



Recovery Speakers and Stories

Serenity Shabbat is an ideal opportunity to invite someone from the Jewish community who is in recovery (including loved ones of those who have struggled with addiction) to tell their story. Please contact us if you are interested in having a Jewish recovery speaker. We can assist you in identifying someone from within your own community or connect you to one of our volunteers in long term recovery. Speakers focus on the life affirming message of recovery, share the spiritual gifts they have received in recovery, and give particular attention to their Jewish recovery journey. For include those who may not be at synagogue (due to covid concerns or other reasons), consider creating a Zoom session during which a recovery speaker can tell their story. You might also make recovery stories of Jewish individuals available on your website; many have published their stories to help others understand their journeys. The Jewish Addiction Awareness Network (JAAN), a comprehensive resource website for information and connection, features many voices sharing Jewish perspectives on addiction and recovery.

<https://www.jaanetwork.org/perspectives/personal-stories.php>

Supplemental Prayers, Readings, and Observances

Synagogues and congregants can incorporate addiction-related readings or prayers into their worship service, into kiddush luncheon after *shacharit* on Shabbat morning, or into a Torah study or adult education class. Readings and prayers that complement the theme of Serenity Shabbat include:

Serenity Shabbat Prayer for Healing

Mi Shebeirach Avotainu, Avraham, Yitzchak, V'Yaakov, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel V'Leah— may the one who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, bless those who are in need of healing from addiction. May those who are suffering from cravings and triggers find the strength of King David who prayed “this too will pass.” May those who feel alone and lost find the guidance that Abraham found in a Higher Power he called “Eyl Elyon”-- God most High -- and went to a land he did not know. May mothers and fathers who suffer as they witness the pain of their



children be heard like Rachel who wept “*for her children and refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are away. For it is written ‘And G-d will answer her: Restrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work will be rewarded, says G-d, and they will return from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future . . . (Jeremiah 31:14-16)’*” May families pulled apart by addiction find the healing that Joseph knew when he said to his brothers “‘please come closer to me,’ and they drew closer.” O God, please heal us now. Together we say: Amen.

Serenity Shabbat Memorial Prayer

In the fullness of complexity that is the human condition, we acknowledge the good and the bad in the lives of our loved ones who have died of addiction. The moments of light and darkness, the disease of addiction and moments of sobriety, the mistakes and the desire to change, the hope and the loss. May their memory forever be a blessing.

With the collective knowledge of their deaths, we lift up feelings of loss and hope, discouragement and relief, anger and awareness—to name a few of the emotional energies in the room. Each of these emotions serves a purpose, and may we be gentle with ourselves and one another as we experience them.

We now remember them in our hearts and in our minds. Let us take a moment of silent reflection and personal remembrance of our loved ones who died at the hands of addiction. May God remember them and may we, without obligating ourselves with a vow, offer tzedakah and acts of loving-kindness for their sake. With this merit, may their souls be bound up in the bonds of life with the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah so that their memories may become a blessing. And let us say, Amen.

T’filat haShalvah/The Serenity Prayer

The Serenity Prayer is a common feature at the end of 12-step fellowship meetings like AA (Alcoholics Anonymous), NA (Narcotics Anonymous), OA (Overeaters Anonymous), FA (Families Anonymous), and Al-Anon throughout the United States and the world. Below is the Serenity Prayer in English, Hebrew, and transliteration.

The Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,



And the wisdom to know the difference.

א-לֵי תָן בִּי אֶת הַשְּׂלוֹה
לְקַבֵּל אֶת הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁאֵין בְּיָכוּלְתִּי לְשִׁנּוֹתָם
אוּמָץ לְשִׁנּוֹת אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר בְּיָכוּלְתִּי
וּתְבוּנָה בְּחִין בֵּין הַשְּׂנִיִּים.
לֵה

*AyLEE tayn bi et hashal VAH
l'kaBAYL et had'vaREEM she'AYN b'YAcholtee l'shanoTAM
ooMETZ l'shaNOTE et had'vaREEM aSHAYR b'yacholTEE
ut'VUnah l'havCHEEN bayn hash'NAYim*

Cake Taking Ceremony

Many people in recovery celebrate sober birthdays (the anniversary of a person's sobriety). Sober birthdays are often celebrated in 12-Step fellowships, during which members are given a cake on their sober birthdays. This is sometimes known as “taking your cake” or “getting my cake.”

This week's *parsha*, *Naso*, is when the Torah teaches that one of the pathways to be close to God involves abstinence from mood altering substances. A person whose spiritual journey included abstaining from alcohol and other drugs would go to the Temple in Jerusalem and make a commitment to following the spiritual program. Part of that ceremony in ancient days included placing a cake in the hands of the person making the commitment. Currently, as we celebrate the birthdays and anniversaries of those who dedicate their lives, one day at a time, to following a program of sober spiritual living, we can celebrate those birthdays and anniversaries with a cake.

