

THE JOFA Journal

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FROM OUR PRESIDENT

DEALING WITH THE PAST, ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE

By Bat Sheva Marcus

A few months ago, I stepped into rather large shoes, as I took over the JOFA presidency from Judy Heicklen. For the past five years, Judy has run the organization with her quiet focus, steel-trap intellect, and acerbic wit. And we have all been the beneficiaries. I have the pleasure of taking over an organization with a new, tremendously talented executive director and staff and an overall sense of renewed energy. I hope not to squander the opportunity.



Our goals for the next few years include putting the organization on a more stable financial footing (thanks to all of you who stepped up so admirably at the dinner), moving seriously on our out-of-town programming, and determining the next steps for JOFA. JOFA is now eighteen years old. (That's a number that is easy for me to remember, since my speech at an early JOFA conference began, "Six weeks ago I gave birth to a daughter.") And it's time to reorient ourselves. What better way than to go out into the broader Modern Orthodox community and listen?

Therefore, in the next few months, JOFA will be embarking on its own "listening tour." During this time, we hope to set up one-on-one meetings with community thought leaders, organize listening salons and meetings throughout the country, and disseminate an online questionnaire for everyone involved in JOFA. We will need each of you to be a part of this effort as we move ahead. We'll be contacting you individually, in groups, and online in the hopes of hearing your voices and your views on what Modern Orthodoxy's priorities and main concerns should be in the coming years. I hope that this will enable us to set out our projects and goals in a more inclusive way for the next eighteen years. You will be hearing more about this in future *JOFA Journals*.

This issue of the *JOFA Journal* takes us into darker territory: sexual abuse. As Orthodox feminists, we try to be sensitive and thoughtful about power dynamics and the various ways in which authority and control can be abused. Sexual abuse extends far beyond the Orthodox community. However, given the confluence of events in the Orthodox community in the past few years, we find ourselves compelled to add our voices to those who have stepped forward to shine the light on sexual abuse and harassment within the Orthodox community in general and, in particular, on sexual abuse by people in positions of religious authority.

As many of you know, my life's work is about trying to bring the issue of sex and sexuality out of the whispered, shadowy corners of our lives, so that we can discuss it with one another, with our children, and with

continued on page 3

Confronting the Demon Within

By David Cheifetz

In April 2013, I spoke out publicly as a victim of childhood sexual abuse while at an Orthodox sleepaway camp in 1979. My article was published in the New York *Jewish Week*, and since then, I have been actively working to address the issue of sexual abuse in the Jewish community.



There is a lot to say about the broad phenomenon of sexual abuse, the lifelong impact of abuse on victims, the importance of thoughtful prevention, the need for institutional policies, the culpability of both abusers and enablers, and the communal culture that has, for years, failed to address this phenomenon.

Rather than focus on those topics, though, I will attempt to offer insight into the thoughts of a victim of sexual abuse: what went on in my mind at the time, what has been on my mind in the years since the abuse, what ultimately caused me to come forward, and how I relate to the experience today. I do not claim that my experience is typical or representative, but I hope that this glimpse into my perceptions will be meaningful for some.

How the Abuse Began

Imagine being an awkward thirteen-year-old boy in an all-boys sleepaway camp. It was my second year at Camp Dora Golding. I had friends, but I lacked confidence. I was painfully shy, and in a world where sports was an important currency, I was an average athlete at best. These attributes may describe many at that age, but to predatory serial

continued on page 3

IN THIS ISSUE:

Dealing with the Past, Anticipating the Future by Bat Sheva Marcus	7
Confronting the Demon Within by David Cheifetz	7
Judaism and Sexual Abuse: The Need to Speak Out by Yosef Blau	6
Lessons from the Bible's Rape Narratives by Sandra E. Rapoport	7
Preventing Abuse in Jewish Organizations That Serve Youth: Ten Policies to Create Safer Environments by Shira M. Berkovits	10
Building Safer Communities: A Team Approach by Ann Luban	13
Rabbinic Oversight: Expectations and Limitations by Michael J. Salamon	17
When Sacred Trust Is Breached: Responses to Rabbinic Sexual Misconduct by Esther Altmann	19
Letter to the Editor by Mordy Hurwich-Kehat	21
Project S.A.R.A.H.: Helping the Survivors and Preventing Sexual Abuse by Elke Stein and Michael Bleicher	22
Learning to Cope with a Childhood Experience of Abuse by Rena Gopin-Wolf ...	23
Book Corner by Roselyn Bell, Eli Leiter, and Barbara Trainin Blank	25

JOFA NEWS

JOFA Dinner	14
Chatan/Kallah Teacher Training Workshop	14
JOFA in Your Community	14
President's Circle	15
JOFA's Response to the RCA	15
Online Programming	15



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From Our President, *continued from page 1*

our community. I truly believe that the more an issue can be talked about in broad daylight and the more it becomes a normal and practical part of our day-to-day lives, the less risk we run of it becoming a twisted and dark phenomenon. Mold and fungus grow in the dark recesses. Wildflowers blossom in the sun and air. Sexual abuse is most likely to exist in environments that don't allow for normal, reasonable sexual expression. Personal fears and biases grow when we are in unfamiliar territory or we are dealing with issues we don't fully understand.

Sexual abuse and harassment are complicated phenomena. They can be dramatic or insidious, obvious or subtle, personal or communal. Our community has to walk

a tightrope in response. We need to keep our eyes open, maintain vigilance and awareness, and develop appropriate responses. On the other hand, we need to understand the complexity of these issues and not allow fear of the unknown to foster a “witch-hunt” atmosphere, or we risk losing more than we gain.

It is our hope that by talking about these issues, raising our concerns, and allowing these voices to be heard, we can bring these issues out of the darkness and into the public sphere, where daylight can shine on them and productive conversations can be had. When we choose this route, then we can take concrete steps toward mitigating these problems in our community.

Confronting the Demon Within

continued from page 1

sexual abusers, this is apparently the mark of a target.

I cannot recall when the predator began speaking to me. I do not recall all of our conversations, although I remember him asking me if I “do things that thirteen-year-old boys should not be doing”—an obvious reference to masturbation—and I remember him taking me bowling on visitors’ day. I have a clear recollection of being “groomed”—being singled out and cultivated as a target—a process that involves relationship- and trust-building on the part of the predator.

I do have vivid memories of the abuse itself: the long walk on the camp grounds one night, being plied with beer, being sexually abused. Every detail. I remember a part of me experiencing the moment as if I were observing another, my mind separated from my body. This experience is referred to as “dissociation,” a common response among the many victims of sexual abuse. It is a coping mechanism of the brain.

Thoughts went through my mind: “Why is he doing this to me? Do I want this? Is this my fault?” They were an intellectual and emotional jumble. Remember, I was an insecure thirteen-year-old being “mentored” by a twenty-eight-year-old rabbi, an authority figure. He was spending a lot of time with me. I felt special. But I knew that this was wrong.

I was abused by this rabbi multiple times, including in my bunk, after the others were asleep. (This may be the cause of my lifelong insomnia, common among many victims of sexual abuse.)

At some point, I confided in a friend and swore him to secrecy. I imagine that this was some subconscious cry for help on my part. Fortunately, my friend reported the situation to the camp administration. I do not recall the exact sequence of events, but I do recall one camp counselor saying that he would kill my abuser if he came anywhere near me.

I was called into the camp administration building and asked to repeat my story to the head of the camp. I was forced to confront my abuser. Then I was “encouraged” to leave camp. A senior staff member took me to a Greyhound bus to head back, by myself, to New York.

The senior staff member voiced resentment that he had to pay for my bus trip. And the camp called my parents to tell them, with little explanation, that they should pick me up from New York’s Port Authority bus terminal.

Now, what thirteen-year-old would not think, under such circumstances, that he had done something wrong? What thirteen-year-old would not feel rejected and punished? The twenty-eight-year-old rabbi and his wife were not sent away; I was the pariah sent into “exile.”

**Why should a yeshiva boy
continue to trust rabbis when rabbis
were responsible for his abuse and
his being shunned?**

This self-guilt would haunt me over the years. At some level, I blamed myself. I must have been responsible for being sexually exploited by a twenty-eight-year-old rabbi. It had to be my fault. This was my own private “mark of Cain” that I carried in my subconscious for thirty-four years.

When I arrived home, I told my parents what had happened. I probably did not share all the details, and they probably did not want to know. My parents never called the police, never pursued a lawsuit, and never sought treatment for me.

So what was on my mind? There were moments of intense guilt—in the dark of the night, lying in my bed, when the flush of embarrassment, guilt, and shame would come over me. There were also questions: Was I attracted to men?

Try to imagine normal teenage angst amplified by the impact of abusive sexual trauma. Teenage rebellion. Disrespect for authority. Why should a yeshiva boy continue to trust rabbis when rabbis were responsible for his abuse and his being shunned? When I told my ultra-Orthodox high school principal about the incident, he reassured me that “[my abuser] was not a rabbi. Rabbis would never do such a thing!”

After a year in Israel and college, I married and began

continued on page 4

Confronting the Demon ...continued from page 3

a career. I told my future wife about the abuse. It was not a topic I thought about regularly, although every once in a while, the shame, guilt, and insecurity would haunt me. Over the years, the guilt faded and was replaced by anger—a generalized anger, directed occasionally at my wife and children.

As my children got older, there was a steadfast rule: no sleepaway camps. Only my youngest went to sleepaway camp, and this was only after various assurances and the knowledge that a friend of the family played a senior role at this camp.

Interestingly, I avoided dealing with the issue by tuning out the sex abuse scandals of the day. I was generally aware of the Catholic Church scandals, but paid almost no attention to the Penn State scandal. I imagine that this was also a coping mechanism.

**I could not change the past,
but I could speak out about a current
phenomenon, and hopefully save
children from the fate I once suffered.**

I was very fortunate. Many abuse victims develop alcohol or substance abuse problems; I did not. Many have relationship and commitment problems; I did not. Some abandon their religious affiliation; I did not. Some have problems functioning professionally and/or academically; I did not. I went to graduate school and built a professional career. But the anger remained, as well as the guilt, shame, and insecurity.

Over the years I barely spoke of my abuse, and thought about it less and less. One time, however, in 1996, I went to see a movie called *Sleepers*, about four teens who were sent to a residential juvenile reform school, where they were sexually and physically brutalized by the school guards. I walked out of the theater shaking, my heart palpitating.

The Trigger

Jump to 2012. My father had severe dementia, and many of the key financial and health care planning decisions fell to me. My teenagers were going through normal teenage rebellion and angst. I started to see a therapist because of the stress.

Suddenly, somewhere along the way, I was “triggered.” What does that mean? It means that the long-buried past; the emotional scars from the abuse; and the guilt, shame, and anger all came to the surface. I could barely function. At work, it was difficult to concentrate. My anger turned to rage. I had a form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A topic I had spent more than thirty years trying to avoid had returned with a vengeance.

There were many factors that led to my being triggered, but one key factor was an essay I had read, written by a friend. The topic was vague to most readers, but to a victim of sexual abuse, it was instantly recognizable as an artfully shrouded account of a girl who had been a victim

of sexual abuse. This essay pushed me over the edge.

I began to address my abuse in therapy. It was not an easy journey, and external circumstances conspired to make the journey more difficult. In 2012, there was the very public trial of Nechemya Weberman, an unlicensed therapist from the Satmar community who was ultimately found guilty of raping and tormenting a young Satmar woman despite extensive efforts by the Satmar community to intimidate the plaintiff and her family. There was also the public case of Yosef Kolko, accused of sexually abusing a boy in Lakewood, New Jersey. The Lakewood community had turned against the victim and his family, and Kolko was supported by one of the foremost *kashrut* authorities of the Orthodox Union. Kolko ultimately pleaded guilty to the offense.

Closer to home, news coverage began about a group of former students of MTA, the high school of Yeshiva University, who were suing YU for sexual abuses that had occurred on campus in the 1970s and 1980s, carried out by the former high school principal, one of the rebbees, and a third person with access to the school premises and the student body. I live in Teaneck, New Jersey, a bedroom community to many in YU. The facts of the YU stories did not shock; most people my age were aware of them. But the most shocking thing for me, as I was beginning my own recovery, was that the rabbi of a major synagogue in Teaneck wrote a controversial blog post arguing that when there is abuse, one should call the police; however, when the abuse took place beyond the statute of limitations, it is incumbent upon the victims NOT to speak out, as the accused abuser is not in a position to defend himself. This legalistic argument demanded that victims of past sexual abuse not come forward. And here I was, a mile and a half away from this man’s synagogue, going through PTSD, barely able to function, while this rabbi was saying that I had no right to speak out. What was wrong with this picture?

Finally, a casual friend reached out to me. He had been physically abused by Baruch Lanner (who had violently attacked him and broken his nose) and had testified before the 1989 *beit din* that more or less exonerated Lanner. (Lanner’s behavior would later be called out in a *Jewish Week* exposé in 1999, and he would eventually go to prison.) The friend told me about the abuses of males and females by people in positions of religious authority. He told me about the religious establishment that looked the other way for as long as it could, because Lanner was part of a web of influence rooted in *kiruv* (outreach), fundraising, and monetary considerations.

For me, this was the final straw. My brain exploded.

Anger and Recovery

As I was going through recovery, my earlier anger evolved into pure rage. I began to speak openly about being abused—not to everyone I met, but to close friends. The cat was out of the bag. I have come to understand that this impulse to speak about having been abused is another common characteristic of individuals in the throes of post-abuse trauma.

