



Religion and Domestic Violence



Yamilka Nigaglioni

“Survivors of abuse
deserve the best of what
both faith leaders and
advocates bring to the
table.”

– REV. DR. ANNE MARIE HUNTER

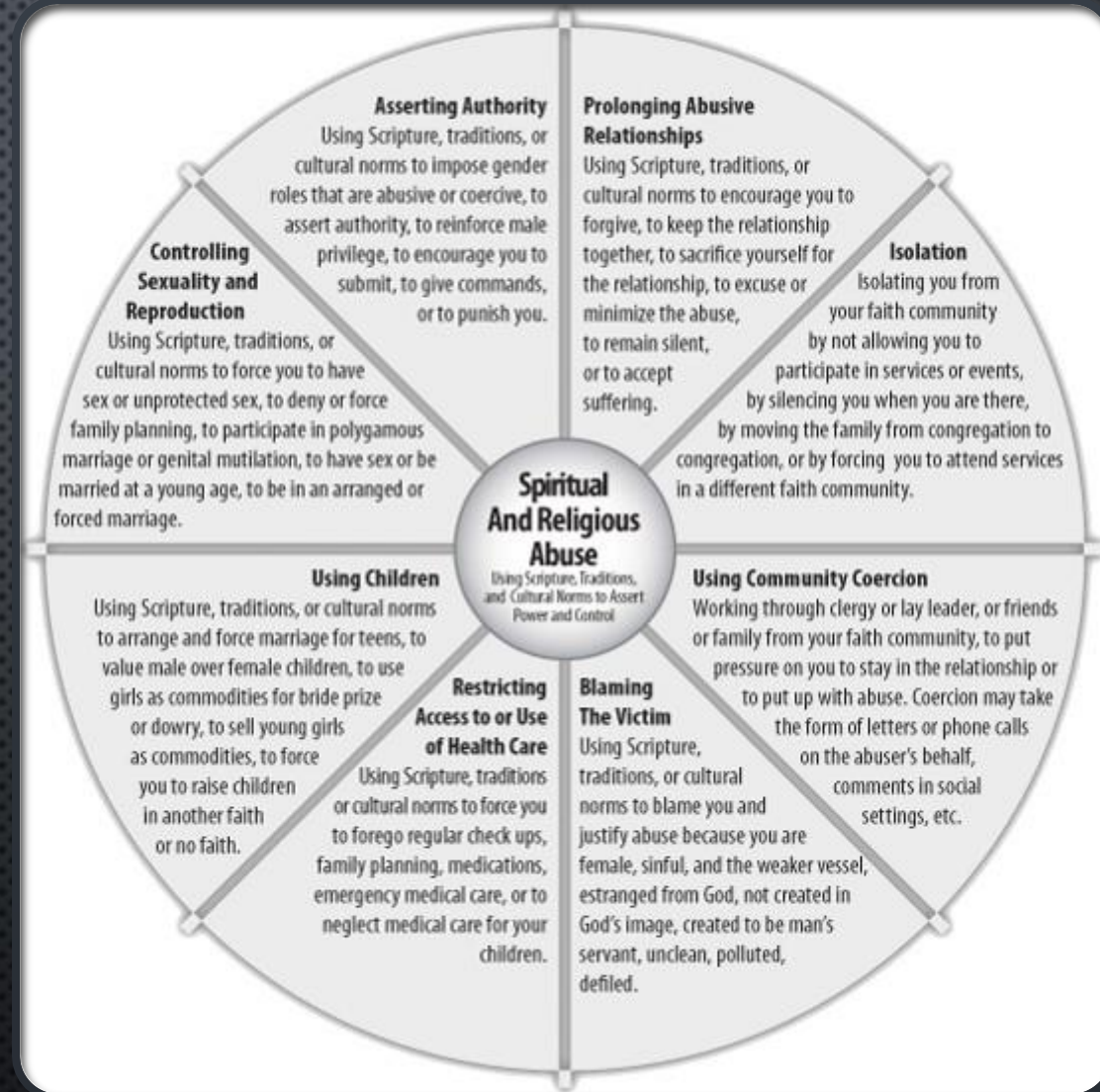


WHAT WILL BE COVERED?

- ABUSERS IN RELIGION?
- OVERVIEW OF MAJOR RELIGIONS
 - CHRISTIANITY
 - ISLAM
 - JUDAISM
- WHAT CAN BE DONE?

