



## **12-Step Torah Discussion**

A 12-Step Torah discussion combines the guidance of the spiritual program for living found in the 12-Step- Fellowships with the insight and *Yiddishe neshama* (Jewish soul) found in the Torah. 12-Step Torah discussions live in connections between the 12-Steps and Jewish holidays (Ozarowski, n.d.), the character development and spiritual growth practices of *mussar* (Twerski, 2010), or specific insights into the weekly Torah portion/*parsha* (Harris, 2017). On or near Serenity Shabbat, consider holding a 12-Step Torah discussion by integrating one of the 12Steps into a *mussar* group, a *parsha* class, an informal meeting at a coffee shop or home, or a special class on Jewish connections with the 12-Steps. Two books that connect the weekly Torah portion/*parshat hashavua* with the 12-Steps are *Finding Recovery and Yourself in Torah* (Borovitz, 2016) and *Renewal Each Day: Daily Twelve Step Recovery Meditations Based on the Bible* (Olitzky & Z., 1992). Both books can serve as inspiration for connecting 12-Steps and Torah, include questions on the *parsha* and can be the foundation of a Shabbat dinner, lunch, or afternoon discussion at home or in shul.

If you would like JCFS Chicago to facilitate a 12-Step Torah discussion please contact [Beth Fishman](#), Program Manager for addiction services at JCFS Chicago

## **Drash Materials**

Some Serenity Shabbat participants may want to develop and share a teaching, or drash, at the synagogue or at home. To support you in this endeavor, below are points from which to build a *drash* related to addiction and recovery. One *drash* is related to addiction and recovery in the Jewish community, one relates recovery lessons from the Nazir, and one relates the weekly Torah portion/*parsha* and 12-Steps of recovery.

If you are interested in having support as you write your *drash* please contact [addiction services](#) at JCFS Chicago.



## **Addiction and Recovery in the Jewish Community**

A drash focused on addiction and recovery in the Jewish community might include the following points:

- Jewish people experience addiction and recovery at the same rate as other populations.
- Addiction can be to alcohol and other drugs as well as to activities such as gambling, gaming, sports betting, spending, shopping, social media use, sexual behavior, exercise, etc.
- Addiction is an “equal opportunity destroyer” meaning Jews of any age and any background are at risk for addiction, can become addicted, and can find recovery.
- Addiction is treatable so there is always hope.
- There is a treatment gap in the treatment of addiction with only 1 in 10 people with an addiction receiving treatment.
- Relapse rates among people with addiction are similar to relapse rates of other chronic illnesses, though there is significant stigma associated with relapse and addiction that is not associated with relapse with other chronic illnesses like asthma and hypertension.
- Mutual support groups meet in Jewish spaces.
- If you are in recovery and are comfortable speaking publicly about it, you might include elements of your own recovery journey as they relate to the Jewish community or your own Jewish identity.



## **Recovery Lessons from the Nazir**

A drash focused on Recovery Lessons from the Nazir might include the following points:

- Abstinence can be a spiritual practice; the Nazir abstains in order to be set apart for God. (BaMidbar 6:3).
- Changing the way we act is hard and abstinence as a spiritual practice requires asking for help and/or partnership from a Higher Power to change how we act. The Nazir makes a formal vow to God: if the Nazir simply wanted to use willpower to change their actions, no vow would be necessary. We don't make vows to make willpower-enabled changes. The Nazir needs and wants support from God and the community and makes a public vow to include both God and the community in supporting the Nazir to act in the ways of a Nazir. Abstinence as a spiritual practice means even when other people might not abstain, the Nazir abstains. This is true even during celebrations and times of sadness and loss. For the Nazir it is total abstinence, not even a little bit of alcohol is used. (BaMidbar 6:3-8). The Nazir is familiar with the idea of relapse and that a relapse doesn't mean all is lost and there is no coming back. (BaMidbar 6:9-12). When the Nazir's vow is broken, he takes responsibility and reconsecrates his vow (BaMidbar 6:11-12).
- Without the Beit HaMikdash, it is impossible for someone to end their period of a Nazarite vow today. For some people in recovery that is the journey they are celebrating with us this Shabbat...a journey to follow their treatment plan and their spiritual program, to continue on the journey of recovery one day at a time.



## **12-Step Torah**

A drash focused on 12-Step Torah intentionally connects one or more steps of the 12-Steps with the parsha. If you are in 12-Step recovery and are comfortable speaking openly about it, you might include your own experience in your drash. Often the first three steps are summed up as “we can’t, God can, let God.” BaMidbar 5:1-4 provides a rich opportunity to see the first three steps in action.

- Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over addiction—that our lives had become unmanageable. . Though sometimes the idea of being powerless over addiction is the first thing that gets noticed in this step, Step 1 also talks about life being unmanageable. Addictive behaviors often begin as a way to cope or self-medicate when life is unmanageable. In these verses, life is so unmanageable that people are sent outside the camp to keep the unmanageability from spreading (BaMidbar 5:1-3).
- Step 2: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.. In verse 4, God’s presence is made known (God spoke) and we are reminded that we are not in this alone. With the help of a Power greater than ourselves, things could become manageable again (BaMidbar 5:4).
- Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God . In the second half of verse 4, we are reminded that God doesn’t swoop in and do it for us. God offers support and partnership, and we still need to do our part. Here we see the Israelites listening to the spiritual program God offers and then following that spiritual program (BaMidbar 5:4).
- These three steps support people in recovery and their allies. The 12-Step principles found in this Torah portion remind us that when life becomes unmanageable, God can make manageability possible again, when we make a decision to listen to and follow a spiritual program to recover our lives.