

I can love myself!

Posted by workingmyprogram - 15 Dec 2011 06:30

About 1.5 years ago I was on the 90 day journey, I even logged my post here. Wow, it's actually quite emotional to be back. Well I am back, and the reason is because I acted out on 12/13, making my new sobriety date 12/14. I'm not sure who's going to read this, but if it's you, then you should know nothing is by accident and Beezras Hashem something I say will help you in your own journey. I had about 1.5 years of descent sobriety. It definitely wasn't as clean as it could be, in fact about 5 months in I even almost master**ted until completion, but stopped. There were also times where I looked at Porn, got involved in inappropriate conversations, etc... but all in all it was a great time. But there was something missing from my sobriety. I just wasn't getting it. I would go for a month or two without looking at anything, and then one day go look at porn. Sometimes I spent hours doing this. So while according to the SA definition of sobriety I was technically sober, I was definitely losing my sobriety. There is a great line in the white book, which reads "sober is not well". Roy K wrote this line, describing that despite having years of sobriety, he was still an irritable mess who was constantly losing his temper. We call this a "dry drunk". Now I'm not going to beat myself up, but there were many times during this past 1.5 years that I was definitely a "dry drunk". There were many times, and still are many times, where I find myself paralyzed by fear. Mostly economic fear. And I would get discontent. I remember thinking, "I thought everything is supposed to work out now that I am sober". And the funny thing is 99% of things did work out, but I was always so scared that they wouldn't! What I was missing was the emunah part of it all, which is steps 2&3. You see, this program is about finding a Higher Power. But not just any HP, a HP that actually loves you. Yes, LOVES YOU. And not only that, loves you UNCONDITIONALLY. Can you believe that? Well I can, because even though I was still sick during my 1.5 years of sobriety, nevertheless I was able to slowly start to heal and once I started to heal one of the things that started to change was my conception of a HP. You see, up until recently my HP was an insatiable perfectionist, ready to smite me down if I delivered anything less than utter perfection. Hmmmm, now that I think of that sounds more like my father than my HP (you see the connection here?). But the biggest chiddush that I learned over the last 1.5 years is that our view of a HP is really a reflection of the relationship we have with ourselves. You got that? For me this is the ikkur yesod of recovery. When I realized that it wasn't Hashem who hated me, but rather I hated myself. And it wasn't Hashem who couldn't forgive me, but rather I couldn't forgive myself, my eyes OPENED UP. This meant, that if I could learn to forgive myself, then I would be able to picture a HP that could forgive me. And even better, if I could learn to love myself then I can have a HP who loves me! You see, I don't think there is any way I can feel Hashem's love until I love myself. And this leads to what I believe is the whole point of recovery: learning to love others, our HP, and ESPECIALLY ourselves. I can bring so many proofs for this, just google "low self esteem and addiction" and you will come across hundreds, maybe thousands, of professionals who agree that the root of addiction stems from low self esteem, or lack of self love (they're the same thing). Rabbi Twerksi himself claimed "I never met an alcoholic with good self esteem". So I, and many others, believe that the root of all healing lies in creating a good sense of self esteem, because it really is the only way to finding a loving HP. Now you might ask, but where is this found in the steps? Well I have only one possible answer for this and it's as follows: it's assumed that when you do step 2 and recognize that there is a higher power who loves you enough to take away your disease that you will then come to appreciate your self worth. After all, why would G-d do this miracle for me if I wasn't worthy of love? As