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CAN AFFECT ANYONE

- DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CAN AFFECT ANYONE, REGARDLESS OF HOW THEY IDENTIFY, THE COMMUNITIES THEY BELONG TO, OR HOW THEY ARE SEEN BY OTHERS. RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION IS NO EXCEPTION TO THIS—DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CAN AFFECT PEOPLE WHO PRACTICE ANY RELIGION, NO RELIGION, MULTIPLE RELIGIONS, OR WHO ENGAGE IN OTHER SPIRITUAL PRACTICES.
- ABUSERS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF MISINTERPRETATIONS OF RELIGIOUS TEXTS AND EXPLOIT SCRIPTURE AS A JUSTIFICATION FOR HARMING OTHERS BOTH PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY.



THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION: ROADBLOCK OR RESOURCE?

- CHURCH DOCTRINES AND TEACHINGS ABOUT A WOMAN'S PLACE, DUTY, AND NATURE ADD TO THE PROBLEM.
- MANY REFUSE TO BELIEVE THAT ABUSE EXISTS WITHIN THEIR CONGREGATIONS.
- RELIGIOUS LEADERS HOLD SIGNIFICANT POWER IN EITHER AIDING VICTIMS OR ENCOURAGING VIOLENCE BY ABUSERS.
- A LOT OF VICTIMS IN THE MIDST OF CRISIS BEGIN TO QUESTION "WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME? WHY WOULD GOD ALLOW THIS?"
- THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT FAITH AND RELIGIOUS TEXTS HAVE NOT HELPED VICTIMS ON THEIR JOURNEYS OF HEALING.



WORLD RELIGIONS

- CHRISTIANITY
 - WORLDWIDE: 2.4 BILLION CHRISTIANS
 - HOLY BOOK: BIBLE
- ISLAM
 - WORLDWIDE: 1.9 BILLION MUSLIMS
 - HOLY BOOK: QURAN
- JUDAISM
 - WORLDWIDE: 15.7 MILLION JEWS
 - HOLY BOOK: TORAH

STATISTICS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITHIN WORLD RELIGIONS

- IN THE U.S., THE INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL POLICY AND UNDERSTANDING, POLLED MUSLIMS, JEWS, CATHOLICS, PROTESTANTS, AND NON-AFFILIATED AMERICANS. IT FOUND THAT MUSLIMS, BOTH CHRISTIAN GROUPS, NON-AFFILIATED, AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC WERE ALL EQUALLY LIKELY TO REPORT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THEIR FAITH COMMUNITY.
- ULTIMATELY, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RATES AMONG DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS GROUPS ARE SIMILAR. THIS IS PARTICULARLY CONCERNING DUE TO WESTERN CULTURE CLASSIFYING ISLAM AS A VIOLENT RELIGION.

CHRISTIANITY: WHAT DOES IT TEACH ABOUT SUFFERING?

God is merciful and loving. Suffering is not pleasing to God and he does not single anyone out to suffer just because.

In Christian teaching, at no point does God promise that we will not suffer. In scripture, God does promise to be present with us during our suffering.

For Christians, the promise to victims from God is that even though all others might abandon them, God will be faithful.

CHRISTIANITY: WHAT DOES IT TEACH ABOUT MARRIAGE?

- MISINTERPRETATIONS OF TEXTS HAVE CREATED SUBSTANTIAL PROBLEMS FOR THE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP.
 - FOR EXAMPLE, WOMEN SUBMITTING TO THEIR HUSBANDS, HAVING TO OBEY, ADULTERY BEING THE ONLY JUSTIFIABLE REASON FOR DIVORCE, ETC.
- EVEN SO HUSBANDS SHOULD LOVE THEIR WIVES AS THEIR OWN BODIES. HE WHO LOVES HIS WIFE LOVES HIMSELF. FOR NO MAN EVER HATES HIS OWN FLESH, BUT NOURISHES IT AND CHERISHES IT, AS CHRIST DOES THE CHURCH, BECAUSE WE ARE MEMBERS OF HIS BODY.' (EPHESIANS 5:28-29)
 - THIS INSTRUCTION TO HUSBANDS IS VERY CLEAR AND CONCRETE. A HUSBAND IS TO NOURISH AND CHERISH HIS OWN BODY AND THAT OF HIS WIFE. PHYSICALLY BATTERING ONE'S SPOUSE IS PROBABLY THE MOST BLATANT VIOLATION OF THIS TEACHING AND A CLEAR REFLECTION OF THE SELF-HATRED WITHIN THE ABUSER.

ISLAM: MISCONCEPTIONS

Honor killings are not caused or encouraged by Islam. Honor killings are not even a problem specific to Muslims.



No laws condoning honor killings are based on Islamic teachings.



Feeding the rhetoric that Islam is a violent religion dismisses that violence against women is a global problem with roots much deeper than the doctrines of one religion or the features of one culture.

ISLAM: WHAT DOES IT TEACH ABOUT SUFFERING?

The Qur'an teaches that this life is a test. Tests can come in a wide variety of forms. A Muslim's goal is to respond to hardships by persevering and by continuing to turn to God for guidance and help.



