

Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 02 Oct 2024 17:29

Hi,

As I mentioned in my main thread (on the way... again) I want to review my journey and the tools and ideas that I have found helpful.

I want to start with "Tracking", keeping a running daily journal of whether I had a fall or not was tremendously helpful for me. It helped me appreciate everyday's victory by recording it. It also allowed me to recognize patterns that showed me where and when I tended to struggle (night time was a biggie).

More on this coming next week ly"H

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 09 Oct 2024 18:54

OK, here goes the first real week of this thread,

I know I wrote before that I started with tracking but looking back it was a few different tools all packaged together in how I tracked.

When I first started out I had this neat little calendar that I kept on my nightstand and during the day it was in my jacket pocket. Every day I would put a check or an X in the calendar based on whether I had a fall. Even if it wasn't a fall, if I had a hard day with lots of urges I would note that as well, becoming a mini journal of sorts. I found this made it real for me that I was actually working to become clean because I could see it visually in front of me, "I have been clean for 5/10/20 days." On the first page of the calendar I put a post-it note, and wrote on it my flight plan, reasons for change and strategies that I planned on using, I would look at this everyday in the morning and at night. This really helped me drive in the big "Why". One last part of the calendar was noting ahead different milestones, when I would hit 3 days clean, 1 week, 2 weeks, 3 weeks, a month and so on until 90 days and noting what incentive I would get myself when I made it. There was the benefit that it helped me visualize how close I was to the next milestone and the incentive more than just having it in mind, at the same time there was a large feeling of let down when I would have to cross them all out and rewrite it after a fall. I think what would have been better would be to have another counter going that focuses on cumulative clean days which is never reset, thereby lowering the down feeling. Not sure how well it would have worked. L'maaseh this is what I did and I feel that it was very helpful in the beginning, later in my journey it was not such a focus, but still provided a good check-in system, especially since I didn't have regular access to GYE to do the daily check-in.

Thanks all for reading, please feel free to chime in with comments on how to make these tools better for the future and with your own ideas!

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 03 Nov 2024 13:15

Been a few weeks but better late then never,

having accountability. I set up to text a rebbe every morning, I would also text him before and after challenging situations.

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 20 Nov 2024 21:17

again better late than never,

Going through the F2F program, but taking notes along with it. I had trouble having the discipline to do all the exercises but found that taking notes helped a lot. Also is helpful to go back through it again. It really helped me feel like I was on a program and had a path to follow.

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 09 Dec 2024 13:48

Getting more sleep, this is a huge aspect of my staying clean. When I'm tired I get upset and when I'm upset I get lonely, that leads to p and m. So getting 7-8 hours every night was and still is a bedrock of my strategy. I BH have kids who like to wake up in the middle of the night and early in the am, so I realized the only way to get more sleep was go to sleep earlier. I cut out night Seder and stated going to sleep at 9:30. Literally changed how I felt very quickly. I also no longer need coffee top function, and I've found when I'm hopped up in caffeine I feel stressed, so it helped me feel generally relaxed.

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by Markz - 09 Dec 2024 14:52

[hopefulposek wrote on 09 Dec 2024 13:48:](#)

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This guy is finally gonna become a posek.

Another win for GYE!

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 24 Dec 2024 19:27

Was on the vaad today and someone asked what I do during the urge that helps, and it got me thinking I should update this thread.

2 Thoughts I found super helpful during an urge:

1) I don't need porn/lust/sex to be happy and survive. I can find happiness without numbing agents.

2) When the urge is coming from emotional turmoil: These feelings will not last, they will subside. I can work on them. The general emotional struggle may exist tomorrow, but I can work on that. But this storm which is threatening to throw me overboard will not last, relax distract and wait 20 minutes. Connect to people, even not about the struggle. It especially helps me to connect to someone who is not a close friend to show that I have connections even beyond my daled amos.

Stay Happy Everyone!