At that time I actively thought about pursuing my abuser. I had a professional background check done on him and discovered his home address and telephone number, the details of his marriage, his employment record (a twenty-plus-year career as a rebbe), and his arrest record, which was nonexistent. I spent time searching the web and discovered discussion threads where his name was linked to alleged abuse.

I felt compelled to call his employers and warn them that they had a sexual predator in their midst. However, according to his employment history, he was no longer employed. There was no one to call. I also felt compelled to pursue confrontation—violent or nonviolent. I had more than one friend offer to join me in providing my abuser with lifelong physical scars to match my psychological ones. Alternately, I thought about confronting him verbally.

In the end, I did neither. My rage was tempered by my rational impulse. I do not believe in vigilantism. And my therapist advised me against my second idea; she said that the aspiration for “poetic closure” often results in disappointment and dread. I followed her advice.

Instead, my rage was channeled elsewhere. As my recovery progressed, my need for some sort of action evolved—from action against my predator to action focused on the broader phenomenon. This was no longer about me and my predator; it was about a community that systematically ignored sexual abuse and consequently enabled abusers to abuse again. I could not change the past, but I could speak out about a current phenomenon, and hopefully save children from the fate I once suffered.

Furthermore, in the course of my therapy, after many months, I finally came to accept the ultimate truth: I had been a thirteen-year-old child groomed by a twenty-eight-year-old rabbi. I was plied with alcohol. I was sexually abused—multiple times. And it was not my fault.

Understanding Among Victims

Since going public, I have been in contact with many victims of sexual abuse. Some have become close friends. And I have learned that some people I have known for years were themselves victims.

There is a unique understanding among victims of sexual abuse. They include people who, like me, were sexually abused in an institutional setting, as well as

the many victims who were abused in their homes. We are members of a fraternity with its own language and psychology. It is a fraternity that no one would ever volunteer to become a member of.

And the opposite is true as well: Most people who have not been abused cannot comprehend the emotional scars, try as they may. This is why some victims have relationship problems with even the most sympathetic significant others; others cannot understand the long-term damage, the strains that tug at our souls, the bottomless pit of anger. This is why parents who expect us to “get over it” do not understand: We cannot.

We all wish we could make the emotional scars go away, but we cannot. We carry lifelong damage to our souls.

Many rabbis and others in the community expect victims of sexual abuse to remain silent or simply go away. Believe me, we all wish we could make the emotional scars go away, but we cannot. We carry lifelong damage to our souls.

Rule of thumb: Across populations, one of every five people has been sexually abused in some way by the age of eighteen. Until the organized Jewish community engages in serious cultural change, puts in place a systematic approach toward awareness building, prevention, policy making, and treatment of victims, this issue will not go away. And until the community recognizes that this is a scourge that cannot be swept under the carpet, we will not go away. Because we cannot.

One final note: My original article was published two and a half years ago and was widely read. Several events at which I have spoken received wide coverage. But to this day, not one person from Camp Dora Golding—either from the administration in 1979 or the current administration—has reached out to me to apologize. Since 1979, there have been thirty-five Yom Kippurs. The many Orthodox rabbis and administrators of the day, my abuser, and the many staff members who sent me away and enabled an abuser to go elsewhere and abuse again have likely gone to *shul* every Yom Kippur and *davened* with *kavannah*. But in *mitzvot bein adam lehaveiro* (*mitzvot* between one person and another), there can be no *teshuvah* without a sincere apology. They can say “*Al hey!*” as much as they want, but, ultimately, their words are empty.

David Cheifetz has founded a nonprofit organization focused on addressing the issues of child sexual abuse in the Jewish community, Mi Li—Who Is for Me. He has had a nineteen-year career in general management in the private sector following a six-year career working for the Israeli government in both the United States and Israel.

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JUDAISM AND SEXUAL ABUSE: The Need to Speak Out

By Yosef Blau

Until the past twenty-five years, the world did not recognize the dangerous impact and the frequency of sexual abuse. There is little discussion in earlier halakhic sources about sexual abuse. Rape is mentioned in the Torah, and, as with other prohibited sexual behaviors, the precise criteria to define an act as rape can be found. The degree of damage, the trauma associated with an adult interacting sexually with a child, was not understood, however, and therefore it was not discussed. Abuse of religious authority is prohibited, but using that authority to take advantage of trusting women was inconceivable.

My experiences have reinforced my conviction that the use of *batei din* is a method that does not effectively prevent and deal with cases of sexual abuse.

The absence of sources acknowledging the seriousness of the different types of sexual abuse has led to the inadequate rabbinic response to the epidemic of accounts of abuse within the Orthodox community. Even with the growing awareness of the prevalence of abuse in society and the severity of the damage caused to victims, the Orthodox world has been in denial, refusing to accept that Jews who appear to be observant could be guilty of such behavior.

The Definition of *Mesirah*

Defense mechanisms clothed in religious terms have been employed to keep the problem “under the rug.” Reporting abusers to the authorities has been classified as *mesirah* (handing over), a term traditionally used for traitors who informed against fellow Jews to non-Jewish governments. Even though authorities such as the *Arukh Hashulhan* and Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik have ruled that there is no issue of *mesirah* in a democratic, non-anti-Semitic country, the argument against going to the secular law enforcement agencies is still often made. However, the issue is moot once one realizes that the abuser poses an ongoing danger and that no internal mechanisms exist to stop his actions. Regrettably, I can testify to the inability of *batei din*, religious courts, to deal with accusations of abuse. My experiences following *batei din* for more than a quarter of a century have reinforced my conviction that the use of *batei din* is a method that does not effectively prevent and deal with cases of sexual abuse.

Because the scandal from allegations of abuse by religious figures—rabbis, teachers, and heads of *yeshivot*—is embarrassing, those who speak out about abuse, particu-

larly to the media, are accused of creating a desecration of God’s name. The argument is that if the public had been unaware of the abuse, there would have been no desecration of God’s name. To accept this logic would be to be complicit in the continuation of the abuse. In today’s world of social media, the notion that sexual abuse can be successfully covered up is not only not viable, but the coverup itself exacerbates the desecration.

The prohibition of saying *lashon hara*, slander, is generally applied here, ignoring the second half of the verse, *lo ta’amod al dam re’ekha*, not acting to prevent hurt to others. Allowing the abuse to be covered up only leads to the child being further abused or more children being abused. However, describing the victims and their siblings as “damaged goods” clearly should come under this prohibition of slander. The misunderstood statistic that many abusers have been abused as children is transformed into “Don’t marry a victim because he or she is likely to become an abuser.”

Furthermore, a suspicion of psychology and psychiatry prevents victims from getting proper therapy that would enable them to live healthy lives.

The Notion of *Teshuvah*

An important religious concept often introduced into the discussion is *teshuvah*, repentance. It is assumed that the abuser—if he is a religious person, and certainly if he is a rabbi—must have repented. Abuse is not only a sin against God, but also a crime against another person. The occasions when abusers have actually approached their victims and sincerely asked them for forgiveness are extremely rare. The majority of abusers, if they acknowledge their abuse at all, blame the victims.

I once met with a group of clergymen from other faiths who were trying to deal with clergy abuse. They used different religious categories, but the phenomenon of excusing the abusers and blaming the victims was the same. Clearly, sexual abuse is a serious problem in all societies. The percentage of young women and men who have been abused does not vary significantly in differ-

What are the halakhic responsibilities of those who knew and didn’t report, and even covered up, the abuser’s behavior?

ent ethnic, racial, or socioeconomic groupings. It is not exclusively an Orthodox Jewish issue—but, as in other societies, ours has its particular defense mechanisms that hinder confronting the problem: If headlines about abuse by a charismatic rabbi in Israel or a leader of a boys’ choir mention the Orthodox background of the abuser, they produce the defensive reaction that opponents of Orthodox Jewry are attacking us.

continued on page 7

Lessons from the Bible's Rape Narratives

By Sandra E. Rapoport

The Torah teaches us through the dual media of its halakhic, or legal, passages and its narratives, or stories. However, the two approaches are not entirely separate. Rather, some of the events described in the Tanakh's difficult stories propel the development of remedial *halakhot*.

Storytelling is a powerful tool; through the telling and retelling of its stories, the Bible insures that we remember both the story and its lessons. Our most enduring rituals—Pesach and Purim—are marked by storytelling, via the *Haggadah* on Pesach and *Megillat Esther* on Purim.

The most difficult Bible stories—those that tell of hatred between brothers, of enslavement of one people by another, of the rape of a virgin princess by her brother—force us to confront our fears. In the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “Biblical ethics is based on repeated acts of role-reversal, using memory as a moral force ... recalling what it feels like to be [the] victim. ... We are commanded to remember ... to prevent a repetition of the past.”¹

The Torah's stories about rape or sexual abuse, though they are not “pretty,” can teach us not only how our tradition views and handles these disturbing incidents, but also, by injecting ourselves into the biblical narrative, how to behave as moral, ethical beings in God's world.

Not incidentally, as we read these difficult stories, we are introduced to memorable characters: victim-survivor heroines, complex villains, and indifferent, enabling, or vengeful families—not that different, after all, from

people today. To paraphrase Shakespeare, “the story's the thing” that will keep us by turns terrified, shamed, saddened, and angry, and can thereby instruct and galvanize us.

The Rape of Tamar

One such story appears in 2 Samuel 13, the story of the rape of Tamar by her half-brother Amnon. It takes place at the very highest levels of the Israelite royal court, around the year 1000 BCE. It is a riveting story of rape, incest, and revenge among King David's grown children, and it subtly references other biblical rape narratives, building on them with compelling results.

The essential cautionary message from this story is that what can happen to an exalted and protected princess can—and surely does—happen to ordinary girls and women,² and what happened to Tamar will happen to Israel.

Let us enter the world of King David's court.

Sometime after the story of David's taking of the beautiful Batsheva, wife of his prized officer, the Tanakh tells us that Avshalom, King David's third-born son, has a beautiful sister named Tamar. Amnon, the crown prince and half-brother to Avshalom and Tamar (all of whom are in their twenties), is infatuated with Tamar to the point that he pines for her, desiring her sexually, because she is a virgin.

Tamar is unaware that she is the object of her half-brother's sexual obsession.

From the story's first words, the reader faces a fraught

¹ Jonathan Sacks, “Letting Go of Hate,” published at Covenant and Conversation.org, September 1, 2012.

² Talmud *Sanhedrin* 21a.

The Need to Speak Out *continued from page 6*

Halakhic Issues

There are real halakhic issues to be explored here. Is a victim of abuse entitled to damages for the pain, medical bills, embarrassment, and employment losses caused by the abuse? When a rabbi, claiming mystical powers, seduces a married woman while asserting that these acts are appropriate, is she considered to have been coerced? What are the halakhic responsibilities of those who knew and didn't report, and even covered up, the abuser's behavior?

The true desecration of God's name is the misuse of *halakhah* to protect the perpetrators and not the victims.

ignores the cries of children in pain and questions their credibility is terribly lacking.

Rabbis have a moral responsibility to speak out forcefully, but this does not free the rest of the community from acting. It is difficult to believe that an individual we know and who seems perfectly normal can be an abuser, but the stereotype of the dangerous stranger applies to a small percentage of cases of abuse.

When we change the environment, progress will be made in reducing instances of abuse and enabling victims to become survivors.

Rabbi Yosef Blau has served as mashgiah ruhani, senior spiritual advisor, at Yeshiva University since 1977. He has been an active advocate for victims of abuse for more than a quarter of a century.

Lessons, continued from page 7

situation: Not only is the crown prince nursing a forbidden obsession for his half-sister, but there is a suggestion of a potentially dangerous political situation, too. Avshalom, Amnon's chief rival for the throne,³ has a beautiful sister. It is precisely *she* whom Amnon is targeting. If one assumes that the kingdom and royal court are replete with beautiful, virginal girls,⁴ one can deduce that it is not just Tamar's beauty and virginity that are motivating Amnon. We must consider that Amnon is targeting Tamar for the additional reason that subduing and humiliating *her* not only will slake his own lust, but also will send a message that he is asserting political dominance over his rival brother, Avshalom.⁵

Enter Yonadav, Prince Amnon's friend. The text tells us via word play what it thinks of Yonadav: he is called "friend," in Hebrew *re'a*, which in the unvoiced Hebrew text is spelled the same as *ra*, the word for "evil." Yonadav and Amnon are not simply first cousins and buddies, but, as the text is signaling us, they are up to no good. Yonadav is Amnon's enabler and panderer; he does not hesitate when Amnon tells him of his unholy "love" for his virgin half-sister. In fact, it is clever Yonadav who conceives the plot to draw Tamar from the house of the women and bring her, unsuspecting and alone, into Amnon's bedchamber.

Amnon feigns illness, drawing a concerned David to his bedside. Amnon tells his father that he will feel better if his sister Tamar, known for her healing skills, could cook special food by his bedside. David agrees, and orders Tamar to go to Amnon's house. Tamar obeys.

We must appreciate that it is unusual for a virgin princess, beautiful and desirable in the bargain, to venture alone out of the house of the women. As the only daughter of the king, Tamar is a prize, and was likely being kept by her father for an advantageous



Eustache LeSueur, *The Rape of Tamar*. Probably ca. 1640. Oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.

political marriage. Yet there is subtle evidence in the text that Tamar responds to royal orders to exit the cloister to ply her healing skills. We are told later that she was wearing the *kutonet passim*,⁶ the striped cloak signifying royalty, virginity, and preference. The cloak was a badge and a protection, telegraphing to all: "Here walks the royal princess! Let no harm come to her on her healing mission!"⁷ It is significant and deliberately ironic that the only two biblical characters to wear the *kutonet passim*, Joseph and Tamar, are abused vilely by their brothers. We are fearful for Tamar, with good reason.

