעַר מִקְדָּמוֹ
וְאָמְרוּ אֶל־זִקְנֵי עִירוֹ בְּנֵנוּ זֶה סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֵה אִיגָּנוּ שְׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹלָנוּ זֹלָל וְסָבָא
וְרָגְמָהוּ כָּל־אֲנָשֵׁי עִירוֹ בָּאֲבָנִים וּמָת וּבַעֲרַת הָרַע מִקֶּרְבֶּךָ וְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁמְעוּ וְיִרְאוּ

This passage outlines what would happen in an accelerating issue of a defiant son. Initially, his parents would speak to him, but if he did not listen to them, his father and mother would be obligated to bring him for the judgment of the elders of the city. According to Deut 21:20, his parents would publicly state that their son is disloyal, defiant, drunkard, and gluttonous. On hearing this statement from the parents, all his town's people shall stone the son to death.

This law is one of the harshest punishments in the Torah. Fortunately, there is no record of such an execution taking place in our texts. It, however, is essential for us to reflect on the concerns of God and this ancient community of the Israelites regarding this severe instruction.

A similar warning appears in the book of Proverbs 23:20. It says, “Do not be among wine-guzzlers (בְּסֹבְאֵי-יַיִן), among gluttonous eaters of meat.”

Rashi explains that the word Zolel (glutton)—זֹלֵל— “refers to one who gluttonously devours meat.” He, however, adds, “The term refers to anyone who commits himself to all that he lusts for, to all that his desires ask of him” (Deut 21:18). On drunkenness, Rashi comments that “*Sove*” refers to one who drinks a lot. It refers to a drunkard. This individual is essentially a heretic. His only desire for life in this world is to eat and drink.” Rashi uses very strong negative language. His understanding is that this individual chooses a life of lust and heresy.

- Have you ever been spoken to harshly/ degradingly because of your addiction?
- Have you ever been labeled with certain names because of your drinking/drug use? If yes, what names and how does it make you feel?
- When you first started drinking/using drugs, did you have a choice?
- Do you still feel like you have a choice now?
- Is your only desire in life to drink and/or use drugs? If so, how does God fit into your life?

Rashi also explains that a rebellious son is one who deviates from the right path and disobeys his father. He comments, “The refractory and rebellious son is put to death on account of the final course his life must necessarily take (not because his present offense is deserving death); — the Torah has fathomed his ultimate disposition: in the end, he will squander his fathers property and seeking in vain for the pleasures to which he has been accustomed, he will take his stand on the crossroads and rob people, and in some way or other make, himself liable to the death penalty. Says the Torah, “Let him die innocent of such crimes, and let him not die guilty of them” (Sifrei Devarim 220:3; Sanhedrin 72a).”

According to Rashi, the drunk and gluttonous son will steal from his family. When he is done with his family, he will move on to rob people at a crossroads. This individual will become dangerous and will commit more crimes to satisfy his urges (addiction). The midrash draws on Rashi's explanation to demonstrate an awareness of the impact of addiction on an individual, their family, and society.

- What adverse effects has your addiction had on your family and your community?
- Does Rashi's description that an individual will become dangerous and will commit more crimes to satisfy his urges (addiction) describe you?
- In what ways is the midrash's description of the life of a person with an addiction accurate or inaccurate?
- What concerns do your family and community speak to you about your addiction? How does it make you feel?
- How have you felt about your family's interventions?

Perhaps the biblical commentary that speaks most profoundly about the urges of addiction is Or Hachaim³⁰ on Deut 21:18. The 18th-century mystical commentary explains that the reason why the son cannot heed his parents' voice is that the "evil urge dominates within man; this deprives man of his normal ability to hear and to understand. The reason is that the evil urge takes up its position at the entrance of man's heart, preventing words from getting through to (the) soul." Or HaChaim recognized what contemporary literature indicates—addiction can dominate a person's body and mind, making it difficult for them to take the necessary steps toward recovery.

The text of Deuteronomy 21:19-22 demonstrates several things: the pain and tough decisions that families make when dealing with loved ones who are struggling with addiction, the concern of the community about the future of the addicted individual and their own safety, the voicelessness of the person with addiction; and mainly the loss of hope for the future for an individual with addiction.

³⁰ Classic commentary on the Torah written by Rabbi Chaim ben Moshe Ibin Attar, 1696 -1743, Jerusalem

Our Jewish tradition is full of hope. During the high holiday season, we take stock of our lives through Cheshbon nefesh, striving to improve ourselves.

Today, we ask ourselves:

- What have you lost in life because of addiction?
- What changes would you like to make to have the future you would like moving forward?
- How can your family and our community support you on this journey?

Rabbinic Texts

Megillah 7B:7-8³¹: Excessive Drinking on Purim as a Religious Ritual Celebration

In Megillah, we read:

Rava said: A person is obligated to become intoxicated with wine on Purim until he does not know how to distinguish between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordecai.

The Gemara relates that Rabba and Rabbi Zeira prepared a Purim feast with each other, and when they became intoxicated, Rabba arose and slaughtered Rabbi Zeira.

The next day, [when he became sober and realized what he had done,] Rabba asked God for mercy and revived him. The next year, (Rabba) said to him (Rabbi Zeira): Let the Master come and let us prepare the Purim feast with each other. He said to him: Miracles do not happen each and every hour, and I do not want to undergo that experience again.

