

why mussar doesn't work

Posted by ted - 24 Mar 2015 02:41

an alcoholic who has an alchohol addiction doesnt learn mussar to help him because alcoholism is not a Sin its a disease.

So too if I am a lust addict my addiction is a disease. and seforim wont get rid of your cancer and they wont get rid of my addiction.

We try learning mussar because our particular disease is also an aveirah but all AA groups use the same 12 steps for their addiction gamblers drinkers over eaters etc.. that is the proof that lust addiction is a disease like any addiction and needs to be cured with "medicine" that works for addictions. And just as I wouldnt learn mussar to help my alchohol addiction same witha lust addiction.

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Re: why mussar doesn't work

Posted by Dov - 24 Mar 2015 04:19

Very simply and clearly explained. Thank you, ted!

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Re: why mussar doesn't work

Posted by Menachem clean by peach - 24 Mar 2015 04:59

I think the issue is here, are our lives really unmanageable? Or is it out frumkeit that we are having trouble with?

I've never been to meetings, but are the non Jews in SA lives unmanageable just because of porn/masturbation? I assume it's usually more than just that. But for us frum guys even p & m seems to make our lives unmanageable. So maybe it's just a religious issue.

Anyway, I agree with you, mussar isn't working.

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Re: why mussar doesn't work
Posted by doingtshuva - 24 Mar 2015 08:53

Menachem

Your asking very good,

is someone who M's considered an addict? or just a baal aveira?

I hope someone like Dov will be able to answer you.

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Re: why mussar doesn't work
Posted by improvementway - 24 Mar 2015 10:26

For myself, I think mussar didn't work because I didn't care. Well, I always pretend that I do, but I guess that an ED or a shlom bais issue is much more painful for me than making hashem upset. Sorry for being so selfish, but that why it didn't work for me, and that's why I hope that understanding the scale of my problem and the importance of the recovery (for me) will help.

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Re: why mussar doesn't work
Posted by Dov - 24 Mar 2015 19:07

Desach is already around the corner
[Menachem clean by peach wrote:](#)

I've never been to meetings, but **are the non Jews in SA lives unmanageable just because of porn/masturbation? I assume it's usually more than just that.** But for us frum guys even p & m seems to make our lives unmanageable. So maybe it's just a religious issue.

No. Actually, the majority of SA members overall, *are* goyim. And it appears to me that the majority of goyim in SA **are** only in it because of porn use and sex with self (masturbation). And with great clarity and pain, they describe the destruction it wreaks in their lives and (goyishe) marriages, as well.

This is not a religious issue for them and it is not a religious issue for us, either...if we are addicts.

Funny, though, for in my 18 years so far of going to meetings, there seem to be a bit more chassidishe/litvishe frum guys I know in SA who's problem is *prostitutes*, than by the goyim I meet there. Surprise!

And I like to frame the difference between an addict and a non-addict like this:

1- You would surely not eat a drop of food on Shabbos or erev yom Kippur (when we are obligated to eat by the Torah), if the only food you could get was treif. Correct? Well, if a *novi* came and instructed all Jewish men to masturbate themselves today, *I would not masturbate*. **No** recovering addicts would, *and every rov in the world (who knows what addiction is) would agree with us* that were are patur from that mitzvah. And if somehow masturbation or porn were a mitzvah d'oraiso - we would be patur from it, for it would still be assur *for us*. We addicts are different. We would have to be healed from our illness first, to be able to be m'kayem that mitzvah - and I am not being facetious. There is a certain Rov in Passaic NJ who understands addiction well. We talk sometimes regarding new guys. He ends every phone call w me with the words: 'Refuah Sheleimah!' instead of "bye!". And not with a smirk, either, for he knows he is not kidding at all - and neither am I when I respond "Amen, thanks."

This is not about the yetzer hora. And that's OK, cuz that's just the way it is. The only question is: Now what do I need to do to be right and healthy - and if I do those things no matter what it costs in time, embarrassment and trouble, *everything* else will fall into place just fine. Shocking, it is. But it really works.