Amnon peremptorily dismisses everyone from his chamber, and from his bed calls out to Tamar, who is cooking her healing pancakes on a brazier outside the room: "Bring the food inside and feed it to me!" Amnon is alone—his chamber is a room within a room and essentially soundproof—and we watch, terrified, as Tamar unsuspectingly enters at his summons.⁸

³ Though Avshalom is actually third in succession, Chileab, son number two, is never considered as kingly material and is said to have died before David.

⁴ As in *Megillat Esther*, 2:3 ff.

⁵ In the Tanakh, subduing a tribal leader's or a monarch's wife or concubine is a sign of dominance and an assertion of power. We see this when Reuven lies with Bilhah, his father Jacob's concubine, in Gen. 35:22, and later in 2 Sam. 16:22, when Avshalom sleeps with his father David's ten concubines atop the palace roof.

⁶ 2 Sam. 13:19.

⁷ Ramban on Ex. 28:2.

⁸ 2 Sam. 13:10.

Amnon surges from his bedclothes and grabs Tamar, saying “Come lie with me, my sister!” The text leaves no room for doubt that Amnon is bent on rape. Likewise, there is no doubt that Tamar is taken utterly by surprise. We know this because Tamar speaks in this story, telling us what she is thinking and feeling. This is a significant difference from the Bible’s earlier rape narrative of Dinah by Prince Shechem.⁹ In that earlier story the young Dinah (Abarbanel calculates her age as twelve), also a privileged only daughter, is silent before, during, and after the rape. But here, both the biblical narrator and Tamar refer to Amnon as “her brother.” Tamar is caught unaware because she has only ever thought of Amnon as her brother. Why should she *not* enter her brother’s sickroom?

Amnon Forces Tamar

Overpowered, and terribly aware of what she is facing, Tamar pleads with Amnon: “Don’t, my brother! Don’t force me! Such things are not done in Israel! Do not do such a vile thing!”

It is painful to read Tamar’s words. “*Al te’anenil!*” she cries. “Don’t force me!” So eloquent is she that it is as if Tamar is speaking right now, and we have a window into the horrific and violent scene. We hear her cries, but are as helpless to stop Amnon as she is.

Tamar uses the precise word to describe her impending rape as is used in the Torah text describing Shechem’s rape of Dinah: *inuy*, meaning abuse, force, and torture. In the Dinah story, Rashi says *inuy* means that Shechem forced himself on Dinah not only in the way of a man with a woman, but that he also repeatedly sodomized her.¹⁰ In both rape narratives the text unambiguously tells us that the attacker subjected the girl to sexual cruelty.

The outcome is inevitable. Amnon violently rapes Tamar. Tamar tries twice more to deflect his attack, her words growing more jumbled each time, indicating her battered state. Tamar also fights back, doing some damage to her attacker.¹¹ After the rape, Amnon has Tamar thrown bodily from his house, and we are told that he loathes her with a loathing that is even greater than the love he had felt for her before.

Tamar stands outside Amnon’s door on the public street, bloody and bruised, and she cries out, ripping her *kutonet passim* in two, expressing her desolation and mourning. She makes a public spectacle of her battered and damaged self, when all instincts are to keep it private. Tamar is centuries ahead of her time; modern-day sex-crime counselors and trained police officers know that the best evidence against a rapist is the girl herself, immediately after the event. But in that ancient time and place Tamar’s brother, Avshalom, sees her, divines in an instant what has occurred, and covers, comforts, and shelters her, counseling silence.

Echoing Jacob’s silence in the Dinah story, King David neither comforts his only daughter nor chastises or disciplines his eldest son. We are shocked! Will no one

champion Tamar? Is there no consequence for a rapist of virgins, a violator of the incest taboo? For two years, Avshalom waits in vain for his father to act. When no justice is forthcoming, Avshalom acts: He murders Amnon and flees the kingdom. Again, as in Dinah’s story, the victim’s brother avenges his sister.

The Message of the Tanakh is Clear

In the rape narratives of Dinah and of Tamar, a rough, vigilante justice is all that is forthcoming. Post-rape, both girls essentially disappear from the text, to be referenced lavishly in the midrash. But because Tamar speaks the truth in her words and actions, the message of the Tanakh is clear: Rape of a virgin girl or any girl is an abomination in Israel; all the more so the intrafamilial, transgressive rape of a half-sister. A swift and class-blind administration of justice for the victim is a *sine qua non* of a just society.

A swift and class-blind administration of justice for the victim is a *sine qua non* of a just society.

And, in fact, after Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar, the sages put in place a strengthened law aimed at clarifying the prohibition against intrafamilial rape. They broadened the legal prohibition, building a legal “fence” around unmarried Jewish girls and women. The biblical *halakhah* forbidding seclusion with one’s close kin, which even specified “your sister, your father’s daughter” (Leviticus 18:6, 9), was changed to unambiguously forbid seclusion with any unmarried Jewish woman, even if it were possible to marry her.¹²

The Talmud explains that this halakhic change came about as a direct response to the Bible’s story of Amnon’s vile rape of Tamar. And such a halakhic response is laudable. For if a society’s highest authority fails to protect and bring justice to the weakest and unprotected among them, the fabric of that society will be rent or unraveled, or end in violence. This is precisely what happened in the wake of Tamar’s rape. Tamar’s torn *kutonet passim* prefigured the fate of ancient Israelite society. Soon thereafter the kingdom itself was riven, and David’s family and monarchy self-destructed.

The Tanakh’s message is clear: Such is the fate of a society that fails to learn the lessons of Tamar’s story.

Sandra E. Rapoport is an attorney and award-winning author. She teaches Tanakh at Drisha and at the Manhattan Jewish Community Center and lectures widely. Her third book, Biblical Seductions: Six Stories Retold through Talmud and Midrash, was a National Jewish Book Awards finalist and was a Boston Globe top-ten best-seller.

⁹ Gen. 34.

¹⁰ Rashi on Gen. 34:2; also *Bereishit Rabbah* 80:5.

¹¹ *Sanhedrin* 21a and Rashi on 2 Sam. 13:15.

¹² *Avodah Zara* 36b and *Sanhedrin* 21 a-b.

PREVENTING ABUSE IN JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS THAT SERVE YOUTH: Ten Policies to Create Safer Environments

By Shira M. Berkovits

It is critical for leaders of youth-serving organizations (YSOs)¹ to adopt child-protection policies proactively, before they are faced with a problem. Policies clarify acceptable and unacceptable behaviors that guide adults² to model safe interactions with children. When a policy is well communicated, it becomes integral to institutional culture and its violations are easily identifiable, making it possible for bystanders to intervene and institutions to respond. Without policies, leaders may forget or dismiss important response steps, become more susceptible to pressure, and introduce their organizations to increased liability.³ Having a policy provides organizations with a plan to act on before a situation escalates. Finally, a good policy can function as a deterrent, sending a clear message to potential abusers: Abuse is not tolerated here and will be reported immediately.

A good policy can function as a deterrent, sending a clear message to potential abusers: Abuse is not tolerated here and will be reported immediately.

The following are ten recommendations for inclusion in an organization's policy. This list is meant as a starting point for conversation, and is not exhaustive.⁴ Organizations should consult with child protection experts when considering these suggestions, as guidelines that reduce risk in one organization or setting may increase risk in another.⁵

1. Screen prospective employees and/or volunteers.

Individuals who sexually abuse children do not end up in YSOs by accident; they work hard to get there. This makes sense—YSOs provide easy access to children and give a respectable cover to perpetrators. However, many YSOs do not screen prospective hires and volunteers—or do so only minimally. When possible, screenings should include a criminal background check; a check of the state's central registry for perpetrators of child abuse and neglect; Internet/social media searches of an individual's names, nicknames, screen names, and email addresses; an interview; and reference checks. An organization's policy developers should consider instituting screening measures for employees and volunteers; lay leaders; subcontractors (e.g., bus drivers, catering staff, course instructors); hosts within or without the community (e.g., *shabbaton* hosts); visitors who request Shabbat hospitality; and others who have repeated interactions with children (e.g., "candy men") or hold the keys to communal spaces (e.g., *mikveh* attendants). Not all screening measures are appropriate or practical for all individuals, but organizations should try to anticipate the various categories of individuals who will come in contact with children and determine which screening mechanisms to employ.

2. Maximize visibility.

Most individuals who abuse children are known or trusted by their victims, the victims' families, and the community at large. Like anyone seeking to commit a harmful act, these individuals will often look for private opportunities to perpetrate their crimes. One way to protect children from abuse is to maximize visibility when designing or renovating a building; it is preferable to opt for open layouts, glass walls, well-lit spaces, and windows in all doors. Once a building is in operation, unused spaces should be locked and frequently used spaces should be supervised. Caregivers, who would not allow their children to wander unattended around malls or public parks, should likewise not allow them to roam unattended in communal spaces full of familiar faces (e.g., synagogue bathrooms, halls, and empty classrooms).

Finally, policies should require the presence of at least two adults at all youth programs or meetings. When this is not possible, policies should follow *yihud* principles and require that all activities be observable and interruptible. Adults should never meet one-on-one with a child in a closed environment. In addition, YSOs can extend open invitations to caregivers to attend programs or meetings. These invitations function as more than just a considerate accommodation; they set the tone for a safe and transparent organization and reassure caregivers that the organization is serious about limiting opportunities for child sexual abuse.

¹ "Youth-serving organization" is a term referring to any organization that provides services or programming for youth, including synagogues, camps, schools, clubs, and community centers.

² For the sake of simplicity, the term "adult" is used throughout this article. In reality, however, roughly one-third of the sexual abuse known to police to be perpetrated against children in the United States is perpetrated by other youth. See Finkelhor, D., Omrod, R. and Chaffin, M. (2009). *Juveniles Who Commit Sex Offenses Against Minors*. Juvenile Justice Bulletin, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Available at www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/227763.pdf.

³ In fact, many insurance agencies no longer provide liability insurance to synagogues without documentation of a policy. Others require a policy as a prerequisite for reduced rates or greater liability coverage.

⁴ For more detailed information on developing an organizational policy, see Audage, S. J. (2007). *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-serving Organizations*; and Vieth, V. I. (2011). "Suffer the Children: Developing Effective Church Policies on Child Maltreatment," *Jacob's Hope*, 2:1 (see sidebar).

⁵ For example, a policy that prohibits adults from entering the changing or sleeping quarters of youth would reduce the risk of adult-on-child abuse, but increase the risk of peer-on-peer abuse. This does not mean that the rule should be discarded, only that YSOs should consult with experts in child protection to ensure that their policies account for these and other risks.

3. Know all participants.

Registration for youth events is necessary so staff can respond appropriately in the event of an emergency. Moreover, it is the YSO's responsibility to know where all children are during an event, which is difficult if attendance is unclear. Unfortunately, many synagogues do not require youth registration, and staff may not even know the names of participating children. If a child were ill or injured, for example, precious time would be wasted trying to find the caregivers or obtaining important medical information. Moreover, if a child were to wander off or be picked up by an undesignated adult, identifying or even noticing the missing child would be difficult. Even though *halakhah* prohibits writing on Shabbat and holidays, other creative ways to take attendance can be developed.

4. Plan for dismissals.

Dismissal from youth events can be crowded and chaotic, especially in large organizations. Without protocols to guide the process, staff may be required to make split-second judgments that may be inaccurate or unsafe. For instance, in a day camp, a visiting grandfather was permitted to retrieve his granddaughter, despite the fact that the counselors had never met him before nor even known that he would be in town. Allowing someone other than the designated caregiver to pick up a child can lead to confusion—or even panic when the caregiver comes to retrieve the child and the child isn't there. More seriously, it allows for the possibility that a congregant or family member seeking to abuse a child may pick up the child by claiming to be doing the caregiver a favor. It also permits a stranger to pretend to be a friend or relative to gain access to a child for abusive purposes. YSOs should prohibit the release of a child to anyone other than the designated caregiver without express permission in advance.

5. Define interaction boundaries.

Individuals who sexually abuse children often commence the abuse with inappropriate touching in order to test the tolerance of those around them. These interactions may begin by creating opportunities for nonsexual or accidental touch, or by being overly physical with a child. If the touching behaviors go unnoticed by bystanders or by the child, the perpetrator may feel emboldened to push the boundaries further. To help bystanders halt inappropriate touching, the YSO must define appropriate and inappropriate touch. At the most basic level, touch of a child that is unwanted or intended to sexually gratify should never be permitted. Touch that violates social or halakhic norms for a particular community, or touch that has the appearance of abusive touch, is problematic as well.

Beyond this, YSOs and their advisors must decide where to draw the line on touching; their policies should include examples of both acceptable (e.g., holding young children's hands) and unacceptable (e.g., wrestling) forms of touch. Formalizing these limits provides staff and children with clear boundaries, enhances adult-child relationships by encouraging safe touch, minimizes opportunities for abuse, and makes instances of inappropriate touching immediately identifiable. YSOs should also develop policies regarding communication with youth, including whether and how adults can phone, text, email, or use social media to contact a child, and prohibiting the use of sexual jokes, innuendo, behaviors, or comments about bodies to and around children.

