

The 12 Step-Program and Judaism

To start, we will quote from the words of Dr Frank Buchman (founder of the Oxford Group apo. Bill W and Dr Bob who took the 12-steps of AA) from the book For Sinners Only, page 75. He writes thus:

According to Dr Frank Buchman, there are eight main ways in which G-d speaks with us:

1. Learning Torah.

When we pray to G-d, we speak to Him; and when we learn Torah, G-d speaks to us.

2. Our Conscience.

We also saw this with Noach Weinberg, paragraphs 5-6-7.

3. Enlightened thoughts.

4. Building judgmental thought.

Learning Gemara.

5. Life Situations.

This is the most important way to know what G-d wants from us. If we see in a particular situation that there is only one logical possibility of how to act, then this is certainly the path upon which G-d wants us to go. Also if something bad happens look at your actions what you may have done wrong and try to understand what G-D may be trying to tell you.

6. Logic.

Even if we can sometimes use more spiritual paths, such as enlightened thoughts or quiet time, it is still important to use our intelligence and to be precise about what logic and the Will of G-d would dictate here.

7. Learning with a study partner and social interaction.

8. Speak to a Raichous person for guidance

9. Quite time

In addition, Dr Frank Buchman "and the Oxford Group" invented. "Quiet Time", and these are his words:

The Thirteenth Step

Quiet Time

(With pen and paper, write down the thoughts that come to you during the meditation about what to do. After writing, check that your ideas fit the criteria below.)

1. Do they go against the highest standard of belief that we have already acquired?
2. (**)Do they contradict the statements made by G-d in the Bible?
3. Are they: completely appropriate?

4. (*)completely pure?
5. with no hint of egotism?
6. definitely for love?
7. Do they conflict with our true responsibilities towards others?

If it is still unclear, continue praying and taking advice from a loyal friend who believes in the guidance of G-d.

Rabbi Noah Weinberg, in the 34th Way, "Love the Straight Path", writes a few ways to ascertain whether our thoughts are really from G-d:

1. In general, the first thought that comes to mind is from G-d, and afterwards, we add our own rationalization and destroy that thought.
2. Ask yourself: is it really the right thing to do?
3. Ask yourself: what would G-d say about it?
4. Ask yourself: is it 100% honest? (*)
5. Listen to your inner voice. Sometimes it says "don't do that!" You usually know if you're wrong. Use your conscience to help you in your work.
6. After you have reached any decision, pause. If the decision is right, you'll feel internal happiness with no feelings of guilt.
7. Ask yourself: How will I feel after I do it? Happy or sad? Pleasure or disgust? In general, after a person does a mitzva, they feel a sense of elation. There are no nagging doubts, no hidden agendas. You feel clean.

Sometimes, after we know what is right, we say to ourselves: "But I can't do that!" Change that to "I don't want to do it". And then you will find that ideas of how to do the Will of the Creator become clear to you.

At times, we start to tell ourselves "But..." Don't let your rationalization destroy the solution. Sometimes you think that you don't have to do it. Don't pay attention to that, and just do what's right.

Rabbi Weinberg ends with these two statements:

"G-d made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Ecclesiastes 7:29)

"Which is the right path for man to choose for himself? Whatever is harmonious for the ones who do it, and harmonious for mankind." (Ethics of the Fathers 2:1) (**)

In my opinion, we need to add a number of points to what has already been said.

1. (*) About the question "Is it completely appropriate"? which we quoted from the words of Rabbi Weinberg in paragraph 4 and in the 13th step, paragraph 3, we need to bring the verses from Psalms 18:26-27 "With the merciful, show yourself merciful; with an upright man show yourself upright; with the pure show yourself pure; and with the perverse show yourself perverse." Similarly, "with the liar show yourself to be a liar". According to this, there are times when one needs to do an action which is not entirely truthful or straight, when dealing with a person who is a liar. (See Gemara, Bava Batra 123, which states that it is permitted to deal deceitfully with the deceitful, as we see with Ya'akov and Lavan).

2. (**) When we weigh up whether our thoughts contradict what G-d states in the Bible, we must remember that sometimes we initially think that something indeed goes against the Torah, but with time, we realize that it is not so. [For example, with mortal danger, we don't always know if that is actually the case, or we discover later on that it is just a test, such as the Binding of Isaac (he who understands, will understand!).]

3. When we follow this path, we must act piously, as it is written in the Zohar on parashat Mishpatim: "Who is pious? One who acts piously with his Creator". Then we merit guidance from G-d, as it says in Tehillim Chapter 89: "Then You spoke in vision to Your pious one" This does not mean overly stringent above the law which is a disease of the generation today but to do exactly what G-D demands of us, through love of G-d.

