

(trying to) Keep Smiling

Posted by smiley1900 - 11 Sep 2013 21:40

Hi, my name is *****,

I am struggling with emotional expression and fulfillment (long story, maybe for another time...) and occasionally turn to inappropriate online material (and other unhealthy behaviors, b"h no substance abuse) for temporary relief. While I am very well aware of the torah view and unhealthy nature of this kind of behavior (I can probably give a speech on it myself...) this awareness does not help sooth my emotional needs.

I don't consider myself to be "addicted" because I feel that I can start and stop whenever I want, I just find the stress I am currently dealing with to sometimes be unbearable and I indulge in this behavior which does give some of that relief effect. At the same time I am unhappy with finding relief in an unkosher source and would much rather find more kosher, healthy and useful methods...

I find that for me facts and other rationale do not help and only make things worse by adding guilt as an additional stress factor, what works for me is sympathy, encouragement and good relationships. I also started biking a few months ago and found it very useful in different ways (stronger healthier body, calming scenery (park, waterfront), "time out" for some mind clarity).

The open and supportive atmosphere here is very encouraging, I hope to get some of what I am looking for here and alleviate the need for "alternative" sources of comfort... and I hope to contribute in any way I can.

On a different note, I wanted to start an intellectual/philosophical conversation about SA but couldn't figure out where would be the best place for that... (or is this forum more for chizuk and inspiration as opposed to dry intellectual conversation? if it was a topic in torah I would post in the beis medrash, but I don't want to hak in tshainik with my philosophies on a forum dedicated to torah...)

Thank you to all the organizers, managers and participants of this great effort, may you all be

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling

Posted by gibbor120 - 11 Sep 2013 22:16

WELCOME smiley1900! It sounds like you already know some of the tools that can help us stay sober.

[smiley1900 wrote:](#)

I don't consider myself to be "addicted" because I feel that I can start and stop whenever I want

Can you be more specific? How often do you engage in this behaviour? In what behavior(s) do you engage? You can take an online test if you are curious. One of them is here www.sexhelp.com/am-i-a-sex-addict/sex-addiction-test .

[smiley1900 wrote:](#)

I just find the stress I am currently dealing with to sometimes be unbearable and I indulge in this behavior which does give some of that relief effect.

Yes, stress is a big trigger for sexual acting out.

[smiley1900 wrote:](#)

I find that for me facts and other rationale do not help and only make things worse by adding guilt as an additional stress factor

VERY TRUE.

[smiley1900 wrote:](#)

what works for me is sympathy, encouragement and good relationships. I also started biking a few months ago and found it very useful

GREAT!

[smiley1900 wrote:](#)

The open and supportive atmosphere here is very encouraging

I couldn't agree more!

[smiley1900 wrote:](#)

and I hope to contribute in any way I can.

Looking forward.

[smiley1900 wrote:](#)

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[smiley1900 wrote:](#)

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Glad to have you with us!

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling

Posted by smiley1900 - 11 Sep 2013 22:29

[gibbor120 wrote:](#)

[smiley1900 wrote:](#)

On a different note, I wanted to start an intellectual/philosophical conversation about SA but couldn't figure out where would be the best place for that

[smiley1900 wrote:](#)

I find that for me facts and other rationale do not help and only make things worse by adding guilt as an additional stress factor

Exactly! I consider intellectual stimulation to be fun, although it does carry the risk of additional stress, I don't think it's a problem when it remains a philosophical conversation...

So, do these things take place here? Of so, where?

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling

Posted by gibbor120 - 11 Sep 2013 22:44

They do take place, but they are generally a distraction from real recovery. Now we discuss all sorts of nonsense here, all in good natured fun of course, but philisophical discussions can be dangerous.

No, I'm not worried about anyone going off the derech c'v. But talking about something and philosophising about something gives us the illusion that we are actually **doing** something about it, when in fact we are not. Recovery is about action, and philosophy can be a distraction.

It also gives the illusion of control. We want to control our addiction. If we feel we "understand" it, we have a feeling of control (which many of us desperately want/need). Recovery, for many of us is about giving up control to Hashem. Letting Hashem into our lives. Realizing, we do not have all the answers and need to rely on others and Hashem.

It is an open forum though. You can write whatever you want wherever you want - as long as it

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling

Posted by smiley1900 - 12 Sep 2013 06:30

Your point is well taken, while for some people understanding their situation helps them deal

with it better, for others it can have the opposite effect like you say. While philosophizing might be fun, it can also be dangerous and things said from a philosophical point of view can often be misunderstood as fact or advice, I wouldn't want to have fun when there is risk involved...

I'll save my philosophizing for another time and place...

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling

Posted by smiley1900 - 13 Sep 2013 03:29

Or even better, I'll find some topic in torah to philosophize about!
Here's the beginning of my story.

