

Breaking Point - The Story and Journey of ElijahPosted by Elijah - 08 Jan 2013 21:34

Shalom,

Well, here I am. My journey has been a long one, so bear with me, but I would like to explain and share it openly with you all. Even if you don't read the whole thing, for me it will be good to type it all out here. So, this is my first post as you can see, and I am on my journey to 90 days. 90 days... something I have never seen since the age of 12 or 13. It was around that time that I began my addiction, and walked in a direction opposite of haKadosh Baruch'Hu and His chesed. By the time I was 17 my addiction had me acting out 5 times a day, everyday, without even the slightest idea that I was destroying myself. I maybe considered that what I was doing wasn't healthy, and played around with trying to lessen it a couple times, but that was about it.

THE FIRST TESHUVAH AND EVENTUAL CONVICTION

After high school I had a severe turning point in my life where I was convicted of the direction I was going and had the hopelessness of my life flash before my eyes. A real wake up call, Baruch HaShem! I made teshuvah at that point, but it was a difficult journey pulling myself back towards His light and away from the darkness which I had accustomed myself to. A year of testing finally rewarded me with an overwhelming amount of His chen v/chesed (loving-COMMITMENT; for He is a faithful G-d who keeps covenant!) which healed much of my heart from how I was living. This was year number two of walking towards Him. However, my addiction was still not brought to the forefront as I was not ready to deal with that. I prayed to HaShem and thanked Him for His blessing, and then I prayed that He would bring me to the next level. This, as you can imagine, brought further tests; much more difficult ones! So my third year of walking back towards Him began to severely clean up my life, and 2/4 of the way through my addiction was ready to be addressed. Conviction. Maaajor conviction!

I was scared. So scared and what I realize now as so prideful. I was always an introvert who kept things to himself, and stubbornly independant to boot, which when dealing with this issue is a recipe for disaster. But my strong will tried everything. I got books, videos, everything you could imagined to try and learn how to overcome. As in Yov31:1, I learned to "guard my eyes" and make a b'rit with them not to look lustfully. I developed new habits, and remember how encouraged I was when I could go a couple days without acting out. That was so huge for me!! But silly me, I wasn't even going to Shul! I had no live encouragement or spiritual nourishment of any kind!! I was living in my shell! So the longest I ever stayed clean during this time, and I only did it once, was 2 weeks. And it was one of the hardest things I had ever done because I was doing it all out of sheer will. Which cannot win. It can never win.

FINALLY OFF TO SHUL

Finally, after reaching a new low and feeling myself slip further and further away from HaShem, severing my keshet with Him, I broke out of my shell and began a new approach. I went to Shul, Yeshiva, made friends who were zealous for Torah and got involved with many things, and began everything you could imagine to try and strengthen myself. I brushed up on my Hebrew (I even teach a beginners class now!), started cantoring, and taking on several other responsibilities to help strengthen and encourage me. I found a good filter for a my computer and had it installed without being able to override, delete, or do anything on the internet without it. But I had still not opened up about my addiction. While all of this helped tremendously, and my acting out lessened more and more to the point where I was maybe averaging once a week (compared to 5 times a day years ago) this was encouraging. But truly, I was what AA called a "dry drunk". Even if I was staying clean for long periods, and even if my acting out wasn't with exposing myself to the same material as before, my disease mutated and found other ways to satisfy itself.

FINDING THE PERFECT GIRL

Be Holy as He is Holy though!! I strived for perfection nonetheless (key word, I strived... big problem), and one of the biggest mistakes in me doing this is thinking that, while dealing with my adiction in secret, the one thing that would help me to overcome was finding the perfect girlfriend. And I did find her... I found a G-d fearing, righteous, Torah keeping girl of the likes of Rebekah, Devorah, Hannah and Ruth. She was amazing in every sense of the word, and I treasured her beyond measure. I have always been a hopeless romantic, believing in the "fairy tale love" and often succeeding in recreating that. But now I don't know if that is just part of my disease or not. At the very least my disease distorted it beyond measure...