4. It is difficult at first to follow the commands of your inner voice because the body rebels, for many reasons. Therefore, you should begin perhaps from a point of "lo lishma", not for the sake of Heaven. Tell yourself that since it is from G-d, what do you care if you do it? It will turn out to be for your good and the good of your family and the whole world. This will help neutralize the body's protests and any other obstacles to your carrying out the mitzva.

But this is just at the beginning. Eventually, you should reach the level of "lishma", for the sake of Heaven, and have the ability to say "Of course, G-d, I will definitely do it for Your sake with joy"

5. Some people ask me: "What if, instead of guidance from G-d, I accept Satan's guidance? He is also sometimes able to influence people's thoughts." I always answer that if a person concentrates and desires only G-d's guidance, even if Satan sometimes enters one's thoughts, G-d will take it upon Himself that it will all work out in the end, or He will stop that person before he does that specific thing.

Since we understand the 13th step, I decided to bring the remaining steps in the next chapter, as they appeared possibly in their original form in ancient Jewish ethics (Second Temple period Judaism and prior to this).

The 12 Step-Program and Judaism

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The steps were first published in the book "Alcoholics Anonymous", and were developed by AA, the organization of anonymous alcoholics, as a 12-step program for weaning people from alcohol addiction. Since then, they have been adopted for a variety of addictive or obsessive behaviors – whether addiction to narcotic substances and others, or things such as gambling.

In the past few years, when millions of people throughout the world have directly benefited from the 12-step method, 70 programs have been developed. The steps are built on the paradigm of individual growth that Judaism has been teaching for more than 3000 years.

It is clear from the official book of AA, that Bill W. and Dr Bob took the 12 principles from Dr Frank Buchman, the founder of the Oxford Group. It is also well-known that the Oxford Group and Dr Frank Buchman took their method from Christian writings of the First Century of the Common Era, after the destruction of the Second Temple; that is to say, 100 years after Christianity, which is based on Judaism, began. It is hence clear that this all stems from Jewish philosophy and moral teachings from the Second Temple period and before.

The first thing that we notice, when we examine the 12-step program, is that addictive behavior is mentioned only once, in the first step: "We admit that we are helpless in the face of ----- (fill in the missing word) which has taken control of our lives." In no other place does the program speak directly about habitual obsessive behavior, because the founders of AA understood that every addiction is a disease on 3 levels:

- Physical (me); strong desire
- Emotional (with other people); use of adiction as medication and escape from dealing with difficult life situations
- Spiritual/intellectual (with G-d); lack of turning to G-d in order to cease the behaviour; stubborn belief that I can do it by myself,egotism,arrogance.

Therefore, the solutions need to include these 3 methods of healing:

- Complete cessation of the physical action (me)
- Emotional (with others); development of healthy coping skills for treatment in difficult situations
- Spiritual/intellectual (with G-d); to humbly understand that we are helpless in the face of that behavior, and to ask G-d to do for us what we are unable to do for ourselves.

The sages taught us about the fundamental prototype, both for global and personal existence. "Shimon the righteous one... used to say: the world stands on three principles, the Torah (spiritual/intellectual – with G-d), worship (physical – me), and acts of loving kindness (emotional – with others). (Ethics of the Fathers 1:2).

The process of repentance (changing to the path of good) is dependent on those same three levels of existence.

- We can channel the intellect either to arrogance or humility (in connection to the Creator)
- Emotions: we can serve jealousy and selfishness or love of kindness and concern (with others)
- We can free our physical instincts to attainment of desires and pleasures, or harness and use them for higher goals. (Me)

Rabbi Elazar HaKapar said: "Jealousy and desire and honor remove a person from the world." (Ethics of the Fathers 4:28)

Judaism teaches that one has three continuous relationships in which one is obligated to succeed: 1. With G-d 2. With other people 3. With oneself.

A relationship with oneself means an honest evaluation of the positive advantages and flaws of one's personality; an awareness of the purpose of one's life; and taking responsibility for one's actions.

A relationship with others translates to realizing your own special role in the world; how you can assist others; and an awareness of the effect you have upon all those with whom you come into contact.

A relationship with G-d connects one to the eternal power of this world; to touching upon absolute happiness; and provides one the ability to humbly see one's place in the grand scheme of creation.

Steps 1-3

Looking beyond this lens, we are able to see how the 12 stages apply to these 3 relationships in the process of healing.

Step 1: We admit that we are helpless in the face of -----, that we have lost control over our lives.

Step 2: We have reached the belief that a force stronger than us can return us to normalcy.