time went on, and with the encouragement of my sponsor and my Rav, I started to practice the art of self love (I would text things I liked about myself to my sponsor on a daily basis and as well read Azamrah by Rabbi Nachman and just generally focus on my good traits) I began to feel that this is what I was missing. It seemed that practicing self love, self acceptance, and self forgiveness really had an amazing power to fill the void. I also noticed I was beginning to be able to love others more, now that I was starting to love myself. Maybe the saying you can't love others until you love yourself was starting to make sense. So I was becoming more and more convinced that it was self love, and the inner simcha and peace that it brings that would bring lasting change for me. You see, before this, I thought that beating myself up and focusing on what I'm doing wrong would change me for good. As if the pain of my self judgement and abuse was going to burn away my character defects. The problem with this way of thinking was that it didn't work. If it did, I wouldn't feel a need to look at porn every month or so. And the thing that solidified this new approach the most was, believe it or not, Rav Nachman. I was talking with a Rav about my struggles with self esteem and addiction and he told me to buy this little book by Rav Nachman called "Azamrah". I bought (from amazon.com) and read it, and was amazed. Here was a tzaddik who was confirming everything that I was thinking until then. Rav Nachman explains that it is depression, not gaavah or anything else, that causes us to sin. When we truly are happy, we don't sin. This makes perfect sense to me. If I'm feeling good (not that superficial feeling good, but that deep inner peace and contentment) I don't need to act out. This might explain why I never had a taavah to act out on shabbos, because on shabbos I always felt a sense of peace and connectedness. It's when I'm not feeling good, rather feeling pain, that I run for my drug. Pashut. So how does he say you find simchah? He says through focusing on your good points. Wow! What a chiddush! I would have thought he would say through doing a mitzvah like talmud torah or chesed, but no, the way to true simchah is being able to focus on your good points. And when we do that we don't come to sin. So in modern lingo, what Rav Nachman is saying is that self esteem keeps us away from sin. Did you Google "addiction and low self esteem" yet? If you didn't you may want to do that now, because you'll see that thousands of psychologists are saying the same thing, the only difference is Rav Nachman discovered this hundreds of years ago. I can tell you guys that self esteem has been the biggest issue for me. If I had to guess the reason why Hashem put me here I would say it's to work on this, because it's been my biggest challenge since I can remember. But now that I'm working on self love, and have resolved to live in love, I can tell you that I am feeling amazing things that I never thought possible. I am starting to feel whole again. I am starting to feel worthy. I don't need everyone's approval. I am able to laugh at myself and not always take myself so seriously. Sometimes. I'm still working on this and am very far from perfect but sometimes I really do feel this way and it's becoming more and more often as time goes on. So I found this gift and want nothing more than to share it with you. You can love yourself too. Make lists about the things you're doing right and text them to a GYE friend. You can even text them to me, just email me at workingmyprogram@gmail.com if you want my number. I really hope you guys can take what I said to heart. Self love is the foundation of our relationship with Hashem, our steps 2&3. It's what gives us the simchah that we need to live our life. It's when it will allow us to begin making decisions based on love and not fear (you have no idea how good it feels to say to yourself I'm learning, or davening, or working because I want to, out of love, and not because I have to). I can love myself today. I am a good person. I don't need to be perfect to be worthy of love, both Hashem's love and mine. I forgive myself out of love and forgive all others too. I have a new opportunity to live. I love you Hashem and I love you GYE. Thank you. I can

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Re: I can love myself!

Posted by yehoshua - 15 Dec 2011 08:39

I must admit that for me too, there were ups and downs, just as you point out. And for real, to be really honest, I have never been as sober as I am now. No joke and I am sorry for pointing this out, I was a "dry drunk" and I am still an addict. You are so right, self esteem is so important....

Uf, I found so much of myself in your writting, that i am bablpbeling here like crazy.

Anyway, I find the positive traits (to search for them and write them down) is a crucial part of the personal inventory (STEP 4). And please don't be upset, forgive me (to You workingmyprogram and everyone), I find one has to write everything down, the good and the bad. If I put just the good down, then I am blinding myself and if I put just the bad down, then too I am just the half. (I have to put the bad down first, because it's bothering me so much and then the good)

So I wish you all the best and thank you. I found so much of myself in what you write. And it really gives me hope, because it's not just self esteem here - so much is linked to it. As you said, how can we love anyone without this crucial step. (how do we give understanding, love, patience, all of that, if we don't see it in ourselves)

For real, it is about respect and honesty to oneself in the steps. No one is a harder judge then oneself especially in step 4, but to be a fair judge is just as important. And there you go, important positive traits: honest and respectful.