Another distinction is:

2- **Normal** people need to control lust, just as they need to control alcohol. But alcoholics (at least those who choose to use the 12 steps) know they do not need to control alcohol. They need to be abstinent from it. It does them no good. The goal of SA is not to finally control lust properly, but to successfully abstain from it. That's why after the 1st step, the next 11 do not even mention resisting alcohol/lust at all, and they are not *there* to teach us how to resist it. They are there to teach us how to live life without our sweet alcohol/lust, because we obviously haven't got a clue.

Surely as 'frum Jews' we have plenty of reasons to live life without lust, no? Then why aren't we? Try to! If you can, then great. It means you are not an addict. But if you really try, get psychological help, medicine, self-help books galore, open up to many clueless rabbonim and shrinks - and are still masturbating and running after the stuff...then you can surely relate well to the drunks at any AA meeting. Try going to one, it won't kill you. You are then probably an addict and hopeless as I am. When that person is finally done, they will be ready to try the great secret of AA: surrender and work the steps as a sick person. It's OK to be who you are, of course. The Maggid said it's actually the only place to serve Hashem from! Working the 12

That make any sense? Useful?

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Re: why mussar doesn't work

Posted by Menachem clean by peach - 24 Mar 2015 20:39

Lots of sense Dov, as usual.

That was a 1 AM post and I was trying to be a good Jewish lamdan and find a hole in Ted's "proof".

As far as your "addict barometer" goes, it's still hard for me to know if my life was unmanageable or my religion was unmanageable. Because after acting out I thought the main steps in a fellowship of other recovering people face to face on a daily basis. You won't die. Problem was a yiras shamayim issue etc and mostly ignored my non living issue. I figured, take care of the aveira cuz that's what it's all about.

I "know" now that that's not the case, I gotta deal with "living" first but still not positive that after acting out my "life" was unmanageable.

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Re: why mussar doesn't work

Posted by doingtshuva - 24 Mar 2015 22:03

Dov I must thank you for your amazing response,
And I'm not planning on acting out again, to find out.

It's Givaldig, and also an eye opening on the inside of SA

I'll be honest, till today I thought that SA was for those who went out with others.

But today I learnt from you that there are Goiern and Yiden that come to SA just cause they have a problem with M' and P'.

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Re: why mussar doesn't work

Posted by lomed - 24 Mar 2015 23:08

Thanks ted for the topic and thanks Dov for the comment in length. this topic was similar than what we discussed in person over the phone. I told you then that you gave me food for thought and I am thinking over how I approached the topic. however it is already more than 3 weeks and I cannot relate to what your opinion is.

1. There is a quote 'once an addict always an addict'. it can be that this quote is the cause behind this fact. How will we define an addict? why cant an alcohol addict after being clean for a long period-say 2 years- why cant he have a small drink? he can have it with the backing of a sponsor. so your brother is getting married tonight, you get 2 shots.

2. this is what I challenged people that are on OA. you didn't eat a peace of cake for 2 years why cant your sponsor allow you to eat 1 peace a week. you are reporting to him dayly, do he will know if you slipped, and will coach you further.

3. a former addict that fell once, does that mean that he is not doing fine. even healthy people fall through their challenges.

4. if you say that s** addicts cannot be clean, then how can they (if they can) have s** with their spouses?

5. I think that there are people that pleasuring them self is killing them and making their life unmanageable. They are spending hours on watching p***, they are not performing life as usual. However there are people that they are conducting normal lives. they are being on time at their jobs they are doing their duties at home. but they are from time to time watching p** and/or masturbating. now you can look at his problem from a few angles. you can decide he is an addict. you can decide he is a baal aveira. you can decide he is not honest with his wife. what happens if his wife agrees for him to watch it, and/or even watches it together with him? I wouldn't advise them so, but I don't think we can say he is not honest. so the reason she wouldn't be happy knowing what he does is a personal issue or a torah issue?

my point is the fact that he should or should not do these kind of things are sourced from a religion point and not from a human point of view. there are many believes in the medical world that masturbating is healthy practice if it is done once a day.

so, it could be that we are struggling a religious struggle. maybe when it affects the way we are performing in normal life, it can be a sickness.

as I said, that for me personal my life is manageable, I wouldn't take this challenge on me. maybe maybe for hashem I am willing to take this challenge on me. although I cannot say that I am a lishma guy, but I don't see any reason to take this battle, other that torah forbidding these acts. and if I fall through, then it may be that my Yiras shomayim is low and needs a recharge.