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 08 Jan 2025 19:35

Daily inspiration: I found viewing an inspiring meme or just quote everyday can be helpful especially if you write it down, at one point I tried posting it daily here but wasn't very consistent.

I personally used Rabbi Moshe Bambergers great jewish... series, and now i get emailed an inspiring quote of the day. But I'm sure there are other very good options out there.

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 10 Mar 2025 19:43

I found reading a few books on addiction to be helpful, it gave me a sense of understanding what I was going through as well as some direction to work on it. However some of the books can be triggering and might not be the best idea if you're not an addict.

Out of the shadows - Patrick Carnes

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous

The White Book

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 18 May 2025 02:47

making friends who share in the struggle is a tremendous step to recovery. Right now I have several guys who I call on a weekly basis and it deffinitely helps when I'm struggling before or after a fall that I have someone who I am totally comfortable calling.

A little CPR to this thread

It took me a while to get to here but it's worth the effort, get numbers reach out and be persistent. Remember: you are responsible for your recovery, if you want to have people to reach out to and who reach out to you, you need to make the calls.

Hatzlachah!

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 20 Aug 2025 23:52

So, as I posted on my other thread, I'm trying to start to write up a lot of the ideas and insights I've had over my journey, and I decided that this would be a nice way to revive this thread. So ly"n I hope to post something every week, whether a new idea or just clarity and elaboration on an old one.

stayed tuned!

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 26 Aug 2025 23:42

This is really a rough draft and I would love to hear feedback and input from everyone here. I

Sleeping better - If I look back at my acting out history and the journal entries which followed, a blazingly obvious theme comes up, I was tired. This is by far the most common element of my acting out. When I'm tired I can't handle discomfort as well as when I'm well rested, I can't function in all areas of life at full capacity and feel frustrated from that, and being tired itself is uncomfortable and it creates a sense of anxiety about when I'm going to be able to get enough sleep. All these are triggers for acting out.

Before beginning recovery I used to get very little sleep, in my early years of beis medrash I would regularly live on 5 hours a night and a ton of coffee. It was so unhealthy. Even after I got married I was still regularly getting less than 7 hours a night and many times much less than that. I learned to just "function" even while being tired, just enough

to get by in life. But early on in recovery it became apparent that being tired was a core cause of my acting out and I made attempts to improve my sleep. I don't remember much in the beginning, but it was pretty early on that I started going to sleep early and getting up early. I switched from an 11:30 bedtime to 9:30, waking up at 7:00 to waking up at 5:00. It was an enormous switch in my life. It did make it easier that my wife was used to going to sleep early and used to go to sleep then anyway. Now that I'm thinking of it, initially the main reason to switch the bedtime wasn't to get more sleep but in order to go to sleep at the same time as my wife to make the nighttime struggle easier. A lot of my biggest urges climaxed at night when I would come home exhausted, my wife would be asleep and I would stay up fighting the urge until giving in, and then have a bad day because I would be exhausted.

One of the hardest things I had to do during recovery was to decide to give up night seder. In the beginning it wasn't so bad because I would learn in the mornings when I woke up, but many times I would wake up later because of nighttime childcare, and eventually I started using the mornings for running. I had to sacrifice what was essentially one of the main ingredients in having a successful yeshiva career in order to have a stronger recovery. I am very grateful that I had the strength and courage to do what was considered an odd choice by my friends, and I still struggle sometimes with this part of my lifestyle even though I know that it is a critical part of my recovery and therefore my being the best me.

It is very difficult for me even now to have the discipline to go to sleep on time. Many nights I sacrifice being a more attentive husband in order to shut off the lights, and there are many important tasks which just don't get done. My friends ask me "When do you do things?" and the answer is that I don't. I've prioritized my sleep above other things because of how important it is for my continued recovery. So where I used to not sleep, now I don't do the other less important chores.