6. Maintain policies off-premises.

Policies developed for the YSO must also apply off-premises. When generating a list of outside activities or events that might reasonably occur during the year, the YSO should contemplate those extra precautions. Situations to consider include transportation to or from events, overnights and *shabbatonim*; staff or volunteers offering to babysit; Judaic studies tutoring or bar/bat mitzvah lessons; taking one child or a small group of children on a special trip or for a treat; and hosting events at a community or staff member's home (e.g., a Shabbat *oneg* or Purim *seudah*).

Resources for Developing Policies to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse

Audage, S.J. (2007). *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Within Youth-Serving Organizations*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, available at www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/PreventingChildSexualAbuse-a.pdf#page=1.

Vieth, V.I. (2011). "Suffer the Children: Developing Effective Church Policies on Child Maltreatment," *Jacob's Hope*, 2:1, available at www.gundersenhealth.org/upload/docs/NCPTC/Jacobs-Hope/Jacobs-Hope-vol2-issue1.pdf.

Darkness to Light. At-home training, available at http://www.d2l.org/site/c.4dICIJOcGcISE/b.6143709/k.3D5F/Child_Sexual_Abuse_Prevention_Training_ONLINE.htm. (\$10)

Haffner, D. *Balancing Acts: Keeping Children Safe in Congregations*. Conversation about policies developed in a Unitarian congregation. Available at www.uua.org/sites/live-zew.uua.org/files/balancingact.pdf.

The Child Welfare Information Gateway has information summarizing the laws for each state on issues of mandatory reporting, clergy-penitent privilege in abuse cases, definitions of abuse, where to call to report abuse, and more. Available at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/>.

Prevent Child Abuse NY has tip sheets for parents and kids, but is not specific to organizations or developing policies. Available at <http://www.preventchildabuseny.org/resources/>.

continued on page 12

Ten Policies, continued from page 11

7. Institute safety precautions in *mikvaot*.

Boys are usually welcome during men's hours at community *mikvaot*, and increasingly in liberal communities, the *mikveh* is used by both adults and children to mark special occasions or for spiritual support during difficult times. Inherently, any situation in which adults and children are naked together presents a risk to children's safety, and the *mikveh*, despite its holy purpose, is no exception. *Mikveh* policies might include limiting use of the *mikveh* to one person at a time, prohibiting nudity outside changing rooms and the *mikveh* itself, requiring children to be accompanied by a responsible adult at all times in the *mikveh* building, having a previously screened and trained volunteer on site whenever the *mikveh* is in use, designating one *mikveh* for the exclusive use of children, or creating special children's hours.

Policies should require the presence of at least two adults at all youth programs or meetings.

8. Emphasize training.

Training is a key component in shaping child-protection attitudes and behaviors in the community. Even the most comprehensive policy cannot protect children without accompanying training. The best training package will include education for all members of the community. Children should be taught anatomically correct terms for their bodies, which areas on their bodies are private, comfort with politely demanding respect for their own personal space, and permission to disobey an adult if ordered to break the rules or keep a secret from their caregiver(s). In addition, children should be able to identify five adults whom they would trust with a concern or problem and be taught to seek help from them if someone acts in a way that makes them feel confused or uncomfortable. Of course, even trained children should never be expected to protect themselves from abuse. Staff, volunteers, and adult constituents should be well versed in the terms of the organization's policy, educated about abuse, trained to model safe behavior, taught to recognize indicators and precursors of abuse (e.g., grooming behaviors), and required to report all suspicions or knowledge of abuse.

9. Develop protocols for responding.

No matter how committed a community is to protecting its children, when faced with an instance of ongoing or historic abuse by an individual who is trusted, loved, or simply known, leaders may freeze, enter a state of disbelief, and, even with the best of intentions, become muddled. This is when having a policy becomes absolutely critical. If the institution has thought through these issues calmly in advance, its leaders should be expected to follow the policy; if they do not, the community can

insist on it. Policies about responding to abuse should address supporting the victim; preventing further abuse of the same victim or others; reporting the abuse to the authorities and *not* trying to handle the matter internally; retaining an outside expert; determining what access, if any, the perpetrator may continue to have to the institution and children; and alerting the community.

Policies must also address instances of behavior that are not known to be abusive but do violate the protocols or are otherwise concerning. Because one rarely catches an individual abusing a child and children often do not disclose their abuse, these behaviors might be the only indicators of wrongdoing. Therefore, policies must also address responses to these situations, such as bringing in an outside expert to advise, conducting a risk assessment, or launching an investigation; and determining what, if any, limitations should be placed on an individual's access to the institution and children.

10. Protect from known risks.

Under a variety of circumstances, an individual known to pose a risk to children may be found in a community. These include an individual who was previously convicted of abusing a child; an accused individual who was not convicted, perhaps due to a technicality (e.g., the statute of limitations had run); a person against whom unresolved allegations are pending (e.g., an investigation or trial is under way); or an individual who has engaged in concerning behaviors but has not (yet) been accused of abusing a child. A YSO is not a court of law, and no standard evidentiary requirement must be met before an institution can take precautionary actions to protect children. The policy should aid leaders in determining how much, if any, access such individuals are granted to the institution and the children within it. The policy should address how and when to enlist an outside expert, meet with law enforcement, develop a safe-engagement plan or limited access agreement (e.g., a *shomer* who accompanies the person to the synagogue), bar the individual completely from any sort of participation, alert the community to the individual's status, and support the individual's efforts to prevent a relapse.

Conclusion

Whatever an institution's policy is, it must be readily accessible and communicated to the entire organization, and policy violations should meet with clear, predetermined consequences. An individual who is aware of the policy, yet is seemingly unable to abide by its terms, should be a cause for concern, subject to dismissal, and trigger an institutional response.

Dr. Shira Berkovits is a behavioral psychologist, attorney, and author of the forthcoming book, Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse: A Policy Guide for Synagogue Professionals and Lay Leaders. She lectures, trains, and consults on issues of child protection and boundary violations for Jewish communities around the world.

BUILDING SAFER COMMUNITIES: A Team Approach

By Ann Luban

A congregant tells the rabbi that she has an order of protection against her ex-husband, who is also a congregant of the synagogue. A teacher sees bruises on the arms of a child in her class who says he didn't fall. An older adult in the community who used to be a regular in *shul* is coming much less often and, when he does come, he looks disheveled and fearful.

What should rabbis, classroom teachers, or other Jewish institutional staff do in these situations? Who should be informed? Where is the relevant information to be collected and safely stored? What are the moral and legal risks of taking action and of not taking action?

The answers to these and related questions are at the core of the Partnership for Safer Communities initiative of Chicago's Jewish Child & Family Services (JCFS). This initiative works with leadership teams in Jewish institutions to provide education and consultation and to craft protocols, guidelines, and policies in a number of specifically focused programs, including Safer Synagogues/*Shuls*, Safer Schools, and Safer Camps.

Safer Synagogues/*Shuls*

The Partnership for Safer Synagogues/*Shuls* begins with a series of three learning sessions for a team of clergy, educators, synagogue professionals, and lay leaders. The first session, "Keeping Children Safe," presents information on how to recognize child abuse and neglect and the state requirements for mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect. The second session explores the dynamics of abuse, including teen dating abuse, intimate partner abuse (also referred to as domestic violence), and elder abuse. Included in this presentation are the unique characteristics of abuse across the lifespan, legal issues such as orders of protection, and mandated reporting requirements as they pertain to teens, disabled adults, and older adults unable to report for themselves. The third session focuses on substance abuse, including signs and symptoms of drug and alcohol misuse and addiction, as well as how to support families struggling with abuse and addiction. Each of these presentations includes discussion of real-life scenarios that have occurred in *shuls*, affecting congregants, clergy, staff, and lay leaders.

Following these learning sessions, key members of the *shul* team meet with a JCFS professional to refine current or develop new congregational protocols, guidelines, and policies to guide clergy, professional staff, and congregational leadership if and when situations occur. Some examples include responding to suspicions or allegations of child abuse or neglect within or outside the synagogue, mandated reporting, handling orders of protection, alcohol use and where alcohol is to be stored when not in use, release of a child to a parent who appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, responding to suspicions of elder abuse or abuse of an

adult with disabilities, and child safety reporting and/or incident reporting. Personnel practices are also discussed, including the need for background checks in the hiring process for both staff and volunteers, and establishing appropriate boundaries between synagogue personnel and congregants, such as "friending" on Facebook and having relations outside the congregational setting.

These protocols, guidelines, and policies provide step-by-step instructions as to what to do in each situation, what information needs to be collected, and where that information can be safely stored. They address who needs to be informed, clarify who is a legally mandated reporter, and outline the process to make a mandated call to the authorities. Synagogue/*shul* staff report feeling great relief at knowing that there is a process that will tell them what to do and that they will not be alone in coping with a difficult situation. Additionally, having clear policies approved by the staff and/or the board and implemented in every instance removes the question of whether anyone is "playing favorites" or "getting away with something" because of status or size of donation.

Some congregations include a special widget on their webpage indicating their participation in the Safer Synagogues/*Shuls* program and providing links to abuse-related resources.

Programs to Raise Awareness in Synagogues

JCFS also works with the Safer Synagogues/*Shuls* team to bring programs to the congregation as a whole to educate and raise awareness of issues that can be difficult to discuss or address. These include opening up the *shul* to host twelve-step meetings, implementing adult education programs, teaching young children about inappropriate touching and how to protect themselves, assistance with developing newsletter articles and sermons, and substance abuse prevention programs for middle school and high school students.

Synagogues that complete the program receive a certificate during a Shabbat service or a board meeting, which provides a wonderful opportunity for a related *d'var Torah* or sermon. An advertisement is placed in the *JUF News*, the local monthly Jewish newspaper, which provides yet another opportunity to raise awareness. Some congregations include a special widget on their webpage indicating their participation in the Safer Synagogues/*Shuls* program and providing links to abuse-related resources.

Safer Schools and Safer Camps

An initiative to promote Safer Schools and Safer Camps is similar in many ways to the Safer Synagogues/*Shuls*
continued on page 17

JOFA Dinner

On November 15, 2015, we celebrated JOFA's eighteenth anniversary by honoring five outstanding pillars of our community: Monique (Nicky) Katz, M.D., Gail A. Katz, Rabbi Daniel Sperber, Ph.D., Audrey Axelrod Trachtman, and Chaim Trachtman, M.D. We also paid tribute to the memory of one of our founders, Belda Lindenbaum, z"l.



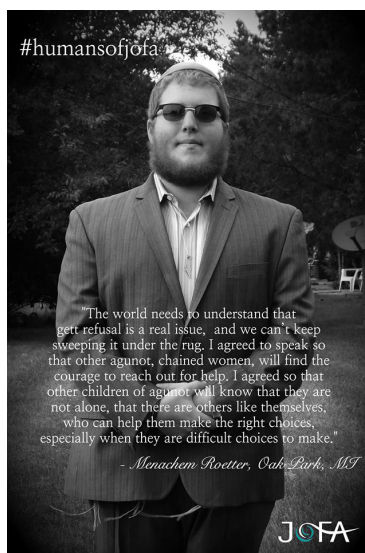
Honorees at the 2015 JOFA Dinner

From left:
Gail A. Katz; Monique (Nicky) Katz, M.D.; Chaim Trachtman, M.D.; Audrey Axelrod Trachtman; Chana Sperber; Rabbi Daniel Sperber, Ph.D.

The dinner was a tremendous success. More than 400 people attended, and JOFA raised more than \$500,000 to help continue our mission of building a more inclusive Orthodox community, one that values and engages women as full participants. The evening's photography exhibition, #HumansofJOFA, celebrated the wide variety of individuals who are "living JOFA" and who embody JOFA's mission in their everyday lives. The photographs captured how JOFA's identity extends across age, location, gender, and *hashkafah*.

Thank you to everyone who helped make the event an overwhelming success! We are grateful to you—our supporters—for partnering with us in this holy work.

If you missed the dinner or want to relive the wonderful evening, visit www.jofa.org/dinner to view pictures, videos of our honorees, the #HumansofJOFA campaign, and the scroll of honor with reflections from our honorees.



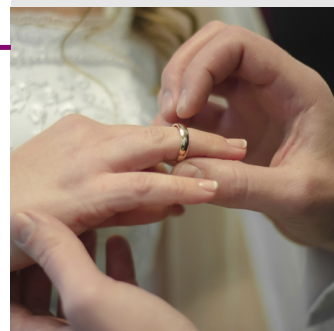
JOFA in Your Community

Over the past six months, Dr. Sharon Weiss-Greenberg, JOFA's executive director, has visited more than a dozen communities in the United States and in Israel. In each community, she discussed women's role in communal prayer, various halakhic models that call for adaptive change, the importance of women in leadership positions, and other topics. People shared experiences, ideas, and ways to shift the paradigm in their communities. If you would like a JOFA representative to visit your community, please email us at jofa@jofa.org. We look forward to hearing from you!

Chatan/Kallah Teacher Training Workshop

In June, in partnership with Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and Yeshivat Maharat, JOFA ran an intensive four-day workshop for *chatan* and *kallah* teachers. Our first coed cohort included twenty-two students. Participants spent time studying primary halakhic sources and discussing a wide range of views on issues of *hilkhot niddah*. They also explored some of their preconceived sexual biases and came to understand the wide range of the human sexual response cycle. This program provides a critically important service to our community. The teachers we have trained in previous cohorts have prepared hundreds of couples for strong, healthy, and halakhic marriages. Together with the current group, we will have nearly sixty teachers out in the field.

