

One Year Sober: My Lonely and Painful Journey from Alcoholism to Tentative Recovery

By: ANONYMOUS

How It Started

When you hear the word “alcoholic,” what do you imagine? A person on a park bench, drinking out of a paper bag? The truth is, I am probably not who you picture. This disease does not discriminate between young and old, male or female, wealthy or poor, professional or unemployed. I am just like you. I am a father, a husband, a son, and a friend. I *daven* in the same shul as you, and I send my children to the same *yeshivos* as you. I am the same as you, with one exception: I am powerless over alcohol.

In this article, I hope to bring awareness about this deadly, progressive disease. I will share my personal journey—from when alcohol was something I enjoyed in small, infrequent quantities, to something I could not live without, and finally to my tentative recovery.

I had a very normal Orthodox Jewish upbringing. I went to yeshivah for elementary and high school, and then spent two years learning in Israel. When I came back, I continued to learn part-time and work part-time as I pursued my college education. I graduated, married an amazing woman, began to work full-time, and started my own business. By 31, I had a wife, a career, three incredible children, and was living a great life.

At that point, alcohol was just something that showed up on weekends—a few drinks at a *kiddush* in shul, maybe a *l’chaim* or two at a friend’s house on Shabbos. It was not a problem. If anything, it felt like a bonus. I loved how drinking made me feel: relaxed, more confident and less guarded. It helped me socialize. I was not the loudest person in the room, but with a few drinks, I brought some life to the party. Soon, our home became the place where people would gather on Shabbos. We hosted a *kiddush* almost every week. Friends would come over, and we would hang out, share laughs, talk about life, and have a few drinks together. It felt innocent—even meaningful. There was community, laughter, and connection. And there was alcohol. Always alcohol.

The author, who wishes to remain anonymous, lives in a Modern Orthodox community in the tristate area.

Looking back, that is when it started to take root—slowly, quietly, without anyone, including me—realizing what was growing beneath the surface. I was not yet drinking every day. I was not hiding bottles or waking up hungover on weekdays. But I was also not asking myself why I looked forward to drinking so much on the weekends. Why a simple *kiddush* felt incomplete without those extra shots. Why I felt more like “myself” with a buzz than without one. I did not see it as a red flag. It was just part of our culture. I told myself I was in control—because at that time, maybe I was, but that would not last very long.

The Downward Spiral

In my mid- to late-30s, something started to shift—slowly at first, but undeniably. I became obsessed with alcohol. I do not mean I was drinking all day or hiding bottles in the closet. Not yet. But I started looking forward to my next drink. I would come up with reasons why I needed to get together with a friend during the week, just so I could have a few drinks with him—and still avoid crossing that line into drinking alone. That had a stigma of being a problem, which I clearly did not have. Or so I told myself.

I loved to drink—vodka, tequila, scotch, bourbon, wine—I was not choosy. Alcohol became not just a drink, but a hobby, a passion. A piece of my identity. An identity I celebrated. Every birthday, every Father’s Day, someone would gift me a nice bottle, or some fancy shot glasses, always something alcohol-related. People saw it as part of who I was. I was the guy who could always be counted on to bring good liquor to a party. I was the one who could drink more than everyone else and still show up to work the next day like nothing happened.

And I loved it. It felt like a gift—a superhuman tolerance I wore like a badge of honor. I was the dependable, fun guy, the life of the party. What I did not see was that my badge of honor was really a mark of **dependence**. I still did not think I had a problem because at that point, it did not feel like one. I was not missing work. I was not being arrested. I was not blacking out or getting into fights. I was drinking heavily, sure—but I was functioning. Looking back, however, that is when the cracks started to appear—I was just not ready to see them.