From my profession, I learned that it takes three weeks of twenty-one days to form a habit, and so before my learning about the 90 days, I thought if I could just make it that long it would be a lot easier. I had only made it past 21 days twice. One was not last Hanukkah, but the Hanukkah before, and the other was last spring. Both of times it was because of the encouragement I got from finding this girl who was perfect in my eyes. But by keeping my disease to myself and thinking I could overcome, I was only lying to myself and others. I was rationalizing it all as well, but a rationalization is nothing more than a reason wrapped in a lie. Unlike an excuse which is designed to mislead others however, a rationalization decieves both others and the one giving it. My pride, ego, selfishness, all of it was hidden from before my eyes until my final breaking point...

THE BREAKING POINT

You see, we began to slip in the area of shomer. Holding hands, hugging, cuddling... and although it was the goal not to kiss until we were married, if she was found in a moment of weakness, because of my disease I was powerless to resist. And that's exactly what happened. She kissed me and it was all down hill from there. Within a month of stumbling, my disease was brought to the forefront and controlling me like no tomorrow. The very thing I wished to protect her from in this world, the very pain and anguish I had the strongest desire (apart from my YH) to keep her from, I ended up inflicting upon her by not fully guarding her. And seeing her pain finally broke me. It broke me in a way that is indescribable, and the breaking has been increasing more and more as time goes on.

The first break came on December 19th, my first clean day in this 90 day journey. 3 days after that I brought my addiction into the light and told her. The next day I found a 12-step group and went to my first meeting. The next Shabbat I told my Rav. I was done. I am done. I surrender. I surrender all. In my powerlessness I give up...

At first the Spirit of HaShem was upon this perfect girl and she was very encouraging. She helped me to open up and let go of my pride. But we knew we had to separate nonetheless because there are consequences to this kind of stumbling. However, the consequences here turned out to be worse than I had imagined. As we spent time apart and got into the right frame of mind, everything became clear. And what we saw was not pretty. She felt cheated of her potential, used, abused, unable to see me and therefore having to leave our Shul, and because of my hiding this, my dishonesty with everything we had been through, it was a very difficult situation. See, if I had been open, none of our stumbling would have happened. But I wasn't. Instead, I hurt her emotionally and spiritually. And I hurt her bad! Seeing that I was the exact kind of boy she should have stayed away from, we just parted out separate ways. We were more than just in a relationship, we were best friends. I lost that friendship and she never wants to see me again. The pain from realizing all of this is at times unbearable, and many bad thoughts have entered in my head. So many bad thoughts! But all the pain is much needed in order to help me realize the seriousness of my disease and how I must be broken and surrendered. Surrendered and transformed by HaShem to become a soldier worthy of fighting in His army. Being rigorously honest with myself sometimes makes it seem hopeless, and I am hanging on to the grace of HaShem by the nick of my teeth...

AND NOW FROM HERE...

But this all has needed to happen. HaShem is finally freeing me, painful as it is. My Rav is away right now, but when he comes back I am going to be having a more in-depth discussion with him and being 100% honest about absolutely everything. my place in Shul will then be decided. He is such a tzaddik and wants to walk with me through this, and I also have the help of my 12-step group now. In addition to this, if I have my Rav's blessing, I want to start a "kedoshim group" with a couple other young men who have different struggles than me, but are at a similar place of wanting to surrender all to HaShem and be Kadosh unto Him. This way I have three strong cords in my face to face life. In addition to all of this though, I am here on GYE and doing the 90 day journey. One reason I stumbled so bad before last Hanukkah is because I work way too much. I am also breaking free from "workaholism" and the stress it has caused me. But I have internet access at all my jobs, and this will be an outlet for me to come to when needed.

Tomorrow I reach 21 days clean, the third time I have ever done so. But it is different from all the other times because I have now surrendered. I have accountability. I have strength outside of myself leading the way because there was never any strength in me in the first place. Only a will that was fooling and lying to itself. But HaShem is all in all and I give everything over to Him. He may do with me as He pleases and I am eager to accept any and all consequences and pain to help keep me broken and surrendered before Him.

Truly, "A broken and a contrite heart, O G-d, You will not despise" (Tehillim 51:7b)

Todah for any who read even a fraction of this.

