



asher lipner <lipnera@gmail.com>

Poem

1 message

asher lipner <lipnera@gmail.com>
To: Me <lipnera@gmail.com>

Tue, Sep 16, 2008 at 2:37 PM

By Anonymous Jewish Mother

Soiling What's Pure

The little girl trusts him,
Since he is older.
He may be her uncle,
Her brother,
Or her father,
And he enjoys
Controlling and confusing her until
Her neshama hurts,
As a family member once
Repeatedly
Hurt his.
This is a legacy
Being passed along,
Over and over.
And *this* legacy is covered up,
By our sweet Mesorah,
Which is also hurting.

CONFRONTING ABUSE IN THE ORTHODOX COMMUNITY

Rabbi Yosef Blau

It is no longer possible to ignore the tragic reality that sexual, physical and emotional abuse exists within the Orthodox community. Recent revelations about rabbis and teachers abusing adolescents, often continuing to abuse for decades, dramatically remind us that our existing mechanisms are failing to deal with the problem. I am not aware of any statistics which clarify whether the numbers of offenders is substantial, but even a small number can traumatize hundreds of victims.

The full measure of the horrendous nature of abuse is not always apparent from a technical halakhic perspective. Two teenagers touching each other inappropriately are guilty of the same sin as a forty-year old rabbi touching a thirteen-year old female student. We intuitively recognize that the rabbi has used his position as an authority figure to manipulate a vulnerable child, though she is an adult according to halakha. A pedophile who abuses minors, even if he gets their approval, is halakhically a rapist, but not if he does the same with an adolescent boy or girl.

It is even more difficult to pinpoint the sin when dealing with emotional abuse and manipulation. While one can make similar technical arguments in other areas of halakha, its significance in this context is its use as cover for the many who do not want to deal with the full implications of confronting rabbinical abuse. Not wanting to see themselves as lacking sympathy for victims, people can claim to be concerned about preserving halakhic standards. How rare it is to have two witnesses who saw the abuse.

Even when the pattern of abuse is clear, the question remains how to effectively deal with the abuser in a way that at least limits his ability to move elsewhere and continue to abuse new people. Schools fire abusive teachers, who then move to another community and start teaching (and abusing) in the new yeshiva. Going public is seen as causing a *chilul Hashem* and going to secular authorities as *mesira*.

Virtually all poskim agree that if there is danger to future victims then there is no halakhic issue of *mesira*, but practically, the taboo of *mesira* remains. Victims are discouraged from coming forward on other grounds as well; it will hurt potential shidduchim, not only for the victim but for members of his family as well. Compassion is expressed for the reputations of members of the abuser's family as well. The probability that the family members may have suffered abuse themselves and suffer from being in ongoing contact with the abuser, is not understood.

Taking the accusation to a Beis Din, unfortunately, is rarely effective. Few rabbis have any training in recognizing abuse and the rabbinical courts have no investigative arm. Some abusers are charismatic leaders and have followers who will say whatever they ask them to say. Perjury to a Beis Din is not punished and in many cases the witness, in support of his mentor, has no difficulty with distorting what occurred. The cultic element in the guru's leadership is hard for us to acknowledge. A rabbi promoting Judaism is seen as incapable of being a cult leader.

Newspapers, particularly Jewish newspapers are assumed to be anti-Orthodox. Speaking to them is almost the act of a traitor. Yet at the present time the media has played a primary role in the increased awareness of this problem and an abuser whose name has appeared in the media is unlikely to be hired by a new school or youth movement.

Two recent cases point to differing approaches now being used. In one story from Israel, a commission including a rabbi, a psychologist and a judge evaluated allegations and the accused was fired from his teaching position. He hired a lawyer and is fighting for reinstatement. The Israeli media have picked up the story. A recent article in Maariv broadened the discussion to quote varying views about rabbis counseling married women.

The other case involved allegations that had been investigated twenty years ago and a resulting

agreement that an individual would leave Jewish education, which was not effectively enforced. After two decades, it became difficult to reconstruct what had occurred. Supporters of the accused spoke freely to the media while victims used pseudonyms. New allegations surfaced and a major expose appeared in the papers and a new Beit Din was formed to decide how to deal with the accusations. While no formal announcement has been made, their apparent decision was to send the case to a religious court in Israel that will deal with the charges.

Despite growing awareness and concern, no consensus has yet emerged. Rabbis are not trained to recognize abuse nor given an approach to aid them in responding when they realize that it is occurring. Principals are not equipped to respond to accusations against teachers in their schools. Rabbinical organizations do not have rules of appropriate conduct. Accused abusers retain memberships in these organizations without any process to remove their names.

Our community has not been educated to recognize abuse nor to appreciate the ongoing trauma of victims. Headlines in newspapers are not effective educational tools. Often the response is to express anger at the paper and then ignore the abuse. Until the mentality of the community changes little progress will be made.

Even if a method will be developed to get rabbinical approval for victims to go to the police, much of the problem will remain. Not every manifestation of abuse involves criminal behavior. "Rabbis" who seduce women as part of outreach or

marital therapy are not guilty of a punishable offence. Proper utilization of secular authorities is a necessary step but clearly not a total solution.

In Chicago, after there were a number of serious incidents, a special Beit Din, whose members are respected across the Orthodox spectrum, was established to deal with accusations of abuse. Similar rabbinical courts in other major cities, whose judges would be trained to recognize abuse and would have appropriate mental health professionals as consultants, should be introduced. Creating special rabbinical courts is a powerful statement that a serious problem needs to be addressed.

Nefesh professionals have a critical role to play in educating the Orthodox community, in treating and supporting victims and in serving as consultants for schools and organizations. Only people who are trained can lead a systematic campaign explaining the nature of abuse and the need to confront it openly. Stigma has to be removed from victims. Invariably when the identity of an abuser is revealed the response of far too many is "We have known that for years." Enabling abusers to continue, covering their crimes to protect the image of the community, contribute to innocents being traumatized. Judith Herman in her book on trauma points out that both the abuser and the victims turn to others for support. The victim needs action while the abuser only asks for our silence.

It is time to stop the silence. The true *chilul Hashem* is that we allow victims to continue to suffer in order to preserve our community's image.

Rabbi Yosef Blau is Mashgiach Ruchani of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

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After verifying from several sources that the 'intel' was correct, my colleague was faced with a dilemma: what to do with the information? After all, by going to the authorities, he would be committing mesirah, turning fellow Jews to the police. Additionally, we were raised to avoid anything that might cause a chilul Hashem – and having observant boys arrested for drug pushing would certainly be a colossal one. We decided that I would represent him and present the quandary to the leading gedolim of our generation, among them my great rebbi, Reb Avraham Pam z'tl, at a meeting that was to be held later that month on an unrelated matter. During their [private] meeting, I presented the information and was asked thoughtful, probing questions by the gedolim on a broad range of issues related to this matter. After a few moments of silence, the gedolim turned to Rav Pam, who was the eldest of the group and revered by all. With great pain in his eyes, he softly but firmly said, "Zei ale hobin a din rodef," meaning that the pushers were presenting a clear and present life-threatening danger to the public and must be stopped at all costs. Then, like a Sanhedrin, they each rendered their p'sak, unanimously agreeing with Rav Pam.

My colleague shared the information with the appropriate authorities, an investigation was launched, and within six months several frum kids were arrested along with the ringleader, a 50-year-old Charedi man who was caught selling the drugs in the basement of a Boro Park shul, of all places. The arrests made headlines in the New York tabloids and were the lead item on virtually every radio station in the New York metropolitan area.

I mention this story in the context of the 'Protecting our Children' series **The Monster Inside** and **Safe and Secure** for two reasons. Firstly, to make public the da'as Torah of our gedolim as it pertains to setting aside mesirah issues when lives are threatened. And although I did not raise the issue of abuse in that meeting, I did receive clear and unequivocal p'sakim from gedolei rabbanim that verified abusers must be reported, as that is only way to insure public safety. (Note: I am not issuing a psak, merely sharing the ones I received. As with other matters, every individual who has a sheilah should ask his Rav and not rely on second-hand p'sakim.)

Another issue of great importance was the reaction of our community to the arrests – which I am sad to say, was a collective, "Wow, can you believe that? ... Please

pass the salt.” It is noteworthy that for many months before the arrests, several of us lectured to standing-room-only crowds in Brooklyn practically shouting that frum people were pushing drugs to our children.

We kept speaking about it, but people didn’t seem to get it. It took a while – and a few deaths of frum kids from drug overdoses – for people in our community to get their hearts in sync with the facts that their eyes and ears were telling them. It was a classic example of cognitive dissonance. After all, we were raised with the notion that these things just don’t happen in our Torah community. So, when we were faced with irrefutable evidence to the contrary, part of our minds just shut down, not willing to accept the harsh truth. But, as we are painfully realizing, the problems we face don’t shut down while we struggle to adjust to new realities.

In addition to the ‘standard’ cognitive dissonance described above, two factors contribute greatly to its staying power in our community. The first is the fact that we are, Baruch Hashem, surrounded by evidence of the astounding successes of our Yeshiva/Beis Yakov systems; thousands of wonderful, spiritual teenagers. How can the negative information we hear about compete with the superb things we see? Additionally, there is a virtual media ban in our charedi papers on any negative news. Few things add to the disconnect and cognitive dissonance more than hearing frightening things about an event such as the arrest of a frum drug dealer or pedophile in the secular media, while our papers completely ignore its existence. We ought to be enormously proud of the first factor, but I suggest that we must end the practice of the second.

The only way to combat cognitive dissonance is to discuss these matters in our public squares, painful as it may be; which is why Mishpacha magazine deserves our appreciation for publishing these columns. Trust me, I wish there was a more discreet way to do this, and if any of our readers have any suggestions for creating venues for this dialogue, please contact me with them. But in the meantime, I will continue to write these essays, as I feel that straight talk and education is the only way to significantly improve things.

In the darkest moments of our agonizing saga with the drug issue, I received a small measure of comfort and chizuk from a non-Jewish police officer who saw me close to tears during our discussions. “Rabbi,” he said softly. “Your community is close-knit and family oriented, so you were lucky to avoid the drug problem for an

entire generation. The [19]90's for you is what the 60's was to us. This isn't a Jewish problem, Rabbi. It is a human problem. It only becomes a Jewish problem when it is ignored."

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★★★★★

1. **Sanhedrin** 1/31/08 - 12:20 PM

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Mrs. Y. Homnick

After a few moments of silence, the gedolim turned to Rav Pam, who was the eldest of the group and revered by all...Then, like a Sanhedrin, they each rendered their p'sak, unanimously agreeing with Rav Pam.