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Re: I can love myself!

Posted by workingmyprogram - 16 Dec 2011 17:20

Is this my old friend Yehoshua? And brother, no need to ask for forgiveness! I agree that at some point you need write everything down, because that's step 4. What I'm talking about is treating the disease of our low self esteem. As the Rambam says, when we find ourselves

veering too far off in one direction, we sometimes need to go to the other extreme to balance back in the middle. So for anyone with low self esteem, it may be a good idea to go to the other extreme by focusing exclusively on our good traits until we balance out in the middle. This doesn't mean you can't be doing step 4 work at the same time, I dont know, maybe you can. But if not at the same time, then for sure before or after.

You see, my goal is not only to be sober. Physical sobriety for me is just not enough. Why not? Because I was sober and I saw how miserable I was at the same time. The reason was because I was constantly beating myself up and focusing on the bad. I was never good enough. My sobriety was never 100% perfect and I was always falling short in other areas. I would waste time at work, not get to sleep on time, get annoyed at my wife, there was always something. I was so focused on my shortcomings that I never felt good about anything i did. I would spend ZERO time thinking of the thousands of good things I did that day, and all my waking hours focusing on the few bad things I did. Is it any wonder I was unhappy??? So rather than being just sober, my goal is to be both sober and "well". I define wellness as living in a state of love where I love myself, Hashem, and others. I once had an amazing therapist who was a true chacham (he told my brother that the Square Rebbe would go to him for advice). He was an old holocaust survivor who would say hello to EVERYBODY he passed on the street, ALWAYS! He told me he picked Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky to be his rebbe because he always saw him smiling. After seeing my issues he told me that I needed to turn my life into one big "love affair" with Hashem, myself, and others. Those words really stuck with me and I am just now really trying to implement them. Also, I'm not saying that the lists are even the best way to get to the goal of self love (btw, the goal really isnt self love. The goal is to love others and Hashem, but I don't think you can get there without first loving yourself, as I've heard from many people). There may be a better way. I'm just doing what I know, and am happy to hear other suggestions. I would actually LOVE to hear other suggestions because this goal is very important to me. I also wanted to say that it really is such a shame that beating ourselves up has become so fashionable in the 12 step circles. It seems that when the book calls for a "leveling of our pride" and "admitting our faults", many people are taking this to mean that we should be constantly beating ourselves up and flattening ourselves. Never allowing ourselves to be built up or take credit for anything. I think this attitude stems from the fact that Gaavah may have very well played a role in our acting out, and many people equate self love with Gaavah. But they are 2 DIFFERENT THINGS! Completely different! The gaavah that caused us to act out, 9 times out of 10 is really just a defense mechanism for our low self esteem. We're feeling so crummy about ourselves that we need to overcompensate with Gaavah. Someone with true self esteem will never become a Baal Gaavah because he doesnt have to feel good about himself. His good feelings are already there as a result of his awareness that he was created betzelem Elokim and has a beautiful neshama with amazing spiritual capabilities. This makes him feel self love, and more importantly, gratitude for the One who created him with this! It is such a shame to see how people, many of whom have years of sobriety, are so reluctant to let themselves see this. It seems that yetzer is fighting this tremendously, because he knows that if we realize our true inner beauty and greatness we would become spiritual powerhouses. So he'll let us have sobriety, but G-d forbid we should have self esteem too, that would just be too much! Yehoshua, thanks so much for your post and I would love to hear your feedback. Like I said before, I don't have all the answers, much of what I'm saying may not be 100% true (consult your local orothodox Rav), but I'm just sharing

some of the insights i've come to, while on this amazing and beautiful journey.

