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STANDING IDLY BY: WHEN LEADERS ENABLE SEXUAL ABUSE

“**I**n order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting,” writes psychiatrist and researcher Judith Lewis Herman about a sexual abuser. “If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure no one listens.”¹ But, as we sadly know, the abuser is often not the only one who tries to promote forgetting, who compounds the silence with the sin of willful ignorance or worse. Sexual abusers need complicit partners to get away with their crimes. This happens with greater efficacy and credibility when these partners have leadership roles and are trusted authority figures. Look carefully, and it’s not hard to find them.

A VIEW FROM TRADITIONAL TEXTS ON COMPLICITY

In two of our most horrific biblical stories of sexual misconduct, a small but significant detail often goes unnoticed. In the story of Judah and Tamar, Judah was assisted in his foul-play at Tamar’s expense by his friend Hirah, a “certain Adullamite.” In the painfully dramatic rape of Tamar at the hand of Amnon, the rapist was assisted by Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David’s brother. These texts are not similar in the nature, brutality, or consequences of the crimes committed, even if the name Tamar appears in both. Yet pondering both texts beside each other will offer an approach and understanding of the role of sexual enablers, those who know what is happening and do nothing or actively promote wrongdoing. It will help us find a portal into how cultures that support sexual abuse may ultimately be just as guilty as those who commit the crimes. They may be worse. While it

¹ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 8.

could be argued that the “act” of one predator is criminal and the knowledge and silence of the culture that protects him or her is not, those who protect abusers often engage in other acts of outright deception to mask the crimes and then often protect other crimes and other predators, resulting in massive system-wide cover-ups that then cause suffering to many more, sometimes thousands.² In organizations that hide sexual abuse, the pattern repeats itself so frequently that it can become deeply enmeshed in the culture, and the acceptable, unspoken secret prevents those with a modicum of courage from coming forward.³ When people who come

² The Catholic Church scandals and cover-ups led to more scandal and a thick layering of lies that enabled additional abuse, while protecting both the criminals and protecting those who turned a blind eye. For more on this, see *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church* by the investigative staff of “The Boston Globe” (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2003), Jason Berry, *Lead Us Not into Temptation: Catholic Priests and the Sexual Abuse of Children* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), A. W. Richard Sipe, *Sex, Priests and Power: Anatomy of a Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1995), Michael D’Antonio, *Mortal Sins: Sex, Crime, and the Era of Catholic Scandal* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2014), Leon J. Podles, *Sacrilege; Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* (Cleveland: Crossland Press, 2008). Note that the titles of these books all point to a problem with the church and not a problem with the priest, even though each act of abuse is unconscionable.

³ A case in point: As of this writing in 2016, a judge has upheld a ruling against Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Britain (Jehovah’s Witnesses) in a case involving the abuse of a four-year old girl whom they failed to protect for five years. The senior member of the church who attacked her “repented” and was allowed back into the congregation. The girl’s mother came forward when she was 14, but her allegations were dismissed. Although an independent study in Norway in 2009 concluded that this organization does denounce abuse and its rate of abuse is not higher than in society generally, there is widespread concern that elders only report such cases when forced to by law. The Society has tried to muzzle attempts of others to come forward. In 2012, a Superior Court in California ordered Watch Tower to pay \$21 million in damages when an abuse case of a nine-year old girl was not reported to the authorities. In the wake of these cases, others have come forward. An adult who was allegedly raped by someone senior in the church, currently in prison, decided to sue the Church when elders who took the stand failed to be accountable: “I thought, nobody’s taken responsibility for this. You could have held up your hands and said, ‘I’m sorry, we were in the wrong.’” In Australia in 2013, the Royal Commission to Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was created to hear claims against the Watch Tower Society and the cases of others. The Society handed over 500 documents which contained 1006 files related to child abuse cases made against members of the Church in Australia since 1950 – not one of which was reported by the Church to secular authorities.

