

# **APPROPRIATE INTIMACY by Rabbi Shefa Gold**

## **Appropriate Intimacy or Not Appropriate Intimacy, That is the Question: Ohalah's Workshop on Clergy Boundary Issues (1/12/09)**

Based on the Ten Commandments of Shir HaShirim developed by Rabbi Shefa Gold and The Sexual Misconduct Workshops developed by Rabbi Arthur Gross-Shaefer

I. Thou shalt explore intimacy, allowing thyself to be drawn by Mystery and to be open to the Power of Yearning for God.

II. Thou shalt be fully engaged, enjoying what is before thee now and learning to perceive the perfection beneath it and behind this seemingly imperfect world.

III. Thou shalt cultivate generosity in appreciation of the beauty that is before thee.

IV. Thou shalt truly experience pleasure and surrender to the intoxication of love, occasionally losing "control."

V. Thou shalt experience and know thy complete purity and innocence and yet pay seasoned and careful attention to the timing of love.

VI. Thou shalt be in conversation with nature and through that conversation explore the mystery of Love and Death.

VII. Thou shalt treasure, protect, and honor the gifts given to thee and allow thyself to be addressed personally by God through the gifts of this world.

VIII. Thou shalt invite all the winds of the world to blow upon thee and receive each gust of change as a summons to strengthen your commitment to fully wake up.

IX. Thou shalt discern the uniqueness in each opportunity for love and risk everything in order to rise to the challenge of love.

X. Thou shalt play... with enthusiasm and curiosity while listening attentively for the voice of Shechina.

"One should not learn from a rabbi who behaves improperly, even though he is a great scholar upon whom everyone depends, until he returns to virtuous behavior"

I. Thou shalt explore intimacy – Sense of arousal can be good and healthy as well as dangerous and destructive

A. Sexual Harassment

1. Quid pro quo

2. Environmental (workplace, congregants, staff, lay volunteers, students, etc.)

B. Hostile Environment

1. Touching (too close to someone's space, inappropriate hugging/kissing, stroking of arm/leg/rear, blocking someone's progress)

2. Leering (posters/objects, obscene gestures)

3. Verbal (excessive compliments, suggestive statements/jokes, sharing of personal/intimate information)

C. Although one has acted this way in the past, does not mean is appropriate

D. What is the standard?

1. Consent and intentions are generally irrelevant.

2. Legal test: Welcome or Unwelcome

3. Ethical standard: Sexual harassment determined by the behavior's impact on the recipient, not the intention of the actor

E. Sexual Harassment Continuum and potential for escalation: Jokes – Flirting – Innuendo – Touching – Fondling – Grabbing

Exercise – Share a time when you felt harassed, saw someone being harassed, or harassed someone. What happened, why did it happen, and how did you feel?

II. Thou shalt be full engaged – Intimacy is both a blessing and a curse

A. Self awareness goals

1. Watch the other for behaviors such as

a. Rush to leave

b. Averted eyes

c. Hunched shoulders

d. Stiff body

2. Consider: Would you act this way in the presence of

a. Your spouse/significant partner

b. Rabbinic colleague

c. National press

3. Examine how you would feel if the same behavior or comments were directed toward someone you care about, such as a daughter or a son

4. Reflect on how your actions stem from your own

a. Experiences

b. Unmet Needs

c. Unfilled Voids

B. Our congregants—like all of us—both need and fear intimacy

1. We do much of our work in intimate moments

2. Our best work is done when rabbi and congregant both feel safe due to clear and maintained boundaries

3. In intimate moments our Yetzer is aroused and, if not contained, can blur boundaries for congregants, staff, volunteers, students, and ourselves

III. Thou shalt cultivate generosity – But our generosity can also be used to meet our own needs

A. Some Common Traits of Rabbis that have not kept clear boundaries (workplace hazard)

1. Marital problems

2. Existential crisis

3. Memory of someone

4. Loneliness or emptiness

5. Attraction of specific characteristics – intelligence, kindness, humor, body, power, wealth, energy

6. Confusing the intimate moment with sexual time

7. Congregant's need for the rabbi

## 8. Charismatic

### B. Some Common Traits of victims

#### 1. Reduced power

a. Gender, sometimes, though this is changing

b. Lack of resources

c. Emotional needs

#### 2. Expectations and feelings about rabbis, possibly including

a. Trust in rabbi as authority figure

b. Assumption that rabbis are safe people

c. Attraction to rabbis as sensitive/caring individuals

3. Behaviors towards rabbis – May attempt to sexualize the relationship as a learned behavior of victimization

### C. Factors that Blur Boundaries

1. Physical Behavior – sitting close, touching hand or body

2. Time Concerns – length of meetings, time of meetings, frequency of encounter

3. Place Concerns – home or office, social or business

4. Goal of Meeting no longer the subject of the encounter

5. Special Treatment – altering calendar to make accommodations, gifts, staying late or arriving early, sending personal notes/text messages, excessive phone calls