Alcohol slowly became part of everything I did. I started buying small bottles of vodka by the case. I would always make sure to have one or two bottles with me, whether it was to one of my children’s Little League games, to the movies with my wife, or to any event where drinks might not be readily available. I did not want to end up without it. Even simple, everyday activities felt incomplete unless I knew I had alcohol

nearby. I told myself it was just convenience, or that I was just being prepared—but deep down, I was losing control. I had gone from a social drinker to a daily drinker to someone who could not leave the house without “just in case” bottles. I had built my routines around access to alcohol. Trips, errands, even carpools—they all included quiet moments of drinking. No one knew. Or so I believed. Over time, my physical and emotional dependence grew. I could not relax without a drink. I could not handle stress or boredom without reaching for a bottle. The idea of going 24 hours without alcohol became unthinkable. I justified it all because I was still “keeping it together.” What I was really keeping together, however, was a fragile illusion—and deep down, I was afraid of what might happen if it cracked.

Denial and the Turning Point

Through my late 30s into my early 40s, life was surging ahead at a nice pace. My children were growing up into fine young adults. My business was expanding. I could not have asked for more out of life. We would go on nice vacations a few times a year, and I always had a great time. Since I did not accept or even realize that I had a problem, I would drink openly at home by myself or with friends and family. I was starting, however, to hide the fact that I was drinking by myself throughout the day. I always had alcohol in the car with me. I would go to a meeting at a client’s office and would make sure to drink before the meeting, and afterwards—when I got back into my car. This was my new normal. When I went out with my wife and friends to a restaurant, I would make sure to have a few drinks privately before we left home. I would then drink at the restaurant with everyone else. I would always order a double and have a few refills before anyone else at the table even finished their first.

I remember thinking, *how can that person still be nursing their first drink? How can they not have finished their glass?* I could not understand anyone who did not finish their drink—it made no sense to me. I started getting comments like, “Wow, you can really drink a lot,” or “You can really hold your liquor.” I was very proud of this reputation I had developed. At this point in my life, I was always drinking. In the mornings, it was to take the edge off the night before. In the afternoons, it was to stay balanced and calm. And in the evenings, it was to reward myself, to celebrate, or just to make it through. I was not drinking to get drunk—I was drinking to feel normal. I needed it. It had become as essential to my daily routine as brushing my teeth. Yet, I still could not admit to myself that anything was wrong.

I knew exactly how much alcohol I had at home and would panic if the supply ran low. I kept bottles hidden in places where I thought no one would ever look—in my closet, my home office, my bathroom, and in the trunk of my car. I told myself it was just smart planning. But in truth, I was building a cage around myself, one bottle at a time. Looking back, I cannot believe how blind I was to what was happening. But that is the nature of this addiction. You lie to the people around you. You lie to yourself. And worst of all, you believe it.

At this point in my life, I saw my situation as manageable. However, with the amount I was consuming, there were times that tensions would rise in our home around my behavior. I would have friends over on a Friday afternoon before Shabbos to hang out, eat good food, catch up on the week and have a few drinks. While preparing the table, I would have a few shots. As my friends started sitting down and getting comfortable, I would have a few more. When I was cleaning up the table after my friends left, I would again have a few more. By the time Shabbos started, I was highly intoxicated. Even though I was “fully functional”—able to take a shower, get dressed, and go to shul—I would do so with a level of sloppiness. My steps would be slower and staggering. My speech would be slightly slurred and, worst of all, I was less patient and more irritable. At Shabbos dinner, I would inevitably upset at least one member of my family with my behavior, but I would not see it as my doing. In my mind, they were overreacting—they were the ones with the problem, not me.

By now, my wife and children were asking me to cut back on my drinking. They did not ask me to stop drinking—that would have implied that they believed I had a real problem. Being the amenable person I am, I would always say, of course, I will take it easy. And perhaps I even believed that. But it never actually happened. My eating was out of control, and the oversized shape of my body reflected my weight gain. I was overweight and drinking throughout the day. I worked 12 hours a day with diminishing productivity. I was driving when I should not have been. Yet, I believed life was great. I would travel for work alone, which I loved. I would get to the airport a few hours early so I could sit at a bar and have a few drinks before boarding. When I got onto the plane, I would reach into my carry-on for the mini bottles I had packed—always prepared, always hiding. Naturally, I would then doze off for the remainder of the flight so I could be fresh for my meetings at my destination. This went on for a number of years and life was good, or so I thought.