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Re: Breaking Point - The Story and Journey of Elijah
Posted by Dov - 09 Jan 2013 04:09

Thanks so much for that openness, chaver. The points I related to and liked the most were where you mentioned how your being honest with this girl would likely have prevented the mess. Also, that you are taking some real steps rather than just mental ones...you are recognizing the problem here is more than just 'thought' - so action is probably needed to effect some real change.

But I'd like to discuss with you whether you are at the best point in your life to pursue a

'Kedoshim group' right now. If your Rov knows about recovery, he might agree that building the basics for a year or two may be better for your long term goals, b'ezras Hashem. I have met many frum guys in very early recovery who get tangled up in their religious development before they have gotten healthy enough to do that. Often, our yiddishkeit (or at least our serious religious awareness) developed *in tandem* with our dependence upon cyclical challenges of self-gratification, porn use, and masturbation...look back at your life carefully and see if this is true for you in some respect. If it is, it follows then that - for better or for worse - our religious identity *itself* is tied into our problematic thinking and the addiction, itself. And it becomes clear that the sick cycle we have come to know so well and are dying to get free of...actually has been and will continue *feeding* off our own desire for kedusha itself. Our broken usage of Torah concepts conspires to keep us in 'the pit where there is no water, only snakes and scorpions'. This broken usage of Torah concepts is what the Mussar movement and others sought to correct: misused instincts, AKA 'bad middos'. It is why none of the 12 steps are about getting sober/clean. Rather, they are all and only about getting more sanity in relation to ourselves, G-d, and others, and better middos. In fact, Rav Chayim Vital zt"l, writes in the beginning of his "Sha'arei Kedusha" that the reason working on our middos is not expressly described in the Torah as a particular mitzvah is because it is the very *context* and basis of Torah *itself*.

For the addict, the basis of life *itself* is sobriety. Mind you, not because there is any inherent evil in drinking alcohol or masturbating - but because it causes us to be out of phase with ourselves, G-d, and others. It ruins our sanity because of how we use it and what we become in 'the cycle'. For the addict, recovery is exactly what Chaza"l refer to when they say "Derech Eretz Kodmah laTorah". It is not a 'mizvah' in itself - but is instead the very basis of all the entire Spiritual life and service of Hashem the addict can have. Without it, there is no platform from which to start avodas Hashem. (That is not to say that a failing addict cannot perform mitzvos. He or she can. But they will not be integrated into a growing, living, useful Jewish person.)

If you really think you are an addict, then I suggest to you that a patient rebuilding process will be needed for your real recovery. Unifying your recovery with beautiful Kedusha goals is essential - but a matter of timing. Too often, it is embarked on too early because of simple pain - shame of feeling less than, chas v'Sholom, and a need to prove ourselves of relative value to the rest of the frum community. We often end up talking of the great kedusha in shmiras habris (guarding the covenant of sexual purity) and it is poison for us for it leads to grandiosity and religious fantasy. Jealousy of 'the normals' or the hubris of insisting one deserves to 'be considered holy just like them' gets the better of some. You may need to focus on the humble, humble **basics** for your first year or so, is what I am saying. I do not know you - I am just suggesting you consider this because I love you, a fellow Jewish addict in recovery.

Have you a sponsor who understands this? That's a help. In fact, real (not phone) relationships with other recovering addicts is a great help and often the one thing that makes the difference for many guys. It gets us out of ourselves. The self-absorption is as poisonous for us as all the other twisted thinking. For many of us (perhaps you allude to that discovery yourself when you

write of the power of honesty with others you have discovered), being open with others is the only thing that saves us 'deep and lonely thinkers' from fooling ourselves. We have gotten tricked so many times already, haven't we?

Going to meetings is a great thing to do - but sharing *openly in the meetings every time and getting current each meeting* is really **using** them. We all deeply want to sound good, holy, intelligent, or whatever - but over time we learn just how to be ourselves. Open and honest. And we actually learn how to have fun doing it. That's what meetings are for. Learning how to admit that we are a part *of* - not just apart *from*. You sound like quite a thinker - it may be time that Hashem is giving you tools to think a little less - and **be** a little more. Also, they are for helping you find another addict who has some things you want, to sponsor you in working the steps one by one. That makes the journey work.

