
[#metoo and us: Guest Blog by Rachel Delia Benaim](#)

Submitted by mdangel1 on Fri, 10/20/2017 - 12:13

(Rachel Delia Benaim is a journalist covering religion, gender, and climate change. Follow her on [Twitter](#).)

This week, social media exploded with #metoo, as I'm sure you've all seen and/or posted about. The social media campaign went viral shortly after it was launched in response to the allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein by actress and UNICEF ambassador, Alyssa Milano.

The lessons to be learned from this campaign run the gamut. And the fact that there are so many insights to be gleaned indicates that there is in fact one larger, meta lesson to be learned: Men, and particularly male educators, leaders and aspiring leaders, must listen before any of the larger lessons can be absorbed.

There is a tendency in the Orthodox community wherein men treat everything like a beit midrash a house of study, wherein everyone should ask questions and and critically dissect every word, every letter and every crown. However, life is not a beit midrash, and the trauma of women across the board isn't a new course of intellectual gymnastics for which to arrive at a new nafka mina, a rabbinic concept meaning practical difference.

What women everywhere's Facebook and Twitter posts show is that the experiences of women of all races, ages, religions, and geographic locations are not unique. None of this is an anomaly. Half of the population has had this experience.

So please, do not dismiss us. Do not call us dramatic. Do not dismiss what we're saying because you can't wrap your minds around it-- as many have posted, 'there's no way everyone could have been assaulted.'

Many of us have been. Many. It is time to listen to us.

Do not challenge us.

Do not explain why this is okay or not as bad as we think.

Do not tell us it only happens in other communities.

Ron Halbright, an internationally renowned conflict resolution specialist based in Switzerland, explained that when people are discussing polarizing social conflict, there are patterns of behavior that lead to a breakdown in communication. This breakdown leads to severed relationships and bars

progress. Examples of this breakdown in communication, as he explained, are “refusing to listen to the other side, insulting the other side, dismissing their humanity, intelligence, or demonizing them.”

What further leads to breakdown in communication, Halbright enumerated, is “pretending the other side does not exist or is unimportant.” I find this point particularly noteworthy for the current social dialogue, as I have seen a flurry of self congratulatory posts from men on social media. The posts express shock at the pervasiveness of sexual assault in the world; posts that doubt how women are using the vocabulary of “assault.” But I have seen very few posts engaging women as important equals in this conversation, and many of the men I know have not meaningfully engaged women in empathetic conversations on the topic. (Yes, this is anecdotal, and I'd be happy to be proven wrong on this count.) It has, yet again, become a series of intellectual contortions, devoid of feeling or groundedness.

Halbright, who is the Co-Executive Director at NCBI Switzerland, an interfaith and intercultural dialogue organization, advises empathetic listening as a solution. So here's what you men can do:

Ask us empathetically about our experience.

Ask us what you can do better.

And then listen to us. Do not challenge us. If you're unclear on something, ask clarifying questions and then keep listening.

I've attached some thought provoking posts from strong Jewish women speaking to #metoo. Can you open your hearts and listen to them, to us? Please do feel free to reach out to me for further discussion.

**

The following are the experiences of some Jewish women that they posted on Facebook that I would like to highlight to you. They talk about problems in Jewish education systems, problems of religious leadership, and sexual assault related problems faced by Orthodox women. I implore you to read them:

Rachel Caplan — <https://www.facebook.com/rachel.caplan.14/posts/10154703679435146>

Chelsea Garbell — <https://www.facebook.com/chelsea.garbell/posts/10212554775615957>

Sharon Weiss Greenberg — <https://www.facebook.com/sheyronwg/posts/950191482017>

Simi Lichtman — <http://forward.com/life/385449/why-are-people-pushing-back-against-the-metoo-campaign/>

Sarah Mulher — <https://www.facebook.com/>

- [Log in](#) or [register](#) to post comments