

Jewish Sisters in Sobriety – JACS in Print

In 2007 JACS was pleased to announce the publication of the book “Jewish Sisters in Sobriety” This book contains personal stories, poems and reflections from the JACS membership.

“I attended a Bar Mitzvah last week and I was ashamed to touch the Torah. I felt a triple shonda (disgrace) in that I am a female, and Jewish, and alcoholic.” A JACS Retreat Participant, 1981

You can see them at any JACS Retreat. Jewish women addicts and alcoholics. Wives, mothers and daughters of addicts and alcoholics. They are a sight to behold. An alcoholic ultra Orthodox Jewish woman, with wig, hat, long sleeves, long skirt, and cotton stockings joyfully embracing another Jewish woman drug addict – in a short tank top, cut off jeans, sandals and tattoos on her arm. All the while a female rabbi, a prescription drug abuser, with yarmulke (skull cap) and prayer shawl watches and smiles.

As different as they are, they share a unique oneness, a “*Jewish Sisterhood in Sobriety*,” of chemically addicted women and family members of addicts who have come together to heal themselves and help others do the same. They represent all walks of Jewish life, experience, background and religious tradition.

They are gay and straight, single and married, mothers of large families. They are girls in their teens and grandmothers in retirement. They have one year of sobriety to more than two decades clean and sober. They are addicts themselves and family members of addicts. They are prosperous and impoverished. They are incest survivors and victims of domestic violence. They have multiple drug addictions and mental health disorders. They are ultra religious to non-affiliated, and everything in between.

These are the sensitive and resilient JACS women who have shared their stories in this collection. They have written passionate and compelling first person memoirs of what it is like to be an alcoholic or chemically addicted Jewish woman – or a spouse, child or parent of one – and to have found sobriety and recovery. Most have done so through the 12- step, self help fellowship programs of AA (Alcoholics Anonymous), NA (Narcotics Anonymous) and Al-Anon, Alateen and Nar-Anon for families - enhanced by their involvement in JACS.

There are common threads: the web of denial of their disease, anger at their Jewish community for “abandoning them” by failing to recognize their illness, and the myths of “cultural immunity” that prolonged their seeking help. There are common feelings: shame, guilt, anger, frustration; fear of personal, family and community rejection. There are common themes: feeling out of place attending 12 step meetings, being alienated from Judaism, being unable to find spiritual leaders who understand their disease and support them. And, finally, there is gratitude, humility, and serenity in overcoming these stumbling blocks, doing what it takes to find recovery, and, in doing so, providing strength and support to others on the same journey.

The writers also share their experiences with early recovery. Some got sober and straight exclusively through 12-step programs, some attended rehabilitation centers, some regularly saw therapists and counselors. Many attended support programs for other issues – violence and abuse, depression/bipolar disorder, overeating. The writers also give insight into how the 12-step

program process works and the power of self help. They share their spiritual journeys and the need to reconcile their Jewish beliefs with the 12 step recovery programs that saved their lives. Most are exploring Jewish spirituality in the 12 Step idiom in one way or another. Some have returned to Jewish religious practice; others are learning Jewish tradition for the first time; still others remain culturally Jewish but religiously unaffiliated.

Recovery has brought other changes for these women. They have gotten married - and divorced. They have gone back to school and started new careers. Some have become new parents; others have watched their children also struggle with addictive behaviors. Others have come out of the closet as lesbians, gamblers, sex addicts. Some have lost loved ones to the disease. Some have relapsed, and turned from self help programs, only to return again. They have lived life on life's terms - but with a difference. They have had the tools of recovery, the steps to recovery, and the promises of recovery to see them through.

For the women who have shared these candid self portraits, it has been a process of self-healing: cathartic, liberating and energizing, giving them a perspective on their lives, struggles and recoveries they had not had before. It has also been a way for them to bring hope and inspiration to others and provide an example of the rewards that can come when one takes those hard first steps toward sobriety, recovery and a new life.

Marcia Cohn Spiegel has called the process of "Jewish women healing themselves" as "spirituality for survival." This might well be an apt subtitle for the stories in this volume.

It is in this spirit, that this book was written:

"Whoever saves a single soul, it is as if he saves an entire universe"

Sanhedrin 19b