

SHALOM BAYIT

ENDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN JEWISH HOMES

Fall 2011 ~ Elul 5771



Support Groups

Offered in San Francisco, the East Bay, and the Peninsula, all healing groups are free and open to women who have been abused in a current or past relationship. For details call our Bay Area Toll-Free Helpline

1-866-SHALOM-7

San Francisco groups made possible by the Jewish Community Endowment Newhouse Fund.

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Shalom Bayit is a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties, a project of the Tides Center, and a proud member of the San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium.

Do not stand idly by: Jewish perspectives on BULLYING

From the Playground to the Chuppah

Naomi Tucker, Executive Director

Bullying: we've all seen it happen. Taunting, threats, verbal or physical attacks, social isolation—and in today's world, cyberbullying—are a part of nearly everyone's growing up experience. But they don't have to be.

Too often, we imagine the painful taunts of peers to be a necessary stage of childhood. Growing up is hard—but it does not have to be full of conscious intent to harm others. No one should have to be the victim of cruelty. Thankfully we can guide young people towards healthier interactions that will last a lifetime.

According to parenting expert and international bestselling author Barbara Coloroso, all of us can have a role in putting an end to bullying. Her book *The Bully, The Bullied, and The Bystander* is full of a powerful simplicity that made me want to bring it to every parent and school teacher I know. From preschool playground woes to fraternity hazing, the book's simple wisdom, tips and treasures can completely transform the way children interact – and the way we, as adults, guide them to be citizens of a world more full of peace than cruelty. *We are very fortunate to offer you a chance to hear the author in person this fall, as she joins Shalom Bayit as the keynote speaker for our annual Creating Hope luncheon.*

CONNECTION TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Bullying on the playground and relationship violence in adulthood have similar effects on a victim's sense of self worth. Both can result in isolation, depression, suicidality, and physical danger. Both destroy a person at their core.

A study published this year by the Harvard School of Public Health found that men who frequently bullied their peers as a child were nearly four times more likely to abuse their adult intimate partner. Why could this be so?

The underlying superiority belief that allows a child to bully a classmate is the same belief that allows one to abuse an intimate partner: *I am better than you* (or need to think so in order to feel good about myself). *If you don't do what I say, I will hurt you.* One such bully was the football star at Columbine High School. His victims? Two classmates who later committed

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Rabbi's Corner

Rabbi Chai Levy, Congregation Kol Shofar

Rabbi Chai Levy wrote this drash last year in response to heartbreaking stories in the news of teen suicides, and the harassment of gay & lesbian youth. Reprinted with permission.

Noach Ish Tzadik Tamim Haya B'dorotav. "Noah was a righteous man in his generation." (Genesis 6:9) He was relatively righteous compared to the corrupt and violent people who lived in his generation, but he wasn't considered all that righteous...Why? He was eager to save himself and his family from the coming flood, but he wasn't concerned with anybody else. He let the rest of the world be destroyed. He stood idly by the blood of his neighbor, as the Torah commands us in Leviticus (19:16) not to do. Noah has been described by our tradition as a "tzadik in peltz," a righteous man in a fur coat: someone who is only concerned with keeping himself warm, while others are freezing.

We've all heard about the terrible tragedies that have taken place among young people across the country - as a result of ridicule, bullying, or despair, in most cases, because the young person was thought to be gay. Tyler Clementi was a freshman at Rutgers University, a shy and talented musician who killed himself by jumping off the GW Bridge after his college roommate invaded his privacy and posted a video of him with another man on the internet. Here in California, Seth Walsh killed himself after relentless bullying and taunting by his peers. He was 13 years old. 15 year old Billy Lucas in Indiana, and 13 year old Asher Brown

—continued on p.4

Upcoming Events Details on p. 6

October 23 • Creating Hope annual benefit luncheon with acclaimed author and parenting expert **Barbara Coloroso** speaking on **bullying**. *Help us raise hope for a violence-free future!*

October 27 • Chico's shop for Shalom Bayit

November 20 • Handcrafted Jewelry Sale to benefit Shalom Bayit (private preview & open studio Nov. 19) at private home in SF; call for location.

Tickets, location & info: (510) 451-8874

From the Playground...

Continued from page 1

the gruesome 1999 Columbine massacre. After years of being tormented, the two boys tragically turned their anger and hopelessness into violent revenge. His other victim? His girlfriend. Yes, this football hero / bully was also under a restraining order for stalking his former girlfriend.

