

## OPINION

# It's time to realise that Amy isn't the only Jewish addict out there

WHILE troubled singer Amy Winehouse's drug and relationship problems dominate the headlines, she isn't the only member of the Jewish community who should stop saying no to Rehab.

Fortunately for Amy, she is in the public eye and consequently cannot hide her addiction from the world like so many Jews in my experience. Despite the fact that the American Psychiatric Association recognise alcoholism as an illness (and alcohol is merely a drug in liquid form), Britain and in particular, British Jews in my opinion are so ashamed of the stigma associated with addiction that their denial of the disease and the potentially life threatening consequences associated with it often prevent them and their families from seeking the help they so desperately need.

One Jewish lady I recently spoke to told me that nobody outside of her close family knows about her addiction and that even they refuse to accept that she abused drugs, finding the concept of her being an alcoholic far more palatable. Another Jewish drug addict told me that when talking to his father about the prospect of 'coming out of the closet' his father's response was: "I certainly hope you wouldn't do it whilst I'm alive. If my friends were to find out it would ruin my life." Whilst I understand where these feelings come from: be it shame, fear or self-blame, what is not being considered is the fact that secrecy feeds

this illness and these types of messages reinforce the unimaginable sense of shame that addicts already feel about themselves.

It is well known that the American culture surrounding addiction is diametrically opposed to that of Britain but I wonder how long it will take for us to catch up and when the Jewish community will open its eyes to the fact that suffering from addiction is no more

## Another VIEW

shameful than suffering from cancer, diabetes or any other illness.

Unfortunately, one of the initial symptoms of addiction is denial which often prevents addicts from acknowledging their need for help. Furthermore, the natural instinct of family members (who are often in denial about the extent of the problem themselves) is to rescue their loved ones from the consequences of their behaviour. Although under normal circumstances this type of love is to be

revered, when dealing with addiction, tough love is very often a far more difficult yet far more productive approach. Rescuing and bailing addicts out is actually enabling them to continue their destructive behaviour as it prevents them from reaching their 'rock bottom' which ultimately will be the deciding factor in their request for help. Personally, I have an enormous respect for the courage of Amy's father-in-law who went on the record by publicly begging her fans not to buy her latest album or go to her concerts. This was not the act of a malicious or jealous man but the genuine love of a desperate father who is rightly terrified for his daughter-in-law's life. Make no mistake – addiction kills.

Tough love is certainly not the first course of action a family member needs to take when dealing with an addict but education around the subject and professional help is vital.

Finally, with regard to Amy at least she has cancelled her concerts for the rest of the year on medical advice and all we can do is hope that this will be the first step for her on the long road to recovery.

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**Simon Leigh**

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