Step 3: We have decided to hand over our will and our life to Divine Intervention, as we understand it.

The process begins from a place of strong individual awareness and admitting the source of the problem – an inability to change our behavior through our own will alone, and a recognition of the results of our current behaviour (step 1 – relationship of man to himself).

Steps 2 and 3 relate to the connection between man and G-d, firstly to realize that the Creator of the World can change our behavior (step 2), if we take the necessary step step 3. In other words, "I cannot do it. He can. I think that I will allow Him to do it."

There are those who mistakenly claim that admitting our helplessness contradicts the Jewish concept of free will – "if I truly decide something, I can overcome every obstacle". However, the Talmud states the opposite. It teaches that man's evil inclination becomes stronger and renewed every day, and that without G-d's help, man will not be able to overcome it. (Kiddushin 30 folio b).

A fundamental principle in Judaism is that everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven (Brachot 33 folio b). The only thing we have power over in this world is fear – to see ourselves in relation to the Creator of the world. In conjunction with this, the feeling of fear stems from this idea, and we have the freedom to choose, but only G-d is able to decide whether to let this choice develop successfully into action.

The disease of addiction is nothing other than the evil inclination, as it manifests itself in people, in relation to their specific tests in life. Without the help of G-d, we are truly helpless.

Steps 4-7

Step 4: We have done courageous, moral and intrusive soul-searching.

Step 5: We have admitted in front of G-d, ourselves (and another person) our specific problems.

Step 6: We are totally ready for G-d to release us from our character defects.

Step 7: We have humbly asked Him to release us from our character defects.

The healing process continues with courageous, thorough soul-searching. The fourth step focuses, among other things, on the tests of arrogance, egotism and giving in to passions, which are often found in addicts who are agonizing with obsessive behaviour.

Admitting these defects in character, in front of ourselves and G-d, and speaking about them with someone who understands the process of healing, are essential for real change. This is not confession or forgiveness-seeking, rather a three-pronged approach of identifying and recognizing particular flaws, in order to form an effective program of action. This is certainly not just lip-service.

Soul-searching is the key to personal growth, according to Judaism. It is recommended to work with a partner (chavruta) or rabbi, in order to judge problems and plan strategies for improvement (steps 4 and 5 – relationship of the person to himself).

In steps 6 and 7, we again examine the relationship of man to his G-d. We realize that He is the source of success for our personal growth and that we must initiate a request for help.

Steps 8 – 10

Step 8: We have made a list of all the people we have hurt and are willing to atone for all our actions in front of them.

Step 9: We have atoned for our actions directly in every case where it was possible, except where this would upset the people we have hurt or anyone else.

Step 10: We have continued our soul-searching, and when we have made mistakes, we have immediately admitted it.

Responsibility for our interpersonal interactions is clearly outlined in these three stages. Addictive behaviour may exact a heavy price from those closest to the addict, and even from those further from him. In great part, recovery is a healing process which is not just internal, inside of ourselves, but also in the relationships which we may well have injured.

The universal custom of Jews to identify possible ruptures between us and those close to us and to ask for forgiveness, characterizes our deeds before the Day of Atonement. How can we ask G-d to forgive us if we are not able to take responsibility for our actions towards our fellow man?

Steps 11-12

Step 11: We have searched through prayer and deep thought how to improve our conscious connection with G-d, as we understand Him. We have prayed only to know what He desires of us and we ask for the strength to go through with it.

Step 12: Once we have experienced this spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we have tried to pass on this message to others, and to put these principles into action in all areas of our life.

These steps can be summed up as collective responsibility to continue to invest in our personal connection to G-d, as well as our social obligation to use our recovery to help others. In simple words: "It is impossible to keep it going unless we pass it on to others".

As Maimonides explains, the highest level of performing the command to love G-d is to help others to fulfil it.

We see the sum of the three kinds of relationships we mentioned in the two last steps. Long-term, stable recovery requires constant focus on physical abstinence from addiction to substances or behaviour, as well as continual attention to spiritual and emotional growth. Complacency is an unforgivable crime for recovering .

The founders of AA were very careful to distance themselves from any organized religion, for fear that alcoholics would be loathe to join them, and hence not benefit from participating in the treatment. They understood that only through physical, emotional and spiritual actions would people be able to recover for the rest of their lives from the terrible sickness.

As Jews, it is certainly appropriate for us. Not as a substitute for keeping the commandments. But as a vehicle to improve our Jewish behavior and our connection with G-d.

Many Jews who have used this healing process in their struggle to defeat countless types of addictions and behaviours, attest to an improvement in their level of Judaism, which accompanies the removal of obsessive behaviours.