See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/aug/12/jehovahs-witnesses-under-pressure-over-handling-of-sexual-abuse-claims>. See <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-11-13/victims-react-to-royal-commission-announcement/4368200>.

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forward are summarily dismissed or vilified, this, too, makes its way into the organizational narrative. Abuse is tolerated here. Whistle blowing is not.

There are a number of additional reasons that such cultures stubbornly aid and abet abusers. Within faith communities, the abuser may be a charismatic individual who is able, through a cult of personality, to bring people to greater commitment. The abuser understands that he or she will be afforded protection because of the “results” produced and then continues the behavior and may even amplify it because there seems to be no visible consequences to their status within the organization. People who come forward to out the abuser are often handed the excuse that the religious ends justify the torrid means, and that *they* are actually an obstruction to outreach in trying to shut out the abuser. This trope can still be heard today in “famous” cases of abusers who were also teachers, preachers, and community leaders. If hundreds or even thousands of people have come to religion as a result of this person’s charisma – and this is an explicit goal of the faith – then the abuser is expediting a desired outcome, even if the means is not explicitly appropriate.

These excuses, in no way, excuse the abuser. Yet often the attention that gets paid to the malfeasance of the one distracts from the immorality of the many, leading to the eventual victimization of many more innocents.⁴ Attention must be paid.

Hirah is mentioned in the very first verse of Genesis 38, as if to suggest that by leaving the sheltering influences of his family, Judah was

⁴ Elsewhere I have written about the problem of religious leaders who commit sexual crimes and the damage that it does not only to the victim’s body but to the victim’s faith, trust in religion, and belief in humanity. When the predator is a rabbi, the damage to the institution of the rabbinate and religious authority in general is severely compromised. See “Straying the Course: Can Jewish and Secular Leadership Archetypes Rein in Religious Leaders,” in *Tempest in the Temple: Jewish Communities and Child Sex Scandals* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2009), 60-73. There I note that three issues must be at the core of any discussion of Jewish leadership and clergy abuse: “the problem of charisma in religious leaders, the difference between public and private morality and its relationship to the clergy, and the importance of creating Jewish institutional environments that deal comfortably with error” (61). Too often, “Denial, wavering, intentional neglect of wrongdoing, and the penalization of the victim or his or her supporters are often found in Jewish abuse cases” (61). I deal with this more extensively in *Confronting Scandal: How Jews Can Respond when Jews Do Bad Things* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2010). See, in particular, “Rabbis and Clergy Abuse,” (97-105). For more on enabling and how to stop it, see Mark Dratch, “A Community of Co-Enablers: Why are Jews Ignoring Traditional Jewish Law by Protecting the Abuser?” in *Tempest in the Temple*: 105-125 and, in the same volume, Amy Neustein and Michael Leshner, “Justice Interrupted: How Rabbis Can Interfere with the Prosecution of Sex Offenders – And Strategies for How to Stop Them,” 197-229.

opening-up another chapter of his life, one that put him far from the center of his values and at possible moral risk: “At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hirah,” (Genesis 38:1).⁵ It is only after he left Canaan and went to the territory of his friend that he married, had children and had two sons die. He kept his third son from Tamar for fear of losing yet another. This man was sadly fated to lose many of those he loved, but his friend Hirah stuck by him:

After a long time, Judah’s wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah, to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went with him. When Tamar was told, “Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep,” she took off her widow’s clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went over to her by the roadside and said, “Come now, let me sleep with you.” (Genesis 38: 12-16)

As readers, we know immediately how this sordid tale will play out. Judah’s state of mourning clears after one verse and, again, he left the presence of his immediate family to a sheep-shearing with Hirah and stumbled into sin. Judah gave into an impulse that surfaced to a man in grief, alone and away from home that could be sated at the side of the road. Tamar, wanting both a child and to shame her father-in-law in an exercise of vigilante