Patience (sabr) is one of the important qualities of a believer. Sometimes, Muslims confuse the concept of patience and perseverance (sabr) with acceptance. In cases of domestic violence, a victim might mistakenly believe that by passively enduring the abuse, she is fulfilling her duty to be patient. However, the Qur'an is very clear that those who are experiencing a hardship should strive to end that hardship.



The fact that people will be tested does not in any way relieve an abuser of being accountable for the violence imposed on others. The Qur'an emphasizes that each person is solely responsible for his or her actions, and that no one can blame another person (e.g., 'she provoked me.') as a way to justify their abusive behavior. In fact, the Qur'an describes oppressors as people who have wronged their own souls because their behavior will lead them to be punished in the hereafter.



The Qur'an also teaches that believers can avail themselves of God's mercy and compassion while they are experiencing tests and tribulations.

ISLAM: WHAT DOES IT TEACH ABOUT MARRIAGE?

- MARRIAGE IS DESCRIBED IN THE QUR'AN AS A ,SOLEMN COVENANT;'14 IT IS A CONTRACT WITNESSED BY GOD BETWEEN TWO CONSENTING ADULTS WHO AGREE TO LIVE TOGETHER IN ACCORDANCE TO HIS LAWS. THE QUR'AN SAYS THAT ,HE CREATED FOR YOU MATES FROM AMONG YOURSELVES THAT YOU MAY DWELL IN TRANQUILITY WITH THEM, AND HE HAS PUT LOVE AND MERCY BETWEEN YOUR (HEARTS)<' (30:21).
- ATHE QUR'AN RECOGNIZES THAT NOT ALL MARRIAGES ARE SUSTAINABLE. COUPLES ARE ENCOURAGED TO EITHER LIVE TOGETHER IN KINDNESS, OR TO SEPARATE IN KINDNESS IF THEY ARE UNABLE TO LIVE ACCORDING TO GOD'S TEACHINGS. DIVORCE IS PROVIDED AS AN OPTION OF LAST RESORT TO PROTECT INDIVIDUALS FROM EXPERIENCING ANY HARM.