You posted this article the week of parshas Mishpatim where Rashi says on 23:1, "the pasuk is talking about dinei nefashos .. we begin from the side, from the least great among them, having them state their opinion ..."

so that it doesn't end up with the ketanim among them rubberstamping the leader's psak.

★★★★★

2. 1/31/08 - 2:01 PM

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Yehoshua

Mrs. Homnick: please don't nit-pick.

This is another excellent article from R. Horowitz.


★★★★★

3. **Beautiful** 1/31/08 - 3:41 PM


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Yardena - EY

This article is literally a wake-up call, and I'm sure I'm only one of many who'll benefit from reading it.



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Caring Enough to Dissent

Who are the True Patriots?

by *Rabbi Yakov Horowitz*

Publication: **Mishpacha Magazine**

★★★★ Rated by 45 users | Viewed 2769 times since 6/4/08 | 94 Comments

6/4/08

Four-Star General Eric Shinseki's abrupt and stunning fall from grace among the civilian military leaders of the Bush administration in the months leading up to the Iraq War is the subject of this column. I feel that it contains profound lessons for us as our growing *kehila kedosha* explores parameters for the public discussion of pressing communal issues in these trying times.

Eric K. Shinseki graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1965, quickly rose through the ranks of the U.S. Army, was promoted to General in June 1997, and became the Army's 34th chief of staff on June 22nd, 1999. After an extraordinary career in the Army, however, Eric was forced to retire in less than ideal circumstances in June, 2003. The 'sin' General Shinseki committed that earned him the disfavor of President Bush's inner circle was his courageous stand in publicly stating that far more troops and resources were needed by the American military in order to secure Iraq and transition it to a vibrant democracy.

On February 28th, 2003, *The New York Times* reported that, "Mr. Paul D. Wolfowitz, the deputy defense secretary, opened a two-front war of words on Capitol Hill, calling the recent estimate by Gen. Eric K. Shinseki of the Army that several hundred thousand troops would be needed in postwar Iraq, "wildly off the mark." Mr. Wolfowitz then dismissed articles in several newspapers asserting that Pentagon budget specialists put the cost of war and reconstruction at \$60 billion to \$95 billion. (For the record, current long-term estimates of the War's cost range

from \$1 trillion to \$3 trillion dollars.)

Many months later, A Newsweek story titled, "ERIC WAS RIGHT," notes that "The personality clash between Shinseki and Rumsfeld was well known. Shinseki had a reputation as a quiet, reserved officer, while Rumsfeld had a history of his tough questioning and "wire-brushing" senior officers. (A senior Army officer described Rumsfeld's wire-brushing as "chewing them out, typically in a public way that's demeaning to their stature.")

Eric paid a steep price for his principled stand. He quickly fell into disfavor with senior administration officials and was either asked, encouraged or forced to resign, depending on whom one asks. In a "highly unusual move," *The Washington Post* reported, Pentagon officials informed the press fourteen months before Eric's retirement that his replacement had already been selected, undermining the General's authority. And in another departure from tradition, no senior administration officials attended his retirement ceremony.

Why all the talk about General Shinseki? Because, from my vantage point, I see striking and frightening parallels between the conduct of Bush administration officials and the attitudes of many members of our community as it pertains to having candid discussions about the challenges we collectively face.

Instead of lauding the caring and knowledgeable individuals who offered diverse and dissenting opinions, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz shunned, ignored and "wirebrushed" them – repeatedly accusing them of being unpatriotic. The result was a headlong rush into a disastrous war without the careful evaluation and reflection that may have avoided the horrific carnage that ensued, the effects of which will haunt us for decades.

Sadly, I keep seeing this pattern of thinking in our *kehila* as well, where people who respectfully attempt to draw our collective attention to pressing communal problems are accused of spreading negativity and displaying a lack of "patriotism."

Look; we all know that there are many very real issues that are practically begging to be addressed—really addressed, not merely managed. The elitism that is needlessly driving more and more of our mainstream, average sons and daughters (according to recent studies, fifty percent of children are below average) to at-risk schools or to the streets because they cannot meet criterion or keep schedules that

few adults can. The exponentially growing instances of abuse and molestation. The lack of *parnasah* that is draining the *simchas hachayim* and *shalom bayis* from so many homes. The crushing, unbearable burden being carried by so many 50-and-60-year olds who are supporting several families at an age when they should be retiring or at least winding down. The horrific acts of violence perpetrated by members of our community on others that do not meet their standards or *chumros*. On and on.

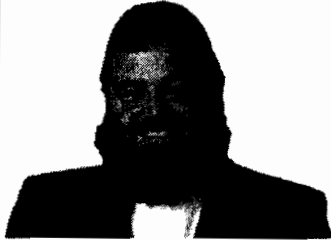
What is most troubling is that we seem to be lurching from crisis to crisis without any substantive discussion of strategic, proactive solutions that could improve things.

Why? Because many of the soft-spoken “*Eric*s” among the members and even leaders of our *kehila* are reluctant to engage in such long overdue dialogue due to the very real fear that they will be “wirebrushed” or worse by *kanayim* for daring to mention that we are not superhuman, flawless beings or for promoting appropriate Torah *hashkofos* that are different than theirs. And I fear that as long as this mindset continues, things will never improve.


Thirty years ago, perhaps the premiere “*Eric*” of our generation, Rabbi Abraham Twerski, received numerous death threats for speaking publicly about spousal/child abuse and kids at risk. How ironic it is that, to my knowledge, none of the recent high-profile accused or convicted pedophiles in our *kehila* needed protection from such threats, while Rabbi Twerski paid the price for being decades ahead of his time and for caring enough to stick his neck out and saying what needed to be said.

Sixty years ago, our *charedi kehila* was a small, start-up enterprise. Since then, we have, with the *chesed* of Hashem, grown and thrived beyond the wildest dreams of our leaders of two generations ago. But along with the growth comes the need to discuss and address the problems we collectively face as we expand and face the changing world of today and tomorrow. Not from a position of weakness, but rather with the self-confidence and maturity of having arrived.

Condemning the “*Eric*s” for their courage to dissent and empowering the “wirebrushers” to intimidate and be hostile to them will only lead us down the road to ever-growing misery and the creation of problems that are increasingly difficult to solve.



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L'maan Hashem - What Will It Take?

Let's start protecting our children

by *Rabbi Yakov Horowitz*

This article originally appeared in **The Jewish Press**

★★★★ Rated by 30 users | Viewed 2171 times since 9/3/08 | 51 Comments

9/3/08

Dear Reader:

Please take a moment to click on this link and read this **letter that I wrote to our readers**. Whatever you can do to be of assistance would be most appreciated.

Thank you so very much,

Yakov

It is difficult to describe the sickening, gut-wrenching sensation I experience when I get phone calls from parents whose children were sexually abused or from adults who have carried the horrible scars of childhood abuse for decades, often shredding their relationships and ruining their lives. And, I am sad to report that those calls are getting more frequent as time goes on.

L'maan Hashem – what will it take for us to take this issue seriously? How many more indictments of *frumpedophiles* will it take for us to cut through the denial and deal with the fact that we have a real problem? Not a Jewish problem, but a human one. (As I've written in the past, abuse and molestation are issues that all communities face. It only becomes a Jewish problem when we choose to bury our heads in the sand and ignore it.) How many more suicides or drug overdoses do we need to endure before we will start understanding that this is one of the pressing challenges that we need to squarely face? And, in my opinion, sexual

abuse is by far the leading cause of high-end drug use and ruined lives of the teens in our community.

The saddest thing of all is that the steps that need to be taken to prevent today's innocent children from future abuse are not terribly complicated. From my vantage point; all it takes is to:

1. Raise the awareness level by having community leaders write and speak about this issue in a forthright and unequivocal manner
2. Teach our parents and educators how to speak to their children about personal privacy. And this can be easily done in a modest, Torah-appropriate manner.
3. Develop the righteous indignation to finally protect our children by sending a clear message that those who molest them will be treated like the *rodfim* and murderers they are – reported to the authorities, arrested and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

This is not only a school issue; it is a communal one. Abusers are far more likely to be family members or kids on the block, rather than educators. This is not to say that schools should not address this matter squarely; rather to note that simply dealing with it in the limited scope of school will not eradicate the scourge of abuse. We are all in this together and it will take broad-based initiatives to improve things.

Is there any more sacred obligation than protecting the children entrusted to our care? Shame on us, for failing to treat it as such.

Shame on us, for allowing ourselves to repeatedly get distracted with meaningless and often silly non-issues raised by self-appointed "*askanim*" that purport to pose spiritual risk to our children while our paramount communal responsibility to keep evil people from destroying the physical *and* spiritual lives of our children keeps getting bumped to the back burner.

Shame on us, for allowing people like Avrohom Mondrowitz, and others like him, to live peacefully in our communities while their victims live tortured lives. Please excuse my sarcasm, but lately, when people ask me what they ought to be doing to rally support in their communities to keep our children safe from predators, I occasionally tell them, tongue-in-cheek, that it might be a good idea to spread

rumors that the pedophiles are distributing non-kosher candy to their children while molesting them. Who knows; maybe that might get people to take notice.

I began writing about sex abuse in these pages more than four years ago – before this was thrust in our faces when we were shamed in the national media with reports of the abusers in our community. I wrote about the scandal of our silence over Mondrowitz's alleged crimes months before it became public news, when efforts were made to finally extradite him to America to face a small modicum of justice after all these years. Shame on us that little has changed in that time despite all the *chillul Hashem* we have endured over this matter since then.

Recently, my wife and I had the incredible *zechus* of walking our fourth child to the *chuppah* and it is exactly one year since Hashem blessed us with the birth of our first grandchild. Knowing what I know and listening to what I listen to on a daily basis, makes me fearful for his safety and the safety of our grandchildren yet to be born. For so long as we do not make every effort to have the warped pedophiles in our midst locked up in prison or in treatment facilities – trust me, when I say that *none of our kids are safe*. At this moment of great *simchain* our lives, I am committed to see to it that our grandchildren will be raised in an environment where the evil monsters that prey on our children live in fear – not the parents and grandparents of our *kinderlach*.

Here is how I ended a column I published on the matter of sex abuse in these pages in January of 2007. The final question is one that I still ask – on behalf of the many silent, silenced and voiceless victims of sex abuse in our community.