Looking for a *chatan* or *kallah* teacher? Check out www.ckteachers.org for our growing list of teachers who have completed the training.



President's Circle

We are extremely grateful to supporters of JOFA at all giving levels. The following is a list of those who have made a very generous commitment to JOFA by giving a minimum of \$10,000. Thank you for your critical support in forging the community to a more inclusive, equitable, and meaningful future.

Arlene Agus
Allie Alperovich & Yuri Simon
Giti & Jack Bendheim
Ilana & Daniel Benson
Carolyn Hochstadter Dicker & Adam Dicker
Victoria & Ben Feder
Abbie & Moshe Greenberg
Pam & Matthew Greenwood
Phyllis & Michael (z"l) Hammer
Laurel Mayer Hecht & Jonathan Hecht
Judy Heicklen
Gail Katz & Mayer Bick
Monique C. Katz, M.D. & Mordecai Katz
Judy Lewis
Sharon & Steven Lieberman
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Carol & Mel Newman
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Ann & Jeremy Pava
Raquel & Aryeh Rubin
Zelda R. Stern & Stanley I. Rosenzweig
Audrey Simons
Abigail & Shai Tambor
Audrey Axelrod Trachtman & Chaim Trachtman
Ariel Groveman Weiner & Josh Weiner and
Jan & Andrew Groveman

Online Programming

JOFA offers new digital content every month. Check out our series of video webinars and blogcasts that explore issues of gender and Orthodoxy. Here are the topics we've covered in the last few months:

- "Engaging Women on Simhat Torah in Your Community" with Toby Goldfisher Kaplowitz, Aliza Abrams Konig, and Rabbi Adam Starr, moderated by Sari Steinberg
- "Stories from the Trenches: 18 Years of Change and Challenges with JOFA's Past Presidents," featuring Blu Greenberg, Carol Kaufman Newman, and Judy Heicklen, moderated by Dr. Bat Sheva Marcus
- "Women and Philanthropy," with Ann Baidack Pava and Leslie Dannin Rosenthal
- "Fireside Chat on the Intersection of *Halakhah* and Sexuality," with Rabbi Dov Linzer, moderated by Ramie Smith
- "The Role of Dress Codes in a High School Setting," with Margaret O'Brien, Dr. Rivka Schwartz, and Rabbi Abby Sosland, moderated by Dr. Sharon Weiss-Greenberg
- "Ask a Kallah Teacher" with Hannah Braune Friedman, Naomi Marmon Grumet, and Chana Novak, moderated by Melissa Scholten-Gutierrez

Visit www.jofa.org/webinars and www.jofa.org/blogcasts to access this content.

JOFA's Response to the RCA

JOFA responded to the Rabbinical Council of America's resolution against women's ordination with an advocacy statement in support of the ordination and hiring of women as Orthodox spiritual and halakhic leaders. Thanks to the help of board member Dr. Noam Stadlan, more than 3,330 members of the Orthodox community have signed a petition in support of women leaders. JOFA placed an ad in the *Jewish Week* highlighting the petition and powerful sentiments from some of the signatories, thereby raising awareness of the overwhelming support for Orthodox women leaders among the Orthodox community at large.

"Orthodox women are already part of the clergy. I intend for it to remain that way." Waltham, MA
"I'm signing because I believe in it, and to give comfort to others who do as well." Ra'anana, Israel
"It is not an issue about gender; it is a need for the sake of Torah." Jerusalem, Israel
"We owe it to our communities." Great Neck, NY

3,228 members of the Orthodox community have signed the following statement:

We, the undersigned members of the Orthodox community, proudly stand with the learning institutions that are training women as halakhic and spiritual leaders and clergy. We encourage Orthodox communities to hire such women to serve in their congregations, in schools and on campuses and to use those titles they feel to be most fitting for the positions and most appropriate for their institutions. We believe individual communities and all of K'lal Yisrael can only benefit from the inclusion of the voices and ideas of highly trained and committed women in positions of communal authority. We hope and pray that their ranks grow and thrive.

"Women are already Torah scholars and rabbis – I want my Judaism to reflect reality." Silver Spring, MD
"I'm signing because I want the best religious leaders we can possibly have. Full stop." New York, NY
"I'm signing because I love Orthodox Judaism and want to see it thrive." Ottawa, Canada
"I approve." France
"I was born and raised in the Orthodox community and have no intention of leaving it." Jerusalem, Israel
"It's easy to find reasons why looking at things differently won't work. Courage is looking at things with new eyes and removing obstacles from the path of what's right." Miami, FL

JOFA

B"H



Harkham Hillel Hebrew Academy wishes Mazal Tov to Gail A. Katz, Hillel parent and Executive Board member, and Dr. Monique Katz, Hillel grandparent, on a most deserving honor.

We applaud you for your tremendous commitment to advancing women's scholarship at Hillel as well as in the greater Jewish community.

Rabbi Y. Boruch Sufrin
Head of School

Mr. Harry Nelson, Esq.
President of Board of Directors

Board of Directors, Administration and extended
Hillel family

9120 West Olympic Boulevard
Beverly Hills, CA 90210
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RABBINIC OVERSIGHT: Expectations and Limitations

By Michael J. Salamon

The role of a rabbi traditionally has been to teach, render decisions, mediate disputes, and provide guidance to families and community—in sum, to act as an authority to his community in all matters religious, moral, and ethical. As the world has become more complex, however, the role has evolved. People can more readily find information on their own and are more likely to question decisions made by others, including their spiritual advisors. Although the changes in the rabbi's role can be viewed as a motivator for growth and engagement, some see this as a challenge to the qualitative position that a rabbi should have, and therefore as a decrease in status.¹

Nevertheless, students and congregants have expecta-

¹ Melamed, E. "Judaism: The Role of a Rabbi Today: The Changes and Challenges in a Rabbi's Role." *Israel National News*, February 6, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/14489#.VcOpDvIVhHw>.

Team Approach, continued from page 13

initiative. JCFS staff work with teams of professionals and lay leaders chosen by the institution to craft protocols, guidelines, and policies focusing on issues of physical and sexual abuse of children. Following extensive policy and protocol development, JCFS professionals provide training for faculty and staff about healthy boundaries, signs of abuse, mandated reporting, and how to implement the new policies and protocols. Specially trained parents and other volunteer facilitators guide students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade through the Safety Kid curriculum, a program of the Magen Yeladim Child Safety Institute in Los Angeles. JCFS professionals present age-appropriate educational sessions to students in middle through high school. Presentations for parents complement student education, raising awareness for the entire community.

We deeply appreciate our partnership with the Associated Talmud Torahs of Chicago to help us bring this important initiative to the schools in Chicago's Orthodox community, as well as our many partnerships with synagogues, *shuls*, other schools, camps, and other institutions. We also deeply appreciate the generosity of the Michael Reese Health Trust, which supports the development and implementation of the entire Partnership for Safer Communities initiative.

For more information, please go to <http://www.jcfs.org/jcares> or contact Dawn Levin, JCFS Safer Communities Coordinator, at 847-745-5450 or at DawnLevin@jcfs.org.

Ann Luban, MSW, MAJCS, is a program specialist and synagogue community partnership liaison at Jewish Child & Family Services in Chicago.

tions of and a need for rabbis. Therefore, like it or not, societal changes have largely brought about a more responsive approach by rabbinical organizations. Increasingly, the major rabbinical organizations have issued decisions that reflect the challenges of the times within the framework of *halakhah*. One of the most notable issues has been responding to reports of sexual abuse of children, both within the community at large and by rabbis themselves.

In some states of the United States, the law mandates all citizens to report any suspected case of abuse—physical, sexual, or otherwise—to the authorities. In other states, only health care providers and teachers are mandated to report. Within many of these states, however, clergy members, especially teachers, are not exempt. Clergy members who have knowledge of suspected abuse or who act as teachers, even in private schools, are mandated reporters.²

Over the past decade, as reports of clergy sexual abuse have proliferated, position statements have been promulgated by rabbinic organizations on just how to handle the mandated reporting to authorities. In one case, the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) issued a resolution on dealing with allegations of sexual abuse by its members.³ No longer could rabbis who sexually abused be ignored, transferred, or privately scorned. In its 2003 resolution, the RCA publicly stated that it "commits ... its members to report acts or suspicions of child abuse as required by civil law." The RCA rendered a halakhic decision declaring that reporting abuse to secular authorities was not considered *mesirah*, the prohibition against turning over a Jew to nonreligious authorities, but such an action was allowed and even encouraged.

This resolution seems to have been a stronger statement of intent and procedure than that proposed by Agudath Israel of America. The Agudah position, affirmed several years later, requires that, before going to the secular authorities, a rabbi must be consulted to determine whether there is sufficient evidence (*raglayim la-davar*) to report suspected abuse to the police or protective services.⁴ In practice, however, there may be little difference between the two positions.

Reasons for the Historical Reticence to Report

Historically, the facts suggest that when information indicating that a rabbi was an abuser was brought to rabbinic organizations, these associations, despite

continued on page 18

² See "Clergy as Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect," Child Welfare Information Gateway: Children's Bureau Association on Children, Youth and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2013). Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/clergymandated.pdf>.

³ Rabbinical Council of America (2003). RCA Resolution Regarding Allegations of Sexual Abuse by Rabbis, May 28, 2003. Retrieved from <http://www.rabbis.org/news/article.cfm?id=105491>.

⁴ Shafran, A. "Agudath Israel Statement on Reporting Suspicions of Child Abuse." *Cross Currents*, July 22, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.cross-currents.com/archives/2011/07/22/agudath-israel-statement-on-reporting-suspicions-of-child-abuse/>.

Expectations, continued from page 17

public comments to the contrary, conducted their own investigations and did not immediately contact secular authorities. This resulted, inadvertently, in protecting abusers and delaying intervention.⁵ Despite all we have learned from the Jerry Sandusky case or the growing Bill Cosby scandal, for example, there is a plodding hesitancy among entrenched organizations to involve the police.

We have seen within our own communities similar heinous transgressions and a similar resistance to reporting. Perhaps this is because most organizations do not want to believe that abuse can occur in their own backyard or they misunderstand how abusers operate. There are common misunderstandings of what paraphilias (sexual perversions and deviations) are. Pedophiles are thought to be worse than voyeurs (which is not *necessarily* accurate), and there can be a complete lack of understanding of the differences among pedophiles, molesters, and abusers. In the Orthodox world, the most tenacious mistake is that “Orthodox individuals, especially rabbis, do not abuse.” This misperception leads to fear that by making an accusation, one is smearing a reputation—committing the sin of *lashon hara*, slanderous talk. This prohibition is used by some to prevent reporting of abusers. Even though many rabbis have publicly indicated that reporting to the secular authorities is allowed, for a variety of reasons, hesitation to do so remains. Abusers are highly adept at selecting and grooming their victims while displaying a facade of morality.⁶ Abusers are, simply stated, very adept liars, and they exist everywhere, in every community, even within the Orthodox one. There is increasing evidence that within religious communities, more so than in secular ones, blame is less likely to be attributed to the molesters, and victims are more likely to feel compromised, abandoned, or blamed for causing communal turmoil by reporting their abuse.⁷ Even though it is true that everyone is innocent until proven guilty, victims of abuse should be shown equal consideration and given the assumption that they are not lying. There are compellingly credible data to indicate that the overwhelming majority of sexual abuse victims who report having been

abused—as many as 98 percent, do in fact tell the truth, even though they may delay reporting what happened to them.⁸

What Is the Responsibility of the Rabbi?

From the perspective of a rabbi who is confronted with the possibility that he may have to deal with an abuse situation, the ethical consideration immediately arises: Whom does the rabbi represent? Is the rabbi's role to act exclusively as the leader of the community, with his primary function being to protect his community, or as an advisor, counseling the victim and/or protecting the abuser as well? Rabbis have traditionally been placed in this confusing position and have taken on all three responsibilities, often simultaneously. A rabbi in such a multifaceted position is confronted immediately with the problem of mixed and divided loyalties.⁹ This is a common moral issue addressed in the ethics codes of most professions, with fines and loss of licensure being used to enforce compliance. Loyalty boundaries are not frequently addressed in the religious professions, however, and there is a very limited code of enforcement if, in fact, someone is found to have breached ethics.¹⁰

In the Orthodox world, the most tenacious mistake is that “Orthodox individuals, especially rabbis, do not abuse.”

Who is being protected and cared for, and whose interests are being served? This question should be the first one asked, but, unfortunately, rarely is. The question cannot be asked if the rabbi is the shepherd of his community, gatekeeper for care of the victim, and also the decisor for whether to report an abuser (especially if the abuser is a well-known member of the community or a rabbi). Which of these three layers takes precedence? Can the rabbi advise the victim, shield the abuser, and protect the community simultaneously? Attempting to do so carries the potential of re-victimizing the victim by shielding the abuser and opens the community to greater harm.

It makes little difference whether a rabbinic board decides that there are *raglayim la-davar* or hires its own private investigators to evaluate abuse claims. By doing either, the board is taking an ethically ambiguous stand. Any delay in reporting abusers to the secular authorities—who can provide professionally trained

⁵ Brown, E. “Rabbi Freundel: A Watergate of Our Own: The Mikvah Scandal Underscores the Need for Regulating the Rabbinate.” *Jewish Week*, October 20, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.thejewishweek.com/editorial-opinion/opinion/rabbi-freundel-watergate-our-own>.

