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THE DAYS OF AWE
Naomi Tucker, Executive Director

The approaching High Holy Days are a time to take a spiritual accounting of how we have transgressed. I have always marveled at the way our Yom Kippur Al Cheyt prayers are said in the plural: reciting together the ways WE may have caused harm, even if each of us did not do each of those things on the list. It is a beautiful way to accept communal responsibility, to note that we are all in this together – from our transgressions to our responsibility to repair.

So where have the global “we” gone wrong this past year? How have we strayed from a right and just path in the world? In our own lives? What steps must we take towards Teshuvah, re-turning to our truest self?

There are many communal and individual transgressions we could examine. But I cannot help but notice that the news this past year has been filled with horrifying stories of violence against women. Campus sexual assault, “honour” killings, gang rapes, mass kidnappings, murders the media persistently call “crimes of passion” (one of the most misleading euphemisms I have ever heard…..there is no passion involved in beating one’s girlfriend to death because she didn’t do what you wanted). So I decided to take stock, at this time of holy reckoning for our communal transgressions, of this last year in the media.

Here are a few highlights of 5774:

November: The Pentagon reports a 50% jump in military sexual assaults, not including sexual harassment complaints.

December: Football player Jovan Belcher shoots his girlfriend Kasandra Perkins and then himself, leaving behind their 3 month old baby girl. The NFL mourns the loss of their great player.

January: A UC Santa Barbara student is gang raped. Village elders in India order 13 men to gang rape a 20-year-old woman for dating a man from another tribe. In Calcutta, a 16-year old is gang raped and tries to report the rape to the police. The... —continued on p.2

RABBIS’ CORNER: MIT HILLEL
Rabbi Michelle Fisher

Meaningful connections have a way of creating lasting relationships that continue to bear fruit. I was introduced to the importance of understanding and speaking about domestic violence (DV) when I was a newly-ordained assistant rabbi to Rabbi David Rose in Potomac, MD. The first sermon I gave on DV quickly led to the first counseling session I had with an abused spouse. I was more than a bit overwhelmed, but my eyes and heart had been opened, and a communal need was made explicitly clear for me. I thus immediately sought out Shalom Bayit as a resource when I later moved to the Bay Area to serve my own congregation. It was an honor to support Naomi Tucker in her work, and to contribute as a Rabbinic Advisory Council member.

Soon, I was drawn back to the East Coast, and particularly to MIT Hillel, where in my role as Executive Director, I now serve a different population: students 18-26 years old. Dating and relationship issues were on my radar as students talked about roommate issues, dating ups and downs, interactions in labs and classes. But I had not considered how to better educate myself or my staff about such issues, particularly with this age group. I am blessed that Shalom Bayit built a relationship with Hillel International. With excitement and purpose, we brought Naomi and Zephira to MIT to train Hillel professionals from across New England about preventing dating violence and building healthy relationships. —continued on p. 4

Join us for...Upcoming Events (more info, p.8)

October 2014
Domestic Violence Awareness Month
October 12th, 2014
Sukkot Community Gathering, Urban Adamah
December 2014
Domestic Violence Sermon Month
May 2015
Creating Hope celebration
The Days of Awe
Continued from page 1

rapists set her on fire, burning her to death. The City of Delhi, dubbed India’s “rape capital,” hires a female commando force to protect women from rape in the streets. In Virginia, a state senator running for Congress says spousal rape should be legal.

February: A Jewish mother blogs about her daughter’s brutal sexual assault by football players on campus in the third week of her freshman year. Despite mounds of physical evidence and an eyewitness, the college judicial board finds the guys not guilty. The same month, another UC Santa Barbara student is gang raped.

March: Silicon Valley tech billionaire Gurbaksh Chahal goes on trial for domestic violence. In August 2013 he was caught on video hitting and kicking his girlfriend over 117 times in 30 minutes. Obtained without a warrant, the footage was inadmissible in court. Chahal pled guilty to only one of the 47 assault charges and was freed on $1 million bail, 25 hours of community service, and a year of batterer intervention classes.

April: President Obama releases guidelines for college campuses to combat sexual assault. 276 Nigerian schoolgirls are kidnapped. Their crime: receiving an education. Over 200 of these girls have not been seen since.

May: A pregnant Pakistani woman Farzana Parveen is stoned to death by her own family for marrying against their wishes. Farzana’s father confesses to killing his daughter because she had married the man of her choice. Time magazine says the college town of Missoula Montana’s recent reputation as the “rape capital of America” is misleading, because sexual assault is rampant on college campuses across the nation.

June: Eiko Nakamura, owner of the popular Napa sushi restaurant Eiko’s, is murdered by her husband.

July: An Indian photographer publishes a fashion photo shoot glamorizing a woman being sexually assaulted on a bus, recalling the 2012 Delhi bus gang rape.