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

Like on most Jewish holidays, we sanctify the day of Purim with wine. On Purim, however, we have an additional obligation to drink until we become intoxicated. In contrast to other Jewish holidays like Pesach, where we drink four cups of wine, there is no specific amount that one must drink on Purim. The emphasis is not put on the amount but rather on the effect the alcohol has on the drinker. One is obligated to drink until one cannot distinguish between the evil Haman (booo) and the blessed Mordecai (Megillah 7B:7).

(Megillah 7B:7) אמר רבא: מיחייב איניש לבסומי בפורי' עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי

This obligation for blind drinking is a well-known tradition. However, it can have serious consequences, as demonstrated in the Talmud by the immediate story of Rabba and Rabbi Zeira. Rabba and Rabbi Zeira, are two great sages who, despite their wisdom, fall into the trap of excessive drinking on Purim. The story turns dark when Rabba drinks too much and slays Rabbi

³¹ This and other Talmudic texts in this paper are from The William Davidson Digital Talmud on Sefaria. All Talmudic translations will be based on Sefaria.

Zeira. While this extreme outcome may not be the norm, it serves as a potential reminder of the dangers of excessive drinking during our festival occasions. It leads us to reflect on our tradition, which obligates and encourages us to drink alcohol excessively.

- Have you ever felt obligated to drink alcohol?
- What was the occasion, and why did you feel it was necessary to drink?
- In what other ways can we celebrate our festivals of joy without excessive drinking?

The story of Rabba and Rabbi Zeira ends on a more miraculous and promising note. When Rabba awakes from his "sleep," he realizes what he had done or what intoxication had caused him to do. He pleads with God for mercy. Miraculously, Rabbi Zeira is revived. However, Rabba plans to repeat the same feast for next year. Rabbi Zeira declines Rabba's invitation to indulge in the same kind of feasting on Purim the following year. He states that miracles only happen once, and he does not want to die. For Rabbi Zeira, his near-death experience gave him a new appreciation for life. He also understood that the only way he would avoid endangering his life was to not be around his friend/colleague, Rabba, who would go on throwing the same kind of parties.

Just like Rabbi Zeira, many people with addiction find themselves in their lowest moments, which makes them realize they need to change their lives.

- When was the moment in your life that you decided to make a change, to exclude alcohol or drugs?
- How might you respond to friends and colleagues who encourage you to drink/take drugs despite their awareness of the consequences?
- What steps are you taking to ensure you don't fall back?

Rabbi Moses Isserles³² comments on the obligation to get intoxicated on Purim to the extent that one can not distinguish between wicked Haman and Blessed Mordecai, saying it is not necessary for one to become drunk so much, but rather to drink more than one is used to (Kol Bo), and to fall asleep, and while one sleeps, one does not know [the difference] between "accursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai".

He adds that "There is no difference on Purim between one who has less, as long as his heart is directed to heaven."

According to Rema, although excessive drinking might help one forget the difference between the evil Haman and blessed Mordecai, what counts most is the intentions. One who has no problems with alcohol might drink just a little to help them sleep. And members of our community who struggle with substance disorder should fulfill the mitzvah by setting their intentions and hearts to the heavens.

- In what other ways can you fulfill the mitzvah of Purim without excessive drinking?
- Has there ever been an occasion when you chose not to drink or use drugs when others were? If so, what led you to your decision?
- How can you increase joy in ritual celebrations without drinking?
- How can we, as a community, support you on your journey to recovery?

³² Also known as the REMA (1530-1572, Poland), a Talmudist and Halachist

Pesachim 49a:19-20: Cautions Against Seeking Opportunities for Excessive Partying For a Torah Scholar

In Pesachim 49a, we read: Every scholar who feasts much in every place eventually destroys his home, widows his wife and orphans his children (his young), forgets his learning and becomes involved in many quarrels, his words are unheeded, and he desecrates the name of heaven and the name of his teacher and his father, and causes an evil name (bad reputation) for himself, his children and his children's children until the end the generations.³³

תנו רבנן: כל תלמיד חכם המרבה סעודתו בכל מקום, סוף מחרים את ביתו, ומאלמן את אשתו, ומייתם את גזליו, ותלמודו משתכח ממנו, ומחלוקות רבות באות עליו, ודבריו אינם נשמעים, ומחליל שם שמים ושם רבו ושם אביו, וגורם שם רע לו ולבניו ולבני בניו עד סוף כל הדורות

The Talmud cautions torah scholars against seeking opportunities for additional feasting. Although certain feasts such as betrothals and weddings are considered mitzvot and are permitted to all, including torah scholars, the passage discusses the impacts of excessive feasting for a torah scholar; they risk losing the ability to take care of their family, lose the sense of self, respect from people as a leader, and ultimately they curse the name of Heaven, of their parents, and of their teachers. Indulging in uncontrolled feasting, which involves excessive drinking, ruins one's reputation, and one passes on this diminished status to one's family for generations to come.

The Talmud recognizes how excessive and continuous eating and drinking at feasts can negatively affect various aspects of one's life, such as home, self, community leadership, and relationship with God. The Rabbis also differentiate between “normal” drinking, which is permitted at feasts connected with a mitzvah, and excessive drinking, where one cannot control oneself but seeks opportunities for drinking beyond the occasions that are considered mitzvot.