I think it is a terribly sad statement that an individual who sold non-kosher food in my hometown of Monsey ran for his life the moment the story broke and was not seen since, while a fiend who allegedly molested both Jewish and non-Jewish children in Boro Park is living comfortably in Jerusalem while evading extradition. I am most certainly not promoting or condoning vigilante violence. But it would be a positive step forward when child molesters in our community need to ask for police protection for fear of being harmed by righteously indignant people.

Incredibly, in that case, only the non-Jewish parents pressed charges. Here is text from a **Nightline article** on the subject: "The only victims that cooperated with the investigation were Italian. They were neighborhood boys who trusted the rabbi because he bought them gifts like bicycles. **Not a single Orthodox Jewish boy or**

their parents would talk to the police. The statements of four Italian boys aged 11 through 16, were the basis for the indictment against Avrohom Mondrowitz. He was facing eight counts of sexual abuse in the first degree, endangering the welfare of a child, and five counts of sodomy in the first degree.”

I ask, “Are Jewish children less sacred and worthy of protection than are non-Jewish children?”

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Also of interest:

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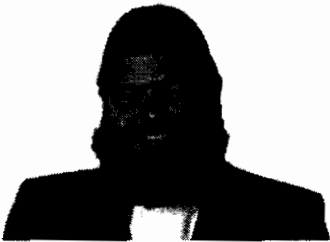
1. **Where the Problem Lies** 9/4/08 - 2:31 AM

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Anonymous

Reb Yanky,

Once again you've done an amazing job! Kol HaKavod! As you may have heard there is presently a molestation case here in Ramat Bet Shemesh. This predator walsk around freely while his victims are in their healing process. And who allows this? The Rabbonim. They have been involved (mostly to cover up). They know about the allegations and yet let him continue to teach our tzon kedoshim. Thank G-d there is now an organization, Lema'an Achai(www.lemmaachai.org), that is reaching out to the local victims and their parents. Their program, ,



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All Pain and No Gain
Shielding Our Children from the Wrong Half
by **Rabbi Yakov Horowitz**

Publication: Mishpacha Magazine

★★★★ Rated by 15 users | Viewed 1731 times since 6/25/08 | 22 Comments

6/25/08

This past summer I went with a close friend to Aspen, Colorado for two days, to recharge our batteries in the glory of Hashem's world amid the majestic beauty of the Rocky Mountains.

On the first day of our trip, as we passed a moped rental establishment, I cajoled my reluctant friend into joining me, and we took two of the mopeds for a few hours. After thirty minutes of riding, I noticed a dirt path that snaked up a steep mountain, and once again used my persuasive powers to get my friend to take it to the top with me, where we were rewarded for our efforts with breathtaking views.

One the way down, I simultaneously learned several lessons. First, riding up a mountain is far easier than riding down. Second, mopeds are rather difficult to manage downhill on bumpy dirt roads. Third, it is good practice to listen to a friend who tells you to act your age. And finally, it is rather excruciating to have several dozen pebbles imbedded in the palm of your hand.

In the emergency room of the local hospital, a doctor offered me several methods for the treatment of my hand, but strongly advised me to tackle the problem head-on and select the most painful option. This would involve peeling back the shredded skin, removing the larger pebbles with forceps and scraping the area with a brush to get rid of the many tiny ones. With a wry smile the doctor informed me, "Rabbi; no pain, no gain."

That doctor's sage advice can be applied to the arena of addressing communal issues as well. For when we are faced with significant *klal* challenges, we have the option of dealing with them squarely, or we can chose to merely manage them in a superficial manner without subjecting ourselves to the short-term pain that addressing them properly would entail.

When challenges are tackled directly and effectively, a temporary rise in the level of communal discomfort usually occurs. During that period, many people understandably feel that the proposed solutions are far worse than the original problem they are purported to solve. But, over time, a reduction in pain and a far healthier community invariably results.

Allow me to share an example with you: When a girl becomes very ill or worse as a result of anorexia, *chas v'shalom*, parents of teenage girls in that community who suspect that their daughter is anorexic reach out for help. A percentage of the girls will actually have eating disorders – upping the numbers of **reported kids** with such conditions. (This does not mean that more girls came down with eating disorders, only that the awareness caused more of them to reach out for help.)

But, then good things start happening. Schools bring in specialists to speak to the kids. Girls become more self-aware of their own eating habits. Peers eventually become informed enough that they can help their friends who are bingeing and purging. Eventually, eating disorder rates drop significantly, as the short-term publicity results in the long-term benefit of awareness and the creation of solution-oriented programs, that remain in place as the pain of the publicity subsides.

I mention this because, as I see things, many of us – with the best of intentions – are not discussing critical *klal* matters in our public squares because we want to protect the innocence of our children and the reputation of our community. Moreover, some take it a step further and accuse individuals who do discuss them of 'charedi-bashing,' "**He never says anything nice,**" or worse, discouraging or intimidating people who deal with these problems on a daily basis from speaking out. But we are merely shielding our children and *kehila* from the wrong half – the beneficial side – while leaving them completely exposed to what we are trying to protect them from. (I am most certainly not suggesting that we abandon our efforts to shield our children from the decadence of society. Only that we teach our children the lessons learned when distasteful events already have become public,

rather than pretending that they didn't happen.)

When abuse cases or drug arrests that are widely reported in the secular media, are not discussed at all or glanced over in our papers, we have the worst of all worlds. We are not really accomplishing our goal of shielding our kehila and teenage children – especially with exponentially growing digital communication. Our adults, even in the most *heimishe* circles, are reading about it via email and the Internet – often written by individuals who have a jaundiced view of our kehila – and those who don't use the Internet are hearing about it from those who do. It is entirely possible to keep young children sheltered, but many or most of our teenagers hear about these incidents anyway from family members or their peers in school. So what we have are swirling bursts of information and misinformation which generate a growing sense of discomfort and “**Human problems**” cognitive dissonance among adults and kids. All the while, the suppression of this information and the personal attacks on those who dare to discuss them, means that far too little of the 'good stuff' – the things that could help prevent these issues from recurring, such as awareness or prevention programs – are happening.

Going back to my moped story; engaging in the 'airbrushing' of distasteful news and not teaching the lessons learned from them, is analogous to asking my doctor to leave the pebbles in place and painfully pull the skin over the stones to cover them. You know what the result would be – infection and far worse. All pain and no gain.

It is my fervent hope that moving forward we will usher in a new phase in our collective dialogue where we – excruciatingly but with steely determination – face our challenges head-on and seek to improve things for our children and grandchildren.

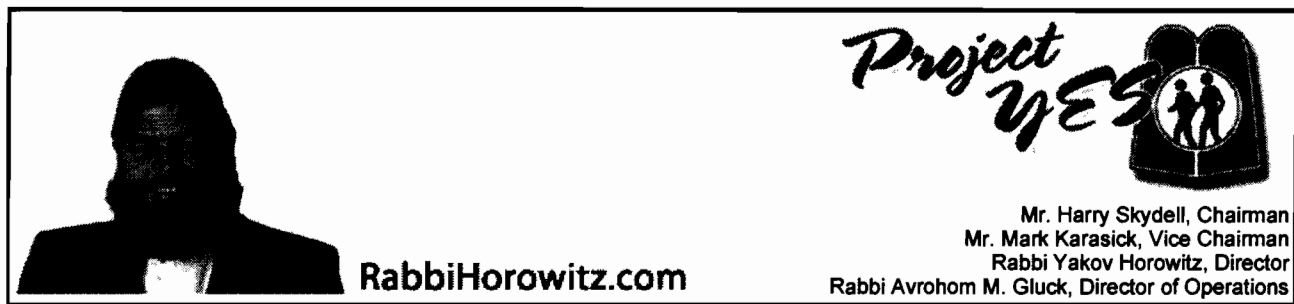
Recommended reading:

“He Never Says Anything Nice”

“The Monster Inside”

“Safe and Secure”

“Human Problems”



Olam Hafuch Ra'isi - A Topsy-Turvy World Gone Mad

by *Rabbi Yakov Horowitz*

★★★★★ Rated by 32 users | Viewed 2428 times since 9/10/08 | 45 Comments

9/10/08

Dear Reader:

Please take a moment to click on this link and read this **letter that I wrote to our readers**. Whatever you can do to be of assistance would be most appreciated.

Thank you so very much,

Yakov

Today, the talmidim of Yeshiva Darchei Noam, where I serve as Dean, moved into our new building after living in rented quarters for 11 years so you can well imagine how hectic things were in my office this week.

Amid all the activity yesterday, I fielded several anguished calls from my dear chaver and colleague, Dr. Benzion Twerski, describing the pressure he was undergoing and the harassment that his family members were undergoing as a result of his courageous efforts to help reverse the frightening and growing abuse statistics in our community.

I have had the privilege of interacting with Reb Benzion many hundreds of times over the past 11 years as I've sought his guidance in dealing with the abuse cases that have come my way. I would like to inform those who do not know him that he is a genuine talmid chochom, a true chassid, and an osek b'tzarchei tzibur b'emunah (one who selflessly devotes himself to communal needs) in every sense of the

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Silencing dissent, hushing up scandal

Sep. 16. 2008

MICHAEL J. SALAMON, THE JERUSALEM POST

Two items recently crossed my desk. The first was an article that appeared in *The Jerusalem Post* written by Matthew Wagner entitled "**Haredim move to silence 'treif' music**". It was about a movement to ban musicians who produce or perform any music which the Guardians of Sanctity and Education deem inappropriate. Musicians playing such music would be banned from playing in wedding halls, their CDs would be banned and their concerts disallowed.

The other item was a breaking news piece from JTA indicating that Rabbi Benzion Twerski had resigned from a task force in formation being brought together to deal with sexual abuse in the Orthodox community. New York State Assemblyman Dov Hikind, also an Orthodox Jew, is establishing the task force to deal with this scourge. Twerski resigned because of the many threats against him and his family made by several individuals from his community.

When taken together these two items suggest such a profound and disturbing conflict regarding the current goals of the Orthodox world, of which I am a member. If music is so important, is not the emotional welfare of members of the community even more so? How can music be a threat and abuse not be? While some may argue that this is not the message to be learned, that the insular community is seeking ways to deal with the sexual abuse problem discreetly, it is clearly not so when someone as prominent and discreet as Twerski can be so horrifically threatened. But, he is not the only one to receive threats. Apparently so have musicians. The canceling of a recent concert is evidence of this.

IN MY work I too have received threats, most recently for suggesting that the rigid shidduch approach to dating seems not to be working. What this approach has accomplished in recent years is to increase rigidity and unrealistic demands for a spouse; rates of domestic violence are increasing and so are the divorce rates.