Besides shifting my sleep schedule I had to stop drinking coffee in the afternoons and alcohol at night. Dropping coffee wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. Once I was getting 7-8 hours of sleep every night I really didn't need the caffeine, and once I stopped drinking it I needed it even less (since drinking coffee makes you need coffee like any other addiction). However I was having a hard time replacing it with something else, and during one of the yeshiva's fundraisers they gave out a K-cup everyday whereas up until that point I had only drunk instant and I started drinking coffee again. It was really enjoyable, but I didn't want to be sucked back into the caffeine drug. After a while I figured I would get decaf coffee pods and drink those, although there is some caffeine in it I felt like it was OK. So that's basically where I am now with coffee, I basically just drink decaf but if I know I didn't get enough sleep I'll have a cup of regular coffee in the morning to help take the edge off. But honestly I think it would be better if even on those days I didn't have caffeine as it puts me on edge and doesn't really help much. (Since writing this I have cut out the morning caffeine even when I'm tired)

In the summer of 2023 I was going through part of the flight 2 freedom program on GYE and was doing the portion on sleep hygiene. Most of the changes I made came from that program. I'm pretty sure I had already started exercising by then but it just got put in the context of doing it to help my sleep.

And still I go through periods where I'll be off my sleep schedule, but I always end up journaling the next day about how I regret staying up. Watching TV at night is really a big killer for me right now. It hurts with the screen's stimulation and also that I end up staying up way too late. For me I need to make solid boundaries and if they're not working then make new ones or adjust the old ones, my sleep is too important to not take seriously.

I'm really happy with the changes I've made to my sleep schedule and the difference it makes for me in my functioning everyday, but more in my ability to handle emotions and to stay calm and sober.

Some more thoughts on sleep: every book I read on mental health has mentioned sleeping as a core component of regaining mental health.

Bottom line, sleep is really important. It's good to recognize that everyone is different and what might be enough sleep for someone else isn't the same for you, and that's ok. It's also ok if other people are able to function well while being tired, what you're concerned with is your own functioning, other people are not your priority right now. So you'll need to do some experimenting with sleep, to find how much you need to be your best, however a safe bet is to try what studies have shown to be effective, getting between 7-8 hours a night. I found for myself that if I try to get 7 then I get 6 and a half, so I always aim for between 7:30 and 8 hours and end up somewhere in the middle.

There are many sleeping courses and selfhelp guides for getting better sleep and I encourage everyone to get the guidance they can, I will just write the tools that I used and found helpful.

There are few important things to consider when tackling the issue of getting better sleep: Bedtime routine, sleep quality, early to bed early to rise.

Just like when we are trying to train a baby to go to sleep nicely, which relies on their falling asleep well and getting into a good sleep, we create a bedtime routine the same principle applies to adults as well. We want to make connections in our brain that tell it, when these things are happening it's time to start getting ready to shut down, and to combine that with soothing activities that trigger the natural sleepiness. The routine I used included turning off most of the lights, taking a shower and reading a book on the couch for a few minutes. Turning off the lights mimics the natural darkening of the sky which tells the body to start shutting down for the night. A warm shower helps relax the muscles and provide a soothing feeling, almost like a massage. And the book is just a way to relax, shut off the noise from the day and let your mind drift. It's also important that the bed is only used for sleeping (and for intimacy) so that the brain connects going into bed with going to sleep. If you are having trouble falling asleep at night, after 20-30 minutes it's worth getting up to do something both so that you don't keep focusing on whatever is stressing you out and so that you don't associate the bed as a place to stress.

As important as it is to get a proper amount of sleep it's also good to get good quality sleep. The main focus seems to be REM sleep or deep sleep. I honestly don't know

much about it but here are some of the things I did and continue to try to do to improve my quality sleep. No screens for an hour before bed, quickly checking a phone is ok but don't watch a show or spend ten minutes having a texting chat. No caffeine after 4pm since it can stay in your system for a long time even after the obvious effects wear off. No naps after 4pm, you want to be tired so that you can get into a nice good sleep quickly. Not drinking alcohol at night, they say that it hurts your sleep, and I personally found that I make bad decisions after drinking and end up staying awake later than I had planned to which further hurts my sleep schedule.