³³ Pesachim 49a:19

In this passage, the scholar feasts indiscriminately. They engage in every feast, everywhere.

- What is your understanding of excessive drinking?
- What have been the consequences for you when you have drunk excessively?
- Were they similar to the ones mentioned in this Talmudic passage?

The text further elaborates that a torah scholar who drinks excessively has a bad reputation for himself and his descendants. Abaye adds that the Torah scholar loses his highly regarded and respected occupation to become an “oven heater,” a menial job.

- Have you ever lost your job and status because of excessive drinking?
- Have you noticed a decline in the prestige or salary of your job because of excessive drinking?

Although not mentioned explicitly, Abaye hints at the effects of addiction. The once esteemed scholar reaches a place where he works only to sustain his drinking. He no longer feels shame and embarrassment, and as a result, the consequences of his actions shift to affect those around him. Because of excessive drinking and the need to sustain the partying, the scholar loses their place as a chacham, a sage. Rava says they become a subject of public humiliation, as one who “dances in bei kuvei,” inns—places that respectable people like Torah scholars do not usually go. Rav Pappa and Rav Shemaya add to the humiliation list respectively: that the Torah scholar now “licks bowls and sleeps anywhere.”

We are also aware today that when a respectable person/leader in our communities drinks excessively or abuses drugs, they lose their sense of direction and respect. Today, we see that the description offered in the Talmud for a scholar includes people with responsibilities for others and those that others look up to and learn from—for example, parents, siblings, teachers, rabbis, and leaders in every capacity.

- What have you lost because of your drinking/excessive partying?
- Who are the people who look up to you? And how do you feel about your relationship with them right now?

The Talmud demonstrates an awareness of the range of emotions that people with addictions and those around them feel.

- Have you felt shame, embarrassment, or regret for drinking alcohol or taking drugs?
- How do you deal with these emotions?
- What are the positive emotions you would like to feel as a person, a member of a family, and a member of the community?

Pesachim 113a: 2-6: Drugs and Other Risky Behaviors that Would Eventually Be Harmful

In **Pesachim 113a**, we read:

Rav said to Rav Assi, Do not live in a city where horses do not neigh and dogs don't bark. And do not live in a city where the head of the city is a physician. And don't marry two wives; if you marry two, marry a third.

Rav said to Rav Kahana: turn over a carcass but don't turn over words. Skin a carcass in the market and earn a living, but don't say I'm a priest or I'm a great man; these words are evil to me. If you climb to the roof, take with you food. One hundred pumpkins call/cost? a zuz, put them in the corner.

Rav said to Rav Hiyya, his son, you should not do drugs (לֹא תִשָּׁתִי סִמָּא) Do not leap over a ditch, do not pull out a tooth, do not provoke a snake, do not provoke a gentile.

Our sages taught three (things) do not provoke them. And these are them: a young gentile, a small snake, and a small scholar. What is the reason? Because their kingship/authority stands behind their ears.

ואמר ליה) רב לרב אסי: לא תדור במתא דלא צניף בה סוסיא ולא נבח בה כלבא. ואל תדור בעיר דריש מתא)

אסיא, ולא תנסיב תרתמי. אי נסבת תרתמי — נסיב תלת

אמר ליה רב לרב כהנא: הפוך בנבילתא ולא תיפוך במילי. פשוט נבילתא בשוקא ושקיל אגרא, ולא תימא "כהנא
 אגרא, וגבגרא רבא אגרא, וסניא בי מלתא". סלקת לאיגרא — שירותך בהדך. מאה קרי במתא בזוזא — תוית
 בנפיק ניהור
 אמר ליה רב לחייא בריה: לא תשתי סמא, ולא תשוור ניגרא, ולא תעקר פכא, ולא תקנא בחיויא, ולא תקנא
 בארמאה
 תנו רבנן: שלשה אין מתקנאין ביה, ואילו הן: גוי קטן, ונחש קטן, ותלמיד קטן. מאי טעמא — דמלכותיהו אחר
 אויבניהו קאי

In his guidelines for living in a secure city and home, Rav advises that one should live in a town with barking dogs and neighing horses for one's safety and security.

For Rav Kahana, Rav warns about the dangers to one's character from lying and convincing oneself that they are better than they are. He teaches that it is better to take a menial job like turning over and skinning a carcass than to gossip and pretend to be someone else, like a priest. Additionally, he teaches that it is evil for one to glorify oneself. Rav also instructs people to bring food with them even on short trips, like going to the roof, and to treat food respectfully, even if it is as cheap as pumpkin seeds. According to Rav, one should strive to live a less risky and less dangerous life by investing resources and thoughts in one's own city for safety and one's home.

- How can we invest in our communities to ensure everyone feels safe and supported in their recovery?
- How might the pressure to pretend to be better/different than you actually are put you at risk of substance abuse?

Rav cautions his son Hiyya not to take shortcuts and to avoid unnecessary risks. He warns him against taking drugs—סמא—as over time, drugs take a toll on one's body, spirit, and mind. He instructs him not to leap over a ditch as one could get injured. One instead takes a

safer route even when it is longer. He also cautions one not to find alternative healing methods rather than pulling a tooth. He warns as well that one should not provoke a snake and a gentile as they could be dangerous.