⁶ Cheit, R.E. *The Witch-Hunt Narrative: Politics, Psychology, and the Sexual Abuse of Children*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014; Salter, A. *Predators, Pedophiles, Rapists and Other Sex Offenders: Who They Are, How They Operate and How We Can Protect Ourselves and Our Children*. New York: Basic Books, 2003.

⁷ Feinson, M.C., and Meir, A. “Exploring Mental Health Consequences of Childhood Abuse and the Relevance of Religiosity.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2015) 30(3): 499–521. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0886260514535094>; Powell, M. “After Sexual Abuse Case, a Hasidic Accuser Is Shunned, Then Indicted.” *New York Times*, June 17, 2013. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/18/nyregion/after-sexual-abuse-case-a-hasidic-accuser-is-shunned-then-indicted.html?_r=1; Ratner-Stauber, A., Muschel, A., Polonsky, J., and Margolis, A. “Victimizing the Victim: Reactions to Child Molestation in the Orthodox Jewish versus Secular Community.” American Psychological Association Convention, Honolulu, HI, 2013. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/e591102012-001>.

⁸ Children's Bureau: Administration on Children, Youth and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Child Maltreatment* (2012) (cf. Table 3-3). Retrieved from www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/cm2012.pdf.

⁹ Salamon, M.J. “The Limitations of Rabbinic Oversight.” *The Jewish Press*, October 29, 2014. Retrieved from <http://jewishpress.com/indepth/opinions/the-limitations-of-rabbinic-oversight/2014/10/29/>.

¹⁰ Von Strohm, S.P., Mines, R.A., and Anderson, S.K. “Impaired Clergy: Applications of Ethical Principles.” *Counseling and Values* (1995) 40, 6–14.

investigators and have the authority of law to act on their findings—inevitably protects the abuser, giving him time to consolidate his lies and threats. Abusers are known to have many victims. If the abusers are not reported as soon as they are known, they are given more time to molest.

For some, the expectation for a rabbi is that his opinion will be *da'at Torah*, the final word of sage counsel based on Torah law. At the very least, though, our expectation for our rabbis is that they should act as moral leaders and religious guides. Their holiness is meant as a beacon to teach and lead their followers to be better people. We must understand, though, that they are humans as well. People are fallible. Human behavior is often misdirected by cognitive dissonance, the lack of conscious willingness to accept that what we believe, especially about others who may very well be dishonest, could be inaccurate. This is a serious moral and religious issue that cannot be set aside, especially in situations in which there is suspected sexual abuse.

The authorities, not the rabbis, have the training and resources to investigate properly and to do what is necessary, assuming that they are given information in an open and timely fashion.

Laws of Mandated Reporting Are Helpful

The laws of mandated reporting help to provide ethical and moral guidelines for everyone, including rabbis, as to the proper interventions. Rabbis are not trained to conduct a proper investigation into who is an abuser. One need not wonder about how to handle a suspected case of sexual abuse when it is reported to the proper secular authorities. The authorities, not the rabbis, have the training and resources to investigate properly and to do what is necessary, assuming that they are given information in an open and timely fashion.

Expectations of whom rabbis are responsible to, at least initially, should be clear. Our expectation is that they will protect their community in the proper manner and help victims, to the degree that they are capable. Protecting a community and a victim requires rapid and proper intervention. Although it is undoubtedly within the purview of a rabbi to offer spiritual guidance and direction to an abuser, that same rabbi should not provide the same services to a survivor of abuse from a molester. Doing so would immediately destroy credibility and put the community at risk.

Dr. Michael Salamon is a psychologist, researcher, and a fellow of the American Psychological Association. He is the director of ADC Psychological Services and a consulting psychologist at North Shore-LIJ Health System, and is the author of Abuse in the Jewish Community (Urim Publications, 2011).

WHEN SACRED TRUST IS BREACHED:

Responses to Rabbinic Sexual Misconduct

By Esther Altmann

From afar, we have witnessed public outrage over the long history of clergy misconduct in the Catholic Church. The church's egregious denial and calculated covering up of priests' sexual abuse of congregants and children was staggering in its scope, the blanket of silence over its victims unfathomable. How much harder is it for us to focus our lens closer to home and acknowledge the sexual misconduct of our own esteemed leaders and rabbis?

This article frames the conversation about the impact of rabbinic sexual misconduct by highlighting concerns from three perspectives: first and foremost, that of the victims who have been violated; second, that of a rabbi in the aftermath of a colleague's transgression, and third, that of the congregations whose rabbinic leaders have betrayed them.

Breach of Trust—Effect on the Victims

By the very nature of their mandates, rabbis are privileged to encounter congregants in their most vulnerable moments. This sacred trust should imbue rabbis with deep humility as they witness profound suffering and the darkest moments of human experience. How much greater, then, is the sense of violation when this trust is manipulated or betrayed? Perhaps the damage is comparable to the heightened impact of a sexual assault perpetrated by a family member over that of an attack by a stranger. Familial sexual violations are among the most psychologically devastating experiences because they occur in the context of presumed love, trust, and protection. So, too, do rabbinic sexual violations rend asunder people's core assumptions about their religious leaders and the role of faith in their lives.

Sexual predators are most adept at targeting the vulnerable among us. In recent times, foremost in our awareness has been the vulnerability of converts. However, life's vicissitudes create innumerable moments of vulnerability for us all. It is precisely at these junctures that we are most likely to approach our rabbinic leaders for sustenance. Although the vast majority of rabbis conduct themselves with integrity and in accordance with halakhic principles, the record of rabbinic sexual violations is significant and unacceptable.

The meaning and impact of a rabbinic sexual violation are unique to each victim. The psychological sequelae are a function of many factors: the nature of the assault, the victim's personal history, individual strengths and weaknesses, stage of life, physical and mental health, and the social support of family, friends, and community, to name but a few. Individuals who have a blueprint of loving, empathic parents and of respectful, kind relationships with

continued on page 20

Responses, continued from page 19

rabbinic figures prior to the breach will be more likely to compartmentalize and contextualize the incident and heal from the betrayal. And, remarkably, even individuals who emerge from troubled families frequently demonstrate feats of extraordinary spirit and resilience. However, as noted previously, perpetrators are most adept at targeting individuals with vulnerabilities. In the painful words of one victim, “We told him how we had been abused sexually, and then he abused us sexually.”

A common resonant theme expressed by victims of rabbinic sexual violations is that rabbinic power is not innate or predetermined but rather is a power that is granted to the rabbi by the religious community. “We give them the power,” said one victim. Sexually exploitive relationships are almost always in the context of a differential power hierarchy. It takes great courage for victims of rabbinic abuse to step forward. The transgressions of particular rabbis are their personal transgressions with which they must wrestle. To be fully accountable, however, Orthodox institutions must also examine the problematic dynamics that ensue from the larger context of hierarchical male rabbinic power.

Defensive responses from the rabbinate may deepen the victim's sense of alienation and betrayal and hinder the potential for healing and reconciliation for both the victim and the congregation.

Effects on Colleagues of the Offender

As one might expect, the discovery of sexual misbehavior is deeply troubling for the friends and colleagues of the offender. Rabbis may experience a range of intense emotions not dissimilar to that of victims when confronted by a colleague's misconduct. The psychological impact on rabbis can be profound. Feelings of anger, sadness, betrayal, shock, and disbelief are common reactions. When a colleague behaves in an abhorrent manner, it may be difficult for rabbis to acknowledge that the status of the rabbinate has been sullied and that there has been a violation of the very core Jewish tenets that they are responsible to model and uphold.

Because most rabbis are not formally trained to monitor themselves and to analyze their own feelings, they may react defensively and with a sense of incredulity that a violation has occurred. Denial, minimization, rationalization of inappropriate behavior, or an overidentification with an accused colleague can cause great additional harm to the victim. Defensive responses from the rabbinate may deepen the victim's sense of alienation and betrayal and hinder the potential for healing and reconciliation for both the victim and the congregation.

Precisely because the violation has been of a sexual nature, rabbis may shy away from approaching victims for fear of invading their privacy or overstepping a boundary. Understandably, they may worry that asking specific questions may feel voyeuristic or precipitate a reenactment of the trauma. They may also fear being the object of displaced anger and may worry about managing their own intense feelings of pain and anger as details unfold.

Thus, they may delegate the work of healing too readily to the domain of psychotherapists. Although psychotherapy may be essential in helping a victim process the trauma and move forward, the role of rabbinic figures in the healing process is also essential. Rabbis cannot do this work without appropriate training and a safe place to discuss their doubts, anxieties, and reactions. Their hesitancy to meet with victims is for a good reason, yet their distance may leave victims further alienated and more likely to abandon congregational or religious life.

In the wake of a disturbing event, rabbis may also worry that their own behavior will be unduly scrutinized and, perhaps, misinterpreted. They may become aware of feeling inhibited and self-conscious when they reach out to provide comfort. Similarly, congregants may feel less trusting of communal leaders and may shy away from consulting them. This frosty pastoral environment may pass in time, but it would be better metabolized through communal discourse and planned opportunities for healing.

A Communal Crisis of Faith

Public disclosure of misconduct is disorienting and can create a crisis of faith. Congregational leaders have a significant role to play when their rabbi has acted unethically or illegally. Numbness, shame, and alienation are frequent consequences of sexual abuse. Frank communication about what is alleged to have occurred and what plans have been put in place to manage the consequences is therefore essential. Because sexual exploitation happens in secrecy, it is of paramount importance that leaders convey their efforts for repair publicly, with openness to the range of reactions and emotional attunement to the intense pain and grief that may emerge. Communal activities that bring people together in the aftermath of betrayal can also help circumvent congregational conflict and splintering. Victims' privacy and needs are also of paramount concern and must be considered. Victims need to be directly encouraged to stay connected and to reach out for help.

Perhaps most challenging for congregational leadership is an internal exploration of whether tacit institutional dynamics may have fostered or supported boundary violations. According to Benyei,¹ faith communities led by an authoritarian or strong central figure may have difficulty confronting unacceptable behavior. In such congregations, role definitions may be diffuse with unspoken rules of governance controlled by the rabbi. For example,

¹ Benyei, C. “Systems: Identifying the Roots.” In *When a Congregation is Betrayed: Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, Beth Ann Gaede, ed. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005.

channels of communication may be chaotic or undefined, and trivial matters may receive much attention while more pressing, serious concerns go untended. In such congregations, new pathways to communal leadership may need to be established and old, unhealthy patterns relinquished.

We need to give full voice to victims, to listen and learn from them how we can do better to protect the sacred trust we grant our clergy.

Challenges to the 'Afterpastors'

Rabbis who serve congregations in the aftermath of a predecessor's misconduct assume formidable responsibilities. These "afterpastors" must reinstate the synagogue as a sanctuary for prayer, and for celebrating milestones, mourning losses, and sharing spiritual experiences. The new rabbi will likely be confronted by unique and multiple demands over and above the taxing quotidian functions of a congregational rabbi. These roles may include managing the media, stemming the flow of departing members, mitigating financial losses, restoring organizational management, and absorbing intense feelings of grief, anger, disappointment, and religious disillusionment. An afterpastor may also experience unsettling reactions of distrust, and may feel ignored, disrespected, or sabotaged by congregants and co-workers.² It is not uncommon for rabbis who assume leadership of betrayed congregations to leave after a brief tenure and for these synagogues to hire a succession of leaders before a new trusting relationship can take root.

The reverberations of rabbinic sexual misconduct span communities and geographical boundaries. Not only are we intertwined and interconnected in complex and meaningful ways, but we are also all responsible for one another (*kol Yisrael areivim zeh bazeh*). Guidelines, procedures, and policies need to be put in place in our synagogues and educational institutions *before* abuse occurs, to protect all individuals and to facilitate timely investigations when misconduct is alleged. For real change to ensue, all religious institutions, especially those with traditional systems of hierarchy and strong male authority, need to go beyond the letter of the law and engage in serious ethical and spiritual reflection for healing and *teshuvah*, repentance.³

Scandals, like storms, pass. For the victims, the consequences continue. The media directs its attention to new crises, and the Jewish community to its full calendar of holidays, fund raising, and educational initiatives. Malaise and inattention seep back into our

institutions. In light of these realities, how do we make an enduring commitment to protect all members of our communities from exploitation and abuse? How do we balance vigilance against abuse with creating safe spaces for engagement between congregants and rabbis? How do we bring violators of our trust to justice and stop them from harming other people while at the same time preserving our capacity to respect rabbis whose wisdom we seek and cherish? These questions require ongoing open discussion, in partnership with rabbinic leaders, Jewish educators, and mental health professionals. Most importantly, we need to give full voice to victims, to listen and learn from them how we can do better to protect the sacred trust we grant our clergy.

Esther Altmann, Ph.D., is the director of pastoral education at Yeshivat Maharat and a psychologist in private practice.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Belda [Lindenbaum, ז"ל] would surely have had what to say about the two pieces sharing the front page of your Spring 2015 issue with Laura Shaw Frank's appreciation of her.

Judy Heicklen's article about having consulted her rabbi regarding *kitniyot* in Israel, and getting the "wrong" answer from him; and Dov Linzer's essay on figuring out how to accommodate a woman in a *mehitza-less mincha minyan* without having included her in working out the solution.

