

# **Beit Yosef: a Sacred Space for Healing from the Disease of Addiction**

Submitted by Ellie Shemtov in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Rabbinic Ordination,

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Advisor: Rabbi Jill Hammer

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## Introduction

If you ask individuals in the Jewish community about substance abuse, a majority would tell you that alcohol and drugs are not a “Jewish problem.” According to JACS (Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons, and Significant Others), an organization dedicated to promoting knowledge and understanding about alcoholism and chemical dependency as it involves the Jewish community, substance abuse affects Jews as frequently as it affects any other group.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the myth “a *shikker* is a goy”<sup>2</sup> and the belief among many that addiction is a character flaw and not a disease, have greatly contributed to a sense of shame and guilt that has prevented many Jews from seeking the help they need. Even the comic Jackie Mason in a famous stand-up routine quipped, “It’s easy to tell the difference between Jews and Gentiles. After the show all the gentiles are saying ‘Have a drink?’ ‘Want a drink?’ ‘Let’s have a drink!’ While all the Jews are saying ‘Have you eaten yet?’ ‘Want a piece of cake?’ ‘Let’s have some cake!’”<sup>3</sup>

While there are many substance abuse rehabilitation facilities throughout the United States, few offer an approach incorporating Jewish spirituality, prayer, and a sensitivity to the Jewish experience. However, Beit T’Shuvah in Los Angeles, California, a residential treatment center emphasizing faith-based recovery and the values of the Jewish community, approaches

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<sup>1</sup> Jewish Board of Family and Children’s Services, *Myth and Reality*, <http://www.jbfcs.org/programs-services/jewish-community-services-2/jacs/myth-reality> (accessed Jan. 14, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> A drunkard is a non-Jew.

<sup>3</sup> Aish.com, *Jewlarious*, <http://www.behrmanhouse.com/store/product-sku/830> (accessed Jan. 28, 2014).

recovery using an integrative model that blends Jewish spirituality, cognitive behavioral therapy, 12-step philosophy and the creative arts.

Beit T'Shuvah has saved many lives but its sphere of influence is localized on the West Coast. Currently, there is no comparable facility on the East Coast. The need is great and the time is now. Using Beit T'Shuvah as a model, this paper will explore the possibility of creating Beit Yosef, a Jewish rehabilitation facility in the New York area that will treat those suffering from substance abuse.

## **The Concept of Beit Yosef**

In 2010, I was a recipient of UJA Federation of New York's Professional Education Network Scholarship (PENS) offered to Jewish graduate students interested in a variety of fields, including rabbinic ordination. It is a two year scholarship and in the second year I had the opportunity along with several other rabbinical students from various seminaries, to study with Rabbi Michael Paley, UJA Federation's Scholar-in-residence. It was Rabbi Paley who suggested that I take on this project.

One requirement of the scholarship was to complete an essay describing a problem in the Jewish community and then create a solution. As the ex-wife of a man who suffered from alcoholism and later passed away from the disease, I knew addiction was a silent problem afflicting our community. Rabbi Paley told me how several years ago he had been working with an intern at UJA on creating an East Coast version of a facility out in California – essentially a

Jewish rehab with a community synagogue inside of it-- a place called Beit T'Shuvah, House of Return. But not long after they began their work, the intern left his position at UJA and moved to Israel, at which point the project was put on hold.

After providing me with this background Rabbi Paley then looked me straight in the face and proposed that this project-- this East Coast Beit T'Shuvah could be something I might want to take on. Suffice to say I didn't exactly jump at the chance. Taking on such a huge project was certainly not one of the solutions I had offered in my application essay, which leaned more towards less conspicuous solutions like speaking about substance abuse in the community from the pulpit or sponsoring a JACS meeting in my synagogue.

But, I knew Rabbi Paley was on to something and I understood whether or not I might take on this project, I could at the very least begin by taking one step forward. And the step forward that kept coming to my mind was choosing this topic for my rabbinical school senior thesis.

## **Beit Yosef**

I selected the name Beit Yosef for several reasons. First, the word "Beit"-- house of-- connects this future East Coast facility to its West Coast model, Beit T'Shuvah. Second, *Yosef* was my ex-husband Joe Wackerman's Hebrew name. Joe and I spent many years together and whatever

difficulties his disease brought into our lives in the end he changed my life for the better. As an expression of my deep gratitude and love I embark on this project to honor Joe and provide hope and help for others struggling with this devastating disease.

But, while the words *Beit* and *Yosef* have their individual meanings, I would not have merged them as a title had I not been familiar with a Jewish code of law called *The Beit Yosef*. Compiled by Josef Caro as a predecessor to his more famous code of law the *Shulchan Arukh*, the *Beit Yosef* is today still an indispensable guide for anyone wanting to follow the development of any individual law of the Talmud.<sup>4</sup> So, having chosen the moniker *Beit Yosef* in a slightly random manner, a year later as I was writing a research paper on wine in the Bible, it became obvious that there was nothing random about the choosing of this name.

One of the more famous statements in the Talmud has to do with drinking on Purim:

אמר רבא : מיחייב איניש לבסומי בפוריא עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן לברוך מרדכי  
*Raba said: It is the duty of a man to mellow himself with wine on Purim until he cannot tell the difference between 'cursed be Haman' and 'blessed be Mordechai.'* (BT Meg. 7b)

For the most part the rabbis tended to agree with this statement. While they may have in general been wary of excessive drinking, on Purim they made an exception-- but not Josef Caro. Caro argued in the *Beit Yosef* that there is never any occasion even the joyous holiday of Purim, when drinking to excess is acceptable.

.....כתוב בארחות חיים (הל' פורים אות לח) חייב איניש לבסומי בפוריא לא שישתכר שהשיכרות איסור  
 גמור ואין לך עבירה גדולה מזו שהוא גורם לגילוי עריות ושפיכות דמים וכמה עבירות זולתן אך שישתה  
 יותר מלימודו מעט

*It's written in Orhat Hayim "one is obligated to mellow himself with wine," but not to become inebriated. This is totally prohibited. There is no greater sin than this. It causes sexual*

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<sup>4</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Caro, Joseph ben Ephraim, p. 490.

*immorality and the spilling of blood and other sins besides these. One should just drink a little more than one is used to. (BY Orah Hayim Siman Tirtzah)*

While Josef Caro was not the first rabbi to view drinking on Purim in a negative light, he was the rabbi to mainstream this notion and so changed the course of how rabbis from then on viewed this Talmudic statement.<sup>5</sup> The link between Joe Wackerman, the *Beit Yosef*, and a “Jewish” drug and alcohol treatment center couldn’t be more obvious.

## **Addiction in Our Society**

Despite Caro’s views on excessive drinking, the problem of substance abuse has not gone away. In the United States drug and alcohol abuse has become a serious public health issue affecting virtually every community. According to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA), addiction is America’s number one health care and health cost problem.

In terms of health care, 16% of the U.S. population age 12 and over meet clinical diagnostic criteria for addiction to nicotine, alcohol or other drugs and 32% currently use one or more of these addictive substances in ways that threaten health and safety. Added together, addiction and risky substance use impacts an astounding 48% of the nation—almost half of the US

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<sup>5</sup> From a conversation with my teacher, Rabbi Michael Pitkowsky.



population. In total, addiction is more prevalent in our society than cancer, stroke, HIV/AIDS, or Alzheimer's disease.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of cost, approximately 30% of national health care spending is driven by substance abuse, and government spending on substance use and addiction totals nearly \$500 billion annually. Even more, about 96 cents of every dollar we spend goes towards coping with the consequences of our failure to prevent and treat it, while only 2 cents goes towards actual prevention and treatment.<sup>7</sup>

As David Sheff writes in his book Clean-- "For decades parents, schools, and communities have tried to stop children from using drugs. There have been myriad national and local drug-prevention campaigns, but clearly these efforts have failed."<sup>8</sup> Every day an average of 8,120 people age twelve and over try drugs for the first time, and 12,800 try alcohol—more than 20,000 people a day which adds up to seven million people a year. Daily marijuana use among high-school seniors is at its highest level in thirty years. Almost a quarter of people who are over twelve years old-- about sixty million people-- binge drink.<sup>9</sup> To make matters worse, 90% of the people who need help never receive it. As Sheff writes, people with addictions are more likely to end up in prison than in rehab.<sup>10</sup>

Substance abuse is a problem that impacts almost every other problem you can name, including "the quality and availability of health care, the national and international economic

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<sup>6</sup> David Sheff, *Clean* (NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), xvi.

<sup>7</sup> The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, *Addiction by the Numbers*, <http://www.casacolumbia.org/> (accessed Jan. 14, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> David Sheff, *Clean* (NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 12.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

crisis; poverty; spousal and child abuse; suicide; U.S. competitiveness in the world economy; property crime; violence shattered families; decimated neighborhoods; and many others.”<sup>11</sup> In short, more than being classified as America’s number one health care problem, substance abuse may very well constitute America’s greatest crisis. One step in battling such a widespread problem is to begin to understand more about addiction itself.

### **Addiction is a Disease**

For years many have argued that addiction is a character defect--“...a symptom of some underlying moral disorder,”<sup>12</sup> which has consequently led to the belief that addicts and alcoholics are weak, selfish, and immoral.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the innocent victims of epilepsy, heart disease, or cancer, many believe that alcoholics choose their fate.<sup>14</sup> Even today, despite advances in the science behind addiction, the impression that drug use is a moral choice still persists.

However, the latest research in psychology, neuroscience and medicine illustrates that alcoholism and drug addiction are diseases that have more to do with factors such as stress, trauma, genetic predisposition, mild or serious mental illness, use at an early age, or some combination of these various categories.<sup>15</sup> Stedman’s Medical Dictionary defines disease as “an interruption, cessation, or disorder of a body, system or organ structure or function....a morbid

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>12</sup> Katherine Ketcham and William Asbury, *Beyond the Influence* (NY: Bantam Books, 2000), 39.