Approximately 5773+ years ago, hashem created the world in six days and on the seventh day he rested. I believe most of you know that part of my story, so I'll skip a little.

Fast forward a couple of thousand years (I can sit here for several weeks telling you about it but I think most of it you know already and what you don't know won't harm you). I am the oldest of a family of 7 children and the only boy*. Growing up, there was a lot of tension in the house*, and while it was always kept low profile, sensitive me sensed the undercurrent very strongly*. At the same time, either as a result of the above or otherwise (not so relevant to the story) I was made to feel "inadequate" and not "good enough"* ("99? nu, you will definitely do better next time, right?"), this is despite being a star student even being skipped a grade* because the lower grade was too boring for me. This feeling of inadequacy was perpetuated in other areas as well* ("can I go play outside?", "did you do xyz?", "not yet", "please do that first", "I did it, can I go outside now?", "um, did you do abc?", "yes", "what about def?", "yes", "sigh, OK, fine"...).

I can't put my finger on it right now, but there was a perpetual feeling of "isolation"* as well, playing with the girls was not so much fun (chinese jump rope? eh...), and was frowned upon as "not appropriate" for a boy like me. Playing with friends, ummm... not sure why that didn't happen enough.

Growing into adolescence, the love and care in the shape of critical judgementalism perpetuated and intensified the feelings of inadequacy causing more feelings of isolation which caused real isolation which caused more feelings of inadequacy which caused more isolation, etc.

This led to mild depression and while I managed to play it well, inside I was lonely and depressed, I went to yeshiva out of town at the first opportunity (couldn't wait...) and tried to keep pushing through life, but you can't escape the love of your loved ones, especially when you don't comprehend the true effects of this "love" and you believe everybody around you who

tell you that you are being unreasonable... What made it worse was that since I couldn't explain the problem to myself I couldn't explain it to anybody else and nobody I was involved with was bothered enough to investigate, I think also because anybody who tried to tell me that I have a problem evoked the perpetual feeling of inadequacy which triggered the immediate reaction of rejection by me, which of course brought with it the chain reaction of more feelings of inadequacy, isolation, depression, etc. etc.

This cycle eventually led to a thought process in which whenever an emotion would come up that would make me uncomfortable I would shut myself down emotionally, this process was reinforced by certain people who I believed in very strongly who told me that it is shameful to express strong emotions because emotions need to be "controlled", after living my life in this way for long enough, I was sure that I was not an emotional person, this idea was reinforced by those around me who said that it is very unusual for a person to be both highly intellectual AND very emotional, me? unusual? na, can't be!...

Shutting myself down emotionally left me with no motivation to do anything and I turned to hashem for help, he carried me around like the sick child that I was and gave me whatever I needed, if he ever put me down so I can learn to walk on my own, I kvetched and complained and he picked me up again...

This went on all throughout my yeshiva years and into early twenties, I was still as lonely and depressed as ever all the time blaming it on the "tough love" noose tied around my neck. Approaching the age of shidduchim I was desperate to get married and find true love for once. The first thing I did was try to remove the noose, hurting the people who loved me because they couldn't understand what was going on. This didn't help because the self destructive patterns and process were already a very deep part of my being that I thought this is who I was.

Of course, I was in no shape to be getting married but living in isolation there was nobody there to tell me that.

The first girl I met was a wakeup call that things were not going to sort themselves out on their own (or even just with a tehillim) and that I would have to actually start doing things if I wanted them to happen, especially since the people who are usually there to help for such things were "off limits" to me and anyways had no idea what I was going through, I couldn't explain it to them and they couldn't figure it out.

Eventually I got married to somebody who seemed to fit what I needed based on how I knew myself at the time, and as per protocol I ignored the emotional queues that were warning me against it.

Now that I am finally married, I can look forward to some true love and happiness, and be normal for once, right? yeah, right...

As it turns out my wife is more intellectually and emotionally shallow than I thought possible (I guess when you live in isolation your imagination is not that big...) and couldn't begin to understand me. At the same time she expressed her love to me best by constantly telling me

about what her expectations were from me and how to best live up to them, this brought back the vicious cycle of inadequacy, isolation, depression in full force, only this time it was more obvious to me that she had no clue what love is or should be. It took me about five years (and just as many children ka"n) to realize that the marriage didn't solve my problem, it only made them worse (which is a brocho in disguise because, things getting worse was what brought about this realization). And I embarked on a mission to discover the root of the problem. I discovered on my own that the root of the problem was the process of shutting myself down emotionally which made me senseless to what was happening to me, when I don't know how I feel I am an unhealthy person and the rest of my life is a total mess. At the same time my feelings towards my wife turned from tolerable to repulsive and I told her so although I couldn't explain exactly why.