When I turned 45, I decided it was time to take charge and make some changes in my life. I made an appointment to have Gastric Sleeve

surgery to stop my weight gain. In the weeks leading up to the surgery, I was told that I had to adhere to a strict diet, which included no alcohol consumption. Prior to my surgery, I met with a therapist as required by my health insurance. We discussed my eating and drinking habits. I admitted that I was a heavy drinker. He explained to me that after the surgery, I would have to abstain from alcohol for 60 days. He then warned me that my body would absorb alcohol differently than it did before. That after one shot the alcohol would go straight to my head, but that the feeling would dissipate within a few minutes. All I heard was, no alcohol for the month before the surgery and for 60 days after. That when I drink I will feel it quickly and recover quickly. Wow! I will be able to drink more than ever. I thanked the therapist and assured him I was a perfect candidate who looked forward to changing his life for the better. Thus began the next stage, when my life started getting complicated.

After the surgery, I felt great. I was losing weight, not drinking (but secretly counting down to day 61 when I would be able to drink again) and going to work. Then, COVID hit. This resulted in forced isolation. It also conveniently coincided with the end of my 60-day post-surgery alcohol restriction. In my business, I work in a private office all day. The only thing I could think of was putting what the therapist told me about the effects of alcohol post-surgery to the test. Sure enough, he was right and it was amazing. I would have a drink, get the full effects of it for a few minutes, and then I would be able to continue what I was doing without any hindrance. What felt amazing at the time was actually the beginning of the final stage of my progression to where life would soon become unmanageable. Over the next year, my drinking escalated to a new and dangerous level. I was no longer drinking out of want—I was drinking out of need. If I went more than a couple of hours without alcohol, the withdrawal symptoms would kick in: trembling hands, sweating, rising anxiety. The only way to make it stop was to take another drink. And so I did—again and again.

Eventually, I developed a grim routine. I would wake up around 4 a.m., slip quietly out of bed to avoid waking my wife, and head downstairs. I would pour myself a drink and then rush to the bathroom to vomit. I would then pour another drink to try to settle my nerves. Afterward, I would collapse on the couch for a few hours before starting my day. Then, as if nothing had happened, I would get dressed, go to shul, head to work, maybe even hit the gym. On the outside, I was holding it all together. But inside, I was falling apart. I felt utterly alone. I hated myself. I would look in the mirror, drenched in sweat, and whisper, “I hate you.” And no one knew. No one saw the storm in which I

was drowning. I could not tell anyone—the shame was paralyzing. I felt trapped inside my mind and body. I began praying every day: Please, G-d, help me find a way out.

I need to pause here and acknowledge the damage I was doing to the people I loved most—my wife and children. They were the center of my world. The ones I was meant to protect. Yet, I was hurting them every day. My wife begged me—pleaded with me—to stop drinking. She saw what I could not (or would not) see. She knew I was not well. But every time she confronted me, I pushed her away. I told her to leave me alone, that she was overreacting, that I had everything under control. I believed my own lies—and expected her to believe them too. I was withdrawing from my children emotionally without even realizing it. I was putting them in danger by driving under the influence, pretending everything was fine.

I was missing the moments in life that mattered most. I was becoming someone they did not recognize. Someone I did not recognize. It was painful to admit, but I was destroying a beautiful life—my beautiful life—one drink at a time. I was a good person, a loving husband, a devoted father—but I was trapped in a self-destructive cycle from which I could not exit.