<sup>13</sup> David Sheff, *Clean* (NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), xi.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., xi.

entity ordinarily characterized by two or more of the following criteria: recognized etiologic (disease causing) agent(s), identifiable groups of signs and symptoms, or consistent anatomic alterations.”<sup>16</sup> Based on this definition, addiction fits every one of these criteria that include measurable and long-lasting changes in the brain.<sup>17</sup>

And it is that abnormal brain chemistry that prevents many addicts from finding the help they need. While when faced with a life-threatening disease, most others will seek help because they want to get well, denial and cognitive impairments that most often go hand in hand with addiction prevent addicts from getting the help they need. <sup>18</sup>

In addition, addiction is a chronic and progressive disease. It is chronic because at least some of the changes in the brains of addicts, it seems, are permanent. It is progressive because the disease will worsen if not treated. There is a very good chance that the predisposition for addiction will remain throughout a person’s life.<sup>19</sup>

Often the victims of addiction to alcohol or other drugs are plunged into lives of poverty, homelessness, crime, and jail. The consequences of the disease of addiction, stunting emotional and spiritual growth, and ravaging mental and physical health, are as potentially devastating as those of most other major illnesses.<sup>20</sup>

But the impact of this disease doesn’t end with the addict. “For almost every addict who is mired in this terrible disease, others—a mother or father, a child or spouse, an aunt or uncle or

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>20</sup> Beverly Conyers. *Addict in the Family* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, c2003), 10.

grandparent, a brother or sister—are suffering too.”<sup>21</sup> The hidden victims of addiction are the family members who live each day with a weight that drags them down and bottled-up anger or a constant sadness that keeps them on the verge of tears.<sup>22</sup>

Recognizing that substance abuse is a disease goes a long way towards identifying ways of treating those who are suffering from this ailment. But before we can treat those who are afflicted, we first have to identify who they are—even or perhaps especially if we find them in our own community.

### **Jewish Attitudes towards Alcohol and other Drugs**

In the examination of groups impacted by substance abuse, the Jewish community has held a unique place. As a group, Jews have been considered to have low rates of alcohol abuse compared to most other religious and ethnic groups and this belief was rarely questioned before the mid-twentieth century. The 1901 edition of the Jewish Encyclopedia states that “The superior biostatics of Jews under normal conditions is well known, and may be connected with the absence of alcoholism among them.”

Modern literature about the role of alcohol in the Jewish community displays two very different trends. On the one hand, Jews are regarded as a population with few alcohol problems and a variety of cultural, spiritual, or physiological explanations are suggested to account for the relatively low rate of alcoholism among Jews. On the other hand, studies of alcoholism in the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Jewish community point out that many cases often go unrecognized, because of the myth of Jewish immunity to alcohol abuse.<sup>23</sup>

The notion that Jews are essentially immune from alcoholism dates as far back as Immanuel Kant's observation in 1798 that Jews and women avoid the appearance of drunkenness.<sup>24</sup> This is reinforced by the infamous Yiddish proverb *Veil Shikker iz der Goy*, more commonly expressed as *A Shikker is a goy*, a drunkard is a non-Jew.<sup>25</sup> Even Sigmund Freud believed that drinking pathologies in Jews were pretty much non-existent. He once reassured a Jewish patient concerned about his own drinking habits, that alcohol would neither help him nor harm him; that alcohol was for the gentiles.<sup>26</sup>

Many studies done on Jews and alcohol seem to also reflect this attitude. One study published in 1980 catalogs various deterrents to Jewish alcoholism. These include: the solidarity of the Jewish community; the emotionally sustained tradition and family organization; the fact that wine is a religious symbol and is first drunk early in life; the fact that alcoholism would be disruptive to the unity of the Jewish people; the religious teachings of Judaism which regulate

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<sup>23</sup> Sheila Blume, *Jews, Drugs, and Alcohol*, an entry from *Macmillan Reference USA's Encyclopedia of Drugs, Alcohol, and Addictive Behavior*. [http://media-server.amazon.com/exec/drm/amzproxy.cgi/MzEyAlVytZUjIB5d0bdf5kY+1M0qigPy/H9BNsdvjFcPP/Gd4VSNR09JwmSc2TW5bwPI0CUSNgz/MYHq2OA450+oSm9RRRfoINinMhyG/H3A5abLRgoohWaRI9ODt3aq5zPiOOEKeCWKVPYIQwQ7Atqs+CPV31HU5vywR9ICY8HVojpVOU2bw2R1gW2kZbrNI3/aIONX2tcMCK+/5ivowK5HbvqjwoTfH+UgLQAdW5gG4OzKm7W6lPYqCf+0MnfGx+oS3WZHPoTxqFpRDACQeMG5h38TAD+eBL86XFYzdBtV6bVkanFmeGAKZ0M3DX2wFQbs5cDFsOMwjgkvNuoYox+nuV+2nk9fKCPITMtQn6VdPEztDS2M4jtbE9k+F2rvEaDSz68k0i0chZ+MmDjmDfJ+xLQC==\\$/GADDG3403100259.html](http://media-server.amazon.com/exec/drm/amzproxy.cgi/MzEyAlVytZUjIB5d0bdf5kY+1M0qigPy/H9BNsdvjFcPP/Gd4VSNR09JwmSc2TW5bwPI0CUSNgz/MYHq2OA450+oSm9RRRfoINinMhyG/H3A5abLRgoohWaRI9ODt3aq5zPiOOEKeCWKVPYIQwQ7Atqs+CPV31HU5vywR9ICY8HVojpVOU2bw2R1gW2kZbrNI3/aIONX2tcMCK+/5ivowK5HbvqjwoTfH+UgLQAdW5gG4OzKm7W6lPYqCf+0MnfGx+oS3WZHPoTxqFpRDACQeMG5h38TAD+eBL86XFYzdBtV6bVkanFmeGAKZ0M3DX2wFQbs5cDFsOMwjgkvNuoYox+nuV+2nk9fKCPITMtQn6VdPEztDS2M4jtbE9k+F2rvEaDSz68k0i0chZ+MmDjmDfJ+xLQC==$/GADDG3403100259.html) (accessed Jan. 14, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Susan Lind Vex and Sheila Blume, "The JACS Study I: Characteristics of a Population of Chemically Dependent Jewish Men and Women," *Jl. of Addictive Diseases*, v. 20, 4 (2001): 72, [http://www.jacsweb.org/documents/JAD20\\_4PAGES71\\_89.pdf](http://www.jacsweb.org/documents/JAD20_4PAGES71_89.pdf) (accessed 1/14/2014).

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix A for lyrics to the well-known Yiddish song *Geht der Goy* including a link to a performance of this song.

<sup>26</sup> Susan Lind Vex and Sheila Blume, "The JACS Study I: Characteristics of a Population of Chemically Dependent Jewish Men and Women," *Jl. of Addictive Diseases*, v. 20, 4 (2001): 72, [http://www.jacsweb.org/documents/JAD20\\_4PAGES71\\_89.pdf](http://www.jacsweb.org/documents/JAD20_4PAGES71_89.pdf) (accessed 1/14/2014).

alcohol consumption; and the belief that sobriety is a Jewish virtue.<sup>27</sup> And if there is a smattering of alcoholism among Jews, that smattering finds its root in alienation, loss of religious conviction, broken homes and marriages, lack of education and poor income.<sup>28</sup>

Other studies done have claimed that alcoholism is not as rare as had been thought. In one such study published in 1980, despite the fact that Jewish alcoholics were supposed to be rare, those who conducted the study had no trouble whatsoever finding 100 Jewish alcoholics in the New York area.<sup>29</sup> They also found that 45% of the participants in the study had positive histories of alcoholism in their families with 21% reporting alcoholism in previous generations.

In 1980, the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies formed a Commission on Synagogue Relations, whose intention was to: encourage synagogues to open their doors to Alcoholics Anonymous; educate the rabbinate and the professional leadership in the Jewish community that a problem exists; encourage Jewish communal institutions to recognize this problem; and establish seminars for rabbis and social workers to inform them about the nature of alcoholism, how to recognize an alcoholic and where to refer such a person for help. Despite these intentions, the belief that Jews do not become alcoholics is still prevalent in our community even today.

This impression is troubling because it promotes denial among active alcoholics and so delays treatment; it deters an accurate diagnosis by health professionals who disregard the notion of Jewish alcoholics; it impedes Jewish community leaders from addressing the problem; and it

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 73.

gets in the way of members of individual congregations from seeking help within the Jewish community.<sup>30</sup>

In 2001 JACS performed a study of 379 of its members. While the purpose of the study was not to report on the prevalence of alcoholism and addiction within the Jewish community, but rather to describe a recovering community, the authors were surprised at the disbelief of several colleagues who had to be reassured that Jewish alcoholics and drug addicts exist in sufficient numbers to be studied quantitatively.<sup>31</sup> In order for the Jewish community to tackle the problem of substance abuse in its midst, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the problem within the community.

### **Recovery from Addiction: the State of Treatment**

It is one thing to understand that addiction is a problem in our society and that the Jewish community is impacted in great numbers, but it is quite another to figure out how and where those who are suffering can get effective treatment. In analyzing Beit T'Shuvah, a Jewish addiction treatment facility in Los Angeles that could serve as a model for other treatment facilities, it is critical to not only understand how their program is Jewish but to some extent also analyze their treatment methodologies as well in order to comprehend their effectiveness as a drug and alcohol rehab facility.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 83.

Unfortunately, it is not easy to navigate through the vast amounts of information and misinformation regarding addiction. It is difficult to identify reliable experts and the advice those experts offer is often contradictory.<sup>32</sup> There is no one reliable source to help people find programs that have been evaluated and scrutinized.<sup>33</sup>

When an addict does find his or her way to a rehab, treatment is often unsuccessful. As A. Thomas McClellan, an expert in evaluating addiction treatment observed, “If you’ve seen one rehab, you’ve basically seen all of them. Yes, there are exceptions, but of the many thousands of treatment programs out there, most use exactly the same kind of treatment you would have received in 1950, not modern scientific approaches.”<sup>34</sup>

As journalist David Sheff explains, the main problem with addiction treatment in the United States is the antiquated notion that addiction is a choice and not a disease. For instance, one common symptom of the disease is relapse. But in most rehabs when someone relapses they are kicked out. As Sheff notes, “Kicking an addict out of treatment for relapsing is like kicking a cancer patient out of treatment when a tumor metastasizes.”<sup>35</sup>

One way to discuss the “success” of a treatment center is to identify treatment philosophies experts say are good predictors of success. Below are a few examples of such treatments:

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<sup>32</sup> David Sheff, *Clean* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2013), 15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>34</sup> Anne M. Fletcher, *Inside Rehab* (NY: Viking, c2013), 6.

