

Jacqui Smith is a psychotherapist who has worked with many clients with addictions. Here, she gives us her take on the disease.

Having read Alice King's book 'High Sobriety' I felt excited and joyful that she had made her way out of the destructive and crippling disease of alcoholism. Many don't.

Her way is to abstain, after many years of thinking that she could manage by 'controlled' drinking.

Yes I hear you say, but abstinence is sooo extreme.

Having once dropped a very sick goldfish into a glass of neat vodka, in order to end the suffering of said fish, I was amazed at how quickly it died. Two seconds at the absolute most, proved what a very effective poison alcohol is. How interesting then that as a nation we spend so much time slaking our thirst with a very effective poison dressed up in many lovely flavours. But is abstinence too extreme?

Addicts of anything don't tend to work in small quantities or controlled amounts. You certainly wouldn't expect a heroin addict to operate that way. Just because alcohol is legal and the government make millions from the tax on it every year, makes no difference to the fact that addiction is addiction. I was faintly amused to read the rumour that the governmental answer to lower the consumption of alcohol is to increase the amount of tax! To the ordinary drinker, this may have a small impact, but to an addict it will have none. Speak to anyone that is brave enough to admit to having a drink problem and they will admit that very often drinking has cost them their family and their home.

A large part of the disease of addiction is 'denial' akin to someone terrified of having cancer, avoiding the visit to the doctor for months. No one likes facing his or her fears.

That doesn't apply to me you may say. Drunks are poor and stupid. They sleep on park benches. So what about Alice?

Alice King started drinking socially when she was fifteen. She is bright, intelligent and at one time exceptionally successful. She isn't stupid and has never slept on a park bench.

Alcoholism is not a judgemental or sexist disease. It affects every level of our society.

So, what to do? I think many readers of 'High Sobriety' will feel very uncomfortable, and many more hopeful, simply because it is so honest and frank. We spend far too much time pretending everything is 'fine'. I hope she receives the recognition for her bravery and that people listen.

For an alcoholic to be able to stop drinking they have to deal with the pain that they are seeking to anaesthetise. Take need to take responsibility and deal with whatever they are avoiding. They can be helped hugely by organisations such as AA, psychotherapy and counselling. There are no shortcuts....

Jacqui Smith