There seems to be little balance left in the Orthodox world. There is no allowance made for harmless pleasure and those who abuse are given a free pass. Those who attempt to stand up are threatened.

Still there is a commandment that states "*V'chai bahem*"; we should live by the rules. That

command, however, requires that the rules are such that one can live according to them. Additionally, we have lost sight of the adage "*yesh chochma bagoyim*," there is knowledge, as well as arts and music, among the nations of the world that is meant for us to share. I believe that is why much of our liturgical music comes from a host of sources including the church. And our great rabbis have not simply accepted it but enjoyed and encouraged this music.

When I look at the increasing rigidity that these events objectify, I think of how we are pushing people away instead of bringing people closer to the core values of Judaism. I also reflect on the experience of Ayan Hirsi Ali, currently a member of the Dutch Parliament, reared as a devout Muslim who was forced to evaluate the oppressiveness of her religion. She became a vocal critic of the religion to the point where she has had to go into hiding. At the end of the day, she may be the model that our children follow if we do not find a way to balance the needs of our society with those of a firmly religious leaning. Pushing people too hard will only force them to push back.

To suggest that the decisions of a few vocal individuals make are the only correct approach and allow them to steer us away from doing what must be done is simply illogical. Every society has its ills. So does ours. We must find productive ways to deal with these ills if we are to survive.

*The writer, a fellow of the American Psychological Association, is the founder and director of the Adult Developmental Center in Hewlett, New York. His most recent book, *The Shidduch Crisis: Causes and Cures*, is published by Urim Publications.*

This article can also be read at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1221489042256&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

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08.08.08 **Devorim: The Destruction and Restoration of Dignity**
Nine Days Minus One

A few days ago I bumped into an old friend whom I have not seen for 34 years. He was my high school classmate, and back then we were close friends.

I could not control my tears – not over meeting my friend after all these years, but over the state he was in. Unnaturally thin and jittery, (I shall call him) Michael was clearly a junkie. He had an awkward smile on his face and I saw that we would not be able to have an honest conversation.

He was such a promising student. Bright and creative, shy and gentle, we always thought that Michael would do some great things with his life. Here he stood before me on a street corner nervously rolling a cigarette, shifting eyes, a mere skeleton and specter of the Michael I once knew and admired.

To my question "Where do you live?" he sadly answered, "I don't have my own place, I move around. Housing in New York is expensive..." "Are you working, earning an income?" "Yes, I'm eking out a living here and there." I offered help, but knew that Michael would not follow up.

I touched upon some of the deepest beliefs that we shared together, back when we ere teenagers in Yeshiva on Ocean Parkway. But Michael was detached. He spoke about the past as if it was not about him.

He was far gone, in a different orbit. Had I tried to hug him he would have recoiled.

I will never forget the Shabbos walk we took together when Michael began sliding so many years ago. At the time he was trying to convince me to join him in, what he called an innocuous, game of gambling at cards. As we walked down Eastern Parkway he asked if I minded that he lit up a cigarette. Always the gentle soul, Michael was being sensitive to my sentiments about Shabbos. I chose not to answer, and Michael took that as an ok.

As time passed I noticed the visible differences in Michael as he became consumed with the "weed" and his daily routines began to orbit around his next "hit." Conversations, usually so stimulating, began to dull. His usually clarity and sharp wit became an afterthought. He would spend hours in his basement apartment all alone. He was slipping and slipping fast, in a vicious ruinous cycle.

It was the first time I was ever exposed to the utter wasting of a human being due to drug addiction. Nothing else matters. You look forward to nothing as much as the drug and its effects. "It" becomes your nurturer, your best friend, the one you turn to in times of need, the final recourse when all else fails. Every minute of your waking hours – and even asleep –

every decision, every move, is determined by the next "high."

And then, perhaps worst of all, is the loneliness. A loneliness that I cannot begin to imagine – and one that demonstrates how utterly destructive this "lifestyle" can become – you are all alone with your obsession, with your compulsion, only you and your dark desire. And every time you succumb, the lonelier it gets. At some point the human psyche must snap into a submission to this "new reality" simply to be able to survive and not be overcome by sheer shame and desperation.

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Once caught in this mad whirlpool, there seemed no way out for Michael. And then we graduated, each of us going our own way.

Now, 32 years later, he is still controlled by the dark demon within. He lives in world of shadows, seemingly always on the run. Escaping what? Himself above all. Why they call it "substance abuse" seems odd; it's not abuse of the substance, but of yourself.

What happened to this young man that I knew? And to so many others like him?

-- As I am writing these words I realize that they may come across as judgmental or condescending. That is the farthest of my intentions. We all have our vices and ugly corners. We are taught that seeing a fault in another is like looking in a mirror: It is a reflection of our own shortcomings. Michael for me is a mirror image of the dark obsessions that we all are capable of falling into. --

What happened to Michael and what happens to each of us when another force takes control of our lives?

Your inner dignity – what the Kabbalists call Malchus – is damaged.

And that's why I chose to write about this subject today. We now stand in the Nine Days, the saddest period of the Jewish calendar, due to the destruction of the Holy Temple and other tragedies that took place during these days, culminating with Tisha B'Av (this Sunday) – the saddest day of all, when the Temple actually went up in flames.

Annually this period is honored as a time of mourning and grief over our losses. Tisha b'Av is a 24-hour fast day (beginning at night), the lights are dimmed, we sit on low stools and recite lamentations.

As continuously discussed in this column, we are not simply grieving over past events, but over all forms of destruction in our lives – every form of grief and loss evolves from the rupturing of the bond between spirit and matter that occurred when the Divine presence in the Temple no longer found a "home" in our material universe and was compelled to go into "hiding."

Each of us has an indispensable soul within, which is the ultimate root of all confidence and sense of purpose. Our convictions, hopes and greatest

dreams flow from our inner "malchus" – a profound sense of dignity and majesty that stems from the Divine image in which we were all created. It is the feeling that "you matter" and you have the power to achieve anything you set your mind to.

In contrast, what is the root of all destruction? The annihilation of malchus – when this dignity is violated.

The Arizal explains why the Fifteenth of Av is the greatest of holidays ("there were no greater holidays for Israel than the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur"), because its full moon follows and repairs the "destruction" of the "moon" (Malchus) on Tisha b'Av, when the Temple was destroyed. The greatness of the ascent is in direct proportion to the depths of the descent that precedes it.

Looking now at my old friend Michael, meeting him during these Nine Days, I see with my own eyes how his malchus/dignity was destroyed. Destroyed on a conscious level. Once that part of you – your purest element, the one that feeds your sense of self-value – is compromised, it's just a matter of time that your life begins to spiral downward out of control, in one form or another.

For some it takes on the shape of raw dysfunctionality. Others are creative enough to find ways to remain functional ("functional addicts") to some extent, and learn how to "cover their tracks" as they maneuver their way day to day. Variations are as numerous as people themselves. Seeing someone use their creative juices – not to mention the energy, time and money wasted – for such machinations is, of course, one of the saddest things to observe. Often arrogance is one of the mechanisms used (usually unintentionally) to cover up low self-esteem (a weak sense of malchus).

The question, however, begs: What could bring someone to compromise their own sense of self-worth? Who in their right mind would allow their inner dignity to be violated? Human nature is such that we would anything to not allow ourselves to be humiliated, let alone to allow our entire dignity to be undermined.

The answer is obvious from the question: At the outset no one ever damages their own malchus/dignity. Any such damage is always initiated by someone outside ourselves: A parent, an educator, an adult – anyone that we may have trusted can hurt us, especially in our most vulnerable and impressionable childhood years.

Not long ago, I conversed with a psychologist who specializes in youth at risk, focusing primarily on kids in the religious Jewish community. I asked him for his experienced opinion on why some young adults break away from the lifestyle and traditions of their own families and communities. None of us are immune to temptations and challenges. In most cases people learn to cope with their vices – some carry them undercover, other carry on dual lives or worse – without a need to break away ostensibly from the larger community. Why then do others make an actual public and pronounced break – they cease to be openly observant or some other manifest

expression of changing their lifestyles? Are they simply more honest? Do they have greater temptations than the norm? Is it due to their upbringing? Is it genetic? Do they lack certain coping skills, and if so, why? Or is it perhaps the other way around: They are smarter and actually deny faith due to their philosophical skepticism?

His answer startled me. "First I considered all the factors you mention – honesty, intelligence, family – but I came to realize that they cannot account for most cases and don't reflect any patterns that point to one cause or another. There are children from excellent families as well as broken ones that remain within the community. The same is with both skeptics and conformists, and the other identifiable categories.

"People are natural social creatures. They gravitate to groups and communities, and in most instances loath total isolation. They crave peer approval. Even non-conformists (which is a minority in any group) need social interaction. Most people, even radical individualists, will usually maintain their social identity, identifying with the communities of their upbringing. In most cases, only a radical jolt to the psyche will cause someone to explicitly break away from their peer group.

"In my experience I am slowly coming to the conclusion that in many of these cases the radical jolt began with some form of sexual molestation, in which the child's inner dignity was violated. When someone is hurt on that level it defiles the innermost, intimate dimensions of the psyche; it drives the child into silence (out of shame and fear he will not speak about the abuse with parents or teachers), a silence and loneliness that eats away, like a cancer, at the child's inner dignity.

"In many such instances a child has enough resilience to absorb the blow and come out intact. But in sustained abuse, or if it is a particularly sensitive child, or other unique factors, the violation – and the related shame, silence and loneliness – will jolt the child into another orbit, making him susceptible to further radical changes.

Then, when you add pot or other drugs into the equation – which a young adult may take recreationally; or due to escapism; to relieve the inner anxiety and shame; out of mediocrity and boredom and the search for a high – these drugs diminish natural inhibitions and thus can actually alter human personality, including the need to remain within ones family and community structure.

"So, combine all the above, coupled with hormones and other natural factors – the volatile combination, ignited by the jolting catalyst, can actually cause someone to make the radical jump and abandon their past.

"I know that this is a radical theory, which may be impossible to substantiate, due to the fact that most victims do not acknowledge or may be unaware of the effects of their own experiences."

"So, what do you suggest?" I asked the psychologist. "Zero tolerance of any form of abuse in our schools, homes and camps. Absolute and unequivocal

action must be taken to not allow any such behavior, and to immediately take action if any such report is made, and not push it under the rug due to 'inconvenience' and scandal."