<sup>35</sup> David Sheff, *Clean* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2013), 135.



1. A primary care program that is at least 90 days long – if addiction is a chronic disease then what is the use of a short term program that expects nothing less than complete abstinence when a person leaves the program?<sup>36</sup>
2. Continuing care -- treatment that goes beyond primary care in rehab and includes aftercare and sober living facilities or halfway houses.
3. Use of evidence-based treatment—there is a big push in the addiction field towards treatment that has undergone scientific evaluation as opposed to approaches based on tradition, convention, intuition, belief, or anecdotal evidence.<sup>37</sup>
4. A sound family program—since families live and interact with their addicted family member fulltime, they will have more impact on outcome than any professionals ever will.<sup>38</sup>
5. Individualized treatment<sup>39</sup>-- One size doesn't fit all. The best treatment programs provide a combination of therapies and other services that meet the needs of the individual patient.
6. Continual assessment of an individual's treatment and services plan—this is to ensure that the patient's changing needs are met. Good treatment facilities will evaluate treatment on a regular basis.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Anne M. Fletcher, *Inside Rehab* (NY: Viking, c2013), 335.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: a Research Based Guide*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2009), 4.

7. Pharmacotherapy—when combined with counseling and other behavioral therapies, medications such as methadone for those addicted to heroin and naltrexone for some with a dependence on alcohol can be effective in treating certain addictions.<sup>41</sup>
8. Monitoring drug use—this can be a powerful incentive for residents to stay clean and sober.<sup>42</sup>

One of the latest treatments is “recovery management,” which shifts the emphasis of addiction treatment from a model that stabilizes people in crisis to one that focuses more on sustaining recovery.<sup>43</sup> This model links recovering addicts and alcoholics to recovery support services such as self-help groups, religious organizations, recovery job co-ops, recovery coaching, and recovery checkups.

So, despite the difficulties in finding good treatment facilities, there are ways to gauge successful treatment.

## **God and Recovery from Addiction**

From a clinical standpoint, the above programs and services are all good predictors for successful recovery from addiction. But clinical work is only one piece of the recovery puzzle.

As Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski Medical director Emeritus and Founder of Gateway

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>43</sup> Anne M. Fletcher, *Inside Rehab* (NY: Viking, c2013), 393.

Rehabilitation Center in Pennsylvania writes, all human beings are spiritual by nature and spirituality is the cornerstone of recovery from addiction.<sup>44</sup>

Spiritually, addiction is a state of “bio-psycho-social brokenness, and moral and spiritual disengagement.”<sup>45</sup> Addicts can be described as lost souls detached from their families, communities and often from their Source. They are souls who have lost their moral compass and spiritual connection,<sup>46</sup> and it’s through the process of recovery those facets of one’s life can be salvaged.

A human being’s ability to go beyond what they can see and touch, and conceptualize an ideal imbued with spiritual meaning appears to be a universal human trait found in every human society throughout recorded time.<sup>47</sup> Back in the 1950’s and early sixties, in a desire to help alcoholics find that spiritual meaning –to help them find God, extensive experiments were carried out in the United States and Europe which tested LSD as a treatment for alcoholism. In the US, the goal for patients was a life-changing mystical/religious experience. Since taking LSD would allow these alcoholics to see God, they would then be convinced of God’s existence, which was thought to be an essential component for a successful recovery. So powerful was the notion that finding God was essential to recovery that researchers were willing to subject alcoholics to a hallucinogenic drug like LSD in order to find a cure. By 1965, when LSD became classified as a Schedule 1 drug in the United States, these experiments came to an end.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The Beit T’Shuvah Handbook, (Los Angeles CA: Beit T’Shuvah, 199-?), 26.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> John D. Sellman et al. “Future of God in Recovery from Addiction,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 41 (2007): 800.

<sup>48</sup> Which seemed to annoy the author of the article since he writes that further research was then severely hampered (p. 802).

Addiction medicine specialist Dr. Joe Molea believes alcoholics are uniformly able to tell you the first time they drank or used drugs. Since for most of these alcoholics having their first drink was a highly spiritual experience, it would seem then that the solution to their drinking would also need to be a highly spiritual experience—albeit a completely different kind of spiritual experience.<sup>49</sup>

Current research on the brain has found emotions and instincts are controlled in the mid-brain. This is where the alcoholic experiences that sense of restlessness, irritability, and discontentedness. The challenge for Molea is to modify the mid-brain without the use of drugs. It's a challenge because it's not something that can be fixed through thought alone. As Molea notes, "Emotion and instinct shape thought, not the other way around"<sup>50</sup> It doesn't matter how smart you are, you can't think your way out of your emotions and instincts.

By way of example, Molea explains that even when we are thirsty, we can curb our need to drink water for a little while. But, eventually we are going to need to drink some water. Similarly, you can explain to an alcoholic why it is that he or she cannot drink alcohol safely and ask if they understand. They might say yes, but the first thing they will then do is go out and have a drink.<sup>51</sup>

Alcoholics and addicts can't think their way out of their problem and they can't manipulate their surroundings to get out. Molea maintains that all that is left for these alcoholics is one neurologic avenue and that's through the spirit. But this spiritual path is not an easy sell since

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<sup>49</sup> Christopher D. Ringwald, *The Soul of Recovery* (NY: Oxford, 2002), 31.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

we in the West have come to believe in ourselves and our ability to control life with technology. “It’s American rugged individualism taken to the nth degree.”<sup>52</sup>

Breaking from what is a compulsive behavioral pattern is clearly one of the great challenges for those trying to overcome their addiction. It is no wonder many believe only a force as big as God is sufficient for recovery to occur. The psychoanalyst Carl Jung used a play on the words *spirits* and *spiritus* to glimpse into the spiritual dimension of addiction. Jung believed that an alcoholic’s obsession with *spirits*, or alcohol, was a misplaced desire for *spiritus*—God.<sup>53</sup> Jung believed the motivating factor in the beginning of an addiction was the seeking of spirit.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other so they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.<sup>54</sup> The impetus behind Alcoholics Anonymous is the Twelve Steps that focus on spirituality and God, or what AA members came to call a higher power. This widely used method of recovery from addiction was developed by the early founders of AA as an attempt by those founders to record their own progress from uncontrolled drinking to sobriety.

Although the fundamental message is a reliance on God or a Higher Power, Alcoholics Anonymous teaches first and foremost to its members that they themselves are not God.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Rami Shapiro, *Recovery, the Sacred Art* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2009), xii.

<sup>54</sup> Alcoholics Anonymous World Service Inc., *Information on A.A.*, <http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/lang/en/subpage.cfm?page=1> (Accessed Jan. 17, 2014).

Twelve-Step recovery is about freeing yourself from playing God.<sup>55</sup> Playing God means living under the delusion that life is controllable, that with enough effort you can get life to do whatever it is you want it to do.<sup>56</sup> It means masking your failure to control your life by blaming others for your failure. It means dulling the pain of failure with for instance, alcohol, pills, television, or overwork. The first step towards recovery from addiction must be admission and acceptance of this fact and from this initial acceptance comes the beginning of healing and wholeness. All in all, it is clear addicts and alcoholics can benefit from a relationship with a higher power.

### **Why Jewish rehab?**

When it comes to Jews in recovery, God it seems also plays a role. According to the JACS study cited above, 91% of the respondents to the study who are members of a 12 step fellowship reported an increased commitment to Judaism in their sobriety.<sup>57</sup> So while many Jews recover in purely “secular” settings, what is it about Beit T’Shuvah —what is it about their integration of Jewish ideas and beliefs that is worth modeling? There are thousands of drug and alcohol treatment facilities in the United States. Why do we need another one at all, let alone one like Beit Yosef, that will espouse a Jewish approach?

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<sup>55</sup> Shapiro, *Recovery, the Sacred Art*, ix.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Susan Lind Vex and Sheila Blume, “The JACS Study I,” *Jl. of Addictive Diseases*, v. 20, 4 (2001), 84 and 86. [http://www.jacsweb.org/documents/JAD20\\_4PAGES71\\_89.pdf](http://www.jacsweb.org/documents/JAD20_4PAGES71_89.pdf) (accessed 1/14/2014).

While there are thousands of rehabilitation facilities in the United States, high quality, effective treatment is not easy to find for anyone, let alone a Jewish addict. A rehabilitation center in the Jewish community would help change the perception of a *shikker* is a *goy* and turn the tide of intense shame experienced by the alcoholic and drug addict. It would change the impression that in the words of Rabbi Susan Berman, to be chemically dependent means to be less than a full Jew.<sup>58</sup>

More to the point, for many recovering addicts spirituality is the key to their recovery and that spirituality often begins with the 12 steps. Among some Jews however, there is the perception that the 12 steps are Christian. But if these steps were developed from New Testament sources, there's a good chance that Jewish wisdom and belief are found within its core.

The Christian character of the 12 steps is often attributed to meetings being held in church basements. Rabbi Twerski concludes that meetings are held in church basements because the Jewish community doesn't consider addiction to be its problem. The fact that more synagogues are now hosting 12 step meetings has much to do with the community beginning to acknowledge the problem.

In truth, Judaism permeates throughout the 12-step methodology. One example is step 5:

*Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*

This notion of admitting our mistakes, of making *T'shuvah*, is at the heart of the *Yamim Noraim*, the High Holy Days. So if spirituality is a key to recovery, then a Jewish addict may well benefit from Jewish spirituality as part of their path.

