

# Washington Jewish Week

## Domestic abuse violates God's laws. Here's why

MAY 4, 2016 BY [RABBI RAIN ZOHAV](#) — [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

This week's Torah portion is Acharei Mot, Leviticus 16-18:30.

The parsha of Acharei Mot deals with sacrifices, the Day of Atonement and with biblical sexual offenses. These can be disturbing chapters to read, but it is refreshing that the Torah does not presume that everyone in the Israelite community is innocent of wrongdoing.

In this column, I am going to look at a single sentence: "You shall keep My laws and My rules; and live by them; I am God" (Leviticus 18:5). The reason that I am delving into this line is that Jewish clergy are being asked to speak out on the issue of domestic abuse in our communities this week. This line seems the one with the most absolutely clear connection to the issue of domestic abuse.

"Domestic abuse occurs in the Jewish community at the same rate as the general population," according to the Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse's Clergy Training Manual. There is often denial that anything like this can happen in our communities. But the Torah does not shy away from difficult topics. When we deny that domestic abuse happens in our communities, do not believe congregants when they tell us about abusive situations, downplay the significance of this issue or suggest that someone remain in an abusive situation for the sake of shalom bayit (a peaceful home) we can endanger the life of a member of our community.

The rabbis taught that "you shall keep My laws and My rules; and live by them" means, at minimum, that you should not die for them. It is from this conclusion that they derive the idea that we may violate the Shabbat and other commandments in order to save a life.

This is the Jewish value of pikuach nefesh. It is part of our responsibility as a community to protect the lives of our members by doing all that we can to address issues of domestic abuse and to assist those who are suffering any kind of domestic abuse.

At a recent training for clergy sponsored by the Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse, we learned that every time one of us speaks out about this issue, the phones begin to ring at the organization. Here is JCADA's number: 301-315-8041.

If you are reading this article and your spouse is abusing power over you in spiritual, emotional, financial, sexual or physical ways, I want you to know that God wants you to live and that there are people ready and eager to assist you. You are not alone, this is not your fault and there is help available.

I also want you to know that the Holy One of Blessing does not support this abuse in any way. I pray for you to have strength and courage to reach out.

For people who might notice something that does not seem right with folks in your community, please know it is OK to gently inquire about how things are going and then listen. Expressing care

and concern and breaking down the isolation and shame that often accompany domestic abuse is part of becoming a holy community that provides ways for humans to live.

Discussion questions:

What other ways can you think of to assist people suffering from domestic abuse?

Have you ever helped someone in this situation?

What was most helpful?

Can you share this with others?

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