⁵ Adullam is a city in Judea, northeast of Beit Guvrin today. Joshua captured the city that was part of the tribal inheritance of Judah (Joshua 15:35), which may explain the early alliance between Judah and Hirah as an ongoing association over time. In II Chronicles 11:17, we learn that Rehoboam rebuilt the city and fortified it. It played an important role as a place of refuge for David when he left the king of Gat for a cave of Adullam (I Samuel 22:1 and II Samuel 23:13). Rashi observes that Judah and Hirah’s was a business partnership, perhaps minimizing the companionability of the relationship. Radak follows suit. Nachmanides comments on the verb choice, namely that “Judah went down” as a statement of his descent from greatness, following the Talmudic reading (*Sota* 10b) but does not discuss the Adullamite. The Netsiv is puzzled by Hirah’s appearance and ponders what it adds to the meaning of the text. His solution is to make a messianic reference to a future time when the messiah will be announced via an “important and noble man.” Since Judah is associated with kingship and future leadership, Hirah is compared to or an embodiment of Hiram, a friend of the house of David, in midrashic literature [*Genesis Rabba* 85:4]. This midrashic overlay coheres with the future significance of the children born to Judah from Tamar as harbingers of the messiah. This explanation, far from a literal understanding, may demonstrate that traditional rabbinic interpreters had little use for Hirah or interest in the role he played in this specific narrative.

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justice, took objects that could only have been Judah's as collateral. Judah wanted the objects back and sent his friend. Here Hirah is identified only as the Adullamite, as if to suggest that this man was a product of the place, a place far from Judah's moral center:

Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her. He asked the men who lived there, "Where is the prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?" "There hasn't been any prostitute here," they said. [Genesis 38:19-21]

By asking for the whereabouts of a prostitute, Hirah was putting his own reputation into question but seemed to be nonplussed by the request for this information. Judah, too, must not have experienced great shame at his act if he could so casually have a friend take care of the payment for his dalliance. The two seem to share a friendship that validated their respective sinful doings, or at least Judah's. It is easier to ignore the spiritual cost and consequence of such misdemeanors if a friend stands by in a posture of acceptance and non-judgment.

When we turn to the other Tamar story of the Bible, the stakes were higher, the outcome more horrific, the enabler more nefarious. Tamar's beauty caught her half-brother's attention. The text repeats their relationship with pronouns to identify them as brother and sister even though this information has already been well-established. Clearly the repetition showcases the suggestion of incest that Amnon ignored to his eventual peril.⁶ Amnon did not know how to satisfy his frustrated lust until Jonadab

⁶ Amnon will be murdered in the same chapter in an honor killing at the hand of Tamar's brother and Amnon's half-brother, Absalom. Although Amnon dismissed Tamar's pleas to do right by her and the royal household, he could not escape a harsh and merciless punishment. Note: Jonadab appears after Amnon's death as a fair-weather friend. He expressed no grief at Amnon's death and discouraged the king from grieving by minimizing the significance of the loss, confirming the reader's sense that Jonadab was a political opportunist of the highest order:

Absalom ordered his men, "Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, 'Strike Amnon down,' then kill him. Don't be afraid. Haven't I given you this order? Be strong and brave." So Absalom's men did to Amnon what Absalom had ordered. Then all the king's sons got up, mounted their mules and fled. While they were on their way, the report came to David: "Absalom has struck down all the king's sons; not one of them is left." The king stood up, tore his clothes and lay down on the ground; and all his attendants stood by with their clothes torn. But Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, "My lord should not think that they killed all the princes; only Amnon is dead. This has been Absalom's express intention ever since the day Amnon

devised a rather strange plan. By calling him an adviser, the text suggests the irony of one who mentors another to sin:

In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David. Amnon became so obsessed with his sister Tamar that he made himself ill. She was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her. Now Amnon had an adviser named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man. He asked Amnon, "Why do you, the king's son, look so haggard morning after morning? Won't you tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." "Go to bed and pretend to be ill," Jonadab said. "When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'I would like my sister Tamar to come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat it from her hand.'" (II Samuel 13: 1-5)⁷