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<sup>58</sup> Susan Berman, *The Twelve Steps and Jewish Tradition* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1988), 2.

In addition, Jewish texts offer wisdom for the healing addict and alcoholic. Rabbi Twerski notes that all of the 12 steps can be found in the Talmud and traditional Torah works.<sup>59</sup> One example of this comes from Psalms—in particular four verses from Psalm 118 which is part of the Hallel service.

*“I shall not die but live to tell the deeds of the Lord. The Lord severely chastened me but He did not doom me to death. Open for me the gates of triumph that I may enter to praise the Lord. This is the gateway to the Lord, the righteous shall enter therein. (ps. 118:17-20).*

Whatever it is that the addict or family member has been through, it’s comforting to know that God is with us and we will be ok.

Another example comes from Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav:

*Someone once asked Rebbe Nachman, “When I’m praying and I mention Hashem’s holy name, what profound thoughts, what deep intentions, should I have in mind?” “Isn’t the simple meaning – God—enough for you?” the Rebbe answered.<sup>60</sup>*

Or, in the words of a well-known twelve step slogan-- Keep it simple stupid.

Aaron Z the co-author of Renewed Each Day: Daily Twelve Step Recovery Meditations Based on the Bible writes: “As a Jew, it is more within my tradition to ask questions than to provide answers. Asking questions is important. It makes us think, it makes us search it helps us grow.

The first question that God asked Adam -- after Adam put his desire ahead of God’s will -- was

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<sup>59</sup> Abraham Twersky, “Mussar and the 12 Steps,” [http://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2010/dtwe\\_12steps.html](http://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2010/dtwe_12steps.html) (accessed 1/17/14).

<sup>60</sup> Chaim Kramer, *Crossing the Narrow Bridge: a practical guide to Rebbe Nachman’s teachings* (Jerusalem: Breslov Research Institute, c1989), 7.



‘Where are you?’ It is the basic question that God always asks, hanging in the air for all eternity, echoing within every room of recovery and within every thirsty soul.”<sup>61</sup>

On the other hand, perhaps the question “Why Jewish rehab?” is a moot point. Jewish substance abuse treatment centers do exist and the people who work in these facilities have, over the past twenty-five years or more saved thousands of lives. The work that Beit T’Shuvah has been doing over these years demonstrates how Jewish texts and Jewish thought benefit those in recovery. It is a model for a much needed Jewish rehabilitation center in the New York area where there is a concentrated Jewish population and many addicts and alcoholics in need of both physical and spiritual healing.

## **Beit T’Shuvah**

Beit T’Shuvah, located in Culver City, California, is a residential treatment center that also offers a range of outreach programs to the community including prevention programs, counseling and support for families and alumni, court advocacy, and professional training.<sup>62</sup> It is also a full-service congregation offering religious services, holiday celebrations and study. Beit T’Shuvah’s mission is to restore lost souls and return them to themselves, their families, and the community through a healing community of Jewish spirituality.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Kerry M. Olitzky and Aaron Z. *Renewal Each Day: Daily Twelve Step Recovery Meditations Based on the Bible, Vol. 2* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1992), xx.

<sup>62</sup> Beit T’Shuvah. “Welcome to Beit T’Shuvah,” <http://www.beittshuvah.org/> (accessed 1/17/14).

<sup>63</sup> Beit T’Shuvah. “Our Philosophy,” <http://www.beittshuvah.org/Our-Philosophy> (accessed 1/17/14).

The center was founded in 1987 by social worker, Harriet Rossetto, who as she describes in the preface of her autobiography Sacred Housekeeping, answered a tiny ad in the LA Times looking for a social worker, a person “of Jewish background or culture to help incarcerated Jewish offenders.” In visiting these Jewish offenders Harriet noticed they all suffered from some type of addiction—addiction to things like drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, and shopping.

She also found the same people being released from prison were returning to prison. As Harriet writes, “Almost every one of my clients had sworn to me that they would never come back to that miserable dehumanizing place. They would turn it around.”<sup>64</sup> But there was no place for them to go when they got out, and so they ended up back in jail.

Harriet submitted a proposal for a post-prison residential stay where the Jewish felons she had been visiting in jail could go to pull themselves together after their release. Her proposal described a place she called Beit T’Shuvah, House of Return, as a place where wounded people could heal their broken souls and reconnect with their families, themselves, and God. The proposal was accepted and Beit T’Shuvah opened soon after in a Los Angeles barrio, near the county jail.

On one of her prison visits Harriet met Mark Borovitz, the prison rabbi’s inmate clerk. He challenged her about the way she was running Beit T’Shuvah so she asked him to come and work for her when he was released. Eighteen months later he arrived on her doorstep. Mark began leading Shabbat evening services and a Torah study group. With the encouragement of

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<sup>64</sup> Harriett Rossetto, *Sacred Housekeeping* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, c2012), Kindle edition, 26%.

Harriet and several rabbis close to him, Mark entered rabbinical school at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies. In the meantime, Harriet and Mark fell in love and eventually married.

Over the years Beit T'Shuvah has grown by leaps and bounds. They raised enough money to build a new facility at their current location in Culver City where Beit T'Shuvah has developed a successful integrative recovery model that blends Jewish spirituality, cognitive behavioral therapy, 12-step philosophy, and the creative arts. Starting twenty-five years ago with an annual budget of \$50,000, Beit T'Shuvah now commands a massive \$8,000,000 annual allocation.

### **Treatment Philosophy**

In its spiritual approach, Beit T'Shuvah goes beyond a 12-Step philosophy, offering a faith-based recovery methodology grounded in Judaism. Engagement in Jewish thought and practice includes Shabbat and holiday services; daily Torah study; spiritually focused group meetings; and a community synagogue, Congregation Beit T'Shuvah.

Jewish thinking also seeps into Beit T'Shuvah's general policies and methodologies. Unlike many other treatment centers, when a patient relapses at Beit T'Shuvah, they are not automatically kicked out of treatment. If they are asked to leave, it doesn't mean they can't come back. If just one staff member believes a resident should be given a second chance, they will be readmitted. This policy comes from the Jewish notion that we all have a *yetzer ha rah*,

an evil inclination, and a *yetzer ha tov*; a good inclination-- we all make mistakes and we all should be given an opportunity to make *t'shuvah*.

Beit T'Shuvah is not a consequence-driven program. Rather, it allows residents to be who they are. No one has to "bury their struggle or tow the party line."<sup>65</sup> As one staff member noted, Beit T'Shuvah allows the expression of the *yetzer ha-rah*, which ends up generating more chaos than a consequence driven rehab. Making your bed isn't about securing permission to go to Starbucks. It is about creating self-esteem. As Assistant Clinical Director Adam Mindel remarked, if Beit T'Shuvah was driven by consequences, you could get people to comply but you would never know what was motivating them.

Residential drug and alcohol treatment is costly and most individuals entering treatment are limited by what they are able to pay or how creative they are at finding funds and working around insurance companies. At Beit T'Shuvah, fees are on a sliding scale and nobody is turned away because they are unable to pay. Scholarship money is available because the Jewish community has generously supported Beit T'Shuvah. The basis for that support can be found in the Torah:

*If, however, there is a needy person among you...do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. Rather you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs (Deut. 15:7-8)*

In fact all of Beit T'Shuvah's core principles, stated in its handbook are based on Jewish values. For instance, the first core value is the belief we are all holy souls. Each one of us matters, each

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<sup>65</sup> Adam Mindel, Assistant Clinical Director/Family Program Director

of us is worthy of respect, and each of us is striving for integrity. As Beit T'Shuvah's Handbook states-- "From the perspective of Jewish spirituality, we each came into this world with a mission, a purpose, a pure soul, and a free will."<sup>66</sup> This principle is demonstrated in the famous story about Reb Zusya:

*Before his death Reb Zusya said, "In this coming world, they will not ask me: 'Why are you not Moses?' They will ask me 'Why are you not Zusya?'"<sup>67</sup>*

Similar to one success predictor that suggests individualized care at Beit T'Shuvah treatment plans are based on individual needs and desires. A typical stay in a rehabilitation facility is 30 days, while at Beit T'Shuvah the minimum stay is 90 days. The average stay at Beit T'Shuvah is between six to eight months and individual residents are evaluated every 30 days. These policies are also in agreement with two other success predictors: a primary care program of 90 days, and continual assessment of an individual's treatment and services plan.

One addiction counselor reported that many of the programs established at Beit T'Shuvah came about in response to the needs of individual residents. If for example, someone expresses a desire to be artistic, to play music, do improvisation, or write poetry—the staff will search for someone in the Los Angeles area to provide that service.

As the Beit T'Shuvah website states:

Many addicts and alcoholics possess unique talents and sensitivities. Providing creative avenues of expression greatly improves their self-esteem and quality of life. Learning to express themselves without the use of substances significantly increases their success in sobriety.

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<sup>66</sup> The Beit T'Shuvah Handbook, 19.

<sup>67</sup> Martin Buber. *Tales of the Hasidim* (NY: Schocken, c1991), 251.

This focus on the individual as a holy soul extends to Beit T'Shuvah's belief in failure-- in learning from your mistakes, a concept they describe as "falling forward." More than one staff member remarked that forgiving residents for their mistakes is something Beit T'Shuvah does to a fault. As one counselor noted, it would be easier if Beit T'Shuvah treated addicts in the traditional way. Our job would be less complicated. We wouldn't have to think about it as much.<sup>68</sup>

Some other treatment facilities have the philosophy that "addicts are undisciplined and morally bankrupt so they have to be punished."<sup>69</sup> Former congressman Patrick Kennedy who has been open about his own addictions, notes that addiction treatment is often based on "treating your weakness instead of your strength"<sup>70</sup> Beit T'Shuvah goes beyond treating the addiction by helping each individual find their strengths.

