

## **Parshat Pinchas**

**Drash for Congregation Netivot Shalom, July 30, 2016**

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Shabbat Shalom.

Thank you, Rabbi Menachem Creditor, for inviting me to give today's drash. Rabbi Creditor is a longstanding member and past Chair of Shalom Bayit's Rabbinic Advisory Council, a group of over 80 Bay Area rabbis who are committed to ending domestic violence in the Jewish community.

In this week's Parsha, Pinchas, one of the pieces that stuck out to me was when Moses is instructed on how the Land is to be divided by lottery among the tribes and families of Israel. The five daughters of Tzelafchad petition Moses that they be granted the portion of the land belonging to their father, who died without sons; G-d accepts their claim and incorporates it into the Torah's laws of inheritance.

In his book, *Torah Lights*, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin said, "The daughters of Tzelafchad argued the case for women's rights under biblical law. And because they won the first bona fide example of feminist legislation 'on the books', it certainly seems that theirs was a landmark victory for women and the feminist cause." I see this as a significant moment in our Jewish herstory. All of us have a right to speak up when we see something that needs to be changed.

The process that the daughters of Tzelafchad had to go through before they could even ask Moses to grant them ownership of the land was not an easy one. And once they approached Moses, some say he said "no" at least three times before he conceded the logic of their position. However, they did not back down. They did not give up.

People who have committed themselves to creating a just world have not had an easy road. Nor have the survivors of domestic violence who have faced many obstacles and many literal and metaphorical "no's." But we do not give up.

Each morning I wake up and think to myself, "What can I do today to speak up against injustice in this world?"

When we see an injustice in our community, it is easy to not speak up for many reasons. Fear of consequences, or backlash for speaking out, or the real possibility that we won't get the result or support we hope for.

When Shalom Bayit was founded, 24 years ago, we were met with many “no’s.” The pervasive myth that domestic violence didn’t happen in the Jewish community prevented many from being open to the work Shalom Bayit was doing. People weren’t talking about abusive relationships at all, let alone how we as a community could work to end this horrific injustice.

The fact that we don’t talk about domestic violence explains why it is so surprising for many of us to hear that in fact, 1 in 4 Jewish women will be in an abusive relationship at some point in her lifetime. 1 in 4...let’s just absorb that for a moment. That is the same rate as the general population, and it’s quite staggering, isn’t it?

So if the problem is so rampant, why don’t we talk about it? Fear, shame, embarrassment, worry about what others think...stereotypical images of how we think family is supposed to be...these things may get in the way of our revealing when there is trouble in our private lives, whether it’s as extreme as abuse or just personal difficulty. But without reaching out we can’t get support, and not having support is a lonely place indeed.

The daughters of Tzelafchad had each other for support. They stood together to speak out against an injustice they saw in the inheritance laws. Shalom Bayit is here to stand with survivors of domestic violence and help reinforce their autonomy and self-determination. We all have the ability to be that support. I want to share with you some of the ways that Shalom Bayit stands up for survivors of domestic violence and against this injustice.

I am here to tell you that both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence come from every walk of Jewish life, every congregation, every denomination, all ages, any sexual orientation, all ethnic backgrounds and all socioeconomic levels of our community.

Shalom Bayit hosts support groups attended by professional women, poor women, highly educated women, young and older women; well-known donors in the community; the secular and the observant; women with children and women without. Domestic violence does not discriminate.

When I talk about domestic violence, I am referring to a pattern of power and control in an adult or teen intimate relationship, where one partner is consistently and intentionally using their power to control the other. Intimidation, emotional abuse, ona’at devarim (oppression by means of words), sexual coercion, threats, isolation from family or friends, controlling resources or finances, and yes sometimes (but not always) physical violence—these are all tools the abusive partner may use to maintain control in the relationship, creating a cycle of fear from which it is very hard to break free.

When someone calls us for help, we offer them an ear to listen, a shoulder to cry on, a group of Jewish women with similar experiences to show them they're not alone.

We offer a place to heal from abuse in a Jewish context—using the spiritual healing tools of our tradition.

We provide tangible resources, expert crisis intervention, safety planning, counseling, advocacy for those facing divorce and custody issues, and help navigating the path ahead as they make vital and often difficult decisions about what to do next to keep their family safe.

We are there for them at every step of the way.

My primary work at Shalom Bayit is educating youth starting in middle school about healthy relationships and how to prevent abusive relationships through our prevention program, Love Shouldn't Hurt. Love Shouldn't Hurt has already reached over 1,100 Jewish youth, parents, and educators this year alone with critical abuse prevention information. My goal is to work myself out of a job so that one day Shalom Bayit no longer needs to exist.

One of my greatest passions is teaching people of all ages about healthy boundaries. I create safe spaces where people discuss what they want in relationships and what they absolutely will not tolerate. In this week's parsha we saw how the daughters of Tzelafchad saw an injustice in their relationship to others and G-d so they did something about it. They teach all of us the importance of speaking up when something is not working for us, even if it is the way things have always been.

In a way, you can think of someone crossing a boundary in a relationship as a form of injustice. It takes a lot of courage to advocate for ourselves in life and in personal relationships. The work that Love Shouldn't Hurt and Shalom Bayit does empowers people with the skills and tools they need to speak up when a personal injustice happens.

In the words of Rabbi Hillel, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?"

Thank you and Shabbat Shalom.