

Rabbi Lisa Gelber's thoughts on Passover and the Declaration

On April 5, 2006, religious leaders from around the country gathered in Washington D.C. in an unprecedented event to unveil a declaration proclaiming that violence against women is intolerable, and pledged their commitment to its eradication. Forty-two leaders of faith groups have signed the declaration representing such diverse organizations as the United Methodists, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Islamic Society of North America, Buddhist Churches of America, and the World Council of Churches (From a Press Release of April 6, 2006).

Among those who spoke at the press conference were Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune, Founder, FaithTrust Institute, Rabbi Elliott Dorff, Rector, University of Judaism, and Mohamed Magid Ali, Imam from All Dulles Area Muslim Society in Sterling, Virginia. I have studied and worked in partnership with all three of these individuals and consider them teachers and friends.

At the gathering, Marie reminded everyone that "We [the signers]...hold divergent opinions on a wide range of issues, but we proclaim with one voice that violence against women is morally, spiritually and universally intolerable." Elliott, representing the Rabbinical Assembly, went on to say that "while recognizing that some batterers have used religious texts and ideas to justify abusing women, we now declare with one voice that that constitutes a misuse of our traditions." Magid made clear that "...our religious teachings provide a tremendous resource for us to address the issue of injustice and empowering the oppressed." Powerfully, he said, "I call on my fellow Imams and community leaders to commit themselves, as I have, to protect our family and those in our communities."

On the eve of Pesach, as we pull our *Haggadot* from the shelves and revisit the text within - whether the traditional words we've come to expect, or the wine splashes that adorn the pages (most *haggadot* have them!), I am mindful of the call to tell our story. Ours is a story of movement from oppression to liberation, of questioning, of speaking out, and of spiritual strength. As we proclaim at the seder, *b'chol dor vador hayav adam lirot et atzmo k'ilu hu yatza mimitzrayim*, "in every generation one must look upon himself as if he personally had come out from Egypt," we cannot help but think of those who live enslaved in their homes, in relationships that break both their bodies and their spirits. It is up to us to say that this way of life is intolerable within the Jewish community.

Either before you sit down at the seder this year, or even during your family and communal gatherings, I encourage you to read the Declaration of Religious Leaders to Address Violence Against Women. I've printed the text below. At some point during the days of Pesach, sign on your support at www.faithtrustinstitute.org. Every person of faith may add his/her name as someone who stands against domestic violence. The declaration is to be distributed to Battered Women's Programs throughout the country. The unity of spiritual leaders and lay-persons can only strengthen our claim that all of us, created in God's image, deserve our love and our support.

Please feel free to forward this to your personal lists across faith lines; working together, may we eradicate sexual and domestic violence and transform our world to one of justice and freedom.

Hag Kasher v'Sameach - may you enjoy a thoughtful and liberating Pesach.

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