Another core value of Beit T'Shuvah is *T'Shuvah*. One translation for *T'Shuvah* is "return." It is the path in which a person restores his/her relationship with God and with another person. God created *T'Shuvah* before God put people into the world knowing we wouldn't be perfect. "God created people with free will so that we could be creative, courageous, could make mistakes and learn and grow from our mistakes."<sup>71</sup> Here Beit T'Shuvah's handbook quotes Samson Raphael Hirsch, a 19<sup>th</sup> century German rabbi known as the father of the Neo-Orthodox movement:

*Torah teaches that God appeared to Abraham and said "Conduct yourself before me and be whole." This instruction tells us that if we place God always before us, we will be whole, Tamim, including all our parts. It means*

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Kelly, one of Beit T'Shuvah's addiction counselors.

<sup>69</sup> Sheff, *Clean*, 135.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Beit T'Shuvah Handbook, 19-20.

*that God accepts all the parts of us, when we present them. Bringing the hidden parts, the shadow, before God, is a turn toward wholeness.*<sup>72</sup>

Another core value of Beit T'Shuvah is obligation to the community. While honoring the individual, Beit T'Shuvah also adheres to the model of therapeutic communities which honor the community. At Beit T'Shuvah this "community as method" model is utilized where each stage of treatment reflects increased levels of personal and social responsibility.<sup>73</sup> Countering the "top-down medicalized" approach to addiction treatment, therapeutic communities view the community itself as a tool for healing.<sup>74</sup> Similar to many of the staff in therapeutic communities, 80% of employees at Beit T'Shuvah are recovering addicts and many found their recovery at Beit T'Shuvah.

The fourth core value is continually seeking wisdom, which is at the center of "what it means to be a human being and what it means to be a Jew."<sup>75</sup> It is a search for understanding, meaning, and purpose, which comes to acknowledge our Godly nature; our capacity and obligation to choose good, and our ability to repent, to return, to make *t'shuvah*, to transform and to transcend.<sup>76</sup>

Beit T'Shuvah's treatment methodology and core values are driven by Jewish ideals. These core principles that view individuals as holy souls; that believe in the value of *t'shuvah*, that obligate the individual to the community; and that encourage the continual search for wisdom, are in a

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<sup>72</sup> Samson Rafael Hirsch. *Symbolism* (NY: Feldheim, 1984), cited in Beit T'Shuvah's Handbook.

<sup>73</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse. *Therapeutic Community*, <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/therapeutic-community/what-therapeutic-community> (accessed 1/17/14).

<sup>74</sup> Beit T'Shuvah Handbook, 21.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

sense wrapped around a fifth and final core value --faith. Faith helps each resident believe in their uniqueness as a holy soul; find the courage to seek *t'shuvah* and wisdom; and acquire the strength to obligate themselves to community. Those values in turn serve as a foundation for the programming and services offered at Beit T'Shuvah, as individual residents seek their passion and purpose.

## **Admissions**

Beit T'Shuvah has come a long way since it began as a half-way house for men back in 1987. Today, women, non-incarcerated residents 18 years old and over, as well as people suffering from a variety of addictions such as drugs, alcohol, sex, and gambling, are also accepted into the facility. The path towards entry into Beit T'Shuvah often begins with the Admissions Department. The Head of Admissions, Harold Rothstein reports that he receives between sixteen and twenty requests per day and those requests then generate about one or two in-person follow-up interviews.

Beit T'Shuvah turns away about half the callers who fall within the scope of Beit T'Shuvah because at the time of inquiry no bed is available. Examples of those who fall outside their scope include persons known to be violent and persons with a mental disorder severe enough that he or she requires more structure. Since Beit T'Shuvah has no doctors on staff, a resident who for instance, can't control their diabetes will also be turned away.



Beit T'Shuvah maintains a balance in accepting those who can pay against those who cannot pay, those who are Jewish and those who are not, and those who live in the Los Angeles area and those who live outside Los Angeles. 30% of their residents are not Jewish and 30% of the residents come from outside the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

About 25% of Beit T'Shuvah's residents come through the Alternative Sentencing Program, which accepts persons who have been convicted and are in jail or those who are likely to be convicted and are facing prison or jail time. These residents are able to serve some or all of their time at Beit T'Shuvah as an alternative to sitting in a cell for their drug and alcohol-related crimes. The Alternative Sentencing staff also visit Jewish inmates in the state prison system and the Los Angeles County Jail, offering spiritual guidance, addiction counseling, and a connection or re-connection to Judaism.<sup>77</sup> In addition to visiting the county jails, the staff at Beit T'Shuvah also responds to written requests from inmates in the state prison system.

### **Programs and Services at Beit T'Shuvah**

Beit T'Shuvah offers various levels of care beginning with primary care for new residents; sober living for individuals with over four months of recovery, and off-campus independent living for those who have graduated from the Beit T'Shuvah program. Day care treatment tailored to the individual's needs is also offered and ranges from individual weekly sessions to participation in a weekly group session, individual therapy, Shabbat services, and Torah study. Since recovery

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<sup>77</sup> Beit T'Shuvah, *Annual Report*, 2012 (Los Angeles, CA: Beit T'Shuvah, 2012), 18.

from addiction is a life-long process that requires constant vigilance,<sup>78</sup> the community continues to be a resource for those in recovery whether it's through Shabbat services, sobriety birthdays, or annual alumni events.

Over the past twenty-five years Beit T'Shuvah's programming has greatly expanded and now includes an assortment of creative endeavors. One such program is Music in Recovery, which consists of both a band that plays during Shabbat and holiday services and a choir that also participates in services and performs at various Jewish community events around Los Angeles. Other programs like Beit T'Shuvah's recording studio, as well as various group meetings devoted to a variety of artistic pursuits including one entitled Hip Hop Heschel, are also the result of these individual appeals. Residents have also put their talents to work by creating companies such as BTS Communications. An advertising and social media organization housed on the premises of Beit T'Shuvah, BTS Communications also provides professional career training in the advertising and marketing fields.

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is a curriculum-based program that reaches out to schools, synagogues, Jewish camps, and youth groups. Concentrating on prevention, PIP utilizes Jewish learning to help thwart addictive self-destructive behavior in the teen community. By concentrating on the underlying "spiritual maladies" PIP utilizes spiritual tools to help teenagers cope with daily stress and anxiety that lead today's youth towards risky behaviors.<sup>79</sup> The Partners in Prevention program also brings teenagers to Beit T'Shuvah by providing one-on-one mentoring, tutoring, music lessons, and a place to hang out.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 14.

Related to the Music in Recovery program and Partners in Prevention is Freedom Song an original traveling musical workshop that highlights the “universality of the struggle to free oneself from external oppression and internal bondage.”<sup>80</sup> Performed by residents and alumni of Beit T’Shuvah, Freedom Song “not only draws parallels between being a slave in Egypt and being a slave to your addiction but forces an audience of all ages to take a look at themselves instead of pointing the finger at everyone else.”<sup>81</sup>

Beit T’Shuvah also offers a program for gamblers called the Right Action Gambling Program. The only residential/intensive outpatient program in the state of California that offers a comprehensive program for problem gamblers, Beit T’Shuvah’s gambling program in partnership with the UCLA Gambling Studies Program, offers options such as daily groups, spiritual healing, and certified gambling therapists.

Addiction doesn’t only impact the addict or alcoholic, it impacts the entire family. The Elaine Breslow Family Program helps to meet the needs of family members through individual and group counseling; weekly support groups; relationship and marriage counseling, and crisis counseling. As Adam Mindel, Beit T’Shuvah’s Director of Family Programming explained; anytime there is a devastating disease in a family such as cancer, it affects the whole family. Addiction is no different. Residents and families need to be viewed in the same way upon entry. Just as each resident needs support so do the families need support as well as acceptance, healing, and community.

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<sup>80</sup> Beit T’Shuvah. *Freedom Song*, <http://www.beittshuvah.org/Freedom-Song> (accessed 1/17/14).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

The family program is a three-pronged program that is designed to “help families identify unhealthy patterns in the family dynamic, learn the language and terminology that is useful for healthier communication, and find support and expression in the shared experience of similar families.”<sup>82</sup> First is a six-week Family Education Program, providing families with an entrée into treatment at the same time their loved one enters treatment. This is followed by weekly Family Process Groups where family members can express, vent, and communicate their feelings in a safe therapeutic environment. Last are weekly family support group meetings that allow families to stay connected and involved.<sup>83</sup>

As is stated in Beit T’Shuvah’s 2012 annual report, having a purpose and a place to go every day is critical in staying sober. At the Leonard and Susan Nemoy Career Center, residents who have been sober for ninety days are given the opportunity to take a career assessment that enables them to learn about their career interests. Once the assessment is done residents are directed to job placement, educational/vocational training, or unpaid internships. Residents also receive assistance with resume writing and interviewing skills. The areas of job placement are varied and have included over the years culinary food services, recovery counseling, computers, building trades, sales and marketing, and the performing arts.

With the completion in the coming months of a new wing on their existing building in Culver City, Beit T’Shuvah’s programming is being primed for multiple types of expansion. Not only will this new wing provide much needed additional space for daily activities, but it will also

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

initiate the opening of a major new program. Called the Institute for Living Well, this new program will bring the message of Beit T'Shuvah and how we can all live well, to the non-addict community.

Beit T'Shuvah is also embarking on a new organizational structure. Started as a "mom and pop" operation which has grown organically over the years, Beit T'Shuvah is working to broaden leadership by allowing all parties in their organization to have a voice at the table-- from the top administration; to the front line staff; to clients; to alumni; to outside partnerships; to donors; and to Temple members.

### **Spiritual and Religious Activities**

As was mentioned above, Jewish ideas and values are part-and-parcel of Beit T'Shuvah's treatment philosophy in that these principles guide each of Beit T'Shuvah's core values. In turn, those core values inform the many daily activities that range from spiritual group meetings; to Shabbat and holiday services; to daily Torah study; to weekly ethics meetings; as well as a range of activities sponsored by Congregation Beit T'Shuvah.