“(Name/s of participants) I invite you to step forward and receive your cake in celebration of the anniversary of your Recovery. May you find strength in following your program, and from the people, places, and things that support Recovery and may you be guided on your journey by a power greater than yourself. Yom Echad B'chol Pa'am—One day at a time.”

Shabbat at Home: Consider having cake for dessert at one of your Shabbat meals to celebrate addiction recovery...that of someone you know or for all who are living a life free of addiction!



Readings from Contemporary Jewish Authors on Recovery for Serenity Shabbat

Hard to Accept

“One of the hardest things that I have had to accept is that I have a bad side to myself. I think bad thoughts and feel hurtful feelings. Along with my goodness and love for life and people, I have urges toward anger, hate, and fear. I continue to work on accepting this part of myself. I don’t see myself as tainted with sin. Rather, I see that I struggle with the challenges of life: with injustice and unfairness, with insecurity (financial and otherwise), and with loneliness. I work to accept these feelings as part of life, as opposed to what I used to do, which was to deny them through drinking.”

Recovery, the 12 Steps and Jewish Spirituality: Reclaiming Hope, Courage & Wholeness, Rabbi Paul Steinberg, page 48.

Shema

“The central prayer of Judaism is the *Shema*. “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is One.” (Deuteronomy/*Devarim* 6:4) It doesn’t say, “The Lord is the one God.” It says, “The Lord is *One*”—that is, complete Unity and Oneness. Nothing exists apart from Him. It is E.G.O. [Edging God Out] that implicitly denies this fact and thus E.G.O. that separates us from our true and essential relationship with God. When we realize that God is truly Everything, we are released from E.G.O., and likewise, when we let go of E.G.O., we feel how God is truly Everything. Most people would call this “enlightenment” or some other fancy word. The recovering addict calls it sobriety.”

God of our Understanding: Jewish Spirituality and Recovery from Addiction, Rabbi Shais Taub, page 29.

Darkness and light

“Spiritual darkness and addiction go hand in hand. As a result, we really can’t see anything. With spiritual renewal comes light. Recovery is slow and gradual, but we can get there—as long as we accustom ourselves to that light. At first our Recovery may feel a bit overwhelming. After all, we were numb to our feelings for so long. But once we get focused we are able to see all the colors of God’s creation in their radiant brilliance. Like the canvas of creation, God has taken paintbrush in hand and colored our Recovery.

Bill W., the co-founder of A.A., often said that alcoholics were ‘all-or-nothing’ people. What are tiny emotional hurts for others become heart-rending crises for us. A minor



fender-bender can throw us into a dizzying tailspin. As one Twelve Step saying puts it, 'Time takes time.'

It is tempting to grab more of this good thing called Recovery and stuff it into our famished souls, but it doesn't work that way. Recovery is a slow fix. Get ready for it one day at a time.

As you light Shabbat candles, allow Shabbat serenity to enter your life and set your soul on fire."

100 Blessings Every Day: Daily Twelve Step Recovery Affirmations, Exercises for Personal Growth & Renewal Reflecting Seasons of the Jewish Year, Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky, p. 42.

What does God say to us?

"What does God say to us? 'I take no joy in the death of the wicked.' Reality is not out to punish us or condemn us or see us die beneath the weight of our addictions and our pasts. What Reality wants is for us to live in harmony with what is, for when we do so, life lives at its optimum. To live in this manner we have to learn to swim with the current of life rather than against it. While Reality allows us to swim against the current, doing so robs us and life of our highest potential. If this is what God wants, it must be possible to achieve it, for Reality cannot ask the impossible of us."

Recovery—the sacred art: The Twelve Steps as Spiritual Practice, Rabbi Rami Shapiro, p. 126.

Finding Recovery and Yourself in the Torah

"Speak to...anyone who vows the vow of a *Nazir*. (Numbers/*Bamidbar* 6:2). Also, we learn in this parsha about the Nazirite. This is a person who takes a vow of abstinence from all intoxicants for a specific period of time. How long this period is depends on each person's life circumstances and desires. For some of us, being a *Nazir* lasts our lifetime, please God. The *Nazir* might be a person who has made mistakes because of poor judgement. We are being taught that in order to make really gross mistakes, to ignore basic truths that God and Torah are teaching us, we must be confused and our sight cloudy. The only reason this happens, according to my understanding of our tradition, is because we are intoxicated.

For some of us, this intoxication is caused by drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex, food, or any number of other things. We are the lucky ones. For others, more subtle substances like power, money, property, prestige, negative thoughts, or faulty logic



cause their intoxication. These are the tools of the Angel of Death. These are the intoxicants that society endorses, allowing us to think we are doing the right thing by pursuing these at any and all costs.

What intoxicants are you still indulging in that cloud your vision?

How can you know the difference between truth and the lies you tell yourself?

Which spiritual practices do you believe you need to adopt in order to stay clear-sighted?"

Finding Recovery and Yourself in Torah, Rabbi Mark Borovitz, p.244