In one of the videos I watched as part of a sleep improvement course (on GYE) it talked about the circadian rhythm lining up with the sunlight in the day, and how naturally we have an internal clock that tells us when to sleep. This is why we get better sleep if we go to sleep earlier and wake up early rather than staying up late and waking up later. Besides for the scientific benefit I've found another reason to move the bedtime up. As a parent I had to get used to the idea of not sleeping through the night along with waking up at random times in the morning, and I realized the only way I could really affect how much sleep I got was by going to sleep early.

Like I wrote before I still have ups and downs, times when I'm really on top of my sleep schedule and times when everythin goes out the window. But the yesod is to continue to recognize the value it has and to keep coming back to it.

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by chosemyshem - 27 Aug 2025 15:29

Thanks for sharing!

Underatedly powerful tool. Also, like you wrote, incredibly difficult to execute consistently. Kudos to you!

Rav Avraham Schorr said in a shuir once something like the nation as a whole would be on a significantly higher level if everyone just went to bed on time.

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 01 Sep 2025 00:32

This is a very powerful mindset shift that helps me to continue moving forward even as things get rough and the tools that were working until now aren't helping:

It's important to remember that everyone is different, everyone's particular situation is different and everyone's psychology is different. So there's really no one size fits all to get you sober, what works for one person may not work for someone else, and it might help you but just not as much. This doesn't mean that you can't get help and guidance from others and learn from their experience, just that it's important to be patient and recognize that you're not hopeless just because someone else's program didn't work for you.

There are certain tools and strategies that seem to help most people and are backed by science, and it makes sense to start with these. Keep in mind that all strategies can be fine tuned and tweaked to fit what you need. Don't be quick to throw out a good tool, take the time to try and see what you can gain from it. You may also have to devise your own strategies, find tools that speak to you. Remember that you know your situation the best (since you lived it) and are best suited to figuring out what will help, though you will gain from having guidance from a professional or mentor.

I like to use an analogy to one who is doing a puzzle alongside others and there's a giant pile of pieces in the middle. You're not sure which pieces you should use, but the logical thing to do is to start with what is working for everyone else, and then fill in the rest. Not all the pieces others use are going to fit for your puzzle and the ones that are small for them might be big for yours and vice versa, and you might have to turn it in a different direction and put it in a different place, but you can solve your puzzle one piece at a time. Honestly the more I say it the worse of a mashup it seems but ly" h I'll find a more accurate one in the future and until then this will have to do.

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Re: Hopeful Memories

Posted by hopefulposek - 11 Sep 2025 11:38

This is just about acceptance of the struggle and the unique lifestyle that one must come to in order to recover. I posted this in my main thread but also wanted to share it here since it is a tool that has helped me and which I still need to work on.

I want to focus on a thought I had on Sunday and try to crystallize it.

One thing that makes me feel dysfunctional and incapable of accomplishing anything in this world is the time swallowed up by my mental health recovery. Even when I was just starting on GYE I was spending a couple hours a day working on it. From watching the videos to posting on the forums GYE essentially became a part time job for me. But now that I've shifted my focus in life to becoming more mentally stable and working through some trauma which is stopping me from living fully, all while maintaining sobriety, it feels more like a full time job plus overtime.

I attend 3 in person meetings a week as well as the vaad phone call. I go to therapy once a week and am now starting twice a week sessions as well as meeting with a psychiatrist to get some meds. I have to exercise regularly, and I have to be working towards goals that excite me and keep me motivated. This translates to around 7-10 hours a week of working out (depending on what training program I'm currently working on). I need to journal regularly. I need to get 7-8 hours of sleep on a regular basis. I need to occasionally take personal time to relax and treat myself for how I'm doing. I need to occasionally take time to be with my feelings when my emotions get really raw.