6. Use of Stimulants – alcohol/drugs

7. Sexual Banter – telling sexual jokes, stories, innuendoes, seductive looks

8. Sharing Intimate Information, Secrets, Feelings of inadequacy

9. Mutual Agreement of Secrecy

IV. Thou shalt truly experience pleasure – But only with equals

A. Rabbinic Sexual Misconduct – It is rabbinic sexual misconduct when a rabbi engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant/staff/volunteer in a professional relationship. Such misconduct, regardless of intent or awareness—whether apparently welcome or not—is a violation of the ministerial relationship in which a person in a position of religious leadership takes advantage of another

B. Dual relationships are very complex and affect perceptions

1. Transference: Congregant's unconscious response or attachment often reflecting attitudes developed in early life and/or serving to gratify the congregant's own physical or emotional needs

2. Counter-transference: Rabbi's unconscious response or attachment often serving to gratify the rabbi's own physical or emotional needs and/or reflecting attitudes developed in early life

C. Get your own needs met...but not at the expense of others

1. If we do not, the needs tend to come out at inappropriate times.

2. Self-control helps both rabbi and congregant.

Exercise: Where/when can and do you let go appropriately?

V. Thou shalt experience purity – Do not awaken love until it is ripe.

A. If you are not careful, the following levels of abuse and betrayal can be created

1. Sexual exploitation

2. Betrayal of trust

3. Misuse of authority and power

4. Taking advantage of the vulnerable

5. Absence of meaningful consent

B. Be careful about going beyond your own abilities and that it is a 'workplace hazard' to becoming aroused by someone coming to you and touching your own levels of shame/guilt

VI. Thou shalt be in conversation with nature – Go outside – can't find it in the book ...

A. Definition of an ethical person

1. Curious as to one's own motives, biases, needs, pains

2. Mission statement
3. Core Values
4. Ethical Decision Model
5. Active creation of an ethical environment

## B. Effects of Boundary Violations

1. On self and family
2. On Congregant
3. On the Congregation

## C. Wanderer vs. Predator continuum

### 1. Wanderer

- a. Isolated mistake
- b. Readily engages in Teshuvah
- c. Context for actions may include
  - i. Ignorance of appropriate boundaries
  - ii. Transient situations, such as divorce, loss, etc.

### 2. Predator

- a. Pattern or repeated actions
- b. Teshuvah is very difficult
- c. Context for actions is a psychologically complex knot, not easily untied.

VII. Thou shalt treasure the gifts given to thee – Warning signs to going unconscious – Seems so good at the time, so smart yet so stupid –

## A. Know ethical considerations

1. No sexual relationship between rabbi, congregants, employees
2. Do not go beyond your abilities

B. Participate in accountability

1. Create and develop a network of peers or supervisors
2. Have a life outside the synagogue with trusting relationships

C. Establish and maintain priorities

1. Maintain personal spiritual life beyond sermon or work-related preparation
2. Pay attention to your needs and those of your family
3. Pay attention to your physical, emotional, and spiritual health

D. Recognize and obey warning signs

1. Symptoms of burnout, sleep disorder, general fatigue, depression
2. Increase in family conflicts
3. Overwork to avoid going home
4. Not taking vacation days, not including spouse or family in plans
5. Dreaming / fantasizing about colleagues or congregants

E. Remember all the traits and signs earlier presented

VIII. Thou shalt be fully awake – Taking an intimate moment and making it proactive

A. Develop spiritual tools that you can use when you do feel aroused or someone triggers something in you

1. Change how you perceive the moment and the person
2. Use a meditation – angel meditation
3. Why am I feeling this way? Use it as an opportunity to learn, to grow.

B. If I have abused another person, how can I grow with Teshuvah?

While there are many conceptions of the rabbinic concept of Teshuvah, it would appear that common elements found in the formulations by Bahya, Saadiah, Maimonides, Wiesenthal, Steinsaltz and Soloveitchik include: recognition of the sinful act, sincere remorse, confession, restitution, and resolve. Furthermore, Steinsaltz directs our attention to the spiritual nature of the

process when he wrote, “(Repentance) is more than just repentance for sin, it is a spiritual reawakening, a desire to strengthen the connection between oneself and the sacred.”

IX. Thou shalt discern the uniqueness in each opportunity – See each person as different... do not objectify... A. Issues of clergy burnout B. Issues of losing the magic – all weddings the same, all bar/bat mitzvahs the same X. Thou shalt play – But playfulness, if not done carefully, can go too far A. Appropriate hugging B. Appropriate sharing C. Appropriate friendships and intimate moments D. Appropriate humor (not a disguise for violence, intrusion)