### **Spiritual Counseling**

Each resident who enters Beit T'Shuvah is assigned three different counselors: an addiction counselor, a psychotherapist, and a spiritual counselor. While addiction counselors and psychotherapists deal more with a resident's state of mental health, spiritual counselors focus

on a client's spiritual health. Beit T'Shuvah employs four full-time and approximately six or so part-time spiritual counselors. During the course of a work-day each spiritual counselor talks with around fifteen different residents. During the course of a work week counselors meet with their individually assigned residents for thirty minutes as well as facilitate about two to three group meetings.

As one spiritual counselor explained, we work primarily as advocates for the souls of the residents--- helping them to discern what is in their spiritual best interest and to understand what is and what is not spiritual. Each counselor helps those who have been living in the shadows feel nourished and inspired, by connecting them to something larger.

### **Religious Services**

Beit T'Shuvah holds weekly Shabbat evening and morning services, as well as services for the various Jewish holidays. The Friday night service includes a band and a variety of distinctive rituals that create a mood, which at times feels like a revival meeting/church service. These rituals include:

1. Testimonials-- Providing an opportunity for any individual to stand up and relate something that happened during the week for which they are grateful and/or something for which they are making *t'shuvah*.
2. The welcoming of new residents-- Each Friday night new residents are welcomed by the community into Beit T'Shuvah. Invited up to the *bima*, together they recite the following responsive reading:

*May the door of this house be wide enough to receive all who hunger for love; all who  
are lonely for fellowship  
May it welcome all who have cares to unburden, thanks to express, hopes to nurture  
May the door of this house be narrow enough to shut out pettiness and pride, envy and  
enmity  
May its threshold be no stumbling block to young or straying feet  
May it be too high to admit complacency, selfishness, and harshness  
May this house be, for all who enter, the doorway to a richer and more meaningful life  
Amen*

Each new resident is then asked to responsively recite a prayer with the congregation:

*(community recites): ברוך הבא בשם ה' –  
Barukh ha ba b'shem Adonai  
May you who have come be blessed in the name of the Source of Life*

*(Individual recites) נלך באור בשם ה' –  
Nelech b'or b'shem Adonai  
Let us walk together in the light of the Divine One*

1. Sobriety anniversaries—On Friday night each anniversary celebrant is given an opportunity to speak from the pulpit.

## **Congregation Beit T'Shuvah**

One of the unique aspects of Beit T'Shuvah is Congregation Beit T'Shuvah, a community synagogue inside a drug and alcohol treatment center. As with many aspects of Beit T'Shuvah the community synagogue grew over time. Religious services have always been held there but as more and more people from outside the community began to connect to their services and the message of Beit T'Shuvah, the synagogue began to grow.

Congregation Beit T'Shuvah presents a model from which all synagogues in general can learn. Synagogues are not always warm and friendly towards newcomers— that is we don't always do a very good job of welcoming people into our congregations. In particular, we don't often do a very good job of welcoming a variety of populations that have fallen through the cracks. These include but are not exclusive to populations such as gays and lesbians; singles; people who are divorced; couples without children; and people with a range of disabilities. To this list I would add the population of recovering alcoholics and addicts.

Beit T'Shuvah turns the notion of welcoming these populations into our midst on its head. Rather than the community welcoming the population that has fallen through the cracks, it is that population welcoming the community into its midst. Recovering alcoholics and addicts are welcoming the larger Jewish community into its home.

There are a variety of relationships and links between the congregation and the daily life of Beit T'Shuvah. About 60% of the congregation has some connection to the treatment community and the congregation has grown as the Beit T'Shuvah family itself has grown. There is also a small core of the synagogue population with no connection to the treatment community who come because they resonate with the message of Beit T'Shuvah. Residents and congregants share weekly Friday night Shabbat dinners; sing together in the Beit T'Shuvah community choir; and celebrate various holiday events together such as Chanukah, Purim, and Passover. Spiritual counseling is also made available to members of the synagogue community.

One of the big changes that will soon take place in the life of the congregation is a new, much needed, and larger sanctuary that will open when Beit T'Shuvah's new wing is completed. This



new wing is also generating conversations about expanding synagogue programming. One idea is the establishment of a preschool in the synagogue.

## **Fundraising**

As a privately funded institution, Beit T'Shuvah is able to mandate the "religious" aspects of their program such as Torah study and Shabbat services. However, fundraising is a constant effort. Beit T'Shuvah's 2012 annual report lists total revenue from contributions at \$3,782,883 with a total increase of contributions for the year at \$1.9 million.<sup>84</sup> This along with a strong bottom line, made it possible for Beit T'Shuvah to provide 150 people with free treatment at a total cost of \$2,940,000. This would seem to be an extraordinary accomplishment that speaks to the Jewish community's belief in Beit T'Shuvah. Moreover, while it's unclear where all of these contributions come from it is possible to at least glean from their 2012 annual report and their website some of the approaches Beit T'Shuvah utilizes to raise money.

For example, since 2010 Beit T'Shuvah has canvassed a team of runners who participate in an annual marathon sponsored by the sneaker company ASICS. The runners who participate are generally a mix of staff, alumni, residents and community supporters. The race is part of Beit T'Shuvah's Run to Save a Soul campaign which raises funds specifically for those who can't afford treatment. This year's race raised over \$129,000 for Beit T'Shuvah.

Other efforts include the annual Steps to Recovery Gala as well as a Runway Show and Boutique Lunch co-sponsored by Congregation Beit T'Shuvah's sisterhood and the BTS Thrift

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 25.

Store whose revenue is responsible for covering 15% of Beit T'Shuvah's annual budget.

Donations are also solicited throughout the year by means of the Beit T'Shuvah website which also targets donations at specific times of year. For example, this year on the day after Thanksgiving the website ran an ad that read: First Black Friday, then Cyber Monday, and now #Giving Tuesday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Beit T'Shuvah also raises funds through their SoulSavers Initiative in which participants commit to annual giving on a sustaining basis. The initiative has multiple tears including Sacred Scholarship that pays for a resident's treatment at various giving levels; Launch a Life that helps residents reintegrate into society; and Buy a Brick, which directly contributes to the construction of Beit T'Shuvah's new wing. Funds are also targeted for specific needs. For example, a request for \$600 donations to purchase chairs for Congregation Beit T'Shuvah's new sanctuary uses the pitch "before we can say please be seated, we need chairs." Every Friday night during Shabbat services a collection plate is passed around. The money collected is used to help fund the Friday night Shabbat dinners which cost \$2,000 each week.

### **Beit Yosef : Preliminary Thoughts**

During conversations with various staff at Beit T'Shuvah, several made the comment that as the unique vision of two special individuals—Harriet Rossetto and Mark Borovitz, recreating Beit T'Shuvah on the East Coast was an impossible task. While there are aspects to Beit T'Shuvah worth bringing to an East Coast facility it is not the goal of this paper to recreate Beit T'Shuvah.

The goal instead is to-- as the well-known 12 step slogan proclaims-- take what is needed and leave the rest. For example, while surf therapy may be a useful path to recovery in Los Angeles, there would not be as much practical application for this type of therapy in New York.

Furthermore, while Beit T'Shuvah began as a small half-way house in a Los Angeles slum, Beit Yosef would commence at a level beyond Beit T'Shuvah's humble beginnings. But just what Beit Yosef might look like on day one will depend on how the business plan for the facility is developed. The business plan would have to be implemented in stages so that while services such as a clinical program and units like Admissions would be necessary requirements from the beginning, other potential offerings like a Partners in Prevention type of program or the development of business enterprises similar to Beit T'Shuvah's BTS Communications, would not be available until the treatment center has been established.

Some of the questions that would need to be answered in order to decide what Beit Yosef will look like on day one include: will the facility be outpatient, inpatient or both? Even if it will be residential, might it be easier to begin as an outpatient facility and phase in the residential piece? Will it offer detox? How many clients will it house or handle? How many and what type of staff will need to be hired? If Beit Yosef is residential, how many beds will be available? What gender population or age group will it serve? Will Beit Yosef use medications to treat certain addictions?

## **Treatment Philosophy**

Beit T'Shuvah utilizes a faith-based recovery methodology that is grounded in Judaism and that grounding seeps into all of their core values. In modeling this "Jewish" approach to addiction treatment, Beit Yosef will employ a similar approach. As it develops its own particular core values and treatment methodologies Beit Yosef will utilize Beit T'Shuvah as a model, making sure Jewish values and ethics are front and center. In the bigger picture Beit Yosef will also need to consider general "predictors of success" in developing a treatment approach, and Jewish values will influence which of those predictors are chosen.

## **The Synagogue at Beit Yosef**

Beit Yosef's synagogue will begin early on to play a role in making connections with the larger Jewish community. That would happen through public events such as lecture series or classes on topics such as addiction; community Torah study focusing on 12-step themes; or the use of Jewish texts in healing.

Shabbat services at Beit Yosef will need to be thoughtfully created to serve the needs of the community and reflect its congregants. Incorporating traditional Shabbat rituals and blending them with a more modern and interactive service will give the community consistency and comfort on a weekly basis. Beit Yosef will find its own soul in its congregants and develop a customized approach to reach its unique community.

## Clearinghouse of Jewish Recovery

Beit T'Shuvah may well be the premier drug and alcohol treatment center in the United States integrating Jewish traditions and spirituality with a 12-step program and traditional psychotherapy. But in examining some of the information coming out of Beit T'Shuvah one could get the impression that no other institutions are doing this kind of work. For example, a press release from 2011 promoting a "Knock out addiction" celebrity fundraiser stated Beit T'Shuvah is the "only addiction treatment program in the United States that integrates Jewish traditions and spirituality, the 12-step program, and traditional psychotherapy."<sup>85</sup> The 2012 annual report states Beit T'Shuvah remains the "only recovery house in the United States delivering a unique blend of Jewish spirituality, the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and traditional psychotherapy."<sup>86</sup>

There are however, other treatment centers that offer "Jewish rehab." One such facility is the Chabad Treatment Center, situated a few miles from Beit T'Shuvah. Chabad which has been in Los Angeles since the 1970's, "uses a psychological-therapy and 12 step model that concentrates on the underlying issues contributing to dependence."<sup>87</sup> Although the program is non-sectarian, it is based on the principles of Torah, the source of Judeo-Christian values.