This is all just to take care of my mental health. Beyond this I have a wife and kids, I have basic responsibilities in life and I'm supposedly in yeshiva full time. But I struggle to really fulfill those responsibilities and to be present in yeshiva because of the time constraints from keeping myself healthy and functioning. I feel like a cripple, seeing and desiring the simple life of others but unable to be a part of it. I'm stuck with my nose to the glass, and I continue to tell myself to just push through and I'll be able to join them, but alas I've found that even when it bends I bounce back and if I push too hard the window shatters cutting me up with shards of reality, landing me flat on my back where I started, still looking but separated.

I've written before about the difference between acceptance of limited potential and the appreciation for unique opportunities hidden within a struggle. I think I need to go back to those concepts and focus on them again and again. But one mashul helps me to be able to work on the acceptance aspect.

If I ChV'Sh had a diseased kidney and needed dialysis every day for four hours just to live, I think I would have an easier time reframing my mindset and changing my goals and lifestyle to fit what Hashem has given me. It is clear, if your kidneys aren't working you need treatment, end of story. Now it's just a matter of taking the situation and working to see the diamond in the rough.

The problem is that in the world of mental health nothing is clear. There are many different approaches and different things work for different people. So there's a lot of trial and error, there's a lot of guesswork trying to figure out what I need for my recovery. How often do I need to journal? When I'm feeling down and alone should I push past it or take time to feel it? How many meetings should I go to? Do I need to be training for a marathon or will I still be excited about a shorter race (with shorter work outs)? How often should I treat myself? Should I learn Friday night or take the time to read a novel and enjoy myself? Should I commit to part of seder or leave it open ended? Should I have a chavrusah and deal with the pressure and flaking on a commitment or learn myself and feel more loneliness and less successful learning? And there are a myriad of

ways to mediate all these points, details filling pages and pages in my mind of “what if’s”.

I don’t want to overthink everything, but it feels like there’s so much at stake and I’m constantly recognizing mistakes that I’ve made and want to change, so how can I just continue on wasting away in one direction or the other.

So now back to the clarity: it doesn’t matter. I must do what I think and feel is the best for my recovery (sobriety and mental health) based on my personal experience and the guidance from professionals and others who have had similar struggles who Hashem surrounded me with.

It’s hard to not show up to seder. It’s hard to go to sleep early. It’s hard to miss minyan in order to exercise. It’s hard to tell my wife I can’t go out because I need a meeting. It’s hard to spend money treating myself when I’m on a kollel salary and am getting support from family. It’s hard to not learn outside of seder. It’s hard to take a vacation in the middle of the zman because I just need to get away from the pressures of life. It’s hard to come home late because I was making a phone call. It’s hard to go out to eat because I missed lunch in yeshiva because I was on the vaad call.

It’s all the same thing: It’s hard to be different.

I need to recognize that the noise from outside, and what other people who don’t share my struggles do and think, doesn’t matter. I need to trust myself and what hashem has given me, even if trusting myself means not trusting myself but trusting others who should be trusted in these areas. I can’t afford to live my life based on how others live theirs. I need to get this clear. I don’t know in the total view of pure emes what exact actions would be the best for me in my recovery. But I do know, based on the understanding and knowledge that Hashem has given me, what appears to be the right general course of action. And that’s what I need to do. I don’t have to get the perfect formula, and in fact I won’t. To get the exact perfect formula of how much to do of everything would be nothing short of godly. I don’t have to demand that of myself and surely hashem doesn’t demand it of me.

Once I am comfortable that I am doing my best within hashems expectations I can face myself and say “Others may not understand what you’re doing and they may think you’re going about it wrong. But it doesn’t matter. The craziest thing is that they might be right that objectively you should be doing something else, but since that wasn’t the perspective Hashem gave you, then it’s not true, you shouldn’t be doing something else. Keep doing what you should be doing through the eyes and mind that Hashem has given you. Your job is to do Hashem's will, not ploni’s will.”

Please feel free to give feedback and if you have any similar tools which were helpful for you, or if you would tweak part of this I would really want to hear about it. I'm still trying to work on this stuff and am by no means out of the fight, every new idea is valuable.

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