I think Belda would have said Judy got it right when she considered that she might have not bothered asking her rabbi in the first place, but rather researched the issue herself. The age of asking rabbis yes-or-no questions, and of rabbis assuming the role of "master and commander," is waning. The Jewish bookshelf is accessible as never before, and even if one isn't sufficiently comfortable negotiating it in search for opinions on a given halakhic question—as Judy decidedly is—one's rabbi could point to the relevant sources and assist in learning and understanding them. And then? Leave it to the individual to choose for himself or herself!

I can vividly picture Belda telling the "*mincha* woman"—with her finger pointing right at her face or rib cage—that she ought not have waited to be invited to share in working out the problem, but rather should have invited herself to do so.

ביילה שרה בת רבקה וזאב דב—זכרך ברוך!

Mordy Hurwich-Kehat
Jerusalem

² Pope-Lance, D. "Afterpastors: Restoring Pastoral Trust." In *When a Congregation is Betrayed: Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, Beth Ann Gaede, ed. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005.

³ Kula, I. "Memo to Yeshiva U.: No Statute of Limitations on God's Judgment." *Forward*, February 13, 2014.

PROJECT S.A.R.A.H.:

Helping the Survivors and Preventing Sexual Abuse

By Elke Stein and Michael Bleicher



Avraham [name has been changed], a fifty-year-old man approaching his twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, was facing something bigger than an ordinary midlife crisis. Rather than anticipating this milestone with great excitement, Avraham and his wife were finally admitting reality: Their marriage was on the rocks and had been for some time. Their communication was poor, and Avraham was in a chronic state of distraction. His wife gave him an ultimatum: Call Project S.A.R.A.H. and seek therapy, or their marriage was over.

Avraham decided that he would try to address some of the issues that had persistently plagued his marriage. During his first session, Avraham disclosed that he was addicted to pornography. He couldn't get through a workday without logging on when his colleagues weren't looking. It became an obsession and completely distorted his perspective on sexuality. Before he got married, he had wildly unrealistic expectations of what life with his intimate partner would be like, and these only became more abnormal as his addiction grew more severe.

His therapist helped Avraham begin to conquer his addiction day by day, and he began to notice subtle but significant improvements in his relationship with his wife, his children, and his co-workers. As the therapy progressed, Avraham was able to confront a part of his history that he had never dealt with and that he had pushed away: His pornography addiction had begun when he was a child, at age 11, after he was sexually abused by a counselor in sleepaway camp.

Every day Avraham endured the pain of memories of the repeated abuse he had suffered during his childhood. Never before had he found someone trained and available to him as a listener. Avraham recalled that he had appreciated the extra candy his counselor gave him, the late bedtime he enjoyed, the extra time at sports, and many other privileges. Never before had he been treated so well. There was no one to tell him that the special prizes, goodies, and treatment were not fair exchange for the sexual abuse he suffered.

Trainings Offered by Project S.A.R.A.H.

The landscape of Avraham's experience was shifting thanks to the efforts of Project S.A.R.A.H., an acronym for Stop Abusive Relationships At Home. This statewide New Jersey program provides culturally sensitive interface with the New Jersey victim service network, as well as statewide access to services through collaboration with Jewish Family Service agencies throughout New Jersey. Since its inception nineteen years ago, it has become a critical resource for prevention of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Project S.A.R.A.H.'s extensive educational and prevention programs provide training for parents before summer camp begins, to equip them with the language

and knowledge necessary to have frank conversations with their children about personal safety. Licensed clinical staff members facilitate small-group sessions in several communities throughout New Jersey. These groups, which meet in a cozy setting, help participants feel comfortable raising any questions they may have. The staff remain available throughout the summer to address any concerns that arise in day camps or sleepaway camps.

Trainings go beyond the home as well. For the past two summers, Project S.A.R.A.H. has trained more than 1,500 day camp counselors and staff in how to create a safe environment for themselves and their campers. After reviewing the chain of command in an emergency or crisis situation, the staff members are urged to take any concerns they may have about their campers or colleagues to the appropriate camp administrator. This is often the most helpful component of the training, as teenagers are often unaware of the nuances of emotional and physical abuse. The program empowers them to fulfill their state-mandated reporting responsibility and offers them concrete examples and real-life scenarios based on cases brought to the agency in previous years.

Training includes behavioral guidelines, intended to protect both campers and staff, that were developed in close consultation with each particular camp. They help staff eliminate situations in which abuse can happen, create a safe environment for children and adults, prevent well-meaning staff from being accused of inappropriate behavior, and, most important, send the message that potential perpetrators cannot hide behind "innocent" behavior. Training is designed to increase self-awareness among staff members. They learn to be aware of their own feelings about camp so that they can provide the outstanding care their campers' parents expect. They learn to explore what their bodies are telling them when they're stressed, to consider taking a break, and to speak about their challenges with their supervisor or member of the head staff.

For many day camp counselors, the training reinforces skills they learned in school through the Magen Yeladim curriculum. This award-winning program offered by Project S.A.R.A.H. is directed to day school teachers, parents, and their children from kindergarten through fourth grade. Alternatively, if the counselors are youth leaders in their synagogues, many will have already participated in Project S.A.R.A.H.'s synagogue youth leader trainings. In the past three years, Project S.A.R.A.H. has reached more than 3,000 teachers, parents, and students. The trainings are offered by licensed mental health professionals in addition to a cadre of dedicated and trained volunteers.

Key elements of the program remind the participants that the private parts of their bodies should not be touched, looked at, or spoken about by anyone who

makes them feel uncomfortable. They learn the difference between secrets and surprises and are encouraged to seek assistance from trusted adults whenever something uncomfortable arises. Safety Kid, the central character in the presentation, helps children appreciate the benefit of always being with a buddy. Older students are encouraged to explore the Internet safely, never sharing personal or sensitive information online via the various forms of social media.

Parents are presented with an adult version of the presentation so that they can reinforce the lessons their children learn in the classroom, while teachers are taught what kind of behaviors constitute a red flag in their students and what behaviors or disclosures they are mandated to report to their administrators. As they work to create a safe environment for everyone in the school building, teachers are also asked to sign a conduct policy formalizing the training they receive.

Hotline for Victims and Mental Health Services to Survivors

In addition to these trainings in schools, camps, and synagogues throughout the year, Project S.A.R.A.H. collaborates with the Shalom Task Force in New York to run a 24/7 emergency hotline that answers calls from victims, rabbis, rebbetzins, *mikveh* attendants, camp directors, parents, attorneys, and mental health professionals. Project S.A.R.A.H. also provides an extensive array of services to survivors of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and stalking, including individual and group therapy, job placement, case management, and advocacy.

When Avraham was strong enough to tell his wife about his addiction and history of abuse, she felt comfortable reaching out to her rebbetzin for support, as both her rabbi and rebbetzin had received training from Project S.A.R.A.H. Together, Avraham and his wife entered couples therapy, where they continue to work on strengthening the frayed bonds that unite them.

Project S.A.R.A.H. is an important resource for the New Jersey Jewish community. Its professionals are available for training, consultation, and treatment of individuals throughout the state. Its services provide extensive outreach through synagogue adult education programs, campus Hillels, classrooms, and camp staff. In addition, Project S.A.R.A.H. works extensively with the service networks provided by the State of New Jersey for all victims, to ensure that Jewish families who enter the system will be treated with sensitivity to their cultural and religious needs.

To learn more, to volunteer, or to use the services of Project S.A.R.A.H., call (973) 777-7638 or visit the website at www.ProjectSARAH.org.

Elke Stein, M.S., LCSW, a graduate of the Wurzweiler School of Social Work, is the director of domestic violence and sexual assault services at Project S.A.R.A.H. Rabbi Michael Bleicher, LSW, is the outreach coordinator for Project S.A.R.A.H. and a psychotherapist at Jewish Family Service of Clifton-Passaic.

Learning to Cope with a Childhood Experience of Abuse

By Rena Gopin-Wolf

How does a woman who was sexually abused as a child—repeatedly, and by different people—learn to cope with her traumatic experiences? I can say today that for most of my life, I was entirely unwilling to answer that question. I was sexually abused as a child of five or six, in the worst way imaginable. I was not molested by a stranger (most children are not), but rather by family members whom I trusted and loved. I remember much of the abuse with exquisite clarity, but I refused to look more deeply at those events for more than forty years of my life. I just knew—and that seemed horrible enough.

Forgiving myself of responsibility for my abuse was the first step in my recovery. But no less significant was the strength I received from sharing my story with others.

I spent the bulk of my life trying to forget the abuse I had suffered as an exchange for a “normal” family life, even though that meant a relationship with the very people who had abused me. After a beginning that was entirely abnormal, I wanted to live a life that at least appeared perfectly normal. I am alive and functioning today precisely because I refused to acknowledge the abuse and reject the people who had molested me. As a young girl, and then later as a teenager and young adult, denial was the best weapon I had against collapsing completely under the weight of sexual abuse.

Why Victims of Abuse Wait to Tell

It seems that everyone asks why victims of abuse wait years—even decades—before revealing their stories. Many question the veracity of these horror stories of abuse and wonder how bad it could have been if victims were able to wait so long to reveal the abuse. Thus, when scores of women reported having been drugged and raped by the actor Bill Cosby, they found their stories questioned because they waited to disclose what had happened to them. In Israel, the attorney for Rabbi Ezra Sheinberg (accused of raping and harassing thirteen women) cited the lapse in time between the abuse and the disclosure as proof that those stories had been fabricated. Here in America, one rabbi has imposed a halakhic statute of limitations on abuse disclosure, stating that one who did not reveal her abuse for years is forbidden to do so.

I cannot speak for other victims of abuse as to why they wait to tell their stories. I do know that no one wants to be

continued on page 24

Learning to Cope, *continued from page 23*

a victim of child abuse. In fact, children fabricate stories of sexual abuse less than 1 percent of the time, and I doubt that those statistics change significantly with time.

I can, however, speak of my personal experience. I waited four decades to acknowledge the abuse I had suffered for many reasons. First, and most important, I was ashamed. I wondered how I had allowed myself to be molested repeatedly. I wondered why I never told anyone and why I acted as if nothing had happened. I forgot how innocent and naïve I was at six years old and judged my child self through the lens of my adult eyes. Second, I was afraid. I was afraid my abusers would punish me or, at the very least, hate me for betraying them. I was afraid of my parents and their reaction. I didn't want to find out whether they would believe me or not. I didn't want to find out if they would hold me as responsible as I held myself. I did the only thing I could do: I waited until they died. I will never know if they had some idea of what I had gone through and, if they did, why they didn't protect me. It always seemed better to live with questions than with the certainty of knowing something that would have the power to hurt me irrevocably.

So I am left wondering. I was afraid of losing my family's support, which was my entire world back then. Finally, I didn't tell until I was old enough and secure enough to survive the telling. I got married and had children and watched them grow into early adulthood. Even then, I probably would have kept silent if not for the jagged crying spells and panic attacks that caught me totally unaware and wreaked havoc with my equilibrium. I waited as long as I could—forty-two years, to be exact. And then I turned my attention and faced the elephant in my life.

I was blessed to find a therapist who received my story with compassion and guided me through the healing process. Nevertheless, recovery meant disclosing intimate details of past sexual abuse to another person. After having suffered the violations themselves, rehashing it all in detail was agonizing. My privacy and personal space were breached twice: once during the abuse, and then again during the retelling of it all. And it infuriated me to no end that it was not sufficient to live with the knowledge that I had been repeatedly molested, but that I would not be spared the humiliation of having to reveal it all to another person, because healing would come only under those conditions. More than once I headed to the ocean and watched the tide change and the waves crash into the sand a few feet away from me. I sat there for hours, often imagining what it would feel like to be washed away on one gigantic wave.

What Doesn't Kill You...

They say that what doesn't kill you is supposed to make you stronger. Like many aphorisms, this one, I suspect, is intended to give meaning and purpose to life's hardships. What I can tell you is that the road from near-death to strength is long and arduous and often heartbreaking, and only if you're incredibly fortunate

can you harvest meaning from the millstones that nearly crush your soul. Somehow I survived. At almost fifty years of age, I was fortunate to have a husband, children, and siblings who loved me, believed every word of my story unconditionally, and supported me.

I had teachers close to me to guide me through the myriad questions I had about a religion that I felt marginalized women. As a victim of abuse, I didn't find much comfort in a religious system that limited what we women studied and questioned our sincerity in pursuing serious Torah study. It has always been especially difficult to subscribe to a tradition that silences our voices and limits our participation in public worship. I spent a lifetime creating an environment that would ultimately support me, both emotionally and religiously, once I was ready to talk. Truthfully, I can't imagine a young, single Orthodox woman revealing past sexual abuse and surviving. Often our community treats abuse as if it were a self-inflicted wound, and we blame the victim. We offer little or no help to young women who have gone "off the *derekh*" and blame their promiscuous behavior for the trouble they are in. Our community tolerates little deviation from the norm, and is especially harsh with young women who don't fit the *frum* mold. It is not surprising that most girls (and many boys) do not step forward to reveal something that would devastate them socially.

I didn't tell until I was old enough and secure enough to survive the telling.

My body and spirit knew when I was ready finally to reveal the abuse I had suffered. I imagine that each victim answers to his or her own internal signals. I think it is presumptuous of lay people and clergy alike to discredit a victim's story because she doesn't conform to their timetable. Forgiving myself of responsibility for my abuse was the first step in my recovery. But no less significant was the strength I received from sharing my story with others. I believe that I have a moral and halakhic obligation to pursue justice and *tikkun olam*. Justice is served not only when a criminal is identified, caught, and punished, but also when a child who was molested and threatened never to tell anyone steps forward and tells everyone.