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Re: I can love myself!
Posted by ZemirosShabbos - 19 Dec 2011 22:46

Working, thanks for these wonderful posts. i printed them out and read them over shabbos. i just saw something similar in a sefer, bl'n i will post it.

thanks very much

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Re: I can love myself!
Posted by Back on Track - 26 Dec 2011 05:00

So well put working. Waiting to hear more from you....

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Re: I can love myself!
Posted by ZemirosShabbos - 26 Dec 2011 16:50

this is from the sefer Karva El Nafshi by Rav Kluger of Beit Shemesh

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Re: I can love myself!
Posted by Dov - 26 Dec 2011 19:54

Disclaimer: I'm not coming here to disagree, nor to argue. All I want to do is share that there is another way out there that works, so it is valid. It doesn't *pasul* any other way - but it does demonstrate that many people do *not* need to love and feel great about themselves before they can start staying sober for long periods and before they can start getting well. And we never finish getting well, really - we never "arrive", do we? Have you? I haven't. "Yehudi hu tamid

baderech," anyway...

I know that Rav Twerski and other good people have taught (or seems to many to have taught) the idea you refer to.

Finally, I am certainly not suggesting what is right for **you** or other

individuals to do. I just want to open a door that seems locked, to those who wish to try and go this way.

I agree that simply not having sex with myself or anyone other than my wife is still not *nearly* 'enough'. It's a *negative* sobriety, and not a recovery of anything. But we ought to be honest with ourselves and admit that once we really stop masturbating or using porn compulsively, we find ourselves in a place where - had we really been there *all along* - we'd never had really felt this desperation for getting all the good things of recovery, anyhow! We'd *bleib* coasting - like most people *are* and *will* be, till they die. Interestingly, then, it is my *sickness* that saves me from the unexamined life, **not** my 'greatness'.

By the same token, this is the only reason that this very day I still need G-d as much as I ever did: to live life in a way that doesn't just *look* or *sound* good, but *actually works*. I need it, while the do-gooders do not. And it was the addicts who taught me that being clean from acting out (ie., sobriety) is only valuable inasmuch as it is the gateway to being able to come to live life right - **if one is an addict**. That's recovery. It's not about 'being good', nor about being 'a better person'.

Plenty of good yidden do bad things, even *sexually* bad things. Very bad things. But they can *still* go on living life right, in the general sense. It's still acceptable to them. They may do a good Teshuvah for the ma'aseh, they may do a weak one. It does **not** wreck their lives, for they *can* move on. But an addict cannot do that successfully, for we are too sick. This is what the 1st step means when it says 'Powerless' (to use lust successfully) and that our lives are 'unmanageable'. Addicts have a cyclical, repeating, and progressively worsening habit. It eventually sucks the life out of us, isolates us from all others, makes us disgusted with ourselves **and with others**, makes us need to have **a double life** (not principally out of shame, but mainly in order *to protect our ability to keep using our drug unimpeded by 'pesky' and nosy Society*), and ruins more and more of our lives every year that goes by.

But I have found that making being **sober** today - and not accepting *any* other option - is the *only* way I can actually eventually grow and recover. It is not the growth itself, but the **only** ticket into recovery. It is what Chaza"l would refer to as *mafteichos chitzoniyos*, rather than *mafteichos p'nimiyos*. I have met many who wanted to "recover" and become "healthy" without making their lives dependent on sobriety today. They take luxuries like occasional porn and inappropriate sex use - and misinterpret the terrible regret afterward as 'growth!' Intense? Yes - but true? No. After a few years go by they discover they are nowhere. They seem to live in a fantasy religious world - and their lives end up a very interesting...shambles. So, you and I are at least on the same page about that. Now...

I did **not** need to love myself in order to get sober. I needed to *not give up on myself* - to simply need to survive and live a life that was not a total loss. It's the most basic self-love, as I wrote to you before. It has nothing to do with looking *good* to myself, nor with morality. Just "enlightened self-interest". My biggest challenge was *actually believing that G-d would actually take care of me even though I was ugly*.

