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## **Rabbis Turn Focus on Domestic Abuse**

By Ari Goldman

The woman comes to her rabbi and says, "Please, rabbi, help me fix my marriage. He's always so angry with me."

The rabbi smiles and says, "Just go home and pay better attention to him and things will get better."

Of course, things do not get better and, tragically, an opportunity to save the woman's life is lost. Her violent husband eventually kills her.

Rabbi Diana Manber told me that story because it is an extreme, but true, version of one she has seen happen again and again. But the same story could have been about a priest or an imam. "It happens in every community, no matter the race, the religion or the level of education," Manber said.

She tells it about a rabbi because she wants to drive home the point that domestic violence is a Jewish problem, too.

"For a long time, we believed that Jews weren't alcoholics, weren't abusers, weren't drug addicts," she said. "But we are just like everybody else in society, and we have to take responsibility."

Manber is the director of an organization called DAYENU! Enough Silence! - the domestic violence initiative of the New York Board of Rabbis. Since the program began in 2005, it has trained more than 300 rabbis and rabbinical students in violence awareness, prevention and intervention.

Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, the board's executive vice president, said that there is a historic failure that needs to be urgently corrected. "For too long we did too little in the Jewish community," he said.

The Board of Rabbis also has forged partnerships with organizations that represent Protestant and Catholic clergy and has hosted training sessions for them as well.

Statistics on domestic violence are not broken down by faith communities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that one out of four women and one out of nine men will be abused by an "intimate partner" at some point in their lifetime.

Members of the clergy are often on the front lines of this issue because they come in contact with husbands, wives, children and siblings in ways that few other professionals do. To counter the example of the rabbi who brushes off a woman's plea for help, Manber offers the following scenario:

A rabbi is teaching a Bible class and notices that a woman has bruises on her arm. He talks to her privately. "Is everything okay at home? Is anybody hurting you?" He then refers her to a place that can help.

Clergy have to know the limits of their expertise, Manber said. They need to know when to turn to professionals who can help the victim, either with a lawyer, with temporary shelter or with medical or psychological treatment.

The issue is one close to Manber's heart and life experience because, she recalls, she saw domestic violence firsthand in her childhood home in New Jersey. When she spoke about her father's abusive nature during a Hebrew school lesson on forgiveness, she says her teacher ignored her pleas for help.

Manber, 33, a rabbi of the Reform branch of Judaism, has been married for 18 months to a man she says is "very supportive" of her work. They live in Manhattan with their dog, Hamantashen.

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