

1. Belief in B'zelem Elokim: What does leadership look like?

Ethics Code for Jewish Leaders (from Jewish Sacred Spaces, founder Shira Berkovitz)

I approach my task as a Jewish communal leader with a profound awareness that God's image (צלם אלוקים) is embedded in every human being. This acknowledgement entails a dual commitment: to treat all people with the utmost dignity and to hold myself to the highest standards of behavior. Aspiring to the ideal that God is said to model in Psalms 84:12, I strive to be a source of "light and protection" (שמם ומגן) to my community, promoting transparency within my institution and guarding the welfare of its constituents.

I recognize that the authority I wield is not my own, but is rather entrusted to me by the community I serve; thus, I am duty bound at all times to exercise my authority mindfully and appropriately. I acknowledge the harmful physical, emotional, and social consequences that abuse victims have often suffered at the hands of those in positions of Jewish communal authority, and I personally pledge to use my own authority to help create safer and healthier communal spaces. Toward this end, I hereby publicly undertake the following commitments:

- I will use my authority first and foremost for the good of humanity and the Jewish people.
- I will maintain the honor, noble traditions, and values of the Jewish faith.
- In following God's call to build a "holy camp," I will at all times avoid even the appearance of wrongdoing (מראית עין).
- I will respect proper physical, emotional, and psychological boundaries between myself and anyone over whom I have authority or with whom I work.
- I will not exert my power over others in ways that demean, harass, exploit, or otherwise cause harm.
- I will respect appropriate boundaries between adults and children.
- I will help my institution to develop robust policies for preventing abuse. These policies will specify behaviors that promote a healthy communal environment, thereby translating our principles and standards into a blueprint for daily action. I pledge to abide by my institution's policies at all times.
- I will acquaint myself with, and abide by, all local, state, and federal laws related to abuse, and I will abide by all codes of conduct governing my professional affiliations.
- I will ensure access to independent, safe, and discreet reporting mechanisms for abuse and boundary violations, which will be made clear to everyone, at every level of my institution.
- I will reach out for help if I feel temptation or confusion regarding my interpersonal behaviors and choices.
- I will not stand idly by if I witness suspicious behavior in a colleague or community member; I will take concrete action as outlined in the policies of my institution.

- I will not succumb to pressures to cover up suspected abuse.

I strive to cultivate the strength, wisdom, and humility to carry out successfully the sacred task of guiding others. Through the above commitments, I hope to help create a true sanctuary (מקדש) of safety and holiness for all that dwell within it.

2. Chovah: Has rules, holds people in power/perpetrators responsible

In the winter of 2017, I decided that I could stay silent no longer. Slowly, cautiously, I began raising the incident with trusted colleagues. The reactions shocked and saddened me. “Oh, he’s been acting like that since graduate school, he hasn’t changed,” one person said. Another declared: “Everyone knows you should never be alone in a room with him.” But I didn’t know. Apparently, many people in the Jewish community are aware of his behavior yet none have spoken out publicly about him.

For far too long, women and girls were conditioned to believe that anything short of rape was not serious enough to warrant complaint. In my earlier years I was molested but did nothing at the time.

The #MeToo movement made me realize that I was not alone. Women of all religions, ethnicities, races, educational backgrounds and socioeconomic levels are revealing that they have been mistreated, usually by men in positions of seniority, authority, power or a combination. It has also helped me understand that all nonconsensual sexual contact is wrong and that we should hold men who engage in it accountable.

There needs to be a Jewish response to the #MeToo movement. There are plenty of whispers and grumbings about abusive colleagues among Jewish academics. But people are afraid of personal or professional consequences if they dare to reveal the truth about these wrongdoers. American Jewry is very good at singing its own praises, celebrating people’s Jewish identities when they do something worthwhile or admirable. But it’s time for the Jewish community to face its own #MeToo crisis. If we want to create positive cultural change for ourselves and for our daughters, women must speak out and the Jewish community must act— regardless of the individual’s position or influence. (Keren R. McGinity, “American Jewry’s #MeToo Problem: A First-Person Encounter” *The Jewish Week* June 21, 2018)