Whether you agree or disagree with this psychologist's ideas, it definitely provides food for thought. Obviously, great care has to be taken not to stereotype anyone and try to over generalize and develop formulas without regarding the complexities of life. Not everything can and needs to be explained. Yet, due to the serious crisis – and so many beautiful souls adrift – we are behooved to look into these issues and see what preventive medicine can be employed in our homes and schools, and what interventions need to be immediately deployed once there is a violation.

I know that this is a heavy – and terribly sad – topic. But when else to speak about it then in the Nine Days...

The lesson of these days teaches us the terrible consequences of malchus/dignity violated. But awareness of the problem is half its cure: It also instructs us how to repair the rupture: Just as dignity (malchus) on earth was destroyed on Tisha B'Av, we have the power of the full moon on the Fifteenth of Menachem Av to restore dignity, and with even greater intensity than the original.

For the sake of our children and their future we need to address these issues head-on, and come up with both preemptive actions as well as appropriate methods to rebuild dignity once it was compromised.

Parents and educators must know that we carry great responsibility and power – with life and death consequences – in cultivating and nurturing the dignity and souls of our children. And this begins not when the child is twenty, ten, or even two years old. It begins at the moment of birth, and even at the moment of conception.

We live in a profoundly insecure world; malchus/dignity is the most lacking dimension. Even if we may have plenty of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, love, discipline, compassion, endurance, humility and bonding (the first nine sefirot) – they are only nine, as in the Ninth of Av; without the tenth – and most important – dimension, we are missing the foundation of all life: inner security, self-worth and dignity that makes all the other nine worth their weight and imbues us with the confidence to use our nine faculties with conviction and sense of urgency and destiny.

Now the challenge is: How do I convey this to my friend Michael and to so many others?

I am open to any ideas.

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08.15.08 **Vaetchanan: Comfort My People**

Dignity Revisited

After last week's heart wrenching article, one of my friends writes: "OMG - what an absolutely depressing essay..... Wednesday night you were in such a good mood - what happened?"

Seeing a soul taken captive by drugs is sad indeed, as is witnessing a life wrecked by sexual abuse. But it's not more depressing than Tisha B'Av, the saddest day of the year, when the Holy Temples were destroyed and all human dignity was violated, changing the course of history...

I was quite overwhelmed by the outpour of responses to last weeks article, and even more so, by their tone. "Your essay brought many tears to my eyes, especially as someone close to me had their malchus destroyed..." "You depicted the story of my life..." "So relieving that someone is addressing these unspoken issues..." "This is so powerful for me that I for one am going to investigate the opportunities here in Boston for adult education in this arena..."

Most impressive of all was the profound empathy that so many of you, from very diverse perspectives, expressed about my "war-torn" friend Michael and his wasted life. Clearly, Michael's story is far too prevalent - and effects far too many of us.

Due to the high volume of responses and my time limitations I will be unable to personally acknowledge every one of your letters. I would therefore like to use this opportunity to thank everyone for their heartfelt comments and especially for the different suggestions how to reach my childhood friend.

Many tears indeed can be shed for our children whose lives are prematurely "hijacked" by the demons of abuse and drugs; bright futures suddenly aborted; robbed of their possibilities; injured psyches. It's one thing when an elder person, who has endured losses and pain, gets jaded. But when children - innocent young men and women - fall hostage to despair, there are few sadder sights.

Its' not supposed to work that way. As life wear on there will be plenty of anguish and loss. But our children? Let them have their hopes and dreams. Let them be driven with enthusiasm and passion to change the world.

Medicine today has vanquished many of the plagues of old. But today we are living through a new plague: Our youth falling prey to predators and substances that take over their lives.

To ignore or deny this sad reality is in many ways worse than the crime itself. As survivors will tell you: "The silence was worse than the rape."

We thus have the Nine Days, culminating with Tisha b'Av to acknowledge and honor the assault and devastation wreaked on our human dignity (malchus). As uncomfortable as it addressing this may be, not addressing it is worse.

Accordingly, last week's Haftorah doesn't mince words as it describes in no uncertain terms the damage humans can inflict on themselves and their children. The "vision of Isaiah" is brutal: "Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth, for G-d has spoken: I nurtured and brought up children, but they rebelled against Me."

"The ox knows his owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know; My people do not understand. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly... they are utterly estranged... The entire head is sick, and the entire heart faint. From head to foot there is nothing sound in it, only wounds, bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been pressed out, or bound up, or softened with oil.

"Your country is desolate; your cities burned with fire. Strangers plunder your land in your very presence; it is desolate, as if overthrown by floods. And Zion's daughter is left like a hut in a vineyard, like a shack in a cucumber field, like a besieged city."

Even the "committed" worshippers of G-d are mechanical and repulsive, masking the corruption within: "Stop bringing meaningless offerings; they are offerings of abomination to Me. New Moon, Sabbath, and the Festivals - I cannot bear iniquity along with solemn assembly. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you. Yes, even though you multiply your prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your doings from before My eyes; stop doing evil. Learn to do good: seek justice, relieve the oppressed, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

"How the faithful city has become a prostitute! She was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves. Every one loves bribes, and chases after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor do they take on the widow's cause."

Apply these words to our times and if you have a description of a society that is allowing its children to fall prey to the forces of corruption. Jerusalem - the "faithful city" - is a symbol of each one of us, it is the "malchus" (*Kiryat melech rav*) within the psyche; and its being ravaged represents the violation of our individual dignity. Each verse dissected depicts different psychological symptoms of abuse, to help us diagnose the problem (so that we can then apply the appropriate interventions).

But, thankfully, the story does not end here. After Tisha B'av, the Hebrew calendar moves forward like a spinning wheel, and in its powerful way, teaches us to align our lives to the cycle of healing from our previous wounds.

This Shabbos, following Tisha b'Av, is called Shabbas Nachamu, when we are comforted: "Comfort, comfort my people" – begins the Haftorah. Now we arrive at the point where we can repair and transform our fractured psyches.

And just as each verse in last week's Haftorah (*Chazon*) helps us diagnose the problem, the verses in this week's Haftorah reveal the methods to heal. And therein surely lies the answer to Michael and to the other "Michael's" we know.

"Comfort my people, comfort them." When you see someone hurting be gentle, be sensitive – extend kindness. This is not a time for judgment or even analysis. Just be there for your friend.

"Speak to the heart of Jerusalem:" Not to the mind, but to the heart, the pure heart within the person in pain. Words from the heart enter the heart. Words from the mind enter one ear and exit out the other. In time of emotional anguish only speaking from and to the heart can work.

"Proclaim to her that her warfare is over:" Tell her soul that she no longer has to fight. Is she just wishes it, she can begin to let her guard down.

"Her iniquity is pardoned:" You are forgiven. Stop blaming yourself. One of the tragic symptoms of childhood hurt and abuse is the tendency to blame yourself. Children of divorced parents, of feuding adults, blame themselves for the problems. Some say that this is because a child cannot tolerate the possibility that his/her parents – who are everything to the child – can be at fault. Left with no one else to blame, the child erroneously sees himself as the culprit. And this self-loathing and sense of inadequacy further erodes the child's confidence. "You are pardoned" – we must tell the person. It's not your fault. Don't allow yourself to be invalidated. You have all the strength necessary to pick up the pieces and rebuild your life.

"For she has received from G-d's hands double for all her sins:" For every fall, we receive double amount of strength to overcome the challenge.

"Listen, a voice calls in the wilderness: Prepare the way for G-d. Make straight in the desert a path for G-d:" Even in the throes of despair, lost deep in the wilderness, we all have a voice that call out from time to time, and perhaps more often than that if you allow it to speak and allow yourself to listen. In our darkest moments we can pave a way toward redemption. Because embedded within the shadows lays enormous potency.

"Every valley will be lifted up, and every mountain and hill made low; the crooked will become level and rough places a plain:" Life is a cycle. Like a spinning wheel, even the dips in life are only a step away from the wheel's ascent. And vice versa.

"And G-d's glory will be revealed and all flesh will see it together; for G-d's mouth has spoken:" Even – or perhaps only – our flesh, our hedonistic experiences of pleasure, even the most depraved, can lead us to seeing the deepest dimensions of the Divine Essence. As Chassidic teachings explain: The material, created "yesh" (the ego of the flesh) originates in the true

"yesh" (the Essence of the Divine). One who has self-indulged and been consumed by addiction and other material obsessions, can channel and transform these passions into powerful forces of good.

"Listen! One says: 'Shout!' And he says: 'What shall I shout?' 'Shout that mankind is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field; The grass withers, the flower fades beneath G-d's breath; surely the people are like grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but G-d's word will stand forever.'" Shout – yes, shout. Yell out from your very guts that not just hurt souls but all of us wither and fade. Only by connecting to the Higher Reality do we mortals gain access to the immortal.

"Like a shepherd He will feed his flock. He will gather the lambs in His arms, carry them in His bosom, gently leading those with young:" When you are vulnerable and allow yourself to be lifted, your Divine soul will carry you through the darkest times. The one set of footprints in the sand are those of G-d carrying you when you had no strength of your own to survive.

"Do you not know? Do you not hear? Have you not been told from the beginning? Haven't you understood from the foundations of the earth?" – People living in their comfort zones can often not see the inner truths. They are trapped on the surface level of existence. When you have nothing, you have nothing to lose and only to gain. Suffering and upheaval reveals cracks in the veneer, allowing us a peek inside, into the foundations of existence. When all is dark – a new light can shine through. But we need to avoid being trapped in our despair. We need to attune our perception and cup our ears – and listen to the voice that goes back to the beginning of it all.

"Lift up your eyes on High, and see. Who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name through the greatness of His might, and the force of His power:" Those surrounded by material success, who see the functioning world around them, can be seduced and blinded by their own vision; they see nothing but themselves and their self-interests. When everything around you is shrouded and you have nowhere to turn, except to your own self-destructive patterns, you have the unique opportunity – not being deluded by the follies of existence – to lift up your eyes on High and see the force that has put all in place.

And the Haftorah concludes:

"Not one is missing:" Your very survival, despite all that you have endured, is a testimony that someone is watching over you. Your only enemy is your own self-perception: If you feel you are lost, you will remain lost. If you feel that you are missing; not just to others, but to yourself: that you don't recognize yourself – your own self-defeating attitude will not allow you to be found.

"Not one is missing:" If nothing else, just do not give up on yourself.

Life is tough. For some tougher than for others. Many battles have been waged; many scars endured. And there are more battles to come.

But today, rest your head on my shoulder.

Be comforted all you/us tortured souls. Be comforted.

