

Masowa pedofilia

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Sex Abuse On The Radar
by Judy Klitsner
The Jewish Week

With many accusations against rabbis, authorities and the religious establishment are slowly coming to grips with the problem.

Jerusalem – There is a growing public awareness in Israel of sexual abuse by rabbis, in part because of so many new cases being reported, including accusations against the recently elected Ashkenazic chief rabbi.

Unfortunately, these charges have come out in the press instead of being dealt with in a systematic and sensitive manner within the religious system. This points to the overall failure of the religious establishment to monitor itself and to take decisive action when complaints are brought.

As a result, the public is reading about it, becoming angry and increasingly aware of the need for some kind of action.

For years following the abuse I suffered at the hands of Rabbi Baruch Lanner, I tried in many ways to persuade religious leaders to stop his progress. When he was finally exposed and deposed (only because of the press), I began receiving calls from many quarters about abuses by other rabbis. I tried to help minimize the damage these rabbis could do by calling whomever I knew to put pressure on institutions that hired or promoted offending rabbis.

There were a few of us out there, people with extra sensitivity to

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this
issue, and we learned to enlist each other's help whenever needed.
Sometimes
we succeeded; often we didn't.

I was greatly disturbed that an issue as serious as this was being
addressed
in this ad hoc way. Where were our leaders? Why was this not an issue
of
concern to all?

I finally decided to look for ways to address the problem in a more
structured way. The immediate impetus was an expose some months ago in
the
Israeli daily Maariv on Rav Shlomo Aviner, the revered chief rabbi of
Beit
El and a central figure in the religious Zionist camp – "the rabbi's
rabbi,"
the "holy of holies," as he has been called by his followers.

In the expose, two women accused the rabbi of creating emotionally
intimate
relationships with them. These relationships included his expressions
of his
love for them during regular late-night phone conversations,
extracting
details from them of their sexuality and promoting an unhealthy
emotional
dependence on him.

The women claimed they reported these problems to the highest echelons
in
the rabbinic establishment and were either passed along to other
rabbis or
told to keep silent and destroy any correspondence they had from the
rabbi.

In response, the rabbinic establishment displayed a nearly
unprecedented
show of unity: on the very day the article appeared, my children
(along with
thousands of other children) returned from school with a letter signed
by
dozens of respected rabbis denouncing the "lies" that were reported
by
allegedly unstable, delusional women. Instead of calling for some kind
of
investigation, the community rallied around Rav Aviner and against
his
accusers.

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Believing there had to be some way to defend these women and others like them, or at least to give them a chance to be heard seriously, I contacted the organization Kolech, a group of Orthodox feminists led by Chana Kehat, a religious scholar and activist. Fortuitously, I found that the group was beginning to organize itself around this issue. While discussing strategies for addressing the problem as a whole, a new case presented itself that put Kolech in the eye of the storm.

Several women called Kolech to complain about Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen, a former head of, and later a lecturer in, the midrasha at Bar-Ilan University, who they claimed sexually harassed them when they were students at the university some years ago. Despite strong pressure against Kehat, who was accused of pursuing a "feminist" agenda, the university appointed a committee, headed by a rabbi, which heard testimony from several women in the presence of the accused rabbi. In the end, the unambiguous ruling was to dismiss Rabbi Cohen.

He is still fighting the decision and claims openly that he is the victim of a slander campaign by the "feminists." Rabbi Cohen says the feminists want to push rabbis out of their positions so they can replace them. The Bar-Ilan commission found no basis to his arguments and ruled that Kolech was operating entirely in good faith.

While I found the charge about feminists repugnant, it is fair to ask why we are practically alone in seeking to stop this terrible phenomenon, with the help of the press.

I can say from firsthand experience that these women do not relish this type of activity and in fact would much prefer to be working on positive reforms in the religious world. There is a palpable sense of distaste, yet a solemn duty to follow up on complaints that no one else wants to touch. This is a

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job that rabbis should be doing themselves but are not, for various reasons (collegiality, politics, fear of airing dirty linen in public, not wanting to deal with "unsavory" topics, etc.)

The Knesset, to its credit, recently held a special session, chaired by Gila Finkelstein, on the question of sexual harassment in the religious community. Many educators, including heads of prominent institutions of Torah learning for women, were in attendance as speakers addressed a number of issues, including the need for acceptable guidelines in conduct between rabbis and students.

Partly as a result of all this, I have been working for a long time toward constructing a rabbinical ethics committee. It would follow the precedent of other professional ethics committees, such as those of doctors, psychologists and university professors, setting down clear sets of norms and guidelines for acceptable behavior. The committee would hear and investigate complaints in a sensitive and thorough manner, reach conclusions and act on them.

We are in the process of bringing together various women's organizations in the hope of getting a broad spectrum of leaders to support the plan. We then have to find rabbis who will agree to serve at the head of such a committee, to give it the religious stamp of approval. So far the rabbis we have approached are reluctant to be actively involved, but they recognize the need for such a committee.

Though there are signs that the community and its leadership are beginning to face the severity and widespread nature of the problem, clearly there is much work yet to be done.

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