Rav also teaches, in the name of our sages, that one should not provoke a young gentile, a small snake, and a small scholar. All these things might initially appear small and harmless, but they grow, come into power, become dangerous, and can take over one's life or cause harm. Here, the Talmud offers a direct injunction against taking drugs; just like a young snake, a small gentile, and a small scholar, drugs grow and take revenge on one's body. Substance abuse might seem small and harmless at the beginning, but over time, one might become dependent on them, putting oneself and others in physical and psychological danger. Today, we understand that drugs can be attractive for the social status or the ecstasy they provide. They might seem harmless on initial consumption, but because of their brain-altering chemicals, over time, they lead to addiction and other adverse effects. The Talmud advises that one is better off not doing drugs at all.

- Why is doing drugs, even for the first time or in small portions, described as a risky behavior?
- What other risky behaviors seemed harmless initially but have eventually become harmful in your life?
- What risk-free activities/behaviors can you embrace as individuals and as a community?

Jewish Prayers and Practices for Individual and Group Use

The Hebrew Serenity Prayer

אֱלֹהֵי תִּנְּלִי אֶת־הַשְׁלָוָה
 לִקְבֹּל אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁאֵין בִּיכֹלֶתִי לִשְׁנוֹתָם
 אוֹמֵץ לִשְׁנוֹת אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר בִּיכֹלֶת
 וְאֵת הַתְּבוּנָה לְהַבְחִין בֵּין הַשְּׁנֵיִם³⁴

Transliteration

Eli, ten li et hashalva
 lekabel et hadevarim sh'ein biycholti leshanotam,
 ometz leshanot et hadevarim asher biycholti,
 v'et hat'vunah l'havcheen ben hashnayim

God, grant me the serenity
 to **accept** the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
 and **wisdom** to know the difference³⁵

- What is your understanding of each of these words: **serenity**, **acceptance**, **courage**, and **wisdom**?
- What situations are you not able to change? How do you deal with that reality?
- What situations are able to change? How does knowing that you can change them make you feel/act?
- What helps you know the difference?
- When is it difficult to know the difference

³⁴ Hebrew Texts and its transliteration by Ancient Hebrew Poetry, serenity prayer explained
https://ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com/ancient_hebrew_poetry/2008/06/the-serenity-prayer-in-hebrew-patiently-explained.html

³⁵ English translation by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky & Stuart A. Copans, MD, The Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery, a Personal Guide to Turning From Alcoholism and Other Addictions—Drugs, Food, Gambling, Sex...2nd Edition

On Awakening—In the Morning!

“On awakening, let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. We consider our plans for the day. Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives....Here, we ask God for inspiration.”

(Alcoholics Anonymous p.86)

Modah/Modeh Ani מוֹדָה / מוֹדֶה אֲנִי

מוֹדָה / מוֹדֶה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם. שְׁהֵזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי, בְּחַמְלָה. רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ

Modah/Modeh ani lefanekha melekh hai vekayam shehehezarta bi nishmati b'hemlah, rabah emunatekha

I give thanks before you, ever-living Sovereign, for You have restored within me my soul with compassion; How great is Your trust.³⁶

- What are you most grateful for in the world?
- And what are you grateful for today?
- How can you share that gratitude with others?
- How can you renew your life today?

³⁶ Translation is adopted from Mishkan Tefillah, a Reform Siddur

Elohai N'shama

אֱלֹהֵי נִשְׁמָה שְׁנַתָּה בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא אַתָּה בְּרֵאתָה אַתָּה יִצְרַתָּה אַתָּה נִפְחַתָּה בִּי וְאַתָּה מְשַׁמְרָה בְּקִרְבִּי וְאַתָּה עֲתִיד לְקַלָּה
מִמֶּנִּי (וּלְהַחְזִירָה בִּי לְעֲתִיד לְבָא,) כָּל זְמַן שְׁהַנִּשְׁמָה בְּקִרְבִּי מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי וְאַתָּה אֲבוֹתֵי רַבּוֹן כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים
אֲדוֹן כָּל הַנִּשְׁמוֹת: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה הַמַּחְזִיר נִשְׁמוֹת לְפָנֶיךָ מֵתִים

My God, the soul You have given me is pure
You created it, You shaped it, You breathed it into me,
and You protect it within me.
(You will eventually take it from me, and restore it in me in the time to come)³⁷
For as long as my soul is within me
I give thanks to You,
Adonai my God,
and God of my ancestors,
Source of all creation, Sovereign of all souls
Praised are You, Adonai, Who restores souls and the breath of humankind³⁸

- What does being a pure soul mean to you?
- Does the knowledge of your being a pure soul change how you think about yourself?
- What is something you would like to do differently today than you did yesterday?

³⁷ This line does not appear in Mishkan T'filah but it is part of the traditional liturgy.

³⁸ Translation adapted from Mishkan T'fillah—A Reform Siddur

During the Day! Take a moment to check in with yourself:

“As we go through the day, we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action.”(Alcoholics Anonymous p.87)

Am I in tune with You (God)?

O dear God,

Be with me,

And help me

Strive to come close—

To be fully committed to You.

Let every part of me –
physical, emotional, and spiritual

Join

In focused determination.

To fulfill Your Will.

May my thoughts,

My emotions,

My words,

And all my actions

Be wholly in whole in tune

With You

—Rebbe Nachman of Breslov—

- What are you surrendering to God today?
- What does being wholly in tune with God look like today?
- How are you feeling physically right now? Emotionally? Spiritually?