Bullying and domestic violence share these common traits:

- Belief in one's superiority over another
- Intent to harm
- Ongoing pattern of power and control
- Tactics such as intimidation, threats, control, and sometimes physical violence or sexual harassment/assault
- Silencing of the victim by fear
- Public support of the perpetrator
- Disbelief of victim's cries for help

It has been documented that Columbine teachers "looked the other way" when told of the bullying, never intervening. The school allowed their prized football star to go on tormenting his girlfriend and his classmates. They regretted their inaction only after it ended in massive tragedy. When society supports misuses of power based on social hierarchies (like class status, popularity, sports) or other structures of oppression like sexism, homophobia, or racism, we *perpetuate the violence*. Instead we need to condemn those hurtful systems and shift the mentality on the playground to one of respect.

DEREK ERETZ: DO THE RIGHT THING

Judaism is replete with teachings that encourage thoughtful, ethical, caring behavior between people – whether someone you know, or a stranger. This is the notion of *Derek Eretz* (behaving in a decent, civilized manner). Jewish values call us to continually focus our intentions back to the just path of making things right in the world. Take for instance the following texts which encourage behaviors that are the antithesis of bullying: "*You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, since you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*" (Exodus 23:9) and "*You shall not hate your brother in your heart*" (Leviticus 19:12)

The teachings of Hillel, one of the greatest Jewish sages, cement the idea that nothing is more important than respectful behavior towards others: "*What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary.*" and "*Whoever destroys a soul, it is as if he destroyed an entire*

world...Whoever saves a life, it is as if he saved an entire world."

MORE THAN STICKS N' STONES:

JUDAISM CONDEMNS VERBAL BULLYING

Did the old adage "sticks & stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me" come about as a coping strategy against bullying? While it might seem like a good line of defense, the problem is that it's not really true.

Words, names and taunts do hurt. Judaism recognizes that words can be weapons, sometimes of the worst kind. Verbal abuse is prohibited in the Talmud (Bava Metzia 58b, 59a). *Ona'at d'varim*, or oppression by means of words, is said to be worse than stealing money because it robs a person of the divinity within them.

Emotional harm is as destructive as

"Breaking the cycle of violence in our homes, schools and communities requires that we examine why & how a child becomes a bully or the target of a bully, as well as the role bystanders play in perpetuating the cycle."

Barbara Coloroso, author of The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander, will appear in San Francisco on Sunday, October 23rd at Creating Hope, a benefit luncheon for Shalom Bayit (details on p.6)

physical violence: "*To humiliate another person is tantamount to shedding blood.*" (Bava Metzia 58b-59a). Why is this so? Jewish teachings reflect a profound understanding of the connection between body and soul, and the importance of treating both with holiness. Most physical wounds heal; some are punishable by law. Verbal abuse mostly goes unnoticed and unpunished by authorities. After all, it's not technically "illegal" to tell someone they are worthless, ugly, stupid or fat every day. Yet victims of bullying, domestic violence, or child abuse will tell you that verbal attacks leave the most painful scars.

Victims of verbal abuse are often blamed for what happened to them: You "should have" just left (your school? your own home? your family?). You "should have" been different, more impervious, resilient, tough.

Judaism also prohibits gossip (*lashon hara*, or "evil tongue"). Telling tales about someone for no greater purpose other than to "gossip" is understood as both devastating to the person being

talked about, and blight upon the character of the gossiper. Let us not forget, however, that this text is juxtaposed in the very same line of Torah with the commandment to **not stand idly by** if someone is being harmed (*Lev. 19:16*). Judaism clearly delineates when to speak up and when to keep your thoughts to yourself: if it causes harm, keep it to yourself; if it prevents harm, speak out. This is the Jewish difference between tattling and telling. In her book, Barbara Coloroso frames it like this: if it gets someone *in trouble*, it's tattling (don't tell). If it gets someone *out of trouble*, it's telling (do tell).

BYSTANDERS AND JEWISH OBLIGATION

That notion leads us to important ethics on what to do if you witness bullying. According to Jewish law, if someone is being harmed we **cannot stand idly by**. We must act. Teaching this to our children is a matter of balancing safety and principle: how to act responsibly, respond ethically, and consider your safety while doing so.

In 2009 a 15 year old in Richmond, CA was gang raped for hours in front of her high school homecoming dance. Onlookers jeered, pointed, laughed, took pictures. When news spread of the rape, more students gathered to watch "and some actually participated," according to Police Lieutenant Mark Gagan. What did the two dozen onlookers NOT do? get help, call the police, do anything to stop the atrocity. How could this happen?