I recall a few instances that emphasize the severity of all this. It was Yom Kippur morning 2021. I woke up drenched in sweat, my hands shaking. I knew exactly what this meant... alcohol withdrawal. I had never in my life ever thought, G-d forbid, of drinking water on Yom Kippur, let alone alcohol. But I had no choice, I had to curb my symptoms. I proceeded to down a few shots of vodka and thought to myself, okay, now I am good and I can continue with the fast and go to shul. By the time I got to shul, I started to feel sweaty and shaky. I figured I would ignore the symptoms and they would go away. An hour later, I collapsed in shul, with my body convulsing in unstoppable shaking. My son was watching this and crying in fear! Hatzalah was called and I was taken to the hospital. As I was being treated with IVs, I overheard the doctor talking to the nurse, ordering a series of tests to figure out what could cause such a reaction. I called the doctor over and told him I was a heavy drinker and was likely going through a serious withdrawal. He agreed that the symptoms aligned with alcohol withdrawal and proceeded to treat it as such with the proper IV medication. After being treated for a few hours, I began to feel much better and was discharged to my home. The crazy thing is, all I kept thinking at that time was, *Okay, when I get home, I will be home alone while my family will be in shul for the remainder of the day. Great, I CAN DRINK!* Let that sink in. It was Yom Kippur, I was rushed to the hospital in front of my crying wife and children, and all I

could think about was drinking again. This is just an example of how the next year of my life went.

Ending up in the hospital was, unfortunately, not enough to get me to stop drinking. At this point, I was drinking about a liter a day of either vodka or tequila. It started to become apparent to those closest to me that I might actually have a real problem. However, as you can imagine, it is not an easy conversation to have. “Hey, Dad, you have a real problem and you need to get help.” “Honey, I love you, but I am very worried about you.” My wife and kids pleaded with me, but I was not hearing them. The months went by and soon it was the Yamim Tovim again, I took my family to Israel for Yom Kippur and Succos. I ran back and forth to the stores to buy bottles so I could always have a bottle of alcohol with me. On Yom Kippur I again drank all day. My behavior was embarrassing. I was irritable, nasty, and impossible to be around.

Before we headed back home, my very close friend called my wife and told her that it was time for me to get some serious help and that he would talk to me and make arrangements to get me rehabilitation therapy. When he told me this, I broke down crying and agreed that when we got back home, I would check in to a detox and rehab center. Thus began my journey to recovery. When we returned home, I arranged to check into rehab for five days of detoxification. I was feeling a whole slew of different emotions. I felt relief that this roller coaster I was riding might actually come to end. I felt scared about how I would be able to carry on living without alcohol. Most of all, I was ashamed of the pain and suffering I had caused my family.

The day arrived and I was scheduled to be picked up by a car sent by the rehab center. I packed my suitcase, and before heading downstairs, I thought to myself that this is the last time I will be able to drink. I opened a bottle of tequila and drank most of the bottle within a few minutes. The next thing I remember is lying on the floor surrounded by EMTs. Apparently, I had fallen down the stairs and blacked out. My daughter, who would be getting married a month later, found me unresponsive and called an ambulance. Amidst all the chaos, I could hear my daughter crying. I was broken. I was taken to the hospital again to be treated with IV fluids and medication. After a few hours, I was discharged. My friend, who had helped make the arrangements for the rehab center, drove me there. He escorted me inside with hopes and prayers that I would get better. For the next five days, I was isolated from my family, friends, and business. It was brutal. I went through a full detox in a medically controlled environment. The shaking and sweats lasted a few days and then I started gaining some clarity.

My wife and I decided that it would be beneficial to stay an additional five days to begin the rehab part of the program. As much as my family needed me back home, my recovery was more important. I learned in rehab to take things one day at a time. I began to feel stronger and was looking forward to this next stage in my life. The next few months were amazing. My daughter got married and I was able to be fully present—to walk her down the aisle like a father should. It was one of the proudest, most emotional moments of my life—not just because she was getting married, but because I was truly there for it, clear-headed and emotionally available. I cherished every moment with my family, sober and clear. I began an outpatient rehab program and started therapy. Life felt good again. I was rebuilding trust with my family, friends, and colleagues.