3. Belief in truth, belief in punishment, belief in teshuva

Believing leshon ha-ra and taking protective action are distinct and unrelated. One can decide not to accept leshon ha-ra as fact, but there is still a halakhic imperative to take every step possible to protect oneself and those in one’s care from harm. Yet too often institutional heads refuse to hear concerns or allegations because they fear speaking leshon ha-ra that may possibly ruin another’s life or parnassa. More often than most would believe, we encounter institutional heads who cover up allegations of abuse. The cover-ups do not usually begin as

intentional dissimulation but are initiated by well-intentioned leaders who believe they are protecting a beloved employee from a false accusation. These leaders may instruct others to lie to the authorities or omit seemingly “minor details” that would “unnecessarily” make the accused look bad. It bears noting here that when reporting reasonable suspicions of abuse to the authorities, one is not making an accusation. One is simply relaying concerning information and asking the authorities to examine it further. If the authorities choose to proceed, they do so because they have uncovered sufficient evidence to move forward.

Finally, the person who files a report is never the one ruining a life; instead, the person who acted abusively harmed his own life and the lives of those he victimized. A misunderstanding of the intricate laws of *leshon ha-ra* and their exceptions has silenced victims of abuse and often led those who might report abuse to protect abusers rather than victims. (Shira Melody Berkovitz, “Institutional Abuse in the Jewish Community” TRADITION 50:2 / © 2017 Rabbinical Council of America)

Maimonides, the great 12th-century Spanish-Israeli philosopher, and sage taught that true *t’shuvah* or repentance, has happened when you are given the opportunity to wrong the same wrong and you don’t. While it is too soon in the process of the [#MeToo](#) movement to enact forgiveness, it is not, in my opinion, too soon to do the necessary work to prepare the ground for that process to occur. When it comes to [#MeToo](#), or Black Lives Matter, or Islamophobia, or the Poor People’s Campaign, or any other movement attempting to rectify a failed system which has resulted in the repeated degradation and harm of others, we have all played a part. Real forgiveness is not only between perpetrator and victim, but on all of us to create a new system where none of what has occurred may ever ever ever occur again.

Here is the thought experiment I would like for us to engage in today. Today, right now as you read this, someone, in a now post-MeToo world, is sexually harassing someone else in the workplace. In a Jewish institution no less. What have we learned and what do we still need to learn to ensure that this situation is handled right? If at some point in time, we want a *Tikkun*, a full repair, from this situation, what do we need to? From the moment of reported transgression to the end, what do all parties need to do to make room for forgiveness to be a possibility at the end?

Someone who is a victim of harassment must come forward. According to the Chofetz Chaim, a 20th century Russian legalist and ethicist, in his Prohibitions Against Gossip (9:1-3) “If one sees that their friend wishes to enter into partnership with someone, and they feel that they will certainly be harmed by this, they must tell them to rescue them from that harm...” Meaning if you know someone has hurt you and will likely or possibly harm someone else, you have an obligation to say something to protect them. Even, or perhaps especially, if the person you are protecting is yourself from future harm.

For organizations, communities or even just groups of friends, hearing of these accusations, the accuser needs to, at the minimum, be able to come forward without facing further harassment, without having his/her sanity or motives questioned as an expected outcome and without anyone suggesting he/she asked for it...At the maximum, upon hearing an accusation of harassment, the accuser should be offered whatever support they need as they define it. The accused needs to no longer have access to the power or to the people. Once someone is accused, especially of multiple, life-long offenses, they need to be removed from their positions of power. Organizations in which harassment occurs must have protocols in place to handle these situations. There is, at this point, no excuse for not having them.

Responding to the accuser and the accused in the ways I have suggested above is of course tricky. We have lived through decades of insidious violence where the accused is protected because of their power, and the accuser is blamed for upsetting the apple cart. This shift above is perhaps the most obvious and perhaps the hardest. Norms and biases are ingrained in all of us. Men and women alike. We like to maintain existing systems. But this cannot stand. The danger here, of course, is sometimes someone might be making it up, might be using the system, might be managing regret by making an accusation. We must trust the institutions investigating the accusations to do this right and well.

Which brings me to the next group: Institutions who investigate accusations need to be exceptional. We do not live in a time when there is room to mess this up. As a populace, it is our job to hold those organizations accountable. If they are blowing it, that needs to be said and loudly to anyone who will listen. And if they are doing it well, it is also our job to trust them and to get out of the way.