August: A Dallas Cowboys player is out for four games due to positive drug testing, but the Baltimore Ravens’ Ray Rice gets only a 2-game suspension for beating up his fiancée in February and dragging her out of an elevator unconscious. Former Press Secretary and gun control advocate James Brady, author of the Brady Bill, dies of complications from his gunshot wound 33 years earlier.

No wonder I am outraged. No wonder sometimes I can barely stand to watch the news. Of course there are also always stories of strength, courage and resilience. But with a year in review like that, we have a lot to account for this coming Yom Kippur.

None of these atrocities could happen if we overturned societal mass acceptance of men’s “right” to control women. None of these atrocities could happen if we dismantled the underlying belief that force is an acceptable way to get what we want. But how do we do that? How can we possibly make a difference here for school girls in Nigeria or rape survivors in India?

There are many ways to be an activist. On the High Holidays, we are reminded that one of the most profound ways to create change is to look inward. We must confront beliefs of superiority and domination in the place we think least likely to find them: our own selves, and in our own beloved Jewish community.

Shalom Bayit’s work is about fostering respectful relationships that embody the Jewish value of treating each other as sacred beings created in the image of the divine. How we treat each other matters: whether that is at home, in the workplace, on the playground, or between nations. The old saying “World peace begins at home” is NOT just a cute bumper sticker: there is a direct link between how we treat people at home and what goes on in the world.

The Days of Awe are a time of introspection and reconciliation. This is not to be interpreted as a call to forgive one who has harmed you / us. But it is a call for us to examine deeply two important things: how each of us may have harmed others – intentionally or inadvertently; and how each of us can contribute to building a culture of integrity, respect, and peaceful humanity. In other words, it’s time to both make change within ourselves, and take action when we see harm being done around us. In the end, it boils down to that basic concept we (hopefully) learned in kindergarten: kindness. If all of us set our individual and communal moral compass towards kindness and judge our actions through that lens, the world would be a better place indeed.

Think about it – the next time you are upset with a coworker, a cranky salesperson, or your partner...the next time your kids or your in-laws are driving you crazy...ask yourself: what is the response of kindness? Do I really need to exert my power here? Can I protect myself and my boundaries without creating more hurt in the world?

What about when you disagree with someone politically, religiously, philosophically? Before you shoot off that snippy email or post a comment on Facebook, think about how your words will be received. The answer is not always shouting loud enough to squash the opposition. Often, to be heard requires a steady, strategic voice. A voice that respects the other, even across difference. After all, respectfully arguing multiple opinions is a quintessentially Jewish practice. And loving our neighbors, respecting human dignity, saving a life, and honoring the divine spark in one another are some of the highest Jewish callings.

During these upcoming Yamim Noraim (Days of Awe) may we each find one small way to walk closer to a path that leads to dignity for all beings.
Thank you to all our sponsors, contributors, host committee, and all who celebrated Shalom Bayit’s 22nd Anniversary on May 14th recognizing over two decades of life-saving work to help Jewish battered women and their children. Your presence and contributions support Shalom Bayit’s mission to foster the social change and community response necessary to eradicate domestic violence in the Jewish Community.

Executive Director Naomi Tucker & Keynote Speaker Joshua Safran
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WANT TO GET MORE INVOLVED?

You can help us raise awareness this fall by encouraging your community, congregation, or group of friends to demonstrate their commitment to a future free of abuse:

• **Purple Ribbons** – **October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month.** Tie Purple Ribbons to your communal or family **sukkah** (Erev Sukkot 5775 is Weds. Oct. 8th) to honor those who do not dwell in peace and safety in their own homes. Place the ribbon on your **sukkah** with a “May our homes be a shelter of peace” blessing card. To request a ribbon/blessing card if you don’t already have one, call (510) 451-8874 or info@shalom-bayit.org

• **Shalom Bayit Community Sukkot** – This year we’ll be at Urban Adamah in Berkeley on Sunday, Oct. 18th for our annual purple ribbon ritual in the **sukkah.** This is a free, family friendly event. For details: info@shalom-bayit.org.

• **Winter is a time to shine a light of hope. Speak out from the Bima during the month of Kislev** (Nov 23 - Dec 22, 2014) and be part of Shalom Bayit’s annual Domestic Violence Sermon Campaign. Encourage your synagogue to offer a sermon, hold a Chanukah candlelighting, or lead a Torah study or other program to shed light on Jewish family violence and healthy/unhealthy relationships.