Hashem knew that Avraham Avinu was setting out to try and slaughter his son Yitzchak as a korban to Him when He got up early that morning, saddled his donkey, and drove off....but He allowed him to drag through the desert for THREE DAYS (at the age of about 150!) to get there and go through all the motions before stopping him and giving him 'full credit' for passing the test. If G-d knew he'd do it, then why all the fuss? The answer is that people do not change except by taking action. The test was not for the points or the record or for G-d (of course). It was to change Avraham. Action is the only thing that really makes change. It can be motivated by thinking - but the action is what makes it real. Straight thinking does not come natural to the guys who have been acting crazy for so long. But as the chinuch and Mesilas Yeshorim teach us, the actions affect our perspective and inner selves. I suggest (and I write to myself here, too) that looking for more ways to take real action is the key to vaulting forward...or stepping forward, for us.

Hatzlocha!

- Dov

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Re: Breaking Point - The Story and Journey of Elijah
Posted by Elijah - 09 Jan 2013 08:22

Wow, thank you so much for the reply Dov! Everything you said rings so true to me. In fact, I have already been convicted in the past few hours about the kedoshim group. I tend to get over

zealous and run into things too quickly. As you say, I am in dire need of the humble basics, and I know that my Rav will agree when he gets back and we discuss these things further. And as you say, I am definitely quite the thinker.. too much in fact, and do just need to be. To let go. To be humbled and not run forward to only stumble again, but walk slowly and build myself up as each test comes forth. The action, all in it's time, for real, lasting change. Thank you also for the advice with how to use the live groups, and a reminder about the twelve steps focusing on the underlying problem. I really do need to step back and address that before I can even move forward with my religious pursuits. It is so hard to come to the realization that they may have been misguided and or distorted by my addiction all this time. Another part of the harsh, humbling realization that comes with rigorous honesty. With the veil removed from my eyes it is sure a lot to handle!

I think I have to remember to put this into perspective. That by taking this one step at a time, I have the rest of my life to look forward to. LIFE! Not death. But it will require a slow investment. I cannot rush this, and I must remember to "keep my eyes on the summit, not how far it is to the top" (I wrote that on my printed 90 day chart). It is difficult though, especially living in such a fast paced, instant everything society! Oi! When you see how much of a time commitment and how slowly and carefully you must go (and I love your avatar for this!), it really clashes with that. The things you must do... and give up... and put off until later. But all along I knew this had to happen; I just needed to reach the breaking point that has finally come. And I am so thankful to HaShem for that, even though it is painful beyond measure at times. Painful in the sense that, if there was a cup to measure pain, the cup is full and you are unable to measure (process) any more pain that will be realized later. But, as cryptic as this may sound, I need as much as I can in order to keep me at bay and in a state of much needed humility. And this has been my prayer.

As I write this and head off to bed, I am completing my 21st day of cleanliness. Another day in the rest of my life.

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Re: Breaking Point - The Story and Journey of Elijah
Posted by Dov - 11 Jan 2013 04:21

Continued hatzlocha, friend.

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Re: Breaking Point - The Story and Journey of Elijah

Posted by Elijah - 12 Jan 2013 05:07

[Dov wrote:](#)

Continued hatzlocha, friend.

Todah rabbah. I've been struggling lately... not with lust though. With seeing who I am when being rigorously honest... and realizing exactly what I did to my (then) girlfriend. It's hard to handle some days, especially when it comes in such a large dose with no "drug" or pretend life to cover the pain. I spent over an hour praying last night though and I think that helped because today I don't feel as "dark". I just pray that lust does not come as a surprise attack to offer me a supposed "way out".

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Re: Breaking Point - The Story and Journey of Elijah

Posted by Elijah - 14 Jan 2013 23:07

So, I had a fall. And while I didn't spill any seed, I nonetheless had a moment of weakness where I was caught away by lust and went and found all of my old comforts. I was able to stop myself at the end, so I did not stumble so as to fall completely, but enough to re-start my count, and I have learned something very important from this all.