I am not strong at my opinion and view, especially after I spoke with dov, but I wrote it here for discussion purpose so others can agree or disagree with me.

I may not come through so clear, but I hope you will understand my point.

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Re: why mussar doesn't work

Posted by inastruggle - 25 Mar 2015 01:54

I probably shouldn't be the one answering this but I'm going to anyway (just in the mood of posting, sorry).

An addict isn't a person with no self control, or someone with a bad habit. He's someone who changed the way his brain works, and relates to certain things.

1. He conditioned himself to go way overboard when dealing with certain pleasures. So if he gives in even a little (a drink or piece of cake), his brain is going to go crazy, and he'll get intense cravings to get more of it. It's a pretty bad idea to take two shots for your brother's wedding if you'll get hit with cravings that you'll either a) resist: and suffer through until they stop b) give into: and end up back at square one, with continued cravings that make you take actions which ruin your life.

2. For this reason slipping is really dangerous, and allowing a piece of cake isn't getting a little harmless pleasure, it's awakening a sleeping dragon.

3. There is no such thing as a former addict, once he built those neural pathways, they're there for good. Of course the longer he's recovering the stronger the new (healthy) pathways he builds afterwards are, but the old ones are there waiting. So while it is normal for everyone to fall in their challenges every once in a while, for an addict it's a lot harder to get back up, therefore it's more important for him to remain standing.

4. Sex and lust are two different things, I'm sure someone on the BB section will explain it.

5. There are many normal people who watch porn. Some use it normally, and some abuse it. An

addict is someone else. He's addicted to it, just like a drug addict. He isn't just watching it, he's obeying his addiction. It's a different problem than a bad habit.

Lust addiction is first and foremost a psychological problem. A true addict is probably a lot less culpable for his actions than a healthy person. He has a serious problem, whether or not his wife and religion are fine with it. He's an addict and addictions tend to bring people down really low.

6. Then there's the lust issue for normal people. It is likely the strongest tayvah that most people have. So whether even if he isn't a addicted, he still will likely have quite a battle to control it.

7. Most people don't even realize how much lusting affects them until they stop for a while. You feel a lot better about yourself, and it helps marriages, and it's good for you religious-wise. Addicts or not, we're here to stop, and it will be good for us.

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Re: why mussar doesn't work
Posted by Dov - 25 Mar 2015 05:37

Your comments in black, my comments in blue...together we are black-and-blue.

G-d help me. I'm tired, spoken to five guys today at least already (cuz I was sick at home anyhow), and my wife is in the bed next to mine doing some work while I am typing this. Kind of funny. So forgive me if she wants the light off and the room quiet. I'll stop the writing then cuz we like to go to bed together even when we are choosing not to be sexual. So here goes!

[lomed wrote:](#)

Thanks ted for the topic and thanks Dov for the comment in length. this topic was similar than what we discussed in person over the phone. I told you then that you gave me food for thought and I am thinking over how I approached the topic. however it is already more than 3 weeks and I cannot relate to what your opinion is.

You are free to call and talk each matter out. Now that you wrote all your concerns out clearly, it should be easier to discuss each one and move on, no?

1. There is a quote 'once an addict always an addict'. it can be that this quote is the cause behind this fact. Interesting. You mean that you suspect it is a self-fulfilling prophecy? But the book was written long after the early AAs discovered that a sober alcoholic usually remained different than a normal person with respect to what happens to him *when he actually drinks alcohol*. All that slogan means is that in most cases we know, a sober alcoholic who tries to drink again as a normal man, fails at drinking like a normal person.

