



A 'REGULAR LUBAVITCHER' TELLS HER STORY

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My husband is an addict.

A specific kind of addict, one that entails a lot of secrecy, deception, and many hours online.

We were married about six years when I inadvertently came upon various websites that had been visited on his work computer and confronted him about it. What he subsequently disclosed over the course of a few days shattered the foundation of our marriage. He was an addict way before he met me although, as addictions go, his behaviors got worse as the addiction progressed. Fortunately, when I confronted him he finally started telling me the truth about himself.

After his disclosure, I began suffering from panic attacks, was having nightly nightmares, and was barely able to eat and take care of myself and my children. My life was falling apart before my eyes and I desperately needed help.

To give some context, I'm a "regular" Lubavitcher girl from a Lubavitcher family. I went to Bais Rivkah elementary and high school, seminary in Eretz Yisroel and then worked for various *shluchim* for a few years before I got married. After dating a few guys, a *shadchan* suggested my husband. We dated for two weeks, got

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engaged, and then married three months later. There was nothing irregular about this; most of my siblings got engaged after dating for that long. When we were dating and during our engagement I didn't see him as anything different than a regular *frum bachur* in his actions, speech, clothing or mannerisms. We had quite a few children *ka"h*, and I was close to giving birth again when I discovered his secret life of addiction.

Looking back, I realize that during the first years of our marriage things were not always great. There was always something about him I didn't trust, but there was nothing I could pin it on. It was very confusing for me and we tried seeking advice from various

Rabbanim, *mashpiim*, therapists and healers. Unfortunately, none of them was able to help us as they were as unaware as I was regarding my husband's addiction. He did privately tell the truth to a few of the therapists we worked with, but not being trained in addiction they made things worse and in some ways even enabled his addictive behavior. They definitely didn't tell me what they knew and did a good job of making me feel naïve and old fashioned in my attitudes toward marriage during their work with us. Because of this we would stop going to them; their perspectives were not at all in line with a *frum, chassidische* household. Other than this, my struggles in life included navigating the

ups and downs of going from one pregnancy to the next and having adequate *parnassah* for our growing family. And I found joy in all of this; having a large family was always one of my dreams and I accepted the challenges that come with it. I spent time listening to Lubavitcher lecturers speaking about marriage and tried incorporating what they said wherever possible. Our marriage improved over time—at least on the surface—and it seemed like we were just a regular couple like everyone else.

Then came the truth on the day that changed my life forever. I began searching for help. Did I have to leave him immediately? What about our kids? How would this

affect their lives? And, in some ways more importantly at that moment, how do I get these panic attacks and nightmares to stop and not fall into depression?

Within a few days I found a *frum* coach who works with spouses of addicts. It was a relief to speak with someone who knew what I was going through and her support was vital in the first few weeks. After a few sessions, though, she started explaining and working with me using the codependency model, which is based on the idea that the spouse of an addict is just as sick as the addict and called a codependent. The codependent spouse often enables and ignores the addiction and in many ways needs the addict, also described as being addicted to the addict. Additionally, the codependent spouse usually has a background of unaddressed abuse, trauma and victimhood that causes her to fall into this pattern of relationships. She started working with me through the Twelve Steps for the Codependent, and although there was initial relief just finally having someone to open my heart to, her work with me was ineffective at best. I was falling into a deeper depression by the day, the nightmares were a constant nightly occurrence and my hopelessness was reaching new depths. I couldn't come to terms with the codependency model; it just did not speak to me. *Baruch Hashem*, I come from a healthy, supportive family, *baruch Hashem* have no trauma or abuse that would have brought me to actively seek an addicted spouse, and barely even knew my husband enough before marriage to have known about his addiction or actively seek this type of relationship. Additionally, I did

not enable or ignore his addiction; I literally knew nothing about it. I didn't even know that the things he was doing existed. I don't think I'm naïve; as a Lubavitcher girl I knew almost nothing about that world and had no interest in it.

As the weeks of devastation went by, I started looking for other alternatives. I bought as many books as I could find, searched through many articles and resources, and began learning that there are alternative models. I learned that I was going through betrayal trauma with similar symptoms to PTSD, and there was hope for getting my life back together. I found a caring, nurturing psychologist who has helped me bring color and energy back into my life. She also connected me with a *frum*, *chassidische* colleague of hers to guide me through the *Yiddishkeit*-related questions and provide the direction that I needed. Both of these wonderful women are walking with me through the healing process and making it possible for my marriage to survive. My nightmares stopped, the panic attacks are gone, and I'm laughing again, enjoying hobbies and being present with my children.

My husband is in recovery thank G-d and taking it seriously. This is vital for our marriage to continue. There's a journey ahead towards repairing our relationship, and his healing from the trauma of his childhood and the addiction that followed. Our lives have been impacted tremendously and we hope to make it through this together.

I *daven* every day to make it through this challenge with my marriage intact, mostly for the sake of my children. I don't want them to

grow up having had the trauma of their parents' breakup, G-d forbid. And I've gained more compassion and understanding for women who have to make the difficult decision to leave their husbands because of untreated addiction. Many times these women are misunderstood in our community where divorce is very discouraged and, understandably, they aren't forthcoming in sharing what tore their marriage apart, mostly for the sake of their children.

There is a lot of stigma attached to addiction in general, and particularly to this type of addiction. Almost none of my family members and friends know anything about this part of my life and marriage, and having to keep up a normal façade to the world definitely adds to my stress and difficulties. Reading the *N'shei Chabad Newsletter* brings me a sense of connection to other women sharing their stories and constantly reminds me that we all have hardships, challenges and difficulties in life, and it's how we thrive and serve Hashem with joy despite the pain that shows the strength of our trust in Him.

After the work it took to find the right help, I felt it necessary to share my story because there are many other women going through this journey, too. The betrayal trauma model has not yet become mainstream in the *frum* community, and unfortunately many *frum* women looking for help are labeled as codependents when they are not. This may impede their healing and can make things worse even though their spouse is in recovery. *Baruch Hashem* there is help, there is hope, and there is a way out of the darkness. ❧

RESOURCES

Guardyoureyes.com is a website to help people who are struggling and their families.

Reliefhelp.org provides referrals to *frum* therapists for severe cases.

Tag.org will help install internet filters.

***Trapped in Cyberspace* by Ayala Stimler (Menucha Publishers)** is a novel on the topic for *frum* teens.

Don't miss an article entitled "**Mei Sotah: The Case for Partner-Sensitive Treatment of Betrayal Trauma**" in the upcoming (Kislev) issue of *N'shei Chabad Newsletter*.

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