“The gift of free will”

God of wonders,
You’ve given me
The most wonderful
Of all gifts—
The gift of free will.
May my will never deviate
From Your holy Will.
Guide me always,
So that all the choices I make
Are good ones—
Choices that are In harmony with Your Will,
As long as I live.
—Rebbe Nachman of Breslov—

- What is your understanding of free will?
- What choices did you make today with your gift of free will?
- What choices would you like to make today?

At The End of the Day

“As we retire at night, we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest, or afraid? Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Or were we thinking about our sleeves most of the time? But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse, or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness. After making our review, we ask God’s forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken.” (Alcoholic Anonymous p.86)

Hashkiveinu/lie us down.

הַשְׁכִּיבֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְשָׁלוֹם, וְהַעֲמִידֵנוּ מִלְּכָנוּ (שׁוֹמְרֵנוּ) לְחַיִּים וּפְרוּשׁ עָלֵינוּ סִכַּת שְׁלוֹמָה, וְתַקֵּנֵנוּ בְּעֶצֶה טוֹבָה מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ, וְהַגֵּן בְּעַדֵּנוּ, וְהַסֵּר מֵעָלֵינוּ אוֹיֵב, דָּבָר, וְחֶרֶב, וְרָעָב וְיָגוֹן, וְהַסֵּר שָׁטָן מִלְּפָנֵינוּ וּמֵאַחֲרֵנוּ, וּבְצֵל כְּנָפֶיךָ תִּסְתִּירֵנוּ. כִּי אֵל מִלְּכָנוּ (שׁוֹמְרֵנוּ) וּמַצִּילֵנוּ אַתָּה, כִּי אֵל מֶלֶךְ חַנוּן וְרַחוּם אַתָּה, וְשֹׁמֵר צִדְקָתֵנוּ וּבּוֹאֵנוּ, לְחַיִּים וּלְשָׁלוֹם, מִעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, שׁוֹמֵר עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַד

Hashkiveinu, Adonai Eloheinu l'shalom v'ha'amideinu shomreinu (malkeinu) l'chai'im. Ufros aleinu sukat shlomeicha, v'tak'neinu b'eitzah tovah milfaneicha v'hoshienu l'ma'an shmeicha v'hagen b'adeinu. V'haser me'aleinu oi'ev dever v'cherev v'ra'av v'yagon v'haser satan milfaneinu u'mei'achareinu, uv'tzel k'nafeicha tastireinu ki el shomreinu ul'shalom me'atah v'ad olam.

Grant, O God, that we lie down in peace,
and raise us up, our Guardian, to life renewed.
Spread over us the shelter of Your peace.
Guide us with Your good counsel; for Your Name's sake, be our help.
Shield and shelter us beneath the shadow of Your wings.
Defend us against enemies, illness, war, famine, and sorrow.
Distance us from wrongdoing.
For You, God, watch over us and deliver us. For You, God, are gracious and merciful.
Guard our going and coming, to life and to peace evermore.
Blessed are you, Adonai Guardian of Israel.

- What did you achieve today?
- What could you have done differently?
- What do you need forgiveness for from God? Yourself? And from others?
- How can you be better tomorrow?

Mi Shebeirach— Prayer of Strength and Healing:

Be with me, God. I feel so lost. I can't seem to escape the dark cloud
that is hanging over me today. Help me, God.
Give me strength to combat despair and fear.
Show me how to put my pain into perspective.
Teach me to have faith in the new day that is coming.
Thank you, God, for today's blessings, for tomorrow's hope, and for Your abiding love.
Amen.

Teach me always to believe in my power to return to life, to hope, and to You,
God, no matter what pains I have endured, no matter how far I have strayed from You.
Give me the strength to resurrect my weary spirit.
Revive me, God, so I can embrace life once more in joy, in passion, in peace.
Amen.

When I feel tainted, God, remind me that I am holy. When I feel weak, teach me that I am strong.
When I am shattered, assure me that I can heal.
When I am weary, renew my spirit. When I am lost, show me that you are near.
Amen.

May God heal you, body and soul. May your pain cease, May your strength increase, May your
fears be released, May blessings, love and joy surround you. Amen.

—Rabbi Naomi Levy, Talking to God: Personal Prayers for Times of Joy, Sadness, Struggle, and
Celebration—

- What do you need from God right now? (Possible answers: strength, love, comfort, confidence, guidance)
- What do you need to renew yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually?
- What do you need to remember that you have the strength and have God's love to help you do what you need to do?

Chapter 3: Sample Companion Guide for Facilitators

Introduction:

This Companion Guide includes additional information and commentaries on biblical and rabbinic texts and prayers. It will help the facilitator relate the texts and prayers to specific aspects of recovery contained in the AA Big Book and other modern recovery literature.

The facilitator should use the companion alongside the handbook to emphasize themes in the texts and prayers as they relate to contemporary literature on recovery.