How will we define an addict? why cant an alcohol addict after being clean for a long period-say 2 years- why cant he have a small drink? he can have it with the backing of a sponsor. so your brother is getting married tonight, you get 2 shots. One of the great mysteries of the universe. Does not knowing the answer to a question matter that much to you? This is not a philosophy or an anatomy lesson - it is just the experience of this community of addicts. We do not even **know** that it is true, as my sponsor would remind me. We just know this: generally it is the case. Humility bears that we respect the experience of the many. Humility is the missing ingredient in most of us, not brains. All the brains and understanding in the universe will not help any drunk agree he really cannot stop, if he is still too arrogant to admit he has failed. Figuring it out does not help.

If you are not an addict, though, then it does not matter at all, of course. If you are, the only question that matters is: can you successfully engage in some controlled drinking (acting out your lust) - or does it eventually defy your control once you start with it? Do you end up doing things you do not want to do? Does satisfying yourself as a result of starting and not being able to stop, make you miserable? If so, do you really give it up, or do you keep doing it anyhow?

2. this is what I challenged people that are on OA. you didn't eat a piece of cake for 2 years why cant your sponsor allow you to eat 1 piece a week. you are reporting to him daily, do he will know if you slipped, and will coach you further. "Coach you further?" What's this thing about a sponsor? Is the sponsor G-d? Is the addict answerable to the sponsor at all, or to himself? Where did you get this thing about the sponsor being the coach, too? Or especially about the sponsor determining what's OK for the addict? Not from AA or SA, I'd bet. Maybe in OA where you seem to have some experience, it is how it works - for they have the Greysheet diet plan and are dealing with *eating*. So what's OK for one person may not be OK for another, so maybe there a sponsor is prone to become a 'manager'. G-d save me from that. In AA and (mostways) SA, the sobriety definition is relatively simple and we all know the bottom line, so I guess there is a lot less of that stuff. Nu.

3. a former addict that fell once, does that mean that he is not doing fine. even healthy people fall through their challenges.

What do you think 'fine' is? Try defining that to your wife in detail and see whether she agrees, or not. I'm 100% serious. Then report back and things may be a bit more clear. Other people are not as confused about us as we are, and see things differently - especially when they are affected by our behavior, too. At any rate, an addict who 'falls' (uch, that word sounds so passive and accidental to me, so I do not use it) is just doing what addicts do. By all rights we should not be sober. Our sobriety is surely a miracle, not a 'project' we are on. There is, in reality, no "Wall of Honor". Just today. Just real life with my G-d, my wife, my kids, my fellows, and myself. Nothing more. So there is nobody going around determining who is a good recovering addict and who is not. So I do not really understand your question. Does something bother you about relapsing? Is it a tiyuvta of some sort? My 2nd sponsor relapsed for three years until he finally had enough humility and pain to do *whatever it took* to stay sober - even to surrender to G-d and be wholly honest with his buddies. And he got and remained sober for decades. Most recovering addicts mess up a few times along the way. So what? The lucky ones do not get more discouraged then, than they got when they were in deep doo-doo years before! They are closer now, than they were then, so why give up now?," they say. Makes sense to me.

4. if you say that s** addicts cannot be clean, then how can they (if they can) have s** with their spouses? Why are you typing "s**"? Is saying sex gonna hurt anyone? Here we are watching naked people on the computer doing the most outlandish things to each other and masturbating ourselves - and saying the word 'sex' is all of a sudden nivul peh or something? Funny. It's OK, man. Relax. Talking it out honestly and in good taste will not hurt you or anyone. Now back to your questions, be"H:

When did I say sex addicts cannot be clean? Huh?

(And when did I use the term 'sex addicts'? I usually say and write 'sexaholics'. Ok, whatever,) But this is important: sex is not really our problem.

Lust is.