See, I have been struggling with accepting this new way of life. In my last SA meeting we read in the big book about this man who couldn't accept their way of life and so he ended up killing himself. This was very timely and as I myself have had many bad thoughts and difficulty dealing with this very thing; this new way life. There is so much to accept and so many changes that must take place. My fall, even though it wasn't complete (B'H!) was necessary to instill more humility in me and lead me to accepting this new way of life. Not just accepting but living it out. And so, I am thankful for my fall. And I am very thankful that I didn't fall completely because then it would be so much harder to recover.

But something that HaShem has been pressing upon my heart is to quit one of my jobs. See, I have two employers and do several jobs at each of them, and one job gives me access to an

environment and a computer that is terrible for temptation and falling. It's my lowest paying job and I don't need it because I work a ridiculous amount (around 60 hours a week and can live on 30-40% of my income if needed). But I hold on to it because it's a safety net for me that I can latch on to when my other work gets slow (which, for quite a while, it hasn't been - HaShem has proven to me without a shadow of a doubt that he can take care of me financially). But this job is just another thing I keep to keep "control" in my life. I must surrender that too. Not only because of the temptation and how HaShem has been pressing upon my heart to quit and surrender to Him for awhile, but because I also work more than is healthy. So this fall is pushing me to finally do it. To finally let go.

I also had someone pray for me and they had HaShem press upon them some words to speak to me, which were the following,

Once you were strong but you need to be weak.

Once you were puffed up but you need to be nothing.

It takes courage to be the last.

When I reach 90 days, I want it to be a true 90 days where I have not entertained lust at all. According to the basic rules of SA I'm still "technically sober", but technically I know doesn't cut it. A dry drunk is still a drunk. It's time to be rigourously honest and get real. And also to establish my bottom line so that I can honestly speak about my sobriety in SA without a guilty conscience.

Here's to accepting a new way of living...

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Re: Breaking Point - The Story and Journey of Elijah
Posted by Elijah - 15 Jan 2013 21:37

Baruch HaShem, I handed in my letter of resignation yesterday afternoon via e-mail. I haven't seen my supervisor since, but may the Almighty provide me with the courage as I stick to my decision to weed out anything that stands in my way of staying sober and establishing a lasting connection with others, my self, and most of all, HaShem Elokeinu!

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Re: Breaking Point - The Story and Journey of Elijah

Posted by Dov - 17 Jan 2013 11:06

May this post only help and encourage you, Elijah: [Elijah wrote](#):

When I reach 90 days, I want it to be a true 90 days where I have not entertained lust at all. According to the basic rules of SA I'm still "technically sober", but technically I know doesn't cut it. A dry drunk is still a drunk. It's time to be rigorously honest and get real. And also to establish my bottom line so that I can honestly speak about my sobriety in SA without a guilty conscience.

Here's to accepting a new way of living...

Wow, chaver, growth is slow, so I hope you stay patient with yourself. Hashem certainly is (contrary to popular belief) much more patient than you or I are with ourselves.

I think that the demand for perfection and salvation from what you refer to as "a guilty conscience" is just **lust**. Lust for greatness. Lust for purity. I am not saying it is evil, in any way - just that it may be at odds with the real thing you are after.

So, you might ask (a little upset, too): "So what's so bad about lusting for *those* things?".....Right?

Answer: It's not helpful, because those lusts are *not* really about purity or holiness - they just *aren't*. They are about you (us) and your (our) personal glory. Call it *religious* glory - it is still just self-glorification with a very frum hechsher. I mean, unless you are way head-and-shoulders above anyone else in this generation, you are basically a self-absorbed person. We all really are. And Hashem loves us anyway. Self-absorbed is not "EVIL" - it is just *human*. He gives us a Torah to help us move away from our natural self-absorption and self-centeredness...not just from evil. But there is so much room to grow in that - it is a long, long process.

Looking at ourselves and pretending that we are truly mainly motivated at our deepest level by spirituality above all else rather than our little 'cupcakes', is a very nice philosophy. Kind of

makes ya feel good...But in real life, it is nothing but a sure-fire recipe for *more of the same mess*.

