

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Recovery, the 12 Steps and Jewish Spirituality: Reclaiming Hope, Courage & Wholeness

Rabbi Paul Steinberg

Introduction

Do you find it odd to have a rabbi come out as an alcoholic? Why or why not?

What may challenge an alcoholic or addict in connecting to his or her religious or spiritual community?

Have you ever felt like you were “on the margins” of your community because of a personal issue or problem you may have had?

Part I: A Judaism of Experience, Strength, and Hope: A Rabbi’s Journey Through Alcoholism

Are there elements to Rabbi Steinberg’s story with which you identify?

Rabbi Steinberg wonders how a rabbi could have been so affected by alcoholism and addiction. What answer would you offer him?

How do you understand what Rabbi Steinberg means by *teshuvah*? Have you ever experienced genuine *teshuvah*?

Chapter 1: Understanding Addiction, Jewish Spirituality, and Medicine

Is the relationship between science and medicine and your spiritual or religious approach a challenge?

How has the science and medicine of addiction changed, affirmed, or added to your conception of addiction?

Chapter 2: A God of Religion and Recovery

What is the message of the quotation from the Talmud at the beginning of the chapter? Do you agree with it?

What are the challenges you face in developing a conception of God? What kind of God do you believe in? Where did your conception originate?

What are the challenges you face regarding your own religious or spiritual tradition?

What is your takeaway from the chapter on God and religion?

Chapter 3: The Dignity of Self

What are the things you do and the people with whom you are connected that demonstrate your infinite value?

Are there any ways in your life in which you have denied the dignity of equality to others? How might you exercise integrating the dignity of equality into your life?

How might have you denied your own innate human dignities? What do you need to do in order to accept them every day?

Chapter 4: The Evil Inclination

How does the *yetzer ha-ra* (evil impulse) manifest in your life? What triggers it most?

Does your ego tend to incline toward the depressive or the grandiose?

What does “elevating evil” mean to you? What does that look like in your life?

Chapter 5: Judaism and Alcohol: A Complicated Relationship

Have you ever felt pressure to drink from your community (like you’re an outsider if you don’t)?

How do you cope with the influences and pressures around alcohol in social and even religious settings?

How has this chapter changed, affirmed, or added to your conception of alcohol and addiction?

Part II: The Covenant of Recovery—Spirituality in Action: Aligning Jewish Spirituality with AA

What actions or practices in your life are spiritual in nature?

What spiritual principles underscore your practice?

Chapter 6: Study—*Talmud Torah*

For you, what makes sacred literature (Torah or other texts) sacred?

How have you experienced the study of sacred literature? What assumptions did you have about it when you began?

How might you implement the study of Torah or other sacred literature in your life?

Why are teachers and/or sponsors so important? Who are your teachers?

Chapter 7: Prayer—*Tefilah*

What can you identify with in this chapter on prayer?

What is your experience with prayer and meditation? What “works” for you and what doesn’t?

For you, are prayer and meditation different experiences? How are they similar?

How might you implement the practice of prayer and meditation in your daily life?

Chapter 8: Repentance—*Teshuvah*

Do you believe that people can change? Have you changed? If so, how and why?

What is the most challenging stage of the *teshuvah* process: a) admitting our responsibility and part in our own resentments, b) confessing our wrongdoings to the injured parties, c) never returning to the same old behaviors, or d) another stage?

How might you implement the practice of *teshuvah* in your daily life?

Chapter 9: Service—*Tikkun*

How does it feel to participate in acts of service?

Although it's not explicitly mentioned in the chapter, the concept of community and fellowship is referenced throughout. What's the connection between service and community?

How might you implement the practice of service in your daily life?

Part III: 12 Texts for the 12 Steps

Step 1—Choice and self-will are very tricky to understand. Is choice an act of mind or act of will? And what's the difference?

Step 2—What are you a slave to? How might you strive toward freedom?

Step 3—Whom do you trust? How do you demonstrate trust and/or faith every day?

Step 4—Are there any resentments that currently affect your life? How might you work to let them go?

Step 5—Do you agree that holding secrets makes us “sick”? Explain.

Step 6—How does fear play a role in your life, behavior, attitude, or thinking?

Step 7—What character flaws and defects will you ask to be removed today?

Step 8—Do you agree that we are constantly transmitting and sharing energy with those around us? Explain.

Step 9—Have you ever had the experience of transforming malignant shame into motivational shame? Explain.

Step 10—Why is it so important for us to focus on one day at a time? Is there anything wrong with looking ahead to the future?

Step 11—What are you reverent about in your life? How are you different when you are behaving reverently than when you are irreverent?

Step 12—How do you demonstrate love on a daily basis?