Convincing myself that 'I was not so ugly' was totally not what I needed! Rather, I needed to come to understand that **Hashem loves the ugly people, too!**

You don't seem to like that idea - and I could not live *without* it. And others feel the same way.

Yes, deep inside that idea it obviously means that G-d sees the beauty in me, in you, in any yid - and yes, even inside *any goy*...for let's not forget that He has also helped millions of dying non-Jewish drunks, drug-addicts, and perverts. My wife and I are so very grateful for that - for through *them* my own life and family was saved. And many other people, too.

But here is the point: I do not have to see that beauty - I just have to believe that somehow, G-d can see it. I do not even have to **ever** see it and need no evidence that it exists. That He saved me does not prove to me that I am indeed worthy - it proves that He loves me. And being cared for (meaning: loved) by G-d is the only worthiness that means anything to me. This is the inner meaning of "*ki mechabdai achabeid, ne'um Hashem*". It is also why we are taught that *the only one who is has true kavod is the one who gives kavod to others* (Pirkei Avos) - seeing the beauty in G-d and His world is what matters - not seeing beauty in me. If I see His beauty and the beauty of His people, then I have inner beauty whether I ever realize it or not - and I never need to realize it! The Mishnah simply spells out the facts as they are: *that* person is honorable. And true honor *is* true beauty.

Also, I did not need to work the steps in order to *get sober*. The main thing I credit with getting me sober was actually the pain of *my acting out*. I had enough of it, because it was so bitter. Hashem threw me forcibly on the path of recovery - much as the Sha'arei teshuvah begins (regarding teshuvah, which is not at all the same as recovery): Tov veyoshor Hashem (Hashem is right and good), al kein yoreh (so He throws down - as in "yoroh vayom" in Az Yosher, and "yaroh yiyareh" by har Sinai) chato'im (those who are mistaken as Rav Noach zt"l always teitched it) baderech (on the [correct] path). He was so good to me, for He made my addiction excruciatingly painful. Until I had no other option than to give up acting out my sex fantasies - though I could not stop.

Thanks to G-d, I did *not* need to love myself before I could start getting well. Nor did I need to love myself first, in order to finally give up the struggle and start getting sober. Nor did I need to love myself before setting well.

Rather, I got sober by the *total* Chessed of Hashem that I found in the rooms, with other recovering men. I *did* not - and *do* not - deserve it in any way, shape, or form. I can be ugly and He loves me a ton anyhow. He brought me - a masturbating and desperately porn-using, frum yid - to recovery! When did he lay the groundwork for that? After I got better? No. He did it *all* for me *while I was on my knees in the bathroom masturbating*. That's Chessed - the *teitch* of Chessed is that onedoes *not* deserve it. He loves me, b'li ta'am.

B'li ta'am means that *I do not have to be pretty to Him*. So I certainly don't need to be pretty to *me*! My G-d is so great that I can say Mizmor Shir Chanukas habayis leDovid, and mean it all! I am sober! Sobriety is breathing, for me - it's life. Not health, but life. And He gives it to me. All I need to do is open my hands. Just like the yidden in Mitzrayim, mischu yedeichem meiavodah zarah - just let go of it! Doing that was sooo hard that it took fifteen years of suffering to finally let go.

And He would have given me the sobriety years before - but I was not willing to let go of what was in my hands, open my fingers and accept it.

But I discovered that I needed to get well if I wanted to *remain*

sober. In other words, to *stay* alive.

That led me to step 3, and the rest of them. The preciousness of my sobriety led me to *need* to work the solution steps. That is the only reason I did. Plenty people read them, do a little work...but do not really work them and use them as they need to be to be the game-changers they truly are. I was and am, only because I needed (and need) to. Not tzidkus, at all, and not a madreigo, certainly.

I spent decades in yeshivah being told that if only I'd get good enough, I'd finally be able to stop masturbating. If I'd get my da'as clean enough, my mesiras nefesh big enough - then I'd be liberated! I believed hook, line and sinker, that if I'd learn Mesilas Yeshorim, sifrei yir'ah with hispaylus, shimush talmidei chachomin, chumash and gemorah, and did chessed and teshuvah well enough, then I'd be straight in the head enough that this behavior would be *below me*, finally. I was sincere....I thought.