Porn use is not intimacy with the spouse. We recovering addicts discover that we cannot stay sober if we are partaking in porn- whether it be a sin or not.

Masturbating myself is sex with myself, not with the spouse. And that is SA's bottom line. We have no police over whether a member is lusting or not, of course...b"H! We do not judge each other any more. That was what we did in our addiction. Each member is free to use the program to get free of lust one day at a time if He wants to. But if he or she defines their own sobriety as including having sex with anyone other than the spouse, they are not members in good standing. What that means practically speaking is that they cannot perform any of the 3-month service positions for the meeting, no one will ask them for sponsorship, and they really belong somewhere else. There are other sex addiction-type fellowships where they may be able to find another sobriety definition that works for them.

And by the way, many recovering sexaholics **do** need periods of abstinence from sex with their wives or husbands for a time with the help and experience of their sponsor or therapist. Usually, the women still goes to the mikvah as always and they even may sleep in bed together, once *that* becomes ok for them. It usually does pretty soon. But just no sex. And they do not die and neither does their marriage, and it doesn't harm their sex later on, either. Sober members may do that for many reasons. One goal may be in order to feel what is left in the marriage when sex is removed - and there is absolutely no way to do that unless it is actually experienced. Another may be to have a vacation from lust for a good long while - something a married person having regular sex will have a very hard time doing. For that reason and others, simple basic sobriety is often easier for single people than it is for married ones. But recovery is just as hard, either

And no, abstinence in marriage does *not* lead to wet dreams, more 'lust attacks', or to greater 'risk of falling', at all, in my experience, and it usually ends up being much nicer for both parties than expected! And some choose to repeat the experience more than just once in a marriage. Some go a few months without it, some longer. Most of us learn to have sex in our lives on an optional basis...which is actually not that strange a concept for normals. But for most addicts it is very, very strange. Even in recovery. So we work at it, pray about it, and get help with it. For it is LUST that we need to be free of, not sex alone. If sex is demanded and expected, then it's just lust.

So *good* sobriety only happens while sex is optional - not *avoided*.
way...or just as easy!

5. I think that there are people that pleasuring them self is killing them and making their life unmanageable.

Why are you judging other people and taking their inventories? Why not just talk about yourself directly and clearly, and leave out as much philosophy as you can about how it works for others or what they really need. This is a problem for us and gets in the way of our recovery, or whatever we need. Bu it does vex us...some of us just love being vexed by the world's problems. Meh. Why not just drop it?

They are spending hours on watching p***, they are not performing life as usual. However there are people that they are conducting normal lives. they are being on time at their jobs they are doing their duties at home. but they are from time to time watching p** and/or masturbating.

So what? The Torah never said anywhere that people 'cannot sin'. We know that Hashem

allows us to sin. That is what Teshuvah is made for - sinning! What's the problem?

now you can look at his problem from a few angles.

I choose not to look on it at all. It's not my business to figure out anyone else, thank G-d.

you can decide he is an addict. you can decide he is a baal aveira. you can decide he is not honest with his wife. what happens if his wife agrees for him to watch it, and/or even watches it together with him? I wouldn't advise them so, but I don't think we can say he is not honest. so the reason she wouldn't be happy knowing what he does is a personal issue or a torah issue?

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as I said, that for me personal my life is manageable, I wouldn't take this challenge on me. maybe maybe for hashem I am willing to take this challenge on me. although I cannot say that I am a lishma guy, but I don't see any reason to take this battle, other that torah forbidding these acts. and if I fall through, then it may be that my Yiras shomayim is low and needs a recharge.

Only you can experience how ok - or how *not* ok - it is to be you, and only you can decide if your life is manageable and what manageable means. No one else can tell you that, chaver. And I would not try to judge that for you.

Some families try to do that, though. It's called 'an intervention. Like when a wife and/or family discovers that their man is a fake and living a double life...even if nothing he is doing is directly hurting any of them. If they feel it is not safe or tolerable any more for them to endure a husband or father with a double life and doing crazy things, they go face to face together and expose to him that they know what he is doing and will not take it any more. They insist he go into rehab - even though all he has been doing is porn and sex with himself! I have seen this happen. And it is usually a good thing.