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08.22.08 **Eikev: Protect Our Children**

The overwhelming correspondence I received in response to my last two articles (The Destruction and Restoration of Dignity, Comfort My People) reflected the most compelling questions of our times:

"What can we do to protect our children from different forms of abuse?"

"And what do we do once our children have been hurt? How can we help them heal from their wounds?"

These are not questions confined to parents. All of us adults were once children. We are and always will be, as they say, our parents' sons and daughters. And we all know in our hearts the impressions, memories and traumas that have shaped our psyches from the youngest age and affect us and our attitudes in every aspect of our lives. Who can estimate how many our problems stem from our childhood experiences? We all then have the same question: Can we heal from our wounds?

Though these are enduring questions all year round, the current period of the year – the second of the "seven weeks of comfort," following the "three weeks of affliction" – carries special power to help us heal from our wounds.

During the "three weeks" we read the Haftorah's that describe the destruction. Then we move into the "seven weeks" whose Haftorah's guide us in the process of rebuilding.

Accordingly, this column has focused, in the past two weeks, on some of the wounds that plague our generation, particularly due to drug and sexual abuse, and how we can begin to gain some measure of comfort and healing.

* * *

When you read these Haftorah readings one outstanding emphasis that jumps out at you is the abandonment and pain of our children.

Take this week's reading: It is essentially the story of children abandoned by their parents. But in their absence the children grow in most surprising and expansive ways.

The prophet begins with the sad words: *But Zion said: "G-d has forsaken me; my G-d has forgotten me"* (Isaiah 49:14).

The cry of every abused child, of every broken heart – how can you leave me here alone, vulnerable to the monsters attacking me?!

At first the hurt child hopes and expects that his parent will come to his rescue. But after a while, the child sadly gives up, and blames herself. After years of waiting for salvation, the child tragically believes that she has been

utterly abandoned, with no indication of hope and salvation. After sustained abuse, protracted feelings of loneliness the child feels that he has been forsaken, abandoned and utterly rejected: *G-d has forsaken me; my G-d has forgotten me.*

To this, G-d responds and informs the child that he is gravely mistaken: *Can a woman ever forget her nursing child; cease to have compassion on the son of her womb?! Yes, they may forget; yet I will not forget you!*

Perhaps the most troubling mystery of life: How is it possible that a mother or father can forget their own child? How can they possibly become so consumed with their own needs (or perceived needs) to the extent that they can neglect the fruit of their womb? Yet, we see it all the time. No animal in the universe is capable of such utter narcissism. How can humans stoop to such cruelty?!...

Yet they do. And when they do, lives are left shattered in their wake. Forever changed. And we children are left to pick up the broken pieces.

But G-d says: *Yes, they may forget; yet I will not forget you.* Even when forgotten by those that should be protecting us, G-d does not forget.

Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me.

G-d tells His children that, in reality, you remain My constant focus every single moment. Moreover, your boundaries (walls) remain continually intact – even when they may have been breached by one form of abuse or another.

Your children hurry; your destroyers and those who laid you waste will depart from you.

This has a two-edged meaning: Abuse causes children to run for cover, to escape and hide. People who have been deeply hurt find it difficult to be at peace, to trust and commit. *Your children hurry.* In their insecurity they are always on the move; always leave a back door open; always ready to flee from danger.

Your destroyers and those who laid you waste will emerge from you. One of the most damning declarations of all: The greatest devastation is perpetrated by the people closest to us – from within our midst.

On the other, healing, side of the coin this verse also means that wounded children learn to hurry and never be complacent. Their suffering has taught them, in the hardest possible way, that we should never take our gifts for granted. *Your children hurry* – their lives have a sense of urgency.

Your destroyers and those who laid you waste will depart from you. You are promised that your abusers will leave you and cannot control your destiny. But it will take your hard effort to ensure that the “destroyers” do not hold your psyche hostage.

Lift up your eyes round about, and see: They all gather together to come to you. As I live, says G-d, you will surely adorn yourself with them like an ornament, and bind yourself with them like a bride. Then your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land will be too narrow for the inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children that were born in exile will again say in your ears: 'The place is too narrow for us; make room for us to dwell in.'

Therein lays the ultimate transformative power of healing. In the bigger cosmic picture it is unacceptable to simply "get out of the line of fire" of those who have tried to destroy us; true healing is about transforming our liabilities into strengths; to become stronger in the broken places.

In the mysterious cycle of suffering and growth – without justifying any form of pain – the fact is that the profound refinement, the nobility, aplomb and unfathomable strength that can come out of sorrow and loss is of a completely higher quality – incomparable to any virtue that comes without anguish. Whether we understand it or not, the most powerful light comes of our darkness, the mightiest energy is generated through resistance.

Your greatest enemy is, of course, yourself. Which is the ultimate meaning in the verse: *Your destroyers and those who laid you waste will emerge from you.* Even when we have been victimized by another, even if the crime was perpetrated when we were vulnerable and innocent, with no power to resist, we all have built-in Divine immune/healing systems to overcome any challenge. Ultimately we will have the choice whether we will remain victims and be haunted by our pasts, or we will access deeper resources and break our shackles.

The Haftorah teaches us that the secret to achieving true freedom from our pasts is by lifting our eyes to a loftier place: *Lift up your eyes round about, and see: They all gather together to come to you.*

Through hard work and determination you can discover how your pain can propel you to expand your horizons. Your sorrow can access enormous reservoirs of strength and creativity, *adorning you like an ornament.* Your hurried sense of urgency – spawned by *your waste and your desolate places* – will not allow you to conform to the status quo. If you allow it, your restlessness will make you feel that this *place is too narrow*, allowing you to dream, aspire and give birth to unprecedented creative heights, broaden our boundaries to expand far beyond the narrow straits of conventional life, *making room for us to dwell in.*

And appreciate the healing you have achieved:

Then you will say in your heart: 'Who has given me these? I had lost my children, and was childless, exiled, and wandering to and fro. Who has brought these up? Behold, I was left alone; from where have these come?'

This is what G-d says: Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations, and raise My standard to the peoples, and they will bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters will be carried on their shoulders. Kings will be your foster

fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down to you with their faces to the ground, and lick the dust of your feet; and you will know that I am G-d. For those who wait for Me will not be ashamed. Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of the victors be delivered?

But this is what God says: Even the captives of the mighty will be free, and the prey of the tyrant rescued; for I will save your children.

When mortals hurt mortals, the only path to salvation is to reach to the immortal.

* * *

As powerful as this message may be; with all the hope and confidence we gain from knowing that G-d protects abandoned children – the big question looms: What does this teach us about our responsibilities to our children.

Yes, it's nice to hear that G-d protects us even when our loved ones do not. But what do we learn from this?

Some may even tragically use this Haftorah as a way to minimize the effect of abuse and cop-out from our own responsibilities, by just relying on G-d to protect our children.

However, with a little thought and sensitivity, it is clear that this Haftorah provides us with many vital lessons. Above all, we are instructed to follow G-d's ways, "just as He is compassionate so too shall you be compassionate." This week's Haftorah reading teaches us the grave responsibility we, parents and adults, carry to emulate G-d's ways.

We must ensure that no child should ever cry out: *G-d has forsaken me; my G-d has forgotten me.*

We must live up to our mandate: *Can a woman ever forget her nursing child; cease to have compassion on the son of her womb?!*

Just as G-d does not forget the child, we too must never allow a situation in which G-d says: *They may forget; yet I will not forget you...*

David Caar – the junkie-turned-acclaimed-NY-Times-journalist – confesses his own greatest sin in his new scathing book, *The Night of the Gun*. In one of the rawest self-condemnations I have ever read, Caar writes about a heart-sickening trip he took to a dope house with his baby twins, who he left in a cold car as he went in to get his fix.

I certainly couldn't bring the twins in. Even in the gang I ran with, coming through the doors of the dope house swinging two occupied baby buckets was not done. Sitting there in the gloom of the front seat, the car making settling noises against the chill, I decided that my teeny twin girls would be safe, that God would look after them while I did not.

I got out, locked the door and walked away. Inside, a transformation — almost a kidnapping — got under way. The guilty father was replaced by a junkie, no different from the others sitting there. Time passed, one thing begot another and eventually I was thrown clear.

Leaving, I remember that. Out the metal door and then out the front door with its three bolts onto the porch and the hollow sound of my boots on the wood floor. A pause. How long had it been, really? Hours, not minutes. I walked toward the darkened car with drugs in my pocket and a cold dread in all corners of my being.

I cracked the front door, reached around, unlocked the back and leaned in.

I could see their breath.

God had looked after the twins, and by proxy me, but I realized at that moment that I was in the midst of a transgression He could not easily forgive. I made a decision never to be that man again.

As we read this week's Haftorah, we are reminded about our greatest responsibility in all of life:

Protect your children.

Comfort you children.

What better way to honor these seven weeks of comfort than by bringing to the fore the question that we must all ask of ourselves and each other: Are we doing our best in bringing comfort to our sons and daughters? What more can we do?

Time has come that we once and for all declare: We will do everything in our power to not abandon our children. To protect them with our very last ounce of energy – to ensure that they can enter their adult lives unscathed by the wounds of abuse.

G-d can and surely protects innocent children. But G-d wants to work through us – His agents, created in the Divine Image, emulating His compassionate ways.

I have personally witnessed – as I am sure many of you have – the never-ending agony of wounded children turned adults. It is unbearable to watch. The thousands of hours wasted on fighting fears, insecurities – the haunting voices – and the loneliness. Oh, the loneliness. The child's utter isolation every time his or her parent neglected him.

Do we need to wait for G-d to intervene and protect our children?

Some basic suggestions:

- Each day take some extra time to spend with your child.

- Don't ignore your children or take them for granted. Every morning make sure your child recognizes that you are aware of him or her.
- Even if you don't have your own children, we can each apply the same attitude to a nephew or niece or a child of a friend.
- Find a child with special needs, an orphan or anyone that can use some extra attention, and volunteer your services.
- Don't wait for trouble. Always be sensitive and look out for any signs of a child's discomfort, and address them
- Maybe we can create a blog, Protect Our Children, which offers more suggestions and provides a forum for further discussion, addressing dilemmas and exchanging ideas.
- Turn this into a priority, excepting the most from ourselves and our friends.

For G-d has comforted Zion. He has comforted all her waste places, and has made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like G-d's garden. Joy and gladness will be found there, thanksgiving, and the voice of song.

The voice of song.

Our children are our most precious commodity. Our voice of song.

Parents, educators, anyone who cares – wake up! Our children are at stake. Our future is at stake. Is that not more important than our own petty comfort zones?

