**Imagine Life HMV**

**Addressing Substance Use**

By Steven Mandel, MD, Gary Smith DVM

Addiction is a crisis! There is a pervasive myth that addiction is not a Jewish issue. In reality, no one is immune, from the least Jewishly involved to the most observant. Family life is often disrupted because of addiction.

At today’s Hearing Men’s Voices/Parlor discussion, join us in exploring your observations and experiences with addiction in your family and community. We will also brainstorm on how we can become more aware and recognize signals to detect early so as to prevent addiction.

**YES WE ARE IN A CRISIS! LET’S TALK ABOUT**! Only we as a community can fix it.



**BACKGROUND PRIOR TO OUR DISCUSSION**

1. **Spirituality** **in Addiction** – This is often overlooked as part of the healing process. I know some people who have healed themselves through meditation and other forms of spiritual healing. Addiction recovery has many components. Seeking forgiveness is a process that can be supported by Jewish teachings and traditions in the congregational and pastoral settings. By sharing these stories and involving your clergy, you can provide an important base from which personal healing can grow.
2. **Religious Life -** Research has shown that participating in religious life provides a protective cover that is cathartic and emotionally satisfying to those in addiction. So many of us have benefited from our involvement in religious life and gained personal satisfaction. We often find that getting involved in our synagogues and communities provides a certain amount of support that helps us through trying times. Ultimately, this makes us feel better about ourselves, knowing we are helping ourselves and have the opportunity to help others.
3. **Identifying Ways to Welcome -** Those that are misusing or are in recovery need our support to help with the healing process. Our job as supporters is to give those with addiction that have had unsatisfying or an absence of religious education and spirituality a forum to expose them to the value and joy of religious and spiritual healing in a safe environment.
4. **Individuals in a 12 Step Recovery Program –** People in these programsoften get very strong daily spiritual practice and can become role models. Our congregation has much to gain from welcoming members in recovery
5. We as human beings treat addiction at times like leprosy. It is up to us to treat those in addiction in our community in a caring and empathetic way. We need each other, especially in these trying times.

1. To develop a course of action, we need to look no further then how our biblical ancestors lived and exposed their mental illness. We can surmise that our ancestors may have had addictions to fight some of their mental issues. King Saul’s “manic” episodes, Job’s “paranoid” feelings, Ezekiel’s “schizophrenic” hallucinations, the mental suffering (and elation) of the Psalmist. George Stein’s book - *The Hidden Psychiatry of the Old Testament* provides an interesting reference and can lead us to comparisons. We have put off addressing mental illness in our community for much too long a time. It is time for us to take the lead and bring these issues out into the open. LET’S TALK ABOUT IT! Let’s make a difference in people’s lives.
2. There are two Talmudic teachings I would like to share with you about relating drug addiction in our ancestors, particularly alcohol, to today’s society;

 **1.**

**Megillah 7-8**

**Rava said: A person is obligated to become intoxicated** with wine **on Purim until one does not know** how to distinguish **between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordecai.**

The Gemara relates that **Rava and Rabbi Zeira prepared a Purim feast with each other,** and **they became intoxicated** to the point that **Rava arose and slaughtered Rabbi Zeira.**

**The next day,** when he became sober and realized what he had done, Rava **asked** God **for mercy, and revived him.**

**The next year,** Rava **said to** Rabbi Zeira: **Let** the **Master come and let us prepare the Purim feast with each other.**

**He said to him: Miracles do not happen each and every hour,** and I do not want to undergo that experience again.

 2.

 Addiction is highlighted in the Torah’s account of the Revelation at Mount Sinai, where the One Who Spoke and the World Came into Being instructed us not to get so caught up in our subjective assumptions about God that we would carve out and worship an image reflecting those assumptions. In other words, addiction is the act of replacing a truth, or need, or innate desire with an artificial facsimile that eventually supersedes the very truth it was originally intended to represent. It is often born out of one’s struggle and subsequent failure to reach the truth in question, the frustration of which can drive one to such desperation that one resorts to, say, a Golden Calf. And the healing of addiction, in turn, involves melting down the image and lapping it up, internalizing that which had been so unwholesomely externalized, to restore to the essential self what had belonged there all along

**YES WE ARE IN A CRISIS! - LET’S TALK ABOUT IT!**

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| 1. The CDC reports that the number of overdose deaths rose to their highest number ever – 100,300 precious souls in just one year (March 2020-April 2021). When JAAN(Jewish Addiction Awareness Network first began, that number was 64,000, and we were all shocked. SAMSHA’s(substance abuse and mental health service administration) annual National Survey on Drug Use and Health for 2020 concluded that more than 40 million Americans were living with an active substance use disorder.
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Despite the efforts of governments, health-care providers, activists and others, the problem is growing much worse. The [new figures](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm), which are provisional but rarely change much in final tallies, represent a 28.5% increase from the same period a year earlier. The financial, social, mental health, housing and other difficulties of the covid-19 pandemic are widely blamed for much of the increase.

By far, the US is the number one country in deaths per 100,000. The US has 21 deaths per 100,000 for drug overdose. The next closest country in Norway at 5 deaths per 100,000.

**YES we are in a CRISIS and more specifically our Jewish Community in a crisis with addiction.**  The good news is that the FJMC and FJMC Foundation for Jewish Life are here to help our regions, clubs, and synagogues. We are at the beginning of addressing this crisis and we need each and every one of you to be proactive and become part of the solution. Our Imagine Life Committee and FJMC are here to help. We need your input. Please do not wait till a friend or family becomes part of the statistic. We can help you.

Before we get started, I’m going to discuss the background of the current addiction crisis for about 5-8 mins. and do a quick review of the rules that apply toall HMV/Parlor sessions.

**BRIEF RULES:**

1. Our goal is to have an open discussion where everyone’s opinion is respected, not criticized. Conversation is encouraged, confrontation is not.
2. The conversation can be of a rather personal nature, so please respect everyone’s privacy by agreeing that all comments made in this space stay in this space - what’s said here, stays here.
3. Please discuss only your *own* opinion from your *own* experiences.
4. Please allow others time to speak as well and don’t interrupt.
5. My role as facilitator is to keep the conversation on track, as well as to do my best to ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak. In that role, it may be needed to gently interrupt, or redirect someone. Please try to be understanding.

**ADDITIONAL RULES FOR VIRTUAL HMVS:**

1. Enable your video so that the other participants can see you.
2. Be sure to login under your actual full name. Guys aren’t going to want to express themselves candidly with ‘Sara’s iPad.’ If necessary “Rename” yourself. If you need help, the host can do it for you.
3. Ensure that no one else is in the room with you during the session.
4. lppopoipo
5. Try to be in a quiet environment or keep yourself muted until it is your tum to talk.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (these can be used in any order):**

How pervasive do you think substance misuse is in the Jewish community?

* While growing up did your family discuss substance abuse?

Do you have family members suffering from substance use disorder? If you discussed it, what do you remember that you might use with your own family or friends in discussing substance abuse?

* What does Torah offer to help people who suffer from substance use disorders?
* How do you feel about this topic of addiction and how far do you think we should go to speak about FJMC’s role?
* What would you do if a close family member or friend confided in you about their addiction and how would you approach this delicate situation?
* How do you feel we as a community can be more inclusive, helpful and accepting of individuals suffering from substance use problems?

For questions, please contact Steven Mandel MD drmandel1979@gmail.com or Gary Smith DVM gvet@me.com