Biblical Texts

Genesis: 9:20-25: Noah's Excessive Drinking

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, an Israeli-American Hasidic rabbi and psychiatrist (1930 to 2021), in his article, "Helping the Addicted Congregant," provides a list of reasons why people turn to addictive substances. He writes, "People may take drugs for many reasons: to relieve stress, to relieve pain, to relax, to sleep, to escape reality, to feel more self-esteem, to feel euphoria, to keep alert. For increased energy, or because of peer pressure."³⁹

As you reflect and brainstorm with the group the reasons why Noah drank excessively, consider the ideas offered by participants alongside the reasons provided by Twerski. This can help participants gain a more comprehensive list of why people drink or use chemicals in our communities today and, more specifically, why they drink or use chemicals.

³⁹ Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., "Helping the Addicted Congregant," Why Should a rabbi Be familiar with Chemical dependency Problem p.193

When discussing how to deal with family and community members who suffer from addiction, the following excerpt from AA Big Book can be used to serve as a reminder to treat people with addiction carefully and with kindness.

In the AA Big Book, we learn the effects of exposing a family member's intimate experiences to others. We read, "Another principle we observe carefully is that we do not relate intimate experiences of another person unless we are sure he would approve.... Members of the family should watch such matters carefully, for one careless, inconsiderate remark (incident) has been known to raise the very devil."⁴⁰

For Noah, when he woke up and learned that his son Ham had exposed his intimate experience to the larger family, he cursed him harshly. We must be careful and kind and find meaningful and helpful ways to deal with members of our families and community who struggle with addiction. While shaming the addicted family member may be an option, it is not a constructive response.

Genesis 19:30-36: Lot's incest with his two daughters

In discussing substance-facilitated assault as it might apply to Lot and his daughters, make note of the laws and implications of such incidents today as defined by the US Department of Justice–Drug Enforcement Administration. It explains that "Drug Facilitated Assault" occurs when alcohol or drugs are used to compromise an individual's ability to consent to sexual activity. These substances make it easier for a perpetrator to commit sexual assault because they inhibit a person's ability to resist and prevent them from remembering the assault."⁴¹

⁴⁰ AA Big Book, The Family Afterward, Chapter 9, pg 125

⁴¹ *Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault*, www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/DFSA_0.PDF. Accessed 20 Feb. 2024.

Also, consider the Ugandan statute entitled “Administering substance with intent to commit a sexual act.” This states that a “person who administers or causes to be administered a substance to another person, with the intention of inducing, stupefying or overpowering that other person so as to perform a sexual act with that person commits an offense and is liable on conviction, to imprisonment for seven years”⁴²

Substance-facilitated sexual assault can happen to anyone and can be caused by a stranger or somebody we know and trust. In the case of Lot, his two daughters made him drink alcohol, causing his “diminished capacity,” a legal term in sexual assault cases referring to an individual who does not have the capacity to give consent. Today, the case of Lot and his daughters would be investigated as a crime. People might take advantage of an intoxicated person in many other ways as well: steal from them, make them sign documents that they would not otherwise sign while sober, make them agree to grant favors, and blackmail them afterward, among others.

Additionally, while discussing the pressure to drink alcohol by others, please note that in the Ugandan Jewish culture, a person who drinks is seen as a social and sharing person. It is admirable to drink with others. Otherwise, you are labeled as anti-social, stingy, and unhappy. Drinking from the same Malwa (local brew pot) pot and sharing a straw with others is seen as a unifying act. On the global Jewish scene, Twerski writes, “We hardly fault anyone for taking a drink. Our culture (Jewish) is an alcohol “pusher.” Anyone making a wedding or bar mitzvah without serving alcohol will be thought of as a tightwad.”⁴³ Just as Lot’s daughters justified forcing their father to drink, these above norms can be experienced as pushing and pressuring people to drink.

⁴² Parliament watch, Sexual offenses Bill No.32

<https://parliamentwatch.ug/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Sexual-Offences-Bill-2019-1.pdf>

⁴³ Levitz, Yisrael N., and Abraham J. Twerski. *A Practical Guide to Rabbinic*, “Helping an addicted congregant”, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2012. pg 195

It's mysterious that Lots' daughter had wine with them in the cave, considering the circumstances of their leaving their city of Gomorrah. We ponder the same question today when we see people who can't afford to buy food and other basic needs but can afford alcohol. It's common knowledge in Ugandan society that those who do not have money to buy alcohol or drugs for the day will be well taken care of by their close circle of friends. There is also cheaper alcohol and drugs widely available in the country. Different regions make their local brews. Waragi is the most famous, is more affordable and has a high volume of alcohol. A study to explore societal perceptions of alcohol use in the Kamuli district found that in Kamuli district, the home of sugarcane growing, local Waragi (a local gin) is made from sugar cane. It is a significant economic activity in many households in the District.⁴⁴ However, even as cheap as this local alcohol and gins may be, most people still cannot afford them, just as they are unable to feed themselves and their families.

Leviticus 10:8-11: God instructs the Levites throughout the ages against intoxication before entering the tent of meeting (their workplace).

Today, we see that drugs and alcohol can interfere with one's work in so many ways, from being ineffective at work to making reckless decisions to being a danger to oneself and others, and eventually to being fired.

As members of the group work through the impact of addiction at the workplace, keep in mind the negative risks of addiction on the addicted individuals themselves and the workplace, as listed by the

⁴⁴ Ssebunnya, J., Kituyi, C., Nabanoba, J. *et al.* Social acceptance of alcohol use in Uganda. *BMC Psychiatry* 20, 52 (2020)

American Addiction Center.⁴⁵ The Center lists the following negative consequences as related to substance abuse at work.