Tamar went to the bedside of her half-brother suspecting nothing, not even when Amnon dismissed everyone from his chamber and insisted on eating food that Tamar made and hand-delivered:

Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister." "No, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me! Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing. What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you." But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her. Then Amnon

raped his sister Tamar. My lord the king should not be concerned about the report that all the king's sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead." (II Samuel 13: 28-33)

⁷ Phyllis Tribble observes that Amnon made himself sick on Tamar's account and that Jonadab ironically recommends him feigning illness to provoke his desired outcome. "Jonadab," she writes, "is indeed cunning. Having elicited from Amnon a confession that seeks license, he schemes to gratify the prince. The skills of a counselor he employs to promote illness. He would use the father to overcome the obstacle of the brother and secure the sister. Around Amnon, then, his speeches weave a net of friendship that ensnares Tamar, Absalom, and David," in "Tamar: The Royal Rape of Wisdom," *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 41. "A confession that seeks license" speaks to the perfidious role of the enabler.

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hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, “Get up and get out!” “No!” she said to him. “Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me.” But he refused to listen to her. He called his personal servant and said, “Get this woman out of my sight and bolt the door after her.” (II Samuel 13:10-17)

Amnon’s love turned into hate, then turned into rage. He used Tamar and closed his fickle heart to her supplications. Reviewing her protests, she resisted force and then when that failed, she importuned him about the wicked breach of social convention. When that failed, she spoke as a sister, abject and ruined. When that failed, she was even willing to seek permission to override the sticky implication of incest by gaining the king’s – their father’s – support for the match. The text established her resistance as an act of courage. But no matter. After he slept with her, Amnon had no concern for her future or the dignity of his family and his prized position as royalty. Even so he did not throw her out. It was beneath him. He had a servant do his bidding. Someone else – more than one person – knew what was happening in that chamber: the one who created the plan and the one who brutally tossed Tamar away.⁸

The role of minor characters in the Hebrew Bible has garnered some scholarly attention since a well-accepted principle of biblical study is that sacred texts are economic with language. If a person appears in a biblical narrative, the role may not be as minor as supposed.⁹ It is not minor in these two stories, even though the names of Hirah and Jonadab appear only a few times. Immoral enablers do not have to have a major role in advisement or support. Oftentimes they are characterized by silence. Their main contribution to sin is that their very presence without

⁸ We have no idea what happened to Tamar and whether or not she was able to lead a “normal” life. Moving from text to life, the long-term scarring on those who are abused is difficult to measure and hard to overcome, as Judith Herman Lewis writes in *Trauma and Recovery*, “Many abused children cling to the hope that growing up will bring escape and freedom...But the personality formed in the environment of coercive control is not well adapted to adult life. The survivor is left with fundamental problems in basic trust, autonomy, and initiative. She approaches the task of early adulthood—establishing independence and intimacy—burdened by major impairments in self-care, in cognition and in memory, in identity, and in the capacity to form stable relationships... She is still a prisoner of her childhood; attempting to create a new life, she reencounters the trauma” (*Trauma and Recovery*, 110).

⁹ The Sages, for example, posited that the anonymous man who directed Joseph on the path to Dotan was the angel Gabriel since his appearance in the text is somewhat mystifying and because the one who put Joseph on the road to his future could not remain nameless (*Pirkei de-Rebi-Eliezer* 38).

resistance justifies the wrongdoing of the protagonist. They say nothing, and in that cowardly silence, the protagonist is given the license to exert immense sexual power over his victim, even greater than had he acted alone. Uriel Simon believes that one of the main functions of minor characters in the Hebrew Bible is as a “device for the moral evaluation of the protagonist.”¹⁰ In this instance, we might shift Simon’s words to read “the immoral evaluation of the protagonist.” Where either character in these biblical narratives could have created resistance to sexual exploitation, these individuals, instead, played a role in perpetrating crimes and hiding them, in ignoring the victim or demonizing her.¹¹ They were not the decision makers in this story. They did not hold the balance of power in the relationship, but they had something more important than power: influence. And in these narratives of abuse, they abused it.