Next week: Child Abuse – What Can we Do to Prevent it?

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08.29.08 **Re'eh: Child Abuse**

What Can We Do to Prevent it?

Afflicted one, storm-ravaged and disconsolate; behold, I will set your stones in fair colors, and lay the foundations with sapphires. I will make your windows of rubies, your gates of carbuncles, and all your boundaries of precious gems. And all your children will be taught about G-d; great will be the peace of your children. – This week's Haftorah reading (Isaiah 54:11-55:5)

Dear Rabbi Jacobson,

I am one of the victims of sustained sexual abuse you so sensitively wrote about in your powerful and profound article *The Destruction and Restoration of Dignity*. My life has been rendered into one battle after another in my desperate search for love, and above all – self-love. The single most damaging effect of abuse is, as you accurately describe, the assault on dignity and violation of self-worth. Feeling like "damaged goods."

Your article deeply moved me and made me feel free. I will read it many times over. To have someone of your stature speaking about these issues is extremely encouraging. It may be an opening – as it was for me – to help wounded spirits breath again.

Now, my greatest concern is my own children. How, as you ask, can I protect them? Having experienced first-hand the damage of abuse, I work very hard, to cultivate and nurture my children's self-esteem, through sustained efforts to reinforce and validate their beings and their *malchus* (as you put it), with unconditional love.

But how can we protect our children from the predators outside our homes? I shudder whenever I think – which is quite often – about of the potential dangers that lurk out there.

No words can describe my appreciation to you for bringing to the surface these issues, which is in itself part of the process of healing, like fresh air on deeply ingrained infections. Now let us continue the dialogue by addressing what can and must be done to protect our children.

Blessings to you,

(signed)

One of the most resonating and powerful statements you made in your last article is that "only a radical jolt to the psyche will cause someone to explicitly break away from their peer group." You cited a psychologist who stated: "In my experience I am slowly coming to the conclusion that in many of these cases the radical jolt began with some form of sexual

molestation, in which the child's inner dignity was violated. When someone is hurt on that level it defiles the innermost, intimate dimensions of the psyche; it drives the child into silence (out of shame and fear he will not speak about the abuse with parents or teachers), a silence and loneliness that eats away, like a cancer, at the child's inner dignity."

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So what can be done to prevent such jarring experiences that can so alter our children's lives? Can we do anything to create safer environments for our sons and daughters? Or are we resigned, as some of my friends contend, that nothing can be done, and basically minimize or ignore the issues (the thing called "denial") to make the horror a bit more tolerable.

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One of my colleagues put it this way: Sending our kids to school and camp is like sending them into a minefield. All we can do is close our eyes and pray that they will come out intact.

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Do you agree with that, Rabbi?

(signed)

No, I unequivocally disagree with that last statement. We are not victims and we are never helpless. Is life a challenge? Absolutely. Are there predators in our midst? Undeniably. But we are not powerless. A fundamental principle in Torah is that there is no challenge that we cannot overcome. We never face adversary, are never asked to do something that is beyond our capacity.

Our true challenge is not to retreat in fear or convince ourselves that this is "somebody else's" problem and could "never happen to me and my family." We must put our heads and hearts together and once and for all take on this man-made plague. As those involved in healing say: Anything that can be broken can be fixed (does anyone know the source?).

The axiom that we can do something about abuse (and about all life's predicaments) is based on the fundamental principle that a good G-d created this universe and imbued in existence is inherent beauty. That no matter what wounds we sustain, our souls always remain intact. The Divine spirit in each in of us can go under cover – concealed by many, many layers – due to abuse; but it nevertheless always remains alive within. As we read in this week's Haftorah (the third of the seven weeks of comfort): *Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, that your soul will live.*

If, for example, you believe that "survival of the fittest" is the driving engine of life, then the logical conclusion is that life is not fair and often predators will prevail and their victims will forever remain damaged. The inevitable consequence of this depressing attitude is, as the Haftorah begins, that the *afflicted one, storm-ravaged does not feel comforted.*

But when you know that beneath and within all the narcissism of material existence lay profound beauty and sublime energy – that a gentle child remains hidden under the hard crust of your adult armor – then nothing, absolutely nothing (except your won self-doubt), can vanquish your spirit.

Take away this principle and you may as well give up. Our challenge is to hold on to this faith and trust even in the darkest moments.

So, in the process of joining together to address the challenge of abuse in our communities, I have been asking this very question to many people: What would you suggest we do to protect our children from abuse?

Though hardly scientific, the grass-roots consensus of the people I spoke to (so far) focused primarily on the effort we must exert on educating our children, from a young age, to protect themselves from anyone who may touch them inappropriately. Explain to them no one has a right to violate their privacy, and that they should report any such violation.

"At what age," I asked, "should we begin to speak to our children?" Some said as early as they can understand.

Without taking away from the merits of this strategy, we have to examine whether speaking to children is actually effective. Does it help to warn children? I can tell you from personal experience that when I was warned to watch out from predators it actually terrified me. Whenever I saw adults hanging around in certain corners, I would suspiciously look at them like criminals. Monsters lurking everywhere. Remember, children hear things differently than adults. They inherently trust, and when they are warned about threatening elements, they can take it to extremes, like the goblins in a fairy tale.

But even more important is the fact that most abuse does not happen at the hands of strangers sitting in cars at street corners near schools, offering candies or toys to unsuspecting children. Though such pedophiles exist, and children can be taught to avoid such situations, most abuse happens in far more "innocent" ways, usually at the hands of a older friend or relative, someone close to the child, someone the child would never suspect, and someone the child would find difficult to resist. Then, once violated, the child would in most cases not tell anyone, even when pre-warned.

Above all, this approach to speak to our children (which, again, I am not opposed to) is still addressing only symptoms, instead of roots. It speaks to the potential victims, instead of to the perpetrators and the causes for abuse.

What struck me about this attitude – reflected in most of the suggestions people were offering – was that they were all focusing on the receiving end of abuse. As if to suggest, however subtly, that it is the victim's fault. Had the child protected himself, had she protested, had he reported the abuse, things would have been fine. This approach further feeds into the victimization mentality.

It also suggests, however subtly, that predators are a given, and we can do nothing about them. All we can do is create strong defenses. This too essentially further reinforces a defensive mode to life. Is that a way to live? In constant fear and suspicion of predators, focusing on protective measures to shield ourselves and our children?

I would like to propose another, perhaps radical, not so subtle, suggestion:

Focus on the predators, not on the victims. Beyond the more "documented" cases of abusers, most (undocumented) abuse is perpetrated by friends who are "having fun" and are not necessarily clinical pedophiles. They are experimenting and have no clue how much damage they are doing in their pursuit.

We need to initiate a massive campaign of informing kids that touching and in any way violating the private space of another is not a "game." It has devastating consequences.

Sexuality is the most intimate and most vulnerable place in the human psyche. When violated it is not like a brawl with a bully, which leaves temporary bruises, but one that remains etched in the psyche and memory, leaving permanent wounds, many which haunt us for the rest of our lives.

Though we must do everything possible to deal with the symptoms of abuse (no different than band-aids and aspirins) with short-term solutions or whatever may possibly work, the biggest challenge is to address the root of the issue: Abuse is only possible because there is a climate, an environment, a breeding ground as it were, that allows abuse to fester and thrive. That breeding ground is the utter ignorance and lack of appreciation of the fundamental sanctity of sexuality. Society as a whole has allowed (or even encouraged) sexuality to be divorced of its intimate mystique; it has been turned into commodity instead of mystery; casual instead of permanent; mechanics instead of relationship; a verb instead of a noun.

The Torah calls sexuality "knowledge" – "Adam knew Eve." Knowledge is an intimate bond, not a "quick fix." Knowledge takes years to develop, to nurture, to cultivate. *The dignity of the princess is within, more than the golden clothing which she wears* (Psalms, 45:14). It is an internal experience, one that works from the inside out, not from the outside in.

Accordingly, we must come out with a massive educational campaign, treated subtly and sensitively, to re-indoctrinate all of us – including our children – in the meaning of intimacy. And how violating someone's intimate space has far-reaching implications.

To address and prevent a state of abuse – *Afflicted one, storm-ravaged and disconsolate* – the verse continues: *And all your children will be taught about G-d; great will be the peace of your children*. By teaching our children about the sanctity of life and intimacy, great will be their peace and comfort they will find amidst the storms surrounding us.

Sexuality, by its very nature, is provoked and fueled by discussion. Therefore, great care must be taken that it should be addressed with the appropriate modesty and subtlety. There are some who address the issue of intimacy in non-intimate ways, like speaking about modesty in an immodest fashion; they say the right things in the wrong way. The sanctity and privacy of our most vulnerable place must be taught by sensitive professionals who will avoid any provocative expressions or associations. It should be discussed

privately with a student, or at most with two or three students, and it should be discussed separately with boys and girls, to keep the boundaries clear. (For more on this, please see the chapter on Intimacy in Toward A Meaningful Life, and also here)

I have no doubt that if kids knew what they were tampering with, and sexual sensitivity would become a social standard (yeh, I know that it's not happening overnight), even if it would not solve all our problems, it would have visible impact.

In addition: Awareness of the power of sexuality and the damage of abuse should lead to instituting a policy of zero tolerance of predators. As a deterrent they should know that they will be ostracized. Every school and institution where children congregate can appoint a professional to look for signs of abuse. Any detection, any suspicion, should be pursued (obviously, with great care not to accuse innocent people, and with the knowledge that accusation can sometimes be made out of acrimony). Anyone violated would be encouraged to speak up, and when enough reports come in – approach the predator and threaten him. Fear of this nature can have powerful impact.

As we move through the seven weeks of comfort, which coincides with the beginning of the new school year, this is a perfect time to set new standards and declare for all, and especially our children, to hear and see that we will do whatever it takes to protect them, so that *no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper*.

[This article focused on sexual abuse, though there are other destructive forms of abuse that violate human dignity, which deserve to be addressed]. Please send me your thoughts and suggestions how to help protect our children. It would be a great service to create a public forum and dialogue to bring this matter to the fore, where we can learn from each other and benefit from our collective wisdom.

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09.05.08 **Shoftim: Exposing Abuse**

Dear Rabbi,

As chief-editor of a news website I commend you for courageously addressing one of the worst curses plaguing our community: child abuse.

I receive many submissions exposing child molesters and various forms of abuse in our communities. I would like you to discuss the issue of publicizing this information. On one hand, many argue that we are prohibited from "*loshon hora*," speaking ill of others, even if it may be true. On the other hand how can any responsible person ignore the issue that has such devastating effects and just "push it under the rug"?