Which brings me to the rest of us. To be a good bystander, you must not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor ([Leviticus 19:16](#)). This is the biblical version of "If you see something, say something." I know a person who was in a long and violent marriage. She tells me that she can spot spousal abuse from a mile away. She has a business card to hand to people she suspects are being abused offering to help. We all can do this. We all must do this. It is hard. I know. But who are we if we do not? We are raised to stay out of other people's business; to talk about it amongst ourselves but never to walk right up to it and speak TO it. This must end. Humanity is our business. Be nosy without being a talebearer. Do not investigate the odd you see because you are curious, but because you are called to help.

Truthfully, what I would like to imagine is a world where none of this even happens. Is there room for prevention? Can we hope to live in a world where sexual harassment or even may I be so brazen to even think, sexual assault and sexual violence, are a thing of the past? To make it so, much needs to change including how we educate ourselves and our children about sex, sexuality, sexual violence, boundaries, consent and so on.

Ultimately, repentance will be or should be, between victim and perpetrator. And that will happen between each victim and each perpetrator in their own time. Public apologies on the

part of a perpetrator are nice and appropriate, but are not the place where the t'shuvah happens. Someone who has harmed many does not owe the public an apology, they owe the individuals an apology and a blast apology to "Everyone I may have harmed" just doesn't cut it.

For the rest of us watching the drama unfold, once that has happened, we will need to consider if, or how, to let chronic offenders, one-time offenders, suspected offenders and the like back into the public space in a way that feels safe and good for us as well as for them. We are not there yet, but for this EVER to be possible in a real and meaningful way, we all have work to do along the way to prepare the ground and plant the seeds which may one day allow for true transformation to occur. (Rabbi Rachael Bregman, Laying the Ground Work for Repentance One Day: Teshuvah and #MeToo, myjewishlearning, August 15, 2018)

4. Commitment to a multiplicity of voices and a power structure that facilitates this

Change the Jewish conversation from advancingwomen.org

Doesn't an all-male roster suggest these are the best presenters?

An all-male roster on a panel or publication usually means that these are the best known presenters or writers. Let's break this cycle. When we rely on the same speakers time after time, we send the message that there's nothing new under the sun. Identifying women scholars, intellectuals, rabbis, and leaders will bring a fresh point of view – perhaps less familiar but equally expert in the matter at hand.

How do we "change the criteria" to add more women to public panels?

Be creative. Ask the male expert, "Who else can contribute to this dialogue?" or "Who might bring a new perspective?" Express your desire to make the panel more inclusive and your hope that future events will reflect the organization's values and goals.

How do we include women when the topic concerns institutional issues where no women serve as leaders, e.g., seminary presidents?

Must the CEO or President be the only organizational representative? For the seminary panel, ask the Provost, Dean, or top professor – here you are likely to find a qualified woman. If your criteria results in an all-male line-up, expand the criteria or category. Adding diverse perspectives, including women, younger people, and a range of leadership roles, makes the conversation richer and more interesting.

What we know is that the Jewish communal world, even to this day, is led primarily by men. And that these men have tended to hire other men, including Steven M. Cohen, to survey American Jews. This large and expensive social research apparatus, driven by male leadership and sustained by aggressive boundary policing, has placed Jewish continuity at its center and defined Jewish continuity in extraordinarily troubling ways.

Most troubling about the data-driven mode of Jewish continuity conversations are its patriarchal, misogynistic, and anachronist assumptions about what is good for the Jews. We learn that single women, queer people, unwed parents, and childless individuals or couples are all problems. And we learn that the Jewish community, should it want to survive, must step into the role of calling out and regulating those problems.

Jewish communal leaders, in turn, learn that the continuity crisis — and its prescriptions about how to regulate primarily women, their bodies, and their sexuality — has its own productive energy that can be harnessed to convince donors to open their pocketbooks and support the very research and programs that prove that the crisis exists.