But it will still be up to the person themselves to buy that he needs to surrender and have G-d manage his life (not just his sex or lust) for a change, or not.

I am not strong at my opinion and view, especially after I spoke with dov, but I wrote it here for discussion purpose so others can agree or disagree with me.

I may not come through so clear, but I hope you will understand my point.

Sorry if you did not intend me to respond. I just read the end of your post. Woops.

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Re: why mussar doesn't work

Posted by Menachem clean by peach - 25 Mar 2015 13:22

Wow Dov! 5 guys, on a sick day?

Thanx!

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Re: why mussar doesn't work

Posted by lomed - 25 Mar 2015 15:10

Thanks Dov for your reply. Yes, I thought that you would reply. After all we are all trying to help each other. I wrote here knowing that may and should happen. you come through very strong and tough that you don't leave any room for different thought, and in some way, if I think different something is wrong. but thanks anyway, and I will read it over and over, to try to relate to what you wrote. if I will have disagreements I will post here for public discussions.

(In terms of your comment why I wrote s**? it is not that I didn't write it out. I thought it was not acceptable here on this site as I saw others write that way.)

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Re: why mussar doesn't work
Posted by Dov - 26 Mar 2015 04:36

Some write it out, and some do not. I'd wager that more of the guys who are careful *not* to write it out are still busy masturbating than those who just write it out.

I do not blame you for thinking that's the etiquette here! (Maybe it is!) The way I see it, I wrote my heart and you did, too. I am sorry if I was too direct and if I should have shared the exact same message by using softer or more face-saving words.

Thanks for describing the forceful feel of what I responded. To be fair to me, the statement-response scenario lends itself to be more like debating. On top of that, you did state a few real challenges, as challenges. And I felt like responding back with challenges rather than just answering questions. Nothing prsonal and no attacks on you as far as I could tell. When I asked "Where did you get that idea from?" - I really meant it as a question and not a statement or rhetorically.

Sometimes I wrote more forcefully and with more 'clipping of escape hatches', as you noticed. Some people actually find that offensive...one good man actually wrote to me that he is absolutely sure I am totally incapable of having a discussion with anyone, because of that. It seems he reads things into stuff. Well, I don't, and am sometimes the butt of a joke because of my caution at reading 'snide' into things people write. But Tolkien taught me that 'the treacherous are forever suspicious of others intentions', so I rest easy and wait till we all get help we need: me with the stuff I need and others with whatever they need. And I am glad to report that I converse with guys from everywhere all through my day and we do quite well! So that fellows claim was really just a jab. I am very sorry if anything i wrote you seemed like an attack to you. But I worry little, for you did not accuse, you shared - very different and refreshing! Some people read vicious sarcasm between the lines others write. They also see the smileys others add to their posts as sarcastic smiles...b"H I don't. Gevalt, I'd hate to be that way. And it sounds like you relate, too.

Frankly, I am shocked that ou would still be ok with reading (and rereading) the responses at all, if you originally felt even a bit put off. God for you, man. I might be more insulted if I had felt that way and may have had a hard time remaining open-minde. I have a lot to learn from you, that is for certain. So thanks.

Whatever you read or do, hatzlocha to you on your trip here and with whatever you need help
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Re: why mussar doesn't work
Posted by lomed - 26 Mar 2015 21:53

Someone wrote to me in personal chat, that since I don't consider myself as an addict I should not question addicts that are in recovery. He wrote that what addicts understand as normal, people that are nor addicts will never understand. Although I may be an addict, I have not yet defined for sure if I am or not an addict. Therefore he wrote me that it is not proper and neither with chaver! (And you can still PM or call anytime!)

logic to challenge it if I don't consider myself a definite addict.

I respect his comment. However if others feel that this is not true or they would want to discuss and debate this discussion, then they can post it here or send me a message, or private chat.

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