Unlike Beit T'Shuvah which accepts both men and women 18 years of age and older, Chabad accepts only men 18 years of age and older.

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<sup>85</sup> PRWeb. *Beit T'Shuvah Announces 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual "Knock out Addiction" Celebrity Boxing Fundraiser*, <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2011/9/prweb8781518.htm> (accessed 1/28/14).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Chabad Residential Treatment Centers. *Welcome to Chabad Residential Treatment Centers*, [www.chabadrehab.com/](http://www.chabadrehab.com/) (accessed 1/17/14).

The Chabad Rehab Center offers a program similar to that of Beit T'Shuvah. However, the different manner in which these two institutions are funded impacts how each is able to deliver their treatment model. As a privately funded facility, Beit T'Shuvah is able to mandate daily Torah study and the various religious services. However, Chabad which is funded by the government can offer Torah study and religious services, but may not mandate these activities.<sup>88</sup>

In addition to Chabad, there are two facilities in Florida that offer "Jewish rehab." Torah and the Twelve Steps in Miami which accepts both men and women, integrates spiritual therapy, Jewish wisdom, and the Twelve Steps. They also treat some eating disorders and like Beit T'Shuvah, have a program for compulsive gambling. Torah and the Twelve Steps offers a choice of kosher dinners and a Shabbat experience, although the web site provides no details as to what that Shabbat experience might entail.

While not an independent Jewish alcohol and drug treatment center, Techiya is part of a larger residential rehab facility called Behavioral Health of the Palm Beaches in Palm Beach, Florida. Techiya, which means rebirth or resurrection, "helps members of the Jewish faith achieve a new beginning through counseling, education and spirituality."<sup>89</sup> Treatment is customized for Jewish patients, providing an opportunity for residents "to draw healing strength from their faith."<sup>90</sup> The program includes consultation with a rabbinical spiritual counselor; the study of

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<sup>88</sup> See below for a further discussion about Chabad and the ramifications of creating a Jewish rehab on the East Coast that meets the needs of a very diverse population.

<sup>89</sup> Behavioral Health of the Palm Beaches. *Jewish Alcohol and Drug Rehab*, <http://www.bhpalmbeach.com/programs/spiritual-programs/jewish-alcohol-and-drug-rehab> (accessed 1/17/14).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

key Jewish religious texts; classes on Jewish spirituality; and the observance of Shabbat and Jewish holidays. Kosher food is available for anyone who desires it. It is unclear from their websites where either Florida program gets their funding.

In addition to these Jewish residential addiction treatment centers, there are also a wide variety of non-residential programs and centers that offer extensive programming in Jewish recovery in many communities throughout the country.<sup>91</sup>

It is unclear why Beit T'Shuvah doesn't seem to publicly acknowledge these other Jewish rehab facilities. As the highest profile Jewish treatment center in the country publicly acknowledging other "Jewish rehab" centers does no harm and could help the efforts of the community to battle this disease in the Jewish community. Jewish drug and alcohol treatment centers need to work together to share information and resources.

Beit Yosef would serve as a clearinghouse of information on Jewish recovery, partnering with local organizations involved in this work as a way to pool resources. For example, JACS already has a program in place that is similar to Beit T'Shuvah's Partners in Prevention. Since the JACS office is in Manhattan, Beit Yosef could piggyback onto that existing program.

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<sup>91</sup> See Appendix B.

## **Building a Facility to Meet the Needs of a Diverse Jewish Community**

In building a facility such as Beit Yosef a number of obstacles will need to be overcome including raising money and constructing a building. While these are formidable obstacles, the most difficult challenge will be to design a treatment facility that accommodates a quite diverse Jewish community—from secular Jews to ultra-Orthodox and everything in between. This belief is based on an awareness of inter-denominational issues; observations made while visiting Beit T'Shuvah, as well as attendance at numerous JACS retreats in New York from 2004 to about 2007.

Approximately 60% of those in attendance at the JACS retreats I attended were part of the Orthodox community. Although the retreats adopted a pluralistic approach, there were instances where pluralism was non-existent. While separate services allowed for religious equality that permitted me to function as a *Shaliach Tzibur* at the Egalitarian service, when meeting as a community the Orthodox rabbis repeatedly took the lead. The community Havdalah service was always led by an Orthodox male and when we once came together for a *Melaveh Malkah* after Shabbat, the singing was led by a young Orthodox rabbi with a guitar.

While the Orthodox population is large at JACS retreats, out of the 150 or so residents at Beit T'Shuvah at the time of my visit, about six of them were Orthodox. Since that number is in stark contrast to Orthodox attendance at JACS retreats and represents a small percentage of the Orthodox population suffering from the problem of addiction, it is unclear where Orthodox addicts and alcoholics desiring a Jewish rehab experience are going. Presumably a number of the men at least, go to the Chabad treatment center nearby.



Beit T'Shuvah does make accommodations for Orthodox residents and they work in conjunction with an Orthodox rabbi who advises them on the needs of these residents. Since Beit T'Shuvah is only kosher for their weekly Shabbat dinners, kosher food is brought in for residents who require it.<sup>92</sup> Orthodox residents are allowed to *daven*, to pray on their own since Beit T'Shuvah's services are not Orthodox. While hard to define movement-wise, the services tend towards Reform.

As a caveat, this arrangement is made only when there is a determination that these Orthodox residents are not using their level of observance as a way to avoid rehab. It is also true that some Orthodox Jews suffering from the disease of addiction have lost their way where God is concerned and don't require these special dispensations.

Because these two facilities do exist in Los Angeles, the needs of the Orthodox population, or at least the Orthodox male population in the geographic area, are easily met. However, on the East Coast, in order to avoid building separate facilities, Beit Yosef would need to strike a balance between the needs of these very diverse populations.

### **A *Mikveh* at Beit Yosef**

On the surface the suggestion that Beit Yosef include a *mikveh* is a crazy and expensive proposition. After all how many drug and alcohol rehab facilities have a *mikveh* inside their walls? Then again, how many drug and alcohol rehab facilities have a synagogue inside their

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<sup>92</sup> While not kosher during the week, Beit T'Shuvah never serves pork or shellfish

walls? If Beit T'Shuvah has presented a new inclusive model of synagogue life by placing a community synagogue inside its walls, so too can a *mikveh* inside Beit Yosef create a new model of purification and transformation for the recovering alcoholic and drug addict.

During the days of the Temple any Jew who wanted to enter the grounds of the sanctuary needed to go to the *mikveh* first, since entry inside the Temple required one to be in a spiritually pure state that matched the "pristine spirituality of the Sanctuary itself."<sup>93</sup> Over time mikvehs have been traditionally used by a bride and/or groom prior to their wedding; by married women as part of the laws of *niddah*; and as one component of a conversion ceremony.

Today, mikvehs serve an even wider purpose. As the website for the Mayyim Chayyim Living Waters Community Mikveh in Newton, Massachusetts affirms, ritual immersion in a *mikveh* marks a change in status such as celebrating moments of joy, healing after times of sorrow or illness, or commemorating transitions and changes. And while there is no "cure" in the waters of the *mikveh*, many people do find a sense of healing and wholeness there.

As Rabbi Maurice Lamm writes:

*"Submerging in a pool of water for the purpose of not using the water's physical cleansing properties but expressly to symbolize a "change-of-soul" is a statement at once deeply spiritual and immensely compelling. No other symbolic act can so totally embrace a person as being submerged in water, which must touch and cover every lesion, every strand of hair, every birthmark. No other religious act is so freighted with meaning as this one which touches every aspect of life and proclaims a total commitment to a new idea and a new way of life as it swallows up the old and gives birth to the new."*<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Maurice Lamm. *Becoming a Jew* (NY: Jonathan David, c1991)  
[http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Life\\_Events/Conversion/Conversion\\_Process/Mikveh.shtml](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Life_Events/Conversion/Conversion_Process/Mikveh.shtml) (accessed 1/17/14)

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

Rabbi Lamm notes that as part of the process of conversion the water of the *mikveh* is designed to ritually cleanse a person from deeds of the past. This is a powerful concept that works for those healing from addictions. The waters of the *mikveh* prepare a person “to confront God, life, and people with a fresh spirit and new eyes.”<sup>95</sup>

But there is another perhaps more pragmatic reason for housing a *mikveh* in Beit Yosef that speaks to the concerns about creating a facility that meets the needs of a diverse Jewish population. A *mikveh* could serve as a bridge between those diverse communities. For traditional Jews a *mikveh* sends a positive message about the Jewish nature of Beit Yosef. For other Jews, a 21<sup>st</sup> century understanding of how a *mikveh* can help transform their lives has the potential to heal the disease of addiction in ways that have not been utilized in a drug and alcohol treatment center before.

### **Rabbis and Cantors**

In a conversation with Rabbi Borovitz during my visit to Beit T’Shuvah I asked him-- if he had the chance to create Beit T’Shuvah all over again, what he would do differently. The rabbi was clear in his response. He stated that if he could do it all over again he would pay more attention to reaching out to other rabbis in the community—that his mistake was not getting the support of local rabbis.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

For Beit Yosef, getting this kind of support early on can raise awareness about addiction in the community and educate a population of pulpit rabbis who are the eyes and ears of the community. Involving local rabbis in the life of Beit Yosef will also have other benefits. Many rabbis in the community have a good deal of knowledge about healing. Being fluent with a range of Jewish texts from Torah to Hassidut, to Midrash, to Kabbalah and beyond, rabbis have much to offer to those in recovery from a variety of addictions. The New York area also has an active JACS chapter which over the years has effectively engaged participation by a range of clergy. Inviting rabbis to become part of the process of recovering from the disease of addiction will also help create a larger Beit Yosef community.

Another way to involve more rabbis in the community is to put them on the staff. This would support a vision for Beit Yosef that embraces a broad base of rabbinic leadership rather than Beit T'Shuvah's top down rabbinic management approach. While Mark Borovitz is the head rabbi and Chief Operating Officer of Beit T'Shuvah, the rabbinic staff under him is largely comprised of rabbinical and chaplaincy students. Rather than one rabbi, the vision for Beit Yosef is a team of rabbis each with a different role or area of expertise which would also embrace a group of rabbinical school interns assigned to individual rabbis.

