



SHALVA News

SHALVA's mission is to bring tranquillity and safety to Jewish homes and relationships through the prevention and alleviation of domestic abuse in the Jewish community.

Let *all* my people go

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For many families, the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of Seders are joyously anticipated. The Haggadah commands each of us to feel as though we ourselves were enslaved in Egypt, and then taken to freedom. Bitter herbs evoke the horror of slavery. Salt water resembles tears of pain and despair. The feast that follows celebrates the joy of liberation.

Unfortunately, not all slavery ended with the Exodus from Egypt. For too many Jewish women and children, the tears caused by tyranny and slavery continue to fall. They live in captivity every day in their homes, as Jewish pharaohs enslave them. There is no triumphant communal Exodus for them. Nor does liberation come with the singing of "Chad Gadya" at the evening's close. They remain behind in the Egypt of domestic abuse even as the rest of us are free to enjoy the week's celebration.

Slavery? "The desire for total control over another person is the common denominator for all tyranny," says Judith Lewis Herman, M.D. in *Trauma and*

Recovery. Abusers establish themselves as authorities over everything in their family's lives.

Captivity? *Why doesn't she stage her own exodus?* After all, there are no visible chains. Every house has a door. There are telephones with which she can dial 911. Why doesn't she leave?

Sometimes he takes away the car keys, or removes the car battery, locks her into the apartment or traps her in

'Slavery did not end with the exodus from Egypt.'

the bathroom. He takes the phone with him to work, or taps it. More often the barriers are invisible. He renders her captive by threats to the children, to her, to her family. He may threaten suicide. He stalks her in person or by e-mail. He insists that she deposit her paycheck in an account that only he can access. He humiliates her to the point where she finds it easier, safer and more socially acceptable to do whatever he wants.

We rarely see this enslavement because it occurs in private. Nevertheless, the impact of domestic abuse

ripples out like plagues through the community. So many families are in trouble our social service agencies have waiting lists. Children fall asleep in class after a frightening and sleepless night of listening to their parents' escalating fight. Doctors, hospitals and mental health workers see visible and invisible scars on their Jewish patients. Lawyers and judges complain about the backlog of domestic abuse cases clogging the courts. Police complain about the calls for domestic disturbances, including those from Jewish homes.

Private slavery has communal consequences. The cost of slavery is seen in the ten plagues brought down upon us by modern day pharaohs, and our difficulty in figuring out how to free ourselves.

The Ten Plagues of Domestic Abuse

Blood: Our bathrooms and bedrooms run red with the blood of our mothers and sisters, daughters and sons who have been abused and defiled by the cruelty of abusers who refuse to recognize the image of G-d in which all of us were created. Overwhelmed by

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SHALVA Unity Dinner 2001

On a beautiful, clear winter's eve, hundreds of people gathered at SHALVA's Unity Dinner eager to celebrate the contributions of Ruth Belzer and Blooma Stark and the work of SHALVA. In "unity," members of our diverse Jewish community joined together to take a stand for safety and tranquillity in Jewish lives.

More photos inside . . .

Blooma Stark, Rodef Shalom Award recipient (left), and Ruth Belzer, Gladys Iser Award recipient.

