



## Sermon Suggestions 2023

### April 14/15---Nissan 23/24 Shemini

*Shemini* refers to “eight” as in the day, after seven days of inauguration, that Aaron and his sons begin to officiate as *kohanim*; sacred priests. The *parasha* is filled with the outline of laws, especially regarding *kashrut*. While many comment on Nadiv and Avihu, this portion also gives an opening to discuss the sacred role of the priest and in modern times, the ways a rabbi functions. This can be a *parasha* in which to discuss the ways a rabbi holds sacred the entire life experience of our people and invites the more difficult conversations around domestic violence as well. It can be a portion in which you comment on what you have learned about domestic violence in the Jewish community, the ways Shalom Bayit has engaged you, and the ways our community grows by understanding the challenges of life as well as its joys.

How do the leaders of our community understand domestic violence? What would we want our leaders to do in the face of domestic violence?



**April 21/22—Nissan 30/Iyar 1**  
**Rosh Hodesh Iyar**  
**Tazria-Metzora**

*Tazria-Metzora* is filled with issues of purity, what the biblical narrative calls clean/unclean and the ways sacrifice functions. This is also *rosh hodesh Iyar*. The portion can be used to demonstrate how, regardless of how one may agree or disagree with notions of purity, the priest must accept the sacrifice and bring the person into community.

Issues to explore can be:

- How can a woman in an abusive relationship remain in community when that community is tainted by her abuser's presence?
- What does teshuva of an abuser look like?
- How does a community make it clear that domestic violence is an issue that does happen inside our community?
- How might we inadvertently exclude someone from the community by not acknowledging their needs as an abuse survivor?
- How are we going to respond if we learn that someone in our community is abusing their partner or kids?
- How do we create a community in which someone is comfortable coming forward to talk about domestic violence?



## April 28/29—Iyar 7/8

### Acharei-Kedoshim

*Acharei-Kedoshim* is rich with possibility in conversation about domestic violence. Here are just three suggestions:

- The portion acknowledges the ways we become holy, epitomized by Hillel's comment "Love your neighbor as yourself, this is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary." The portion looks at issues of idolatry and ways we must be honest (as a *mitzvah*) in business and other interactions. How do we falsely worship the gods of purity when we refuse to acknowledge domestic violence is in our community? How do we end up in a kind of idol worship when we aggrandize the notion of a perfect Jewish home when we know some among us are in an abusive home? How is it dishonest when we insist that domestic violence is not as bad among us as in other populations? How do we become holy? How does the path to love and holiness include honesty about painful relationships?
- This portion also articulates the prohibition against *lashon ha-ra*. We can use this to make this distinction: talking about being abused by someone is not *lashon ha-ra* against them, it is an act of self-preservation. *Lashon ha-ra* is typically seen as doing harm. Telling the truth about being abused is not harming another, it is removing oneself from harm.
- You can also tie the concept of *tokecha* to domestic violence by saying that true peace comes through holding each other accountable for when we harm others.

## May 5/6—Iyar 14/15

### Emor

Emor is filled with instructions for how the *kohanim* are to conduct themselves and the communal observance of core holidays such as Sukkot. If we understand *kohanim* as leaders, how then can we discuss the role of leadership in a community? How does a leader respond when they hear about domestic violence? How do our leaders respond when they hear a fellow leader is an abuser? How does a community respond when a leader is abusing their loved ones? How are leaders holding abusers accountable for their behavior? Is it a contradiction to tell survivors that they're welcome in the community if we are also welcoming their abusers?



**May 12/13—Iyar 21/22**

**Behar-Bechukotai**

*Behar-Bechukotai* is filled with ways the biblical world sees a return to one's original community, such as the return of a slave to freedom and their community of choice. Today, how can we understand that living in domestic violence is a kind of slavery? What does freedom look like? The portion ends with the commandments to tithe. How do we use our *tzedakah* to support the efforts of eradicating domestic violence?

**May 19/20—Iyar 28/29**

**Rosh Hodesh Sivan (Sun)**

**Bamidbar**

*Bamidbar* is noted for its counting us all in a census. Today, how do we count ourselves? If one in four women experience domestic violence, if one in eight men have the experience of sexual violence, if one in three 10<sup>th</sup> graders experience dating violence, then how do we understand the development of our own resources to respond? How do we talk about this so we do not worship the idol of silence? How does our communal honesty allow us to form healthier relationships so we remain a holy people?

**May 26/27—Sivan 6/7**

**Shavuot**

In the book of Ruth, we see many themes including the safety of shelter and taking in someone who may need a new home with open arms. We also see the transformation of Naomi to Marah, reminding us of the bitterness of domestic violence and how it changes a person. When have we been the Naomis (or like Naomi's community of origin), welcoming survivors into our homes and our hearts? When have we been the Ruths, seeking better circumstances than the ones we came from? What can we do to end the bitterness of domestic violence in our communities?



**SHALOM BAYIT**

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