



## Understanding Addiction and Recovery

Addiction is a complicated process involving physical, social, societal, psychological, and spiritual components. The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) defines the psychiatric disease of addiction as:

a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory, and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social, and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.

Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one's behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response. Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment or engagement in Recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death (ASAM, n.d.).

Rabbi Mark Borovitz, Rabbi Emeritus of Beit T'Shuvah (a Jewish long-term residential treatment program in Los Angeles) defines addiction as a spiritual disease and that *t'shuvah* (the Jewish process of returning to our true selves) and *Tikkun Ha-Neshama* (repairing our souls) are the path for lasting recovery (Leibovic-Douglas, 2019). The Torah teaches that we have a communal obligation to support those in need of healing through *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick), *bikeish rachamim* (praying for healing), and emotional support. Members of the Jewish community are *not* at less risk for addiction than others; we are equally likely to struggle with addiction in our community.

It is sometimes necessary to talk about addiction to raise awareness and engage in prevention and intervention. Yet a problem does not define a person. It is not someone's fault to have an addiction, and at the same time recovery is their responsibility (Ohlms, n.d.). Addiction recovery treatment plans can include detox, hospitalization, residential treatment programs, intensive outpatient treatment programs, individual and family therapy, attending mutual support groups like 12-Step fellowships, spiritual counseling, talking with Jewish educators, cantors, and rabbis, participating in Jewish communal life, and engaging in Jewish prayer and meditation. Our Jewish communal obligation is to support recovery. We do this by creating brave spaces in our synagogues to honor and support Jewish recovery, to reach out to and support those among us who struggle with addiction in ourselves or our families, and to mourn the losses that we experience at the hands of this disease.



## **12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous**

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001, 59-60).