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In *Principle-Centered Leadership*, Stephen R. Covey contends that leaders have three types of power: coercive power, where followers are afraid of the consequences should they not listen to the leader, utility power, where the power in the relationship is based on the useful exchange of

¹⁰ See, for example, Uriel Simon, “Minor Characters in Biblical Narrative,” *Journal for the Study of Old Testament*, 46 (1990), 11-19, which also appears in his short appendix in *Reading Prophetic Narratives*: 263-270. There he writes that the Hebrew Bible has relatively few characters and even fewer minor characters: “...the focus is always on the deeds of the protagonist, while the fate and character of the minor personages is neglected” (263). He contends that minor characters in the Bible play a similar function as they do in other works of literature: “A primary function of some minor characters is to move the plot forward; others endow the narrative with greater meaning and depth” (266). Simon contends that some minor characters offer out-right support for the protagonist – like Hirah and Jonadab – in “expressive auxiliary roles” (266). They can also oppose the protagonist’s choices or behaviors, providing an important contrast or “clarify situations by serving as background” (266). For a specific example, see Samuel Hildernbrandt, “The Servants of Saul: ‘Minor’ Characters and Royal Commentary in I Samuel 9-31,” *Journal for the Study of Old Testament*, 40 (2015), 179-200.

¹¹ Although we have grouped Hirah and Jonadab together, a reasonable argument could be made that the cases are not alike. One could argue that Tamar, in fact, victimized Judah by sleeping with him, an act that he would never have initiated had he known her true identity. As a masked woman, Tamar had power over Judah that she abused. Contextually, however, this is the only power she had over him. His power over her was far greater. As a result of withholding his last son from Tamar, she could neither have children in a levirate marriage nor a new husband from another family. In other words, she had power over an act. He had power over a life.

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goods and services; the follower has something that the leader needs or wants and, finally, principle-centered power, where the leader gains followers because of respect and a compelling ideology. Such leaders can influence because their power emanates from a set of core values:

They are trusted. They are respected. They are honored. And they are followed because others want to follow them, want to believe in them and their cause, want to do what the leader wants. This is not blind faith, mindless obedience, or robotic servitude; this is knowledgeable, whole-hearted, uninhibited commitment. This is *principle-centered power*.¹²

One could make a case that the two biblical narratives above are illustrations of both coercive and utility power since the characters had power over the lives of others via their position as royal or patriarch and that by engaging in these acts of exploitation, they had to forego what little principle-centered power they had. The same can be said for the minor characters in both stories, who had power because they had knowledge of the dark behaviors of their respective friends. Holding someone else's secret is a form of currency and a measure of power over another.

But what was expected of these characters from the reader's perspective was principle-centered power, the kind of power we associate with the values transmitted in our sacred literature. Tamar expected these of Amnon or she would not have resisted with her pleas to a sense of compassion and duty that he lacked. The other Tamar may have believed that deep down Judah would ultimately lead from this place, and he did. He acquitted Tamar and recognized his wrongdoing: "She is more righteous than I..." (Genesis 28:25). In this sense, Judah offers the proto-type of a principle-centered response: admission of guilt and, to some extent, an apology (although not using the exact language of contrition).¹³ In speaking to many victims in Jewish sexual abuse scandals at the hands of rabbis, I have never heard a single person share they were offered an apology. Not one said that the offending organization that protected the abuser, in cases where this factor was relevant, reached out to apologize to them personally. The blanket 'apology' sent to the public, if there was

¹² Stephen R. Covey, *Principle-Centered Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 102. Italics are Covey's.