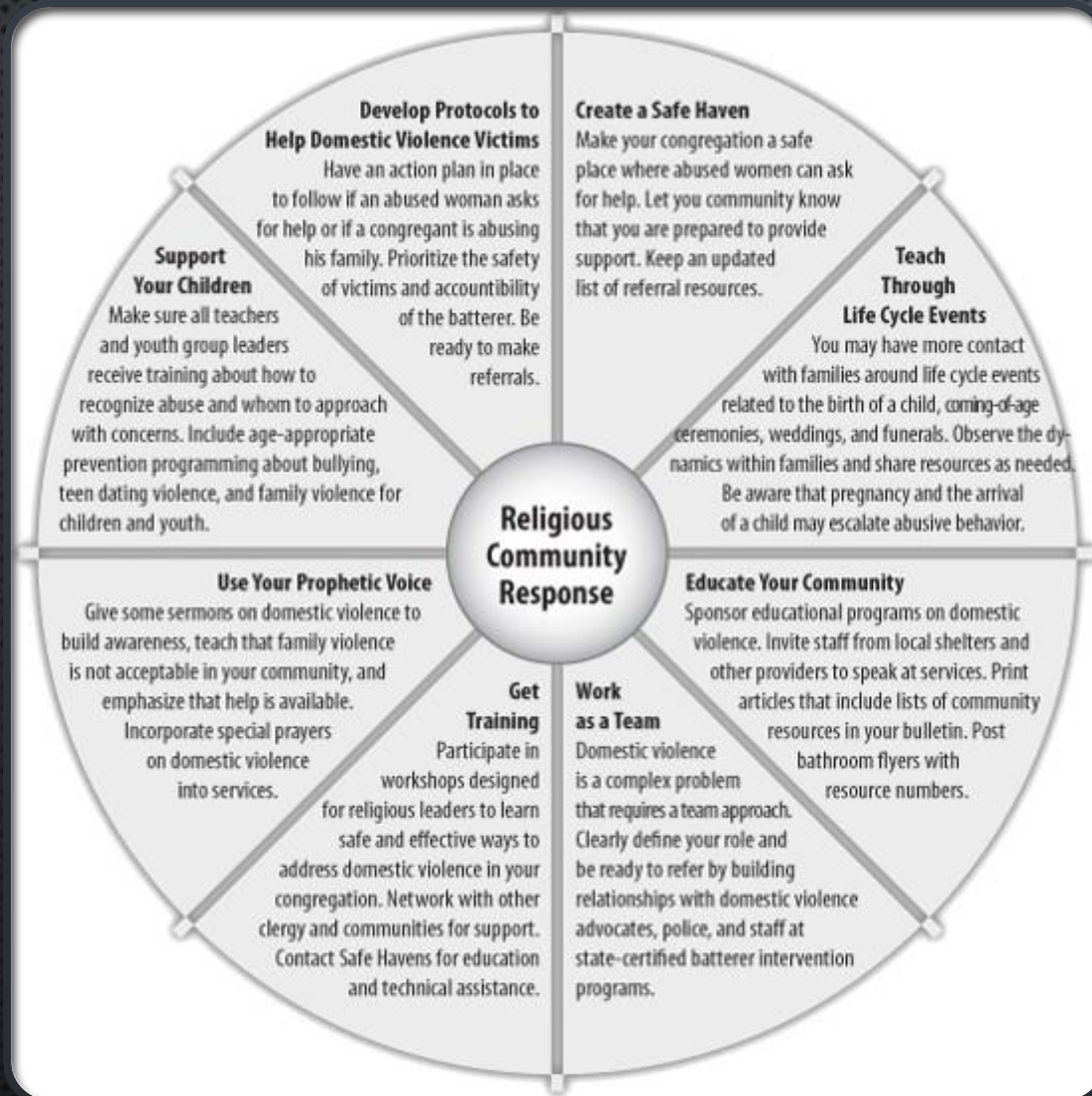


JUDAISM: WHAT DOES IT TEACH ABOUT SUFFERING?

- MANY JEWISH TEACHINGS MAINTAIN THAT DIVINE PUNISHMENT IS NOT METED OUT AT ALL IN THIS WORLD—IT IS LEFT FOR THE WORLD TO COME. AND ALL AGREE THAT IT IS NOT FOR US HUMANS TO EXACT DIVINE PUNISHMENT OR, FOR THAT MATTER, ANY PUNISHMENT OUTSIDE OF THE JUDICIAL PROCESS.
- ACTS OF PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, OR EMOTIONAL ABUSE CLEARLY ARE NOT UNDERSTOOD TO BE INSTRUMENTS OF DIVINE JUSTICE OR PROPER LEGAL PROCEEDINGS. IT IS THE DIVINE GIFT OF FREE WILL THAT UNFORTUNATELY ALLOWS SOME TO ACT IN HURTFUL AND SINFUL WAYS. THE ABUSERS, NOT GOD, ARE RECOGNIZED AS THE SOURCE OF SUFFERING.
- THOSE WHO SUFFER ARE TO FIND COMFORT IN THE HELP AND SUPPORT OF FAMILY, FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY, AND FROM GOD. JEWS HAVE A RELIGIOUS OBLIGATION TO LESSEN ANOTHER'S BURDEN AND NOT TO STAND BY CALLOUSLY OR INDIFFERENTLY WHEN ANOTHER SUFFERS.

JUDAISM: WHAT DOES IT TEACH ABOUT MARRIAGE?

- JUDAISM VIEWS MARRIAGE AS NECESSARY FOR PERSONAL FULFILLMENT AND IS THE FUNDAMENTAL UNIT OF COMMUNITY LIFE.
- ONE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL VALUES OF JEWISH FAMILY LIFE IS 'SHALOM BAYIT,' PEACE IN THE HOME. 'SHALOM,' WHICH IS SIMPLY TRANSLATED AS 'PEACE,' ALSO SIGNIFIES WHOLENESS, COMPLETENESS, AND FULFILLMENT.
- THE CONCEPT OF SHALOM BAYIT SHOULD NOT BE INVOKED TO PLACE DOMESTIC HARMONY SOLELY ON THE SHOULDERS OF A WIFE, NOR SHOULD IT BE USED TO ENCOURAGE MAINTAINING AN ABUSIVE MARRIAGE. WHEN DOMESTIC HARMONY IS IMPOSSIBLE BECAUSE OF PHYSICAL ABUSE, THE ONLY WAY FOR PEACE MAY BE DIVORCE.
- ALTHOUGH MARRIAGE IS A SACRED INSTITUTION, DIVORCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN OPTION ACCORDING TO THE JEWISH TRADITION.



WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- FAITH AND RELIGION CAN BE A SENSE OF HEALING AND COMFORT FOR VICTIMS.
- FAITH LEADERS MUST TAKE STEPS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE DYNAMICS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND HOW TO SUPPORT SURVIVORS.
- ADVOCATES AND SERVICE PROVIDERS MUST UNDERSTAND HOW TO SUPPORT SURVIVORS' RELIGIOUS PRACTICES.
- RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES HAVE THE POWER TO ENSURE THAT FAITH IS NOT MANIPULATED BY ABUSERS, BUT RATHER IS A SOURCE OF EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

QUESTIONS?