Please reply. Your response will not only be appreciated, but will guide us in setting policy what to post and what not to post on our public site.

I believe that you have the power to spearhead a major campaign, headed by real Rabbis and activists, to address this issue for the benefit of the larger community. The gravity of abuse and its terrible consequences requires that we do nothing less than wake up, shake up and turn the community upside down.

I am willing to dedicate to this discussion as much space as necessary on our site. Please let's push and help our *kinderlech* (children)...

Thank you,

(signed)

Thank you for your supporting words and confidence. I am not really sure whether I can live up to your expectations to spearhead any major effort, but I can try adding my small contribution to this vital topic.

The only reason I have for the last few weeks been writing about abuse is precisely due to its far-reaching and devastating effects on so many lives. And not just for now, but for generations to come. Everything we build and teach our children, all our investments and dedication to good, all our moral standards, our entire education system, can be wiped out in one fell swoop when we or our children are violated.

I have been trained in the Torah way of thinking that any question we have must be framed in objective context, and weighed by various moral criteria that help us achieve some clarity. This is especially true for controversial and emotionally charged issues, due to their subjective effect on all of us – fear, anger, vengeance, shock, disbelief, and all the other complex feelings evoked by abuse.

The first of all ethical and Torah axioms must be stated at the outset: No one has a right to in any way violate in any way the body or soul of another human being. Indeed, we don't even have the right to mutilate our own bodies, because your body does not belong to you; it is "Divine property." Let alone someone else's property. No crime is worse than assaulting another's dignity – which is compared to the dignity of G-d Himself, being that every person was created in the Divine Image. Even a hanged murderer must not be defiled and his body not left to hang overnight because it reflects the Divine Image. How much more so – infinitely more so – regarding a live person and innocent child...

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Abuse, in any form or shape, physical, psychological, verbal, emotional or sexual, is above all a violent crime – a terrible crime. Abusing another (even if it's intangible) is no different than taking a weapon and beating someone to a pulp. And because of its terrible long-term effects, the crime is that much worse.

What do we do with violent criminals? We punish them. Once it has been determined that abuse was perpetrated, there should be consequences, both for the perpetrator and as a deterrent to other potential violators. The actual consequences need to be determined by local legal and Torah standards by the authorities on location. If for any reason the Torah authorities cannot deal with the situation, the only recourse is the same one employ for murderers, thieves and other criminals: legal action.

The next question is this: What are our obligations as parents, teachers, writers, website editors, or just plain adult citizens, when it comes to abuse?

On one hand we are talking about protecting innocent people from criminal predators, which clearly is a major obligation and priority concern. On the other hand, we do have laws prohibiting embarrassing people (even criminals) in public, always hopeful, allowing people to correct their ways. We have laws about avoiding gossip and speaking ill about others (*loshon hora*), and not feeding into the base instinct of "talking about others" or "mob mentality" witch-hunting expeditions.

We have several obligations when we see or know about a crime, as well as obligations to prevent further crimes:

1) A witness to a crime who does not testify "must bear his guilt" (Leviticus 5:1).

2) "Do not place a stumbling block before the blind" (Leviticus 19:14), which includes the obligation to warn someone from a danger we are aware of. If you see someone walking down the street and you know that further down the block there is an uncovered pit in the ground or a man with a gun, you are obligated to warn him.

If we are aware of a predator we must do everything possible to protect people from him.

3) "Do not stand still over your neighbor's blood (when your neighbor's life is

in danger)" (Leviticus 19:16). It's interesting to note that this commandment follows (in the same verse) "do not go around as a gossiper among your people," suggesting that gossip is an issue only when no life is in danger. But if a life is in danger then "do not stand still" even if means speaking about it in public.

4) "You must admonish your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him" (ibid 17).

If one does not admonish, then he is responsible for the other's sin (Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive 205; see Shabbat 54b. 119b). Though at the outset rebuke must be done "in private, kindly and gently," not to embarrass him publicly (Arkhin 16b; Sefer HaMitzvot, Negative 305), but if it doesn't help, the obligation is to admonish him in public (Rambam Deos 6:8. Shulchan Aruch HaRav Hilchos Onaah v'Gneivas Daas 30).

This is true even about a crime that does not affect other people. All the care taken about public shame is because the crime does not affect the public. And even then, there are situations where the admonishment must be done publicly. By contrast, in our discussion about abuse, which affects others, all these restrictions do not apply: Embarrassment of a criminal is never an excuse a reason to put anyone else in potential danger.

Based on the above, I would submit that the following criteria to determine whether to publish and publicize the name of a molester:

1) The abuse must be established without a shred of doubt. Because just as we must protect the potential victims of abuse, we also are obligated to protect the reputations of the innocent, and not wrongly accuse anyone without evidence or witnesses.

2) Publicizing the fact will serve as a deterrent or even possible deterrent of further crimes, or will warn and protect possible future victims. If that is true, than "*loshon hora*" (speaking ill about someone) does not apply. It would be the equivalent of saying that it is "*loshan hora*" to warn someone of a weapon-wielding criminal who may cause harm!

If however publicity will not serve any benefit to the public, then there would be no reason to mention an individual's name. For instance, if abuse took place years ago, and the crime has recently surfaced, unless publicizing the name could potentially protect future incidents, what point would there be to exposing the identity of the abuser? He may even have done *teshuvah* and been rehabilitated.

Even if he caused great damage to those he abused, and his victims want to get even and publicize his name, that alone may not be enough reason, unless it may help prevent future abuse. What may require further research is whether public shame in this instance is a legitimate form of punishment. This also touches upon the laws of forgiveness, which include the exception that one need not forgive if the perpetrator still needs to be humbled or if in the process the victim is being hurt.

3) Even if a name is not publicized, the issue of abuse itself must be addressed for the same reasons stated: To make the public aware of the dangers, to protect innocent children.

The argument that publicity will give the community a "bad name" and "why wash our dirty laundry in public?" does not supersede the obligation to protect the innocent from being hurt.

Anyone who suggests that abuse must be overlooked, because (as one person told me) it "happens all the time" and "by many people, including our leaders," or for any other reasons – is not different than ignoring any other crime, and is in itself a grave crime.

One could even argue, that the greatest "Kiddush Hashem" (sanctifying G-d's name) is when a Torah based community demonstrates that it doesn't just mechanically follow the laws or isn't merely concerned with reputations and shidduchim, but that it sets and demands the highest standard of accountability amongst its citizens, and invest the greatest possible measures to protect its children from predators, create trust and absolutely will not tolerate any breach or abuse. That the greatest sin of all is ignoring or minimizing crimes being perpetrated against our most innocent and vulnerable members: our children.

In conclusion: The bottom line in all matters regarding abuse is one and only one thing: Protecting the innocent. Not the reputation of an individual, not the reputation of the community, not anything but the welfare of our children. In every given case, whether to publicize or not, whether to take any other action or not, the question that must be asked is this: What is best for the potential victims? Will or can this action help prevent someone from being hurt or not? If the answer is yes or even maybe yes, then the action should be taken.

Obviously, this has to be looked at on a case-by-case basis, due to the different nuances in every given situation. And of course, there will be instances when there are exceptions due to unique circumstances. Therefore, it is vital that competent, sensitive and educated authorities be consulted when a question arises.

My writing is not meant to serve as a "psak halacha," a legal ruling. Rather, simply an attempt to frame the issues in terms that can help us discuss the issues and come away with some measure of clarity.

Legal rulings require more in-depth review and analysis by experts, preferably by more than one, to establish a consensus.

But one thing is clear: The crisis has reached a boiling point where it must be addressed and brought to the attention of the public, if nothing else, to make everyone aware of the dangers, the long-term consequences and the zero-tolerance policy that needs to be applied to every form of abuse.

Anything less would be irresponsible, immoral, and, yes, in some way complicit.

* * *

This week's Haftorah, the fourth of the seven weeks of comfort, accelerates the healing process from all forms of abuse against our children. It describes how G-d Himself – I, I (*anochi, anochi*) – comforts His people.

I, I am He who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, and the son of man, who will be made like grass. And have forgotten G-d, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; so that you are constantly afraid of the oppressor's fury as he prepares to destroy? And where is the oppressor's fury?

Despite the impeccable logic, that we should not fear mere mortals in the face of a formidable G-d, the fact remains that we do *fear* them. As Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai told his students at his deathbed: "May you fear G-d as much as you fear man."

Oh, how life would be different if we did not fear, and could not be hurt by, people of flesh and blood. If we could only transcend *the oppressor's fury*.

Yet, despite our short-sightedness, the Haftorah comforts us with the knowledge that our fears are unfounded and unnecessary. By meditating on the extreme contrast between transient oppressors and an immortal G-d, that very awareness can help lift us to a greater place, which cushions, if not immunizes us against, the harsher impact of abuse.

Ask people who have learned to heal from their wounds and virtually every one of them will tell you that a major step – indeed, the first of the twelve steps – toward healing consisted of recognizing that you, the human, are powerless. You must surrender to a Higher force, to G-d, and recognize that G-d protects us against predators. As long as you hold on to the illusion – one that holds us trapped in its iron-clad tentacles – of earthly power ("one world and many gods"), you remain a victim to your own beliefs. When you discover that there is "only one G-d but many worlds," you become free of the fear of losing one world, because there is always another that can fill its place.

I have put My words in your mouth, and covered you in the shadow of My hand, planting the heavens, laying the earth's foundation, and saying to Zion: 'You are My people.'

But this discovery does not come without a price. Often we need to hit rock bottom before we awake. To achieve this level of cognizance requires a wake up call.

Awake, awake, stand up, Jerusalem! You have drunk from G-d's hand the cup of His fury. You have drunk and drained the cup of the bowl of staggering.

Of all the sons she has borne, there is no one to guide her; nor is there any, of all the sons she brought up, who takes her by the hand. Your sons fainted; they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net. They

are full of G-d's fury, the rebuke of your Lord.

Awake, awake, put on your strength, O Zion. Shake yourself from the dust, arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the bonds around your neck, O captive daughter of Zion.

Depart, depart, go out from there, touch no unclean thing. Go out from her midst, purify yourselves, you bearers of G-d's vessels.

Your sons fainted... Captive daughter...

It is quite unnerving to read the Haftorah with child abuse in mind and see its uncanny relevance (I didn't even quote the rawer verses).

But above all is the overriding message of deep hope:

I, I am He who comforts you. I, who planted the heavens, laid the earth's foundation, say to you: 'You are My people.'

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