I immediately went to find professional help and spent half a year with 3 failed attempts to find the right person to talk to. While at the same time trying to train myself to reverse the effects of chronic emotional shutdown, my "self help" therapy did manage to jumpstart me emotionally, but was not focused (duh!) and led me in the wrong direction. I finally found the right therapist for me and began the road to a more focused and healthy recovery process, this process is going on for about 7 months now and me being very motivated, have almost completely reversed the effects of all the emotional garbage I've been living with all my life, namely emotional shutdown, lack of confidence, isolation, and depression. I am still sensitive to criticism, even constructive criticism even advice is sometimes a problem for me, but I am aware of it and can usually figure out my way around it (bring it on! worst case scenario I'll yell at you for it...).

Now I am in the process of cleaning up the mess and starting my life over from scratch, not an easy task with a marriage like mine (or lack thereof...), a family like mine (5 lively boys, (each with challenges I heard existed but never saw up close, think therapists galore...) and 1 adorable little girl), a demanding job like mine (I am the director of a department that is responsible for the needs of a 50+ member franchise-like company, each person being responsible for a few hundred franchisees), and a social support system like mine (friends and family who at best their eyes glaze over, and at worst are just not interested, and a developing).

This place for me serves multiple purposes: it combats isolation, helps for self-esteem issues, provides intellectual and emotional stimulation, and provides a distraction from disturbing thoughts. There is still a lot that needs to happen some of which takes time, and I am quite impatient, as is the world around me (I think I have like 200+ unread emails, oh, well, it'll have to wait...).

But I am very determined (my therapist says I am very resilient) and full of hope for a brighter future despite the apparent impossibility for that to happen.

I will leave you with this: I think the most important thing I have learned during this process is that attitude is not an important component of our journey, it is what determines the direction and ultimate successes and failures of our journey, I have experienced this concept first hand and it is supported both in torah and lehavdil in scientific research.

Remember: The light at the end of the tunnel is not from an oncoming train!

Wishing you all a gmar chasima tova, and hatzlacha in the continuation of your journey!

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling
Posted by inastruggle - 13 Sep 2013 09:57

Be"n this story is going to have a happy ending.

Welcome to gye, we're all here to grow together.

Gmar chasima tova and a gut gebensht yuhr.

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling
Posted by gibbor120 - 13 Sep 2013 18:44

WOW! Thanks for sharing. gmar chasima tova!

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling
Posted by cordnoy - 13 Sep 2013 19:00

it should be bhatzlachah

a gmar chasimah tova

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling

Posted by SIB101854 - 22 Sep 2013 05:51

Take a look at Ibn Ezra's commentary on Lo Sachmod. We are commanded to control our emotions, not let our emotions control us. Then look at all of the Dibros in the Aseres HaDibros from Lo Sinaf to the end-all are rooted in Taavah of one form or another. This is the challenge that we must face and confront on a daily basis.

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling

Posted by smiley1900 - 22 Sep 2013 05:57

[SIB101854 wrote:](#)

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Thank you for that vort. I feel that you are commenting on something I wrote, and it sounds like something important, but I am not getting the connection. Can you please elaborate? Thank you very much.

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling

Posted by SIB101854 - 22 Sep 2013 06:05

"It also gives the illusion of control. We want to control our addiction. If we feel we "understand" it, we have a feeling of control (which many of us desperately want/need). Recovery, for many of us is about giving up control to Hashem. Letting Hashem into our lives. Realizing, we do not

have all the answers and need to rely on others and Hashem."

I think that the Ibn Ezra is telling us that unless we realize that our Taavos are governed by HaShem in the same way that HaShem Yisorach decreed how to perform so many other Mitzvos, we are not letting HaShem into our lives. It is easy to do the right thing-it is so much more difficult in this area of Torah to refrain from something that is wrong, and with a little insight that we would realize is a substitute for real marital intimacy.

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling

Posted by smiley1900 - 22 Sep 2013 06:35

[SIB101854 wrote:](#)

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Interesting. I find that for me understanding myself and what leads me to do the things I do, is the most powerful tool I have for combating taavos and other bad habits, for me it's not about "taking away" control from hashem so that I can be in control instead, but on the contrary, to use the tools hashem gave me, my intellect, my emotions and other bodily functions to serve him better. I found in the past that the idea of "giving up control" to hashem had the opposite effect, because it meant that (to a certain extent) I am not responsible for my actions, "hashem is in charge", only by me "taking control" of myself am I able to feel responsible for myself and "own up" to my behavior and figure out ways to change it. So far, this way of thinking has done and continues to do wonders for me in all areas of my life. This doesn't seem to be the experience of others in this online community, I guess I am a little "different"...

Thank you gibor and sib for the insight.

Mipnei kedushas hamoed...

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Re: (trying to) Keep Smiling

Posted by cordnoy - 18 Dec 2015 03:43

To understand or not to understand.....that is the question.

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