But it did not work, obviously, and I discovered that I could not stop acting out my lust, because the only fool-proof method I knew to get free of it *was to do it!*

Finally *I* could not afford to act out any more, and had to stop. It wasn't that Hashem needed me to stop, but that I needed to. I was losing my humanity and could not accept that - not because of what you are calling self-love, but because of the survival instinct. I do call that self-love, as I wrote to you earlier.

So I knew there *must* be a third option - a way out - but could not for the life of me figure out what it could be!!

Hashem guided me to real, live, recovering perverts. Finally, I found people who had my problem and were willing to speak openly about it with me - they were sober and getting better. I asked them how to do it and followed them to sobriety one day at a time....for the past 14 years and nine months...but who's counting?

They taught me all they were doing (the steps), no secrets, no complicated rituals:

They taught me that I had it backwards. I would learn to accept myself **by learning to be accepting of others** - I'd come to comfort with myself by becoming comfortable with others. And the "other" who I most need to become comfortable with and most desperately need to

And

here is what I mean by that:

All the years I was acting out, I always wanted to get that 'madreigoh' first. And similar temptations are still in me! Loving Hashem was always the ikkar, and loving *people* seemed tefeiloh to it. Yes, it is true - but it doesn't work that way, at least for me. First comes living right with the things that are really **real** to us: other people and ourselves. **Then** we will finally be able to really get right with G-d. As Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai told his talmidim (tanna'im!), "*Halevai* you should in your hearts see/treat Hashem as **real** as you treat any person." He said that cuz **we don't**.

I was ma'arich, as usual. Gevalt! Sorry if I lost you, or anyone else. But I have no interest in heartwarming drashos or what *sounds* nice - all I want is **what works**.

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Re: I can love myself!

Posted by gibbor120 - 27 Dec 2011 20:33

if I could take the liberty of trying to summarize the two sides here...

1) I need to see the good in me.

2) I need to feel that G-d loves me unconditionally.

I think #2 is the foundation. I think it leads to self acceptance. I don't beat myself up, but accept that hashem made me this way and loves me the way I am. That is not to say, that I don't need to grow, but it frees me from obsessive perfectionism. I think #2 may allow me to see the good in myself - which is #1.

I have found that purely trying to see the good in myself (#1) doesn't really work for me unless I first accept that G-d loves me unconditionally. I think even Twerski and others talk about self esteem coming from the fact that G-d created me, not that I have maylah x, y, or z.

Make sense to anyone?

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Re: I can love myself!
Posted by Dov - 27 Dec 2011 21:25

To me, it is so important to accept that presuming the ability to be **able** to figure out or understand *why* Hashem loves me so much, is just hubris. So I choose not to do it. Just like I choose not to check whether 'that news story has something in it that I shouldn't see'. Surrender, acceptance of my place...it's all the same. And it leads to living right-sized, for a change.

Hubris leads me to take over again - in my mind. Whenever I have ever taken over and edged G-d out (E.G.O.) it was happening **in my mind**. Eventually I'd act out. To lust for *understanding* something that is not my business, is just as ill as my lusting for a better view of that woman in the window...not my business, either. Not "an aveiro", but just not my business. That's the truth. Gotta remember that....

Ultimately, masturbating myself is just taking the reigns again and playing G-d, isn't it? "Obviously *You* (Hashem) are doing a very *poor* job at taking care of me....**I** know just what to do." :') That's how it always is, as far as I am concerned.

His love and cherishing of me is *His* business, not mine. Simple.

Other people do not need this, that's all. No big deal.

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Re: I can love myself!

Posted by gibbor120 - 27 Dec 2011 21:56

dov, would you agree that a person needs to feel that G-d loves him, and the flipside, feeling that G-d hates him - is bad for sobriety/recovery?

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