Barbara Coloroso teaches about different types of onlookers in a bullying scenario, ranging from those who aid the bully, to passive supporters, those who dislike it but don't intervene, and those who actually defend the victim. Jewish teachings compel one who witnesses harm to become a defender – in other words, an ally who actively stops the bullying (or calls for help) rather than allowing it to continue.

Take for example the following Torah texts: "*You shall not follow a multitude to do evil*" (Exodus 23:2). Just because the gang is doing it, doesn't mean you should. "*You shall not utter a false report*" (Exodus 23:1). Tell the truth about what happened. "*In righteousness shall you judge your kinsman.*" (Lev. 19:15) Judge people fairly: not based on stereotypes, scapegoats, or rumors; and not with intent to harm them.

TREATING EACH OTHER AS BLESSED BEINGS

A core Torah principle is the notion of *B'tzellel Elohim* – each of us is created in the image of God, so every human being contains a spark of the divine within us. Every soul is blessed and beautiful, holy

—continued on p.6

Thank you!

Donations & grants received January - June 2011

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our life-changing
work.**

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***We all can take part in
saving a life today.***

THANK YOU to the many individuals, foundations, businesses and organizations who make our programs a success. We couldn't do this without you! Any omissions are unintentional.

Rabbi's Corner

Continued from page 1

in Texas also took their own lives, unable to bear the torment of bullies.

In this parasha of Noach, we consider that being truly righteous is not just taking care of ourselves, but looking out for others, not standing by while others' blood is shed, while others are suffering. I have frequently heard kids use homophobic slurs. What message are we sending to kids when we allow bullying, or homophobic language? When we don't create safe spaces for kids who are struggling with their sexual identities, or with anything else for that matter? We too are standing idly by.

At the end of the portion, after the flood, after Noah and the animals are saved, and society starts over with a second chance, God says to humanity: "Whoever sheds the blood of a person, so shall his blood be shed. For in the image of God, did God create the human." (Gen 9:6) The Torah commentators understand this prohibition of murder also to include a prohibition not to publicly embarrass a person. As the verse says, each person is created in the image of God, and to cause a person to feel ashamed of who they are diminishes them and diminishes

the image of God. It can also lead to bloodshed, as we've tragically seen.

Suicide is among the top three killers of young people. Gay and lesbian kids are four times more likely to commit suicide. Last year, 9 out of 10 gay, lesbian, or transgender middle and high school students reported experiencing verbal and/or physical harassment.

After the flood, God also creates a covenant with the Earth, an agreement never to destroy the Earth again. The sign of the covenant is the rainbow. The rainbow is a symbol of gay pride, originating here in San Francisco in the 1970s. The rainbow suggests the beauty of the diversity of humanity: people come in all colors and stripes, and all are created in God's image. I signed a pledge on behalf of the Kol Shofar community on *Keshet* online, which means "rainbow" in Hebrew and is an organization that affirms a place of dignity and honor in the Jewish community for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. It's a pledge to not stand idly by, to commit to ending homophobic bullying and harassment, and to speak out when we witness anyone being demeaned for their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. It's a pledge to ensure

that everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

Bullying is cruel—including internet and Facebook bullying, spreading rumors, threatening someone physically or emotionally. It's wrong, it's against Judaism, and it's dangerous, even life-threatening. We grieve for those young people whose lives were cut short because of the pain and isolation they felt in their schools and communities. Those who bullied them and those who did nothing to ease their pain have to live out their lives knowing the tragedy of the suffering they inflicted or ignored.

To every young person who might be the target of bullying, I want to say: you are created in the image of God. You are sacred exactly as you are. You are worthy of love, you are not alone, you have a wonderful life ahead of you, and your life will get better. If you feel alone, afraid, or hopeless, please talk to an adult you trust.

May our reading of Noach remind us to be truly righteous by concerning ourselves with those who are suffering, treating everyone with dignity and respect, and ensuring a safe and caring place for all. And may God's rainbow covenant remind us of the beauty of God's diverse creation, all of whom deserve to live in dignity and peace. ☞



This poem was written by a member of Shalom Bayit's support group. The author writes, "I never would have found the ability and gumption to put these words to paper, had it not been for the love and support I received at Shalom Bayit."

Undertow _____

by J. G.

Barely breathing
(and to the extent to which courage permitted),
she probed the image of her man of two faces.

Friend to others, fiend to her,
She turned his essence over and over,
the light striking it one way and then another,
lending itself to the confusion of
her perceptions.

He made them cower and cry,
hiding under covers and under their skins,
shrinking from his rage and causing them
to sink beneath themselves.