¹³ Although there are midrashim that suggest Judah denied his responsibility in this (*Genesis Rabba* 85:11), Judah's confession, which appears explicitly in the biblical text itself, was regarded as a *kiddush Hashem* in the Talmud and Judah the paradigm of a penitent (*Sota*, 10b).

one, was more about self-protection and re-building a reputation than about healing those who suffered.¹⁴ Such stubborn withholding only deepens the wounds.

For those victimized by an act of abuse, particularly at the hands of a purported religious leader, the heartache is two-fold. There is the physicality of the act in question and the spiritual collapse that comes in the wake of hypocrisy, of expecting leaders to be principle-centered but realizing that they are users and takers. That they can get away with these acts for months, years, and even decades becomes all the more horrifying when we realize that people around them had their suspicions or possessed actual information that could have prevented the abuse. Some claim self-righteous grounds for not turning in an abuser under the umbrella of *mesira*, the sin of turning over an alleged Jewish criminal to secular authorities or courts. Such claims must be scrutinized.¹⁵ What is the defender actually defending?

¹⁴ For more on the public apology that has become an expected and trite feature of business and political conduct, see *My Bad: An Apology Anthology* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007). Authors Arleen Sorkin and Paul Slansky contend that the popularity of such apologies surfaced about 25 years ago and serve the mechanical function of allowing a leader to resume duties. They anthologize text after text of apologies that sound tame and rather meaningless next to their crimes. *The New York Times* created “Apology Watch” to collect terrible apologies, mostly in the corporate sector. In 2014, Dov Seidman called for an apology ceasefire: <http://dealbook.nytimes.com/2014/02/03/calling-for-an-apology-cease-fire/>.

¹⁵ There is a passage in *Bava Metsia* where R. Elazar, son of R. Shimon, was appointed by the authorities in his town to arrest Jewish thieves. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korha sent him a message: “You are vinegar, son of wine. Until when will you inform on the nation of our God to be executed (by a gentile king’s court)?” The vinegar label suggests a person who is sour, bitter and not well-liked. This is in addition to the actual prohibition of turning over a Jew to a secular court for either criminal or financial misdemeanors. Even if the person is himself a sinner, Maimonides slurs the one who turns him over, saying that he will have no share in the world to come (*Hilkhot Hovel u-Mazik*, 8:9, *Shulhan Arukh*, H.M. 388:9. There was legitimate concern that because of anti-Jewish sentiment, such criminals would not be treated with justice but such concerns may be mitigated today, as Yitzchok Adlerstein, adjunct chair of Jewish law and ethics at Loyola Law School explains: “The reason that *mesira* was seen as the equivalent of a capital crime is that when you handed over a Jew to secular authorities, courts and prisons were run like independent fiefdoms, and prisoners often did not emerge alive...you were theoretically costing someone their life [sic], and that is not true in America,” cited in Rebecca Spence, “Case of Informant Reverberates through L.A.’s Orthodox Community,” *The Forward* (January 23, 2008). J. Simcha Cohen also shares concerns about the way *mesira* can be misunderstood today in a democratic country and used as a cover up for sexual predators in “Reporting and Prosecuting Jewish Criminals: Halakhic Concerns,” *Ideas and Ideals* (Feb 11, 2008),

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The most insidious abuse protectors are not lone operators, as in our two narratives, but the leaders of institutions that risk their reputations if wide-spread abuse is discovered. One of the great ironies embedded in abuse cases is that the organized structures that protect individual abusers often do so because they want to protect the reputation of the faith or the hierarchical structures that promote faith. This strategy routinely backfires, bringing in its wake condemnation and reprisals. Yet were such safeguards in place to create security for the victim and not the abuser, the religious body in question would likely be regarded as worthy of emulation. When we look closely at the leadership structures of the Catholic Church, we can understand how the culture may have unintentionally and intentionally contributed to the problem.