One rabbi would be responsible for working more closely with the resident population while another would function as the synagogue's rabbi. Another rabbi would be in charge of outreach to the community while yet another would take on community learning. Whether these would be full or part time roles remains to be seen but it would still be possible to bring in other rabbis on an adjunct basis to serve as spiritual counselors.

These adjunct rabbis would have expertise and experience in a variety of areas from addiction and spiritual teaching to rabbinic texts and counseling. All of these rabbis could work as a team. Beit T'Shuvah's plans to reach out to the non-addict community by training rabbis in this kind of work can only help to make this type of structure a reality at Beit Yosef.

A configuration similar to that for the rabbis could also be implemented for cantors. While Beit T'Shuvah has a principal cantor, they also bring in other cantors to lead services. Beit T'Shuvah also has a music director and a variety of musicians who play in the band. There is also a community choir whose membership comes both from Beit T'Shuvah as well as from Congregation Beit T'Shuvah. It could be possible for cantors from the community to play some sort of adjunct roles, whether it's as guest cantors or whether they come in to give a concert or conduct a musical workshop or lead a musically focused spiritual group.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has presented a rationale and a motivation for the creation of a "Jewish rehab" on the East Coast, specifically in the New York area. It is by no means a comprehensive statement of what needs to be done but has instead focused on the philosophical underpinnings and the spiritual needs of a treatment center modeled in part on the success of Beit T'Shuvah. Much more work will need to be done and many more questions will need to be answered. Those questions range from the location of the facility; to the makeup of the non-clergy staff; to fundraising; to decisions about the clinical approach to treatment.

Beit T'Shuvah has shown what is possible, and what is most inspiring is the long-term impact and effect of their efforts. Step 12 declares that: *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.* Over these many years Beit T'Shuvah has created a *kehila*, a community of alumni, family members of alumni, and others who have found Beit T'Shuvah's message relevant and vitally important. That *kehila* has supported and cultivated the community in a variety of ways that involve giving back to the community.

Some alumni work at Beit T'Shuvah; some volunteer; some stay connected through their attendance at Shabbat services; and some participate in alumni/resident events such as surf therapy, Torah study, and athletics. Beit T'Shuvah's Alumni Association maintains the connection between its alumni and the community. Programs sponsored by the Association not only provide opportunities for alumni to get together but also provide opportunities for them to give back to the community.

Whatever the underlying motivation might be that inspires involvement in Beit T'Shuvah, the ultimate goal is the same-- to reduce the incidence of addiction and other harmful behaviors through individual and family education.<sup>96</sup> As one resident exclaimed, "We want to be free of this longstanding epidemic of addiction. One bed, one soul, and one example of recovery one person at a time, we are making the world a little bit brighter each day."<sup>97</sup>

This work must continue and flourish on the East Coast as well, but there are obstacles. During the week of my visit to Beit T'Shuvah an article about Jewish drug and alcohol treatment in Los

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<sup>96</sup> Beit T'Shuvah. *Our Philosophy*, <http://www.beittshuvah.org/Our-Philosophy> (accessed 1/17/14).

<sup>97</sup> Beit T'Shuvah. *Ohh, that Gala*, <https://beittshuvah.wordpress.com/category/gala-2/> (accessed 1/17/14).

Angeles appeared in Los Angeles' Jewish Journal. Featuring both Beit T'Shuvah and the Chabad Residential Treatment Center, the article included an interview with a resident at Chabad. His name is Zvi.<sup>98</sup> Having been in and out of numerous short term rehabilitation centers, Zvi who is from New York was finally told he needed to be in a long-term inpatient program. As the article noted, being an observant Jew the only place for him to go was 2800 miles away. As it turned out at least according to the article, this was just as well:

“Despite the stigma that keeps many addicts in the shadows, [Harriet] Rossetto said California’s culture makes admitting addiction --- and thus recovering – easier. ‘There’s more openness about everything here, drug use included.’ Zvi, who is expecting another child in the coming weeks, said he plans to move his family to California following his recovery. He doesn’t think the New York environment he’s known his whole life is healthy for him. ‘I definitely think out here it’s a lot more ok to be a recovering addict than in NY,’ Zvi said. ‘I feel like everyone is more laid back.’”<sup>99</sup>

The belief that it is not ok to be a recovering addict in New York is unacceptable and the best way to counter that belief is to provide an option for Jewish addicts and alcoholics from across the Jewish spectrum living on the East Coast-- a structure that will openly advertise itself as a place where Jews can go to heal from addiction. This will create a healthy environment where it is acceptable for those in need of help to feel comfortable being a recovering addict and alcoholic in New York and on the East Coast.

We read in the Talmud that:

*-- Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world. (BT Sanhedrin 37a).*

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<sup>98</sup> Not his real name

<sup>99</sup> Jared Sichel, “Welcome to Rehab City,” *Jewish Journal*, June 14-20, 2013, 37.

In whatever aspects Beit Yosef might model Beit T'Shuvah, that modeling begins with saving lives. And there are lives looking to be saved. Each week Beit T'Shuvah receives at least ten phone calls asking whether there is something like their facility on the East Coast. Building Beit Yosef is not a quick fix for the problem of substance abuse, which by its very nature offers no long-term promises or guarantees – only the hope for something better, for saving a family, for keeping a loved one alive and healthy, for giving a lost soul new-found purpose. By providing a supportive Jewish approach, one that looks for the good in every individual and the potential of every addict, we can give hope the chance it deserves.

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## Appendix A

### Geyt der goy

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwyTtDRHVRk>

<p>Geyt der goy in shenkl arayn,          In shenkl arayn, in shenkl arayn,          Trinkt er dort a glezl vayn,          A glezl vayn, a glezl vayn.          Oy, veil shiker iz der goy,          Shiker iz er, trinken muzer,          Vayl er iz a goy.</p>	<p>The "goy" (non-Jew) goes into the tavern,          Into the tavern, into the tavern,          There he drinks a glass of wine,          A glass of wine, a glass of wine.          Oh! because the goy is a drunkard,          Drunk he is, drink he must          Because he is a goy.</p>
<p>Geyt der goy fun shenkl aroys,          Fun shenkl aroys, fun shenkl aroys,          Klap er unz yidelech di shaybelekh oys,          Di shaybelekh oys, di shaybelekh oys.          Oy, veil shiker iz der goy,          Shiker iz er, trinken muz er,          Vayl er iz a goy.</p>	<p>The goy goes out of the tavern,          Out of the tavern, out of the tavern,          He beats up a Yidden (Jew) breaking a window,          Breaking a window, breaking a window.          Oh! because the goy is a drunkard,          Drunk is he, drink he must,          Because he is a goy</p>
<p>Geyt der yid in bes-medresh arayn,          In bes-medresh arayn, in bes-medresh arayn,          Khapt er dort a minchele arayn,          A kedushele arayn, a bruche'le arayn,          A perek mishnayos oich arayn          Oy, veil nichter iz a yid,          Nichter iz er, davnen muz er,          Vayl er iz a yid.</p>	<p>The Yid (Jew) goes into the House of Study,          Into the House of Study, into the House of Study,          There he grabs an afternoon service,          A little holiness, a little blessing,          Also a chapter of Mishna          Oh! because sober is a Jew,          Sober is he, pray he must,          Because he is a Jew</p>

## Appendix B

In addition to the Jewish residential addiction treatment centers mentioned above, there are also a wide variety of non-residential programs that are happening in many communities throughout the country. Some examples include:

1. **JACS** (Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons, and Significant Others) is an active organization whose mission is to encourage and assist Jewish alcoholics, chemically dependent persons and their families, friends, and associates to explore recovery in a nurturing Jewish environment. JACS is also dedicated to promoting knowledge and understanding of the disease of alcoholism and chemical dependency as it involves the Jewish community, as well as acting as a resource center and information clearinghouse on the effects of alcoholism and drug dependency on Jewish family life.<sup>100</sup>

JACS sponsors weekly meetings which are held in select cities around the United States as well in Australia, Brazil, Canada, and Israel. They also offer a wide variety of programming including weekend retreats, spiritual days, birthright Israel trips, a speaker's bureau, teen programming, and training for clergy and Jewish communal service professionals.

2. **The Jewish Recovery Center**, located in Boca Raton, Florida has "close working relationships with leading programs and addiction experts, providing a vital link for

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<sup>100</sup> JBFCS. *Mission Statement*, <http://www.jbfcs.org/programs-services/jewish-community-services-2/jacs/mission-statement-traditions> (accessed 1/17/14).

those seeking treatment in South Florida.”<sup>101</sup> They offer referrals, screenings and emergency placement for detox, as well as aftercare management for those completing in-patient treatment.<sup>102</sup>

The Center also does extensive programming including: holiday and Shabbat dinners; various lectures by world-renown spiritual leaders; spiritual retreats with members of the Jewish recovery community; support groups for alumni and parents; and group outings to sports and cultural events.

3. **The Jewish Center for Addiction: Prevention, Help, and Hope** located in Chicago, assists those in the path of addiction’s immediate trauma and helps build caring communities that are aware of and responsive to the problem of addiction. The goal of the Center is to ensure that Jewish individuals and their families who are impacted by substance abuse are empowered to seek help, striving to open multiple avenues of access within and outside the Jewish community.<sup>103</sup>

The Center has a Speaker’s Bureau and offers a wide range of programs including: Jewish 12-step meetings; sobriety support including case management, pastoral counseling; recovery skills training; spiritual programs such as *mussar* practice, writing healing prayer, *Chesed* meditation, and 12-step Torah; and professional training.

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<sup>101</sup> Jewish Recovery Center. *About the JRC*, <http://www.jewishrecoverycenter.com/about-the-jrc> (accessed 1/17/14).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Jewish Center for Addiction. *Jewish Center for Addiction: Prevention, Help, and Hope*, <http://www.jcfs.org/node/91> (accessed 1/17/14).

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