Assured of his power,
they were near to being overcome
by the waves of his ire
in which they were awash.

She remembered the time
he repeatedly flooded her ears
with the word, "Bitch"
and then hid in the basement,
later telling a friend,
"I was afraid of her anger."

She introspected:
Perhaps I, who have never
bent someone to my will
or plotted to shatter a soul's spirit,
am a mossy caldera
with a meadow lake
masking the depths of my fury.

Most likely, not, however,
because as time passed,
she became fainter in the face of his loathing,
receding below the surface,
withdrawing to a dark place.

And in his continual rampages,

he thought he was grinding her to dust,
but instead, with each retreat,
he was transforming her,
bit by bit, into grit.

Ice cold she was, where flowing water
never felt the sun's warmth.
So quiet, so alone, with nothing but
thoughts of her children to sustain her.

Her goslings, her boys, her bonny lads—
for them she had to surface, find an escape,
snatch them, and flee.

She became able to slip without detection
from her underworld to the
overland of her terror,
making her plans while
swimming in and out of consciousness

On these journeys,
she gathered the shards of herself
and molded them as best she could,
hoping that as time passed,
she would find all the pieces
and, perhaps, even stronger ones.

The day arrived when
she emerged fully into the light,
sought her children,
stood between the man and them,
and led them to safety.

From that day forward,
from time to time,
they still looked over their shoulders
but back, less than rarely.

And she heard them laugh.
and knew that the undertow
had released its hold on them.

For to laugh, you must breathe well,
and they surfaced breathing as deeply
as their lungs would allow
and as freely as the first breath they ever drew.

In the Classroom: Shalom Bayit confronts bullying

Each year, over 900 teens and their adult allies take part in Shalom Bayit's *Love Shouldn't Hurt* abuse prevention workshops. In order to prevent violence in future dating and intimate relationships, we start with the basics of what makes a healthy friendship or peer relationship at school. Teaching these ideas through a Jewish lens, we include such core principles as protecting ourselves, treating ourselves and each other with respect, and the difference between a bystander and an ally. When kids take on values of respect and compassion for others as their own, they help make it "cool" to be kind. We give them specific tools to make that happen — from understanding Jewish values behind these

ideas, to identifying subtle unhealthy behaviors in others and themselves. Then we help them set personal goals for the qualities they seek in a friend, and provide information on what to do if someone is in danger. Teens leave our workshops knowing that if they see mistreatment happening — regardless of who is the victim — it's everyone's business.

Allowing bullying to go on in the hallway is no different from ignoring a person who is mistreating their girlfriend. By considering what they value, thinking ahead, and using the tools they learn in the workshops, teens can make smart choices — and help set a positive standard for a caring community.



Shalom Bayit

P.O. Box 10102
Oakland, CA 94610
www.shalom-bayit.org
www.love-shouldnt-hurt.org
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EVENTS AROUND THE BAY...Announcements & Programs

We invite parents, grandparents, educators, and all who care about building a safer future for our kids to join us in

Creating Hope

A benefit luncheon, auction & booksigning featuring
BARBARA COLOROSO
author of *The Bully, The Bullied, and The Bystander*

Sunday, October 23, 2011 ♦ 11:45 am

California Culinary Academy
350 Rhode Island Street, San Francisco



Together we can build safe futures for our kids.
Individual tickets: \$118. For tickets, sponsorship and
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From the Playground... *Continued from page 2*

and worthy. Our behavior towards one another should reflect this spark of holiness. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect, to have relationships that are safe and healthy. This is the core teaching of our teen program, *Love Shouldn't Hurt*.

RETURNING TO WHOLENESS

Can we break this cycle and create change? Absolutely. First, we can all be allies and interveners. Second, we can coach our kids to do the same — and to not become bullies or victims. Third, we can coach bullies to transform their behavior, writes Ms. Coloroso: "To repent honestly and unconditionally means to assume responsibility for the deed, admit the wrongness of what has been done, express a strong desire not to do it again, assume responsibility for the damage, and begin to mend the torn relationship." Sound familiar? Yes indeed, these are the basic steps of *t'shuvah*.

Although it's not a Jewish book, *The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander* is full of Jewish wisdom from start to finish. From her parenting strategies to unknowingly describing a *t'shuvah* process, it's a great Jewish read. But I smiled the most when the author described how raising children to prevent bullying can not only make our schools and communities safer, but "promotes genuine Peace in the Home" —or *shalom bayit* in Hebrew. Where have we heard that term before? 

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