In *Supreme Authority: Understanding Power in the Catholic Church*, Mary Faulkner tries to understand a Church in crisis, one of many that have beset the Catholic faith in its long history.¹⁶ She refers to the Catholic Church as a study in paradox and contends that although previous scandals resulted in the formation of competing faith structures and denominations, this current crisis of sexual abuse and cover-up has ironically not led people to the loss of numbers expected because “millions of Catholics are more casual about their Catholicism than their forebears once were.”¹⁷ In other words, the Church has curiously not lost its hold on people because it has lost its hold on people.

Faulkner sets out six principles of the hierarchal structure of the Church in relation to non-ranking members that can and have contributed to why abuse problems were not tackled early and eradicated completely. They point to the creation of an authority pyramid that diminishes the lay person’s ability to shape his or her religious experience and even to deny the validity of one’s own opinions in relation to religion. They are also so normative in the Church that that are assumed to be the way that communication and leadership must function:

1. Identification of what is working and not working is done by the leaders.
2. What the people need is determined by the leaders.

www.jewishideas.org/print/58. These sources are included in “Turning in Criminals,” *Confronting Scandal*, 58-63.

¹⁶ Mary Faulkner, *Supreme Authority: Understanding Power in the Catholic Church* (Royersford, PA: Alpha, 2003), 17.

¹⁷ Faulkner, 19.

3. Leaders are the only ones who know how to get things done.
4. Communication is one-way only: from leaders to subordinates.
5. Accountability is one –way: from people to leaders.
6. Opportunity for leadership is reserved for certain types of people, often based on race, gender, or religious affiliation.¹⁸

In the aggregate, Faulkner understands how the abuse scandal happened:

The principles of hierarchy and patriarchy combine to create an all-male ruling structure. This ruling authority is believed to be God-given – therefore not open to question. Thus, in the Catholic Church, the highest-ranking male – the pope – has unique access to God that isn't available to everyone. He stands between the people and God. Through him, all must pass to reach God. He is, therefore (with due allowance made for those who know no better), their means to salvation.¹⁹

The hierarchy does not end there, as Faulkner explains, and this creates the cultural context for problems to be “solved” or managed internally through a system impenetrable to claims of fallibility.

However, his rank and privilege do not belong to him [the pope] personally, but come to him through his position in the organization: the Church. The Church, then, becomes the means to salvation through which all must pass. Because this deals with something as important as salvation, a primary preoccupation of those in charge is to preach and maintain this self-serving status quo. Such a church is not likely to shed its power lightly.²⁰

Judaism in North America and most of the Diaspora has no such centralized structure with which to contend. To a much lesser level, Israel with its Chief Rabbinate does, but it is incomparable to the Church in age, scale or influence. On the sexual side, Judaism does not have the commitment to celibacy that can be the driver of sin for priests seduced by temptation. But these aside, it's not hard to see that some of the patterns Faulkner describes have resonances for Jewish leadership, where authority is foundational and a ladder of decision trickles down instead of working its way up from lay channels, needs and problems. This is compounded by the notion of *Da'as Torah* that grants rabbis the authority to expand their jurisdiction to lifestyle issues well beyond normative halakic

¹⁸ Faulkner, 12-13.

¹⁹ Faulkner, 15-16.

²⁰ Faulkner, 15-16.

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rulings. Given this, Jewish organizations must be particularly vigilant in offering lay people appropriate feedback loops, have an ethics committee to handle internal moral issues and be able to give regular and pointed critique to its leadership.

In *Primal Leadership*, Daniel Goleman, the pioneer of emotional intelligence studies, writes – along with his co-authors – about the problem of self-delusion, the incapacity of leaders to assess themselves accurately. The best way to “correct self-distortions in self-perception,” he writes, is to receive corrective feedback. And although we seem to hear feedback all of the time from friends, colleagues and family, we do not get it regularly enough when we hit the echelons of higher leadership. Goleman calls this the CEO disease. In a word, the higher up you are, the more feedback you need, the less feedback you get:

...people deny their leaders important information – not only about their behavior and leadership styles, but also about the state of the organization. The reasons people are silent include fear of the leader’s wrath, not wanting to be seen as the bearers of bad news, or wanting to appear as “good citizens,” and team players...Often the reason is simply that it makes people uncomfortable to give candid feedback on someone else’s behavior.