You apparently are well-learned in 'guilty conscience', as most of us are. I think that has got to go. Completely. Guilt tells you lies: you are trash, you are undeserving of the basics like Hashem's love, etc., and other things. All those lies cause you and me to reach for sweet, sweet porn...and it is sweet, isn't it? But guilt is not at all what Torah is about, and though guilt motives may be very 'Jewish' (and *Catholic*, too), using it (as you and many of us do a lot) is just strengthening our '*self-absorption and self-centeredness*' muscles. The source of the problem, itself. So we may indeed end up more holy in some respect - but all the more self-absorbed and self-centered...now just for that great brass ring of 'being called a Kodosh'. Having that status.

For an addict, this just stinks, cuz it goes on forever. Our struggle is really so predictable. Same thing, over and over. It is like a person running frantically to escape from his own rear end that is on fire. Gotta stop, drop, and roll. Not time to run.

Does this help at all? I am trying to shine light on structural things that can be changed a little for you, if you want to. Motives changed a little bit at a time, make a big difference.

So in short: The weight of your guilt is pushing on you too hard, chaver. Even if your motives seem very kosher, they may not be realistic - and that is a recipe for disaster. Guaranteed failure. Hashem and His Torah do not seek our failure. Guilt is ***always*** self-centered motivator and also makes a person sicker, never better. I believe you could come to REGRET without self-centered guilt, be"H, but it will take you a bit of time to learn that.

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Re: Breaking Point - The Story and Journey of Elijah
Posted by Elijah - 17 Jan 2013 18:26

[Dov wrote:](#)

Does this help at all? I am trying to shine light on structural things that can be changed a little for you, if you want to. Motives changed a little bit at a time, make a big difference.

It does, thank you! And you're right (again). Not only have I been bogging myself down with guilt (although this week is better than last) but having to come to realize that this attitude/motivation change is difficult, deep, and takes time, is also a struggle. It makes me ask just who am I and where am I going? The underlying behavior is so strong, it's incredible. And to think that we can feed it with seemingly good intentions (spirituality, religiosity or righteousness). That's where those words that someone spoke over me ring so true - "once you were puffed up but you need to be nothing".

In a world of instant everything, the patience and process is all the more difficult, and all the more challenging in a roundabout way. See, I'm used to an athletic goal oriented way of life. A quote that rings home for me is "keep your eye on the summit, not how far it is to the top". And yet, with this, we can't even see the top! As the white book says, we only know that there have been people who have gone before us, and we can only see a couple feet in front. Trusting G-d with every step of the way...

As before, thank you Dov for your encouragement. It does really help and remind me of the essentials. I can literally feel the truth in your words, hard or difficult as some of it may be in the struggle known as our brains.

On a positive note, the hope and forgiveness of step one is starting to show through. The first time I read it was supposed to be there I just laughed and knew I wasn't there yet. My fall actually helped get me there too, surprisingly enough, because it was a wake up call for what really matters in this stage of life. Surrendering and being nothing, which is my only hope at being something.

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Re: Breaking Point - The Story and Journey of Elijah
Posted by Dov - 18 Jan 2013 03:03

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Re: Breaking Point - The Story and Journey of Elijah
Posted by Elijah - 21 Jan 2013 18:20

Thank you chaver! Back up to one week again with a progressive victory over lust. I made a first step in my SA group in really beginning to share some things. I decided that each week I am going to bring something into the light (at least one thing). I also only have a few more shifts at that job that often makes me stumble. A sacrifice unto HaShem that will allow the real me to come forth and connect to Him and others around me, and though the transition process is quite fuzzy at times, I do look forward to the other side where mroe and more rest/shalom comes forth. Yes, progressive victory, one day at a time...

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Re: Breaking Point - The Story and Journey of Elijah
Posted by Dov - 22 Jan 2013 23:16

It's not that fuzzy, actually. Just take the actions of love to your fellows and to everybody, instead of running from them. As you work your steps with your sponsor that will become clearer and clearer, be"H.

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