Jewish academia has benefited from the continuity crisis, as well, accepting its terms and its male leaders and averting its eyes from disturbing or far worse power dynamics, sometimes playing out at Jewish studies conferences. (Kate Rosenblatt, Lila Corwin Berman and Ronit Stahl, “A #metoo Disaster” The Forward, July 9 2018)

5. Understanding that at the heart of sexism is a power imbalance -- and working to correct and dismantle power structures that minimize and damage our community.

It's been a troubling fortnight for those already concerned about the place of women in Israel and the broader Jewish community. Last week, a pre-eminent scholar of the American Jewry, Steven M. Cohen, was [accused](#) of sexual harassment by five women. Cohen says he is now engaged in a process of "education, recognition, remorse and repair."

Two weeks ago, Ari Shavit gave an [interview](#) in Haaretz, detailing his "journey of tikkun" after a retreat from the limelight following allegations of [assault](#) by journalist Danielle Berrin in 2016. Straight on the heels of publication, another accusation surfaced, describing Shavit [gripping the neck](#) of his daughter's ex-partner. The Shavit of cerebral restraint in the interview - who declared he was "blind to the power [he] had as a privileged white man" - responded with a hysterical and incriminating loss of control, live on [national radio](#). "What was done to me is cold-blooded murder." He furiously hurls allegations back: the accusations against him are "radical and disproportionate," a "blood libel."

The Jewish community ponders what to do, as the intellectuals it celebrated fall from grace. Yet what should focus our attention is that , although the #MeToo movement has done much to break taboos of silence, there are clearly more stories that haven't come to light.

That's because the Jewish institutional world suffers a sickness of ingrained, unethical gender and power relations. And power, not sex, lies at the heart of #MeToo.

We need to examine entrenched power dynamics in the Jewish world. For if a woman is inferior, it's not a jump to denigrate her. It's not much more of a leap to assault her, either.

The Jewish woman is vulnerable because she is invisible in a way the Jewish man is not. The Jewish woman is unequal in a way the Jewish man is not.

The Jewish woman, as Berrin wrote, jeopardizes "jobs, social standing or even the opportunity to convert" in naming sexual aggression. Cheryl Moore wrote recently of her decision to leave the Jewish non-profit world, where she felt she was being "[pimped out](#)" to engage with rich male donors with wandering hands, and that their "public, outrageous and/or crude comments and behavior" was "observed by others, but questioned by no one. It was machismo at its core."

As Jews we recognize everyone has a right to ask for forgiveness, and we have an obligation to forgive. But this cannot be the community's main concern. To agonize over how we can still appreciate the leadership of accused men is morally dubious: it prioritizes salvaging egos over realizing the human suffering those accused have caused to others. It deters us from recognizing talented women who feel they've had no choice but to leave the Jewish community's institutions.

Wringing our hands dissuades us from a critical reckoning. Recent events should keep anyone who cares about Jewish community policymaking up at night. Who have we let [set the agenda](#)? What are the ideas, who are the people we as a community have disenfranchised?

How far have agendas been pushed to reinforce, in, ironically, Shavit's own words, "inequity, misogyny and exploitation," the power structures that already exist?

Ari Shavit was lionized by the U.S. Jewish community as an iconic voice of liberal Zionism. Yet "My Promised Land" was told by an Ashkenazi man about, mostly, Ashkenazi men. Even its description of the social protests of 2011 was narrated through the eyes of men, not the women who largely led its cause.

As a community, we unthinkingly granted an academic the power of a policy maker, who told women, in effect, to [fill Jewish baby carriages](#), and led a movement that prioritized reproduction over meaningful Judaism.

Chauvinism has distorted those we choose to laud, those we're able to hear; the thinking we're exposed to, and the ideas that shape our community.

#MeToo offers Israel and the Jewish community in America and elsewhere a precious opportunity to push back against how normalized defective gender relations have become. Undoing this is not just women's work.

The issue isn't whether we should pardon the men we hallowed, too readily. Rather than pining for their mythic return, we must find and celebrate women and men, with the inclusive and innovative thinking we so desperately need, to inspire us. We must examine the entrenched gender assumptions on which our Jewish lives are built.

And we must tackle the inequalities and abuses of power that lie at the heart of our Jewish community. ([Clare Hedwat](#), The Jewish World's #MeToo Crisis Is Much Deeper Than Ari Shavit and Steven Cohen, Haaretz, Jul 26, 2018)