- “A loss of productivity and job performance.
- Workplace accidents and injuries.
- Employee absenteeism.
- High turnover.
- Low employee morale.
- Theft.
- Conflict among employees or with supervisors.”

Intoxication takes away one’s ability to make intellectual and spiritual decisions. While discussing the effects caused by intoxication on decision-making, Rabbi Dr. Twersky notes that substance use takes away one’s ability to make intellectual and spiritual decisions, as well as everyday decision-making.

Twerski writes, "Alcohol(drugs), however, affects the brain—and if the person’s makeup (genetics, physiological, psychological, and social) is such that the effects of alcohol (drugs) are abnormal, these effects on the brain render him unable to make a cause and effect connection.”⁴⁶

Finally, according to the American Addiction Center, drug and alcohol abuse at work negatively impacts both the life of the addicted person and the workplace.

⁴⁵“The Effects of Substance Abuse in the Workplace.” *American Addiction Centers*, 7 Feb. 2024, americanaddictioncenters.org/workforce-addiction.

⁴⁶ Abraham J. Twerski, M.D, Practical Guide to Rabbinical Counseling, “Helping the Addicted congregant,” pg 194-95

Deuteronomy 21:18-21: The Fate of a Gluttonous and Drunkard Son

While discussing the effects of addiction on an individual, note that addiction hinders one from taking the necessary steps to recovery. For most people who have adverse effects of addiction, treatment should be the first step to recovery. Or HaChaim recognized what contemporary literature indicates: addiction can dominate a person's body and mind, making it difficult for them to take the necessary steps toward recovery. In a publication of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Washington, DC, USA, addiction is defined as “a chronic, relapsing disorder that has been characterized by (i) a compulsion to seek and take drugs, (ii) loss of control over drug intake, and (iii) emergence of a negative emotional state (e.g., dysphoria, anxiety, and irritability) that defines a motivational withdrawal syndrome when access to the drug is prevented.”⁴⁷ The group can use these two pieces of commentary to indicate that addiction is not always a straight ward path. Group members can also share their stages of recovery, including treatment, support groups, relapse, and way forward.

Rabbinic Texts

Megillah 7B:7-8⁴⁸: Excessive Drinking on Purim as a Religious Ritual Celebration

Just like Rabbi Zeira, many people with addiction find themselves in their lowest moments, making them realize they need to change their lives. In your reflection on moments when group members realized they needed to turn their lives around, consider the testimony of several members in the AA Big Book entitled “They Stopped in Time.” They comment, “We didn’t wait to hit bottom because, thank God, we could see the bottom. Actually, the bottom came up and hit us....” (Alcoholics Anonymous pg 279).

⁴⁷ George F. Koob 1 National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Washington, DC, USA, Accepted 26 November 2014, Available online 9 January 2015.

⁴⁸ This and other Talmudic texts in this paper are from The William Davidson Digital Talmud on Sefaria. All Talmudic translations will be based on Sefaria.

Consider this statement from AA as a conversation starter for group members to share times they hit rock bottom and how they have/can use these experiences to turn their lives around.

Pesachim 49a:19-20: Cautions Against Seeking Opportunities for Excessive Partying For a Torah Scholar

As you work through this text about excessive drinking and the active seeking of opportunities to party with the group, utilize the AA's description of the stages of substance abuse. In the Big Book, we read that "Men and women drink essentially because they like the effects provided by alcohol. The sensation is so elusive that, while they admit it is injurious, they cannot, after a time, differentiate the true from the false. To them, their alcoholic life seems the only normal one. They are restless, irritable, and discontented unless they can again experience the ease and comfort which comes at once by taking a few drinks—drinks that they see others taking with impunity. After they have succumbed to the desire again, as so many do, and the phenomenon of craving develops, they pass through a well-meaning stage of a spree, emerging remorseful, with a firm resolution not to drink again. This is repeated over and over, and unless this person can experience an entire psychic change, there is very little hope of his recovery."⁴⁹

Pesachim 113a: 2-6: Drugs and Other Risky Behaviors that Would Eventually Be Harmful

As you study Pesachim 113a, consider the caution the Talmud offers against taking drugs even in small quantities or for the first time. The text teaches that just like a young snake, a small gentile, and a small scholar, drugs grow and take revenge on one's body.

While discussing the dangers of experimenting with drugs, please note Twersky's warning not to minimize even the occasional use of drugs as they could lead to addiction and harm.

⁴⁹ AA, Doctors Opinion xxviii

Twersky notes that “ Many people naively experiment with heroin or cocaine. Some people will say “it's not my thing” and not use it again. Others will like the effect and may think that occasional use is harmless. Even brief uses of these drugs cause dependence in vulnerable people.”⁵⁰ Group members should study this text alongside reflection questions provided in the workbook as well as share their own stories of how they started drinking/using drugs.

⁵⁰Levitz, Yisrael N., and Abraham J. Twerski. *A Practical Guide to Rabbinic*, “Helping an addicted congregant”, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2012.p.195

Jewish Prayers and Practices for Individual and Group Use

The Hebrew Serenity Prayer

The serenity prayer can help group members distinguish between situations they can and cannot control. Identifying these different situations can help people in the recovery groups respond to them appropriately.

The group should use the Serenity prayers to name things outside one's control, like the weather, other people's actions and thoughts, and their past. The group should name the things they can change, such as their own actions, the people and places they choose to spend time with, and their future.