As many as one out of every four girls is the victim of sexual abuse. Surely their sense of isolation can be mitigated by hearing of others who have been down the same road and are surviving. It might even save a life. And really, how can we put any limitation on that pursuit?

Rena Gopin-Wolf has been teaching Tanakh for thirty-two years at the Samuel H. Wang Yeshiva University High School for Girls. She earned a B.A. from Bar-Ilan University and a master's degree in Bible from Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University.

Beyond Sectarianism: The Realignment of American Orthodox Judaism

By Adam S. Ferziger

Wayne State University Press, 2015, \$34.99

By Roselyn Bell

Adam Ferziger might have said of the latest brouhaha over the Rabbinical Council of America's vote to deny the ordination and hiring of women in rabbinical roles, "I told you so." In *Beyond Sectarianism*, he posits that Modern Orthodoxy's "slide to the right" is not a one-directional development, but that the growth of both *hareidi* and Modern Orthodoxy has led to a realignment and a triumphalism that carries with it a propensity to draw lines in the sand. Those of us in the Open Orthodoxy camp should take note—but not fear.

Using his knowledge of both sociology and Jewish history, Ferziger builds upon a distinction made by sociologist Charles Liebman in the 1960s between "church" and "sect." Liebman saw Modern Orthodoxy as "church-like" in that it was inclusive and emphasized what it shared with non-Orthodox Jews, whereas *hareidi* Judaism, in both its Hasidic and *mitnagdic* versions, was "sect-like" or turned inward, catering to the needs of its own constituency. Liebman thought that despite the fervor and the ideological consistency of the *hareidim*, they would shrivel in numbers because of their resistance to Americanization. However, according to the 2013 Pew Report, *hareidim* now comprise two-thirds of those who identify as Orthodox. What happened?

Several developments worked against Orthodox isolationism and toward greater involvement in the larger American Jewish community. In his early chapters, Ferziger traces how leadership of the Soviet Jewry movement, heritage trips to Eastern Europe, and, most significantly, the *kiruv* movement brought Orthodox Jews into closer relationships with non-Orthodox Jews. The public activism adopted by the Modern Orthodox leadership of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry was later embraced by mainstream American Jewish organizations, and even though the Lubavitcher rebbe opposed public demonstrations, he cooperated with SSSJ in sending religious materials with activists who traveled to the Soviet Union.

In the field of outreach, or *kiruv*, it was the *hareidim*—particularly Chabad, but also the Lithuanian yeshivas, through their community *kollels*—who led the way. (Curiously, Ferziger does not mention the Modern Orthodox National Jewish Outreach Program, founded by Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald.) Right-wing rabbis were willing to go into non-Orthodox synagogues to teach (and to take money from Federations and from organizations like the Avi Chai Foundation to do so) on the theory that their non-Orthodox students were "infants taken captive" who were not responsible for their dearth of *mitzvah* observance. Orthodoxy's earlier polemic against the lib-

eral denominations as heretical softened, although this change did not imply legitimization of the denominations themselves.

The accusation of heresy did not, however, go away; it was directed instead at the proponents of expanding the religious roles of women in Orthodox Judaism. (That's us, Orthodox feminists.) Ferziger analyzes the strategies employed to counter Jewish feminism, and in particular, the prohibitive role of Rabbi Herschel Schachter, from his

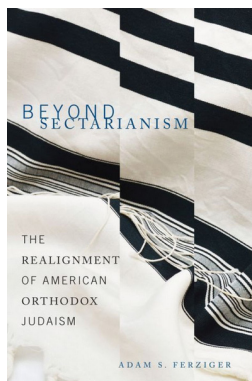
1997 opposition to women's *tefillah* groups to his 2004 essay "Can Women Be Rabbis?" to his rejection of women wearing *tefillin* and his disapproval of partnership *minyanim*. He notes that Rabbi Schachter's arguments were often meta-halakhic, moving "beyond technical points to meta-legal or policy considerations." Rather than answering the specific *halakhic* arguments for expanding women's roles made by Rabbi Mendel Shapiro and Rabbi Professor Daniel Sperber, Rabbi Schachter invoked "historical tradition," or *mesorah*, painting Jewish feminists as similar to Sadducees, early Christians, and

the Reform movement, who were all considered heretics. Ferziger draws a parallel between Rabbi Schachter's rhetoric and the polemics used by the Ultra-Orthodox Hungarian school of the Hatam Sofer (Rabbi Moses Sofer) against the more "modern" Orthodox camp of Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer. Both Rabbi Schachter and the Hatam Sofer sought to delegitimize their opponents by comparing them to those who were already considered "beyond the pale."

So where does the boundary-setting happen, and who gets to set these boundaries? In his concluding chapter, Ferziger details the battles of the last few years over "Open Orthodoxy" and its flagship institution, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. He notes Rabbi Asher Lopatin's call, on ascending to the helm of YCT, for a more inclusive Orthodoxy, and the response of Rabbi Avi Shafran, spokesperson for Agudath Israel, that "Open Orthodoxy is not really Orthodox at all." Ferziger sees the move to the right of Modern Orthodoxy and the decline in sectarianism of *hareidi* Orthodoxy as possibly producing a situation in which the two will come together to challenge the legitimacy of Open Orthodoxy. Will they draw a line in the sand?

Other factors to consider are the influence of the Israeli *yeshivot* on both the learning and observance levels of American Modern Orthodoxy and the shift to the right in non-Jewish religious communities worldwide.

Ferziger concludes, "Notwithstanding the realignment highlighted in this volume, then, at this juncture it is premature to declare that Modern Orthodoxy will disappear as a distinctive educational ideal and lifestyle." Will this Modern Orthodoxy more resemble Open Orthodoxy or *hareidism*? Ferziger suggests that economics and sociology will play as important a role as theology. Adam Ferziger is a fine historian, but he is not, nor does he claim to be, a prophet.



Changing the Immutable:

How Orthodox Judaism Rewrites Its History

By Marc B. Shapiro

Oxford/Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2015, \$39.95

By Eli Leiter

In his latest book, Dr. Marc Shapiro continues his penchant for exploring Orthodoxy from differing—and, at times, controversial—perspectives. In this volume, he focuses on lying and truth-telling as they have played out in the tradition. His scholarly erudition and engaging prose style make this book a delight to read for both scholars and novices.

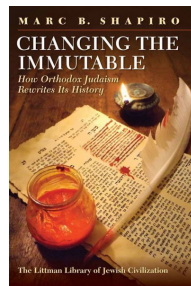
Dr. Shapiro's book can be divided into two parts. The first section is a comprehensive, and sometimes shocking, history of the ways in which, from the very beginning—at least since the time of Abraham—truth could be stretched, tweaked, and sometimes dispensed with. This begins with the account of God repeating to Abraham Sarah's statement that she and her husband are too old to bear children, but leaving out the part about him. There is the "little white lie" of the brothers saying to Joseph that Jacob asked him to forgive them—for which there is no evidence.

Within the rabbinic tradition, we find many instances of changing or censoring texts, including a number of cases related to women's issues. For example, a halakhic opinion in the *Tosefta* is attributed to Beruriah, but when repeated in the Mishnah, Beruriah's name is omitted. Similarly, where the *Tosefta* deals with cases of women studying Torah and wearing *tefillin*, these passages are altered in the Babylonian Talmud. Much later, a responsum of Rabbi Joseph Hayim of Baghdad (1832–1909) justifying the practice of married women not covering their hair is deleted when the Arabic version was translated into Hebrew. Dr. Shapiro brings passages related to consumption of non-Jewish wine, the time of starting Shabbat, and the eating of *kitniyot*, where the lenient opinions are generally the ones censored.

This distortion occurs in all areas of Jewish tradition, says Dr. Shapiro, whether halakhic or hashkafic. The purpose in general seems to be to present a simplified narrative of tradition, with a minimum of controversy or disagreement.

Of interest to this reviewer is how individuals generally considered *gedolim* (major figures) have been treated—in particular, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Rav Abraham Isaac Kook, and Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik. In each of these cases, the complexity of the *gadol's* personality has been overlooked, and significant elements of his thought wiped out.

For example, Rabbi Hirsch, a pillar of German Orthodoxy, always posed a problem to the yeshivish world of Eastern Europe. Even though he has been accepted as a *gadol*, enshrined in an Artscroll biography, certain aspects of his thought were considered unacceptable. His harsh criticism of Maimonides was deleted from a translation of



The Nineteen Letters, and his critique of mysticism and critical comments about Eastern European Jewry were likewise omitted. A passage of his writings on Jewish education eliminated mention of "*Torah im derekh erez*," one of his central values. Rabbi Hirsch is allowed to enter the pantheon, but only after being purged of "heresy."

Similarly, Rav Kook was regarded by some as the *gadol hador*, but his positive attitude toward secular Zionism created cognitive dissonance in the *hareidi* world. Here, the strategy was to marginalize him by eliminating his *haskamot* from *hareidi* works and bringing quotations from his works without attribution. Thus, instead of censoring his writing, his name is written out of the *hareidi* world. Somewhat the same approach has been taken vis-à-vis Rav J. B. Soloveitchik, whose image was cropped out of a photo of himself and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein at a Chinuch Atzmai dinner.

On the matter of altering photos, Shapiro brings a multitude of examples: Head coverings appear on previously bare heads. Women's photos are retouched to render them "kosher" and modest.

But what about truth? Here is where the second section of the book comes in. In the last chapter, aptly titled "Is the Truth Really That Important?," Dr. Shapiro explains the rationale for all this deception. There are many statements in the Torah and rabbinic literature attesting to the importance of truth: "*Mi-d'var sheker tirhak*." ("From lies, distance yourself.") "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord." However, the rabbis are not Kantians. Everything depends on context. Rules are black-and-white, but life is gray. Historical truth is not particularly important. Falsification for a greater good can be countenanced.

Both Rambam in the *Guide for the Perplexed* and Plato in the *Republic* argue for the usefulness of "noble lies"—lying for a greater good. Rabbi Elijah Dessler, in an essay titled "What Is Truth and What Is Falsehood?," argues for a utilitarian approach to truth. Truth is not factual truth, but that which leads to a good result. What helps people lead people to do God's will, even if factually inaccurate, is regarded as true. Many fabrications and revisions are seen as serving a higher good—the preservation and protection of the *hareidi* Torah culture. If this requires rewriting history, so be it. There are sources to support such a view. We are not talking about selfish individuals purposefully lying, but people struggling to protect something precious.

We "moderns" tend to see the downside of this trend. We see it as a diminution of the varieties of Jewish tradition and a denial of reality. In fact, one application of our approach is to find precedents for our views in the minority opinions of previous eras. However, for the traditionalist, variety is not necessarily a good thing; conformity and consistency are more important.

There is danger, however, in our reading this book in a self-serving way. It would be too easy to distance ourselves from the *hareidim* and see them as primitive compared to ourselves. Not so fast! The *hareidim* are defending their cultural suppositions. Are we so free of our own? Do we not sometimes ignore data that do not fit our assumptions?

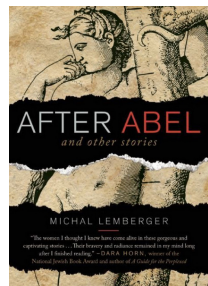
After Abel and Other Stories

By Michal Lemberger

Prospect Park Books, 2015, \$16

By Barbara Trainin Blank

Contemporary *midrashim* are often the province of women writing about women. One capable practitioner of the art is Michal Lemberger, a nonfiction writer, poet, and journalist, as well as a teacher of Tanakh as literature.



Inspired by the Book of Ruth—which, among biblical books, is unusual for the centrality of female characters and its happy ending—she has crafted compelling, beautifully written stories about biblical women we’ve heard of but may know relatively little about. One such woman

is famous but nameless—Lot’s wife.

A few reviewers have stated inaccurately that Lemberger chose obscure characters, but she writes that she imagined herself into “characters and situations that are well known, but from an angle that, I suspect, most have never considered.”

Lemberger asks why these women did what they did and what might have been if they had made other choices. In short, how much power did they have over the events surrounding them? She asks, for example, how Eve feels after the murder of Abel—hence the title of the short-story collection. She envisions how Lot’s wife tries to prevent her husband’s reckless offer of his daughters to the mob in Sodom and how Miriam interacts with Pharaoh’s daughter, who saves the baby Moses.

Three stories are particularly intriguing. The one about Hagar reinterprets why she decides to return to her mistress, Sarah, beyond the angel’s command. The story of Michal is particularly lyrical. David abandons his first wife when escaping from her father, Saul. Eventually he comes back for her, but only after she has found apparent happiness in a second (if not halakhic) marriage with Palti. The lovelorn Palti is one of the few male characters in the collection.

Then there is Lemberger’s new interpretation of the motivation of Zeresh, Haman’s wife. Without wanting to give away anything, I would say it concerns another female character in the Book of Esther.

The book’s only flaw is its somewhat monotonic quality. There are fewer dramatic highs and lows than one might expect, given the material.

No matter how imaginative a journey Lemberger has taken with these *midrashim*, she declares herself committed to ending the stories in the same way they ended in the Tanakh, so as to be true to the characters and the biblical narratives. Thus, the stories are feminist, but not radically so.

Lemberger does the reader an added service by enclosing the biblical verses connected to each story. *Zil gemor*. Go and learn.



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