



to them. Whether they are family members, close friends, business associates, or colleagues, people tend to defend those accused of wrongdoing. “Old boy” networks often play a role in this process as well. What is often tragically ignored in this instinctive rush to “protect” their loved ones is they are in fact sowing the seeds of the eventual destruction and disgrace of the alleged perpetrator. How many cases of eventual public airing of the crimes of perpetrators could have been avoided had only those closest to the perpetrator confronted him and dealt with the problem head on? And how many victims could have been saved by prompt attention to allegations and accusations?

2. Chillul Hashem – desecration of God’s name. Many feel that bringing these problems to light casts the Orthodox community in a bad light, causing a desecration of God’s name. What they do not understand is that the community is judged not on whether or not it has sexual predators in its midst, but rather it is judged upon its reaction to those predators. If public perception is that the community covers up for its crimes, then indeed a grave Chillul Hashem takes place, for the community is seen as condoning evil. But if the community deals with the issue in a forthright manner, it creates a Kiddush Hashem, a sanctification of God’s name, by sending the message that this behavior is viewed as contemptible and not tolerated.

3. Lashon harah – gossip and tale bearing. The prevailing attitude often is that airing these kinds of accusations is prohibited by halacha, Jewish Law, because it constitutes gossip and tale bearing. Those who piously spout these Torah teachings forget that the biblical prohibition, Lo taamod al dam re’echa, do not stand idly by when your fellow’s blood is being spilled, is also Torah Law. They also forget that that there are situations when saying something negative about a person is not prohibited at all. Obviously these are complicated halachic issues that cannot be fully discussed in this forum, and halachic authorities must be consulted in this area, as in regard to any area of Jewish Law. But in consulting, a full picture of the situation must be presented to the halachic authorities.

4. The halachic rules of evidence. Many people are under the impression that since according to Torah Law, convicting a person of a crime requires two witnesses to the crime, we cannot accept any accusations without the corroboration of witnesses. By their very nature therefore, accusations of crimes of sexual abuse can virtually never be considered true because there is no corroboration. Those who promulgate this view fail to realize that the Talmud is rife with cases of establishing fact without witnesses. It is true that to mete out the formal punishments of a Jewish court, witnesses are required. However, we are dealing not with meting out punishment, but with preventing predators from continuing to prey on victims. To give an analogy – while we would require two witnesses to convict a serial murderer, lacking such witnesses would certainly not give us license to permit him to roam the streets at will!

5. Mesirah – turning in another Jew to cause him harm. Many feel, erroneously in our opinion, that one cannot turn to the authorities to deal with Jewish criminals in our midst. While this too is a complicated halachic issue, but we may safely state that one cannot use the specter of Mesirah as an excuse to allow criminals of any type to stalk the streets. If we as a community had some effective manner of dealing with the problem perhaps one could argue that the interference of outside authorities would be unwelcome. Since we lack any such sort of communal structure, it is foolhardy, harmful and dangerous to use mesirah as an excuse to do

nothing.

This piece is a modest attempt to begin to address a subject that so seriously calls out for our attention. Only if serious and forthright discussion begins, can we hope to deal effectively with the problem and eliminate the culture of denial and obstruction that brings shame upon us all.