Goleman believes that the only genuine antidote to blind spots is for the leader to invite on a regular basis assessment from others through formal and informal means. Organizations must do the same to make sure that the kind of moral gaps and cultural norms that create abuse problems and cover-ups are identified early and ameliorated as soon as possible before the problems grow and hurt more people. This can only happen when those “low-down” in any organizational hierarchy can have reasonable access to those at the top of the pyramid. Power sharing is never easy, especially when the perception is that access is risk rather than access and transparency builds trust. Then there are those who are often to the side of the pyramid when they are usually most at risk: women. Lay boards and senior leadership roles in the Orthodox community are still dominated by men. The large majority of sexual scandals have men at their center. The implicit protection of men by other men is broken when more women take active roles. When the voices of women are sought, they are heard, but too often men in leadership roles imagine what women would say or think in the absence of actual women to inform the conversation and the culture. Token female representation will not shift a culture and make it more healthy and less prone to abuse, largely because the tokenism itself makes the implicit statement that a sponsoring organization is doing enough simply by having one

woman, treating women's participation as something to be checked off rather than encouraged and cultivated.

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Most of us can name a rabbi who just got out of jail or is in jail for sexual abuse without thinking too hard. We can all name a former Israeli president recently released from jail for rape. Jewish newspapers abound with stories of Jewish organizational heads, journalists and others in high-ranking positions who have fallen mightily.²¹ I am not a sociologist or historian to say whether or not this phenomenon is happening with greater frequency or is simply benefiting from more reportage. But from a spiritual standpoint, I believe Orthodox organizations have to take larger and bolder steps to ameliorate the chances of sexual abuse happening in their ranks. Often the steps they do take are small and paradoxically celebrated, offering the moral permission of license not to do more.

Instead of organizational perspective alone perhaps we can view this problem from the inside of the holiness code within which we should abide. In *The Road to Character*, David Brooks addresses the way that suffering builds character, a well-known trope used by amateur theologians. But instead of merely resting on the gratitude for suffering that people often feel with hindsight, Brooks offers a different response. When people are stuck in the midst of difficulty, they may begin to feel a call, a way of morally determining their reaction once they get past the question they will not be able to answer, namely, why does evil happen? It's not in the search to numb the pain:

The right response to this sort of pain is not pleasure. It's holiness. I don't mean that in a purely religious sense. I mean seeing the pain as part of a moral narrative and trying to redeem something bad by turning it into something sacred, some act of sacrificial service that will put oneself in fraternity with the wider community and with eternal moral demands... Suffering simultaneously reminds us of our finitude and pushes us to see life in the widest possible connections, which is where holiness dwells.²²

²¹ This is not the place to profile such crimes or discuss practical solutions. For a greater understanding of what may drive this problem, see Michelle Friedman, "Crossing the Line: What Makes a Rabbi Violate Sexual Boundaries – and What Can Be Done About it?" in *Tempest in the Temple*: 43-59. In the same volume, see "Out of the Jewish Closet: facing the Hidden Secrets of Child Sex Abuse – and the Dame Done to Victims" by Joyanna Silberg and Stephanie Dallam: 77-104.

²² David Brooks, *The Road to Character* (New York: Random House, 2016), 95.

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If our community has suffered from a few highly-publicized cases of abuse, we must put in every possible hurdle so that there will be no future cases. On a deeper level, we must revisit the notion of holiness and how such cases afford us the opportunity to strengthen our commitment to it, to *kedusha*. By this, I refer not to Otto's difficult *mysterium tremendum*, some mystical state, the stuff of kabbalists and philosophers, but to the very real and lived experience of a life of discipline and self-restraint, of sexual modesty, and a commitment to a life of the mind and the heart. We tell ourselves to be good. We have yet to tell ourselves to be holy. Where holiness lives, abuse cannot live.