Thank you for helping us to spread peace. Together we can make a difference for the coming year and future generations.
CONFRONTING SEXUAL ASSAULT
ON MY COLLEGE CAMPUS
Amalia Bob-Waksberg, former intern

As an intern at Shalom Bayit three summers ago, I got the opportunity to work with Zephira Derblich-Milea, Shalom Bayit’s Youth Program Coordinator, leading healthy relationship workshops for Jewish youth. The workshop unpacks dangerous myths, such as the myth of the “nice Jewish boy.” I had never really thought about how this could be harmful before and I found it to be particularly relevant in my work and understanding of power structures when I returned to my studies at Brandeis University, where a large percentage of the student body is Jewish.

I saw how this “myth” hurt my friend who was raped by a “nice Jewish boy.” He was a student leader actively involved in Jewish life at Brandeis. They met at Shabbat dinner. My friend didn’t think that “nice Jewish boys” could rape. When he did, she found that the status afforded to the “nice Jewish boy” made it difficult for others to believe he had inflicted harm. The burden was placed on my friend to prove that it had happened. She ultimately found it easier to remain silent.

I learned at Shalom Bayit that it is difficult for many to accept that abuse happens within the Jewish community. People agree that domestic violence is a problem, but it’s a problem “out there,” understood as abstract and distant. Despite studies showing that gendered violence exists in every single community regardless of race, class, religion, or educational background, people tend to believe that their community is somehow immune.

I saw this at Brandeis, when university president Fred Lawrence stated in a campus newspaper in regards to sexual assault, “I don't think that we have as serious a problem as some other institutions do, which is not to say that we don't have any issues that we have to focus on as well. But I'm glad that we don't have the issue to the degree that some other schools do.” And according to the Brandeis Public Safety statistics, he would be correct. There were only three reported cases of sexual assault between 2007 and 2010.

It is estimated that between 20-25% of women in college are raped over the course of their college career. Why are the Brandeis numbers much lower than the national statistics? Research has found that a low reporting rate does not equate to a campus where incidence is lower, but rather is indicative of an environment in which students feel unsafe reporting.

The culture at Brandeis was one of denial. The administration was silent and survivors, like my friend, were silenced. Because survivors weren’t talking, it became easy for people to hold on to the belief that it just “doesn’t happen here.” I needed to take action.

This past year I worked very closely with a small group of students who were passionate about addressing sexual violence on campus. We identified the various obstacles students faced due to (1) the general campus silence and denial about sexual violence, (2) students feeling unsafe to speak out about their experiences with sexual violence, and (3) lack of effective communication among groups working to confront sexual assault. To address the first two issues, we created a story-telling platform called SpeakOut! Brandeis. We placed locked boxes around campus and created a Tumblr page where students could anonymously submit their stories. During Sexual Violence Awareness Week the site went viral. Within the first two days we received 80 submissions. It quickly became clear how desperately students needed this space. Survivors felt they were finally being heard. The page became the number one resource for students. SpeakOut! became not only a story-sharing platform, but also a place where students came to ask for advice, to understand their options, to get help navigating the confusing reporting process. Almost overnight, the culture of silence at Brandeis was transformed.

Now that people were talking about it, it became clear that it was time for action. We organized a group of activists, student leaders, survivors, and peer counselors to come together and formed the Brandeis Students Against Sexual Violence coalition. This resulted in a 15 page letter to the administration in which we proposed actions creating a safer environment at Brandeis. We published our letter on change.org and received over 2,700 signatures. After multiple meetings with administrators and pressure from faculty, the administration promised to fulfill each of our demands. I feel proud of what we accomplished.

For the four years that a student attends college, that place becomes their home. Brandeis is a university that is rooted in Jewish ideals of social justice. I strongly believe that social justice starts at home. I hope to see that people in power are committed to making Brandeis — and all college campuses — a safe space that every student can comfortably call home, a shalom bayit.

MIT Hillel (Continued from page 1)

Shalom Bayit arrived at a time when college date rape is making headlines in campus newspapers, on YouTube, and even in Time Magazine. The timing could not have been better.

For me, the “refresher course” brought new light to ideas I knew, and reframed familiar texts and information for the college-age student. I could tell that for many of my Hillel colleagues, the information was eye-opening. We discussed the relationship continuum, and identified warning signs of unhealthy, controlling, and abusive behaviors. Particularly powerful, Naomi and Zephira led us in an exercise, slowly covering a colleague in layers of blankets as we read statements representing barriers to leaving an abusive relationship. The statements described belittling, fear, and isolation, small step by small step stealing the participant’s ability to see, to breathe, to feel in control. And then, freeing them piece by piece; each statement of caring attention relieving them of a layer of weight. We framed everything in Jewish language and text, and discussed ways to have these conversations, Jewishly, with our students. The training was powerful, educationally and emotionally. We will take back to our campuses new language, new insights, new questions to ask students we are concerned about. It is an honor to still be able to partner with Shalom Bayit, from miles away and in a completely different setting. May we all go from strength to strength, teaching and building healthy, safe, and loving relationships at all age levels.
Thank you!

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