



## **12-Step Torah Study**

12-Step Torah Study combines the guidance of the spiritual program for living found in the 12-Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous with the insight and *Yiddishe neshama* (Jewish soul) that only be found in the Torah. 12-Step Torah Study lives in connections between the 12-Steps and Jewish holidays (Ozarowski, n.d.), the character development and spiritual growth practices of *mussar* (Twerski, 2010), and specific insights into the weekly *parsha* (Harris, 2017). On or near Serenity Shabbat, consider holding a 12-Step Torah Study by integrating one of the 12-Steps into a *mussar* group, a *parsha* class, or even a special class on Jewish connections with the 12-Steps. Two books that connect *parshat hashavua* with the 12-Steps are *Finding Recovery and Yourself in Torah* (Borovitz, 2016) and *Renewal Each Day: Daily Twelve Step Recovery Meditations Based on the Bible* (Olitzky & Z., 1992). Both books can serve as inspiration for connecting 12-Steps and Torah and each book includes questions on the *parsha* which can be used for a 12-Step Torah study.

If you would like JCFS Chicago to facilitate a 12-Step Torah Study for your congregants, please contact Beth Fishman at [BethFishman@jcfs.org](mailto:BethFishman@jcfs.org).

## **Drash and D'var Torah Materials**

Below are points from which to build a *drash* or *d'var Torah* related to addiction and recovery. One *drash* is related to addiction and recovery in the Jewish community, one relates recovery lessons from the Nazir, and one relates the *parsha* and 12-Steps of recovery.

If you are interested in having a colleague serve as a sounding board as you write your *drash* or *d'var Torah*, would like to have a clinical ear listen to your message, or would like additional materials, please contact JCFS Chicago.



### Addiction and Recovery in the Jewish Community

A drash focused on addiction and recovery in the Jewish community might include the following points:

- Jewish people experience addiction and recovery at the same rate as other populations.
- There is a treatment gap in the treatment of addiction with only 1 in 10 people with an addiction receiving treatment.
- Relapse rates among people with addiction are similar to relapse rates of other chronic illnesses, though there is significant stigma associated with relapse and addiction that is not associated with relapse with other chronic illnesses like asthma and hypertension.
- JCFS Chicago addiction services can help connect you with assessment, treatment, and recovery resources.
- 12-Step mutual support groups meet in Jewish spaces.
- Reminder that people and families facing addiction are not alone and that you and the Jewish community are here for them.

### Recovery Lessons from the Nazir

A drash focused on Recovery Lessons from the Nazir might include the following points:

- Abstinence can be a spiritual practice; the Nazir abstains in order to be set apart for God. (BaMidbar 6:3).
- Changing the way we act is hard and abstinence as a spiritual practice requires asking for help and/or partnership from a Higher Power to change how we act. The Nazir makes a formal vow to God, if the Nazir simply wanted to use willpower to change their actions, no vow would be necessary. We don't make vows to make willpower-enabled changes. The Nazir needs/wants support from God and the community and makes a public vow to include both God and the community in supporting the Nazir to act in the ways of a Nazir.
- Abstinence as a spiritual practice means even when other people might not abstain, the Nazir abstains. This is true even during celebrations and times of sadness and loss. For the Nazir it is total abstinence, not even a little bit of alcohol is used. (BaMidbar 6:3-8).



- The Nazir is familiar with the idea of relapse and that a relapse doesn't mean all is lost and there is no coming back. (BaMidbar 6:9-12). When the Nazir's vow is broken, he takes responsibility and reconsecrates his vow (BaMidbar 6:11-12).
- Without the Beit HaMikdash, it is impossible for someone to end their period of a Nazirite vow today. For some people in recovery that is the journey they are celebrating with us this Shabbat...a journey to follow their treatment plan and their spiritual program, to continue on the journey of recovery one day at a time.

### 12-Step Torah (see information on leading a 12-Step Torah Study session below)

A drash focused on 12-Step Torah intentionally connects one or more steps of the 12-Steps with the parsha. Often the first three steps are summed up as "we can't, God can, let God." BaMidbar 5:1-4 provides a rich opportunity to see the first three steps in action.

- Step 1: We admitted we were powerless over alcohol/addiction—that our lives had become unmanageable. (BaMidbar 5:1-3). Though sometimes the idea of being powerless over alcohol/addiction is the first thing that gets noticed in this step, Step 1 also talks about life being unmanageable. Addictive behaviors often begin as a way to cope or self-medicate when life is unmanageable. In these verses, life is so unmanageable that people are sent outside the camp to keep the unmanageability from spreading.
- Step 2: Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. (BaMidbar 5:4). In verse 4, God's presence is made known (God spoke) and we are reminded that we are not in this alone. With the help of a Power greater than ourselves, things could become manageable again.
- Step 3: Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God. (BaMidbar 5:4). In the second half of verse 4, we are reminded that God doesn't swoop in and do it for us. God offers support and partnership, and we still need to do our part. Here we see the Israelites listening to the spiritual program God offers and then following that spiritual program.
- These three steps support people in recovery and their allies. The 12 Step principles found in this Torah remind us that when life becomes unmanageable, God can make manageability possible again, when we make a decision to listen to and follow a spiritual program to recover our lives.