

The Hope - התקווה

Domestic Violence

Shelter from the Storm



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE ULTRA ORTHODOX WORLD

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) between 20-50% of all women will be subject to domestic violence in some form during their lives.

In Israel, there are 14 women's shelters to deal with this problem. However, Orthodox women in abusive relationships often do not take advantage of social services provided for them by the state. They fear the stigma associated generally with welfare services in the Orthodox community. They also have special religious needs, and more children than the average battered woman. In spite of the challenges, the number of religious women seeking help is on the rise. The number of religious women who called domestic abuse hotlines nearly tripled from 477 in 2004 to 1,402 in 2007.

Meira's Story

Meira's abuse began a few weeks after her wedding. At first she didn't fully realize what was happening. It began verbally. He would call her stupid or ugly and shout at her if she did the slightest thing wrong. The verbal abuse became physical abuse. When he hit her, Meira rationalized to herself that it would be better when they had children. However in reality, the abuse intensified when she became pregnant.

The final straw came when her husband locked her in the house. He threatened Meira that he would "get even once and for all." Fearing for her life, she climbed out the window and hid outside in the bushes all night until a police car passed by. She ran to the car begging them for help, and through them was referred to Bat Melech-Miklat.

Bat Melech-Miklat's Approach

With their network of shelters and safe havens that provide social, financial, emotional, and legal assistance to women and their children, Bat Melech is the only organization in Israel to provide apartments that serve as shelters for abused Orthodox women. Bat Melech-Miklat aims to rehabilitate the women in the shelter and to enable them to gain self-sufficiency by offering them therapy, vocational training, job readiness, legal services and counseling.

In 2004, Bat Melech opened the Israel Center for Family Justice, the only organization of its kind in Israel, offering free and comprehensive legal aid for victims of domestic abuse in the secular and religious courts. Serving all women regardless of religious or ethnic background, professional lawyers at the Center seek restraining orders as appropriate, child custody, alimony and divorce or separation agreements. The Center serves over 5000 women each year. Bat Melech also runs the Keren Ohel Meir's Nigunim Hostel for At-Risk Adolescent Girls. This is Israel's *only* long-term, supportive living environment for at-risk, adolescent girls from ultra-Orthodox families.

Meira's Story Continued

Meira stayed in the shelter for several months with her three young children – ages six, three and one. At the shelter it was safe for them to be children again, to play and to laugh without worrying about what might happen. The Israel Center for Family Justice enabled Meira to fight for custody of her children and win her case.

WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Initiating social change has never been an overnight process—especially when it has to do with domestic abuse. The support of compassionate individuals enables Bat Melech to continue its life saving mission to help Israeli women and children suffering from domestic abuse to return to lives of dignity, productivity and self-respect.

Adopt a Family Program