

The Ched Evans rape case and Jewish concepts of forgiveness

IF THERE is anything that might be said to be embedded in Jewish DNA, it is the spirit of forgiveness, the possibility of giving others a second chance. I'm not talking about Christian concepts such as turning the other cheek: our own cheeks have been turned so often we can practically see ourselves coming back.

No, I'm thinking of a generosity of spirit, which allows, perhaps naively, that when people say they are sorry for some reprehensible behaviour, they mean it. In this category, one might put Abe Foxman and the Anti-Defamation League, who first denounced the fashion designer John Galliano and then believed him when he said he truly regretted the anti-Semitic remarks he had made, which caused him to lose his job as Dior's chief designer. Abe Foxman has not survived for more than 40 years at the helm of the ADL by not knowing how to play a wily political game, so his acceptance of Galliano's apology has some significance.

Here's the particular issue in a nutshell: Galliano said he was sorry. He accepted that his behaviour was wrong, he took it seriously, he expressed contrition. Cynics might sneer at the value of the apology, but the fact is that he did apologise.

And then there is the Sheffield United footballer Ched Evans, newly released from prison after serving half of a five-year sentence for raping a 19-year-old woman. The woman was said by the judge to have been so drunk when she encountered Evans and his friend – who

also had sex with her but was cleared of the rape charge – that she could not possibly have consented to the encounter.

Not only has Evans not expressed remorse, but the furore surrounding his release and the possibility that he might be re-signed to play for Sheffield United has stirred up a whole new slew of repellent behaviour.

When Olympic athlete Jessica Ennis-Hill said she would prefer that her name be removed from the Sheffield United stand if Evans were to return to the team, there were endless poisonous threats against her on social media.

Evans is plainly being advised by someone a great deal smarter than him (not that that would be hard) not to apologise, because he is still claiming that he is innocent of the crime of rape. Nevertheless, he was convicted of that offence and, at the time of writing, the conviction stands.

Intriguingly the response to the Evans case is cutting clearly across the gender divide. Women – such as Ennis-Hill – are largely saying that there should be no way back to his former status for Evans. And men – led by the repulsive tweeters, but also containing some of good sense and goodwill – are talking about rehabilitation of offenders, and the fact that Evans has served his time, and that there are even some footballers who were convicted of murder who have returned to kicking a ball about for a living.

Into this cauldron of bad feeling has stepped

Rabbi Jonathan Romain, a former prison chaplain. And sadly, Rabbi Romain has sided with the majority of his gender and has called for Evans to be reinstated at Sheffield. He told *The Times*: "Once anyone has served their term, they should be allowed to resume a normal life, be it as footballer or fishmonger. Victims need protecting, but discharged prisoners need the chance for a new start."

I might be inclined to agree with Rabbi Romain were Ched Evans a fishmonger. The problem, however, in my view, is that the encounter with the unfortunate victim came about precisely because Evans was a footballer, a role that attracts wannabes and those overly-impressed with reality TV rather than real life.

Can Rabbi Romain really believe that Evans should be permitted to resume his position as a Sheffield United footballer – as though nothing has happened, and without expressing any remorse?

Is the Evans case a Jewish problem? You might think we had enough of our own aggravation. But how Jews function in society has much to do with how we behave in the context of the wider community, and we should treat people how we would want to be treated.

Evans' first steps towards rehabilitation and a second chance lie in understanding how he behaved towards a 19-year-old drunk woman, and then apologising.

And then, perhaps, he should learn how to gut fish.



Jenni Frazer

'How Jews function in society has much to do with how we behave in wider community'

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