By around the six-month mark, however, the disease reared its ugly head. Just as I began to feel confident in my recovery—maybe a little too confident—I let my guard down. I convinced myself that because I had everything under control, I could drink a little—like a normal person. The lie whispered in my ear: *You have earned it. You have proven you are strong enough. Just one drink won't hurt.* That lie is the disease talking to you, and I fell for it—twice.

Within days of that first drink, I was back to finishing a bottle a day. After a few weeks, my wife discovered the truth. I made the decision to stop again—this time detoxing on my own, which was incredibly painful. Six months later, the same thing happened. That is how powerful the disease of alcoholism is. Each time that life settled and I felt “normal,” I convinced myself that I had power over alcohol—but I clearly did not. It had reached a breaking point: I had to choose between alcohol and my family. It was no longer theoretical—I was on the verge of losing the people I loved most. The thought of my wife and kids walking away, not because they did not love me, but because they could not keep getting hurt—shook me to my core.

Ultimately, I chose my family. I loved them too much to lose them.

The Lasting Reality of Recovery

I think back to that terrible Yom Kippur morning, convulsing on the floor of the shul as my son cried in fear. The shame of that memory, and many others that I have, are a constant reminder of how far I have come. Now, when my son and I are in shul together, my hands do not shake. My mind is clear and I am present in the moment. When I sit with my family at the Shabbos table, we enjoy a peaceful meal with relaxed conversation. This progress is a return to G-d, to myself, and to

my family. That is the true gift of sobriety, a gift I work to protect every day of my new life.

My story is not just about me. It is about every person who smiles in shul on Shabbos while hiding his terrible struggle. It is about the friend who brings the best bottle to a party; the parent who seems to have it all together; the person next to you who is silently drowning. The disease of alcoholism thrives in silence and shame. By sharing my story, I hope to chip away at that stigma, to make it a bit easier for someone else to say, “I need help.” Recovery is possible, but it starts with a single brave moment of truth and admittance.

At that point, I felt stronger, more grounded, and more grateful. But I know this is a lifelong journey, and I wake up every day ready to fight for it. Recovery did not come neatly wrapped with a pretty bow. Recovery is not a switch you turn on. It is not something from which you graduate. It is a lifelong process—daily, deliberate, and deeply personal.

I began going to AA meetings every day. At first, I was just trying to stay afloat. I sat quietly in the back, listening to stories that sounded uncomfortably similar to my own. There were men and women with 30 sober days, or 30 years, and everything in between. No matter their age or background, they all spoke the same language—one of pain, honesty, humility, and hope.

My relationship with Hashem deepened. I began to pray not just for help, but to express gratitude, clarity, and connection. The biggest benefit was that I was not alone. I start each day listening to like-minded people. Regular people who suffer as I do. We are powerless over alcohol. Because of that, we do everything in our power to stay away from that first drink. A few weeks ago, a fellow AA member and friend fell victim to the disease. He relapsed, and on the first day of his drinking, fell down a flight of stairs and suffered a fatal injury. That is the brutal reality of this disease, a reality I live with, and it motivates me every day to stay sober, to fight for my family and for myself.

Epilogue by Zvi Gluck, CEO of Amudim

For a long time, we harbored the illusion that we live in a bubble. That our Orthodox Jewish communities are immune to the problems plaguing the world at large. If only that were true.

The reality is that we are encountering issues we never thought would affect us, including alcoholism. The above author and various others who have been caught up in the downward spiral of alcohol addiction should be a wakeup call to all of us. I have seen successful individuals, people with wonderful families, men and women of all age

brackets and demographics who have had their lives turned upside down by alcohol addiction. Worse yet, the prevalence of alcoholism in our communities is on the rise.

We need to tackle the challenge of alcohol addiction head on, both by supporting those who are struggling with this addiction, and by coming up with thoughtful solutions to prevent others from developing this dangerous and potentially deadly habit. ❧