The group can reflect on their understanding of God or a Higher Power and how they define the keywords in the prayer, like serenity (being calm, peaceful, untroubled), acceptance (letting go, taking charge, accepting help), courage, (physical strength, being brave, having the will), and wisdom (experience, knowledge, learning, perception)

The prayer can be recited in Hebrew or English at the end of every meeting.

On Awakening
Gratitude/inspiration

“On awakening, let us think about the twenty-four hours ahead. We consider our plans for the day. Before we begin, we ask God to direct our thinking, especially asking that it be divorced from self-pity, dishonest or self-seeking motives....Here, we ask God for inspiration.”
(Alcoholics Anonymous p.86)

When we wake up, we offer gratitude to God (Higher Power) for keeping us safe throughout the night. We offer prayers, Modeh ani—Grateful am I, for my restored soul, and Elohai Neshman—God my Soul, for the gift of our breath and our pure souls every morning. These morning prayers help us begin the day with gratitude, affirmation of renewal, and a will to do better.

This prayer of gratitude thanks God for renewing one's soul every morning. The prayer does not specifically mention God's name, giving opportunity to each person to fill in their understanding of God, such as Higher Power, Sovereign, Compassionate One, Source of Strength, Source of Wisdom, and Source of Life.

The Prayer reminds us that every morning, God renews/returns our souls. This prayer of gratitude can serve as a reminder for us to have faith and take daily actions to return/renew our lives as God's partners in creation.

Group members can recite the prayer individually or in a group. They can also name things and people for whom they are grateful for.

Elohai Neshama—אֱלֹהֵי נִשְׁמָה

“Consider reciting these words (Elohai Neshama) each morning—or whenever you feel the need for God’s purifying waters to wash you clean....”⁵¹

Elohai Neshama prayer is traditionally recited in the morning. It reminds us daily of the precious gift of breath and the pure soul God renews in us each morning. It helps us view ourselves as pure each day.

It reminds us that the wrongs we have done are because of our falling short and not because we are inherently evil. It grants us the power to start anew daily with a fresh perspective and a clean spiritual slate.

⁵¹ Olitzky, Kerry M., and Stuart Copans. *Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery: A Personal Guide to Turning from Alcoholism and Other Addictions Drugs, Food, Gambling, Sex...* Jewish Lights Pub., 2009. p.47

**Throughout the day,
Take a Moment to check in on yourself.**

“As we go through the day, we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action.”(Alcoholics Anonymous p.87)

These two prayers by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov⁵² can be recited individually by group members when they pause for a check-in on how their day is going. They can also help ground individuals when they feel out of balance emotionally. Group members can reflect on their decisions for the day, their emotions, and how to go forward. These prayers help to set intentions and remind one of God's presence.

We read in the AA Big Book that, “As we go through the day, we pause, when agitated or doubtful, and ask for the right thought or action, we constantly remind ourselves we are no longer running the show, humbly saying to ourselves. Thy will be done” (Alcoholics Anonymous p.87-88). Rebbe Nachman of Breslov’s prayers can be said individually or in a group when one feels indecisive, in danger of too much excitement, anger, worry, self-pity, and loss of faith to help them find other thinking will, inspiration, and bring us back/close to God.

⁵² Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, also known just as Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810), was the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov (founder of Hasidism). Nachman of Breslov was the founder of the Breslov Hasidic movement.

At The End of the Day

“As we retire at night, we constructively review our day. Were we resentful, selfish, dishonest, or afraid? Do we owe an apology? Have we kept something to ourselves which should be discussed with another person at once? Were we kind and loving toward all? What could we have done better? Or were we thinking about our sleeves most of the time? But we must be careful not to drift into worry, remorse, or morbid reflection, for that would diminish our usefulness. After making our review, we ask God’s forgiveness and inquire what corrective measures should be taken. ” (Alcoholics Anonymous p.86)

The Hashkiveinu prayer gives voice to our deepest fears of the dark/night. We ask God to shield and shelter us beneath the shadow of God’s wings. In that, we ask for peace and protection through the night and to be granted a life renewed in the morning. The Hashkiveinu prayer reminds us of God’s protection during our darkest and uncertain times. People in recovery can also reflect on their day's actions, their deepest fears, and what helps them feel safe. The prayer can be recited individually before bed, or if the group meets in the evening (Erev)

Before we recite the Hashkiveinu prayer, we can review our day by asking ourselves the questions listed on the page with the prayer.

Mi Shebeirach– Prayer of Strength and Healing

This prayer of healing by Rabbi Naomi Levy can be recited when we seek joy, strength, healing of body, mind, and spirit, and affirmation. It can be said in times of despair, sadness, and struggle and when we are losing faith in God and ourselves.

In the first section, we ask God for strength of body, mind, and spirit, especially in times of despair. It's for us to learn to have continued faith in God and ourselves in times of darkness.

The second part of the prayer asks God to be with us as we renew our spirit and our hope for the future.

The third section invites us to remember who we are. To remember that we are strong, are holy, and God is with us always. This is important because when people are in despair, they forget that they are strong, loved, and holy.

This Prayer can be recited by group members in sections or in its entirety. It can be said individually or during the Mi Shebeirach part of the services when the group has a minyan together. It could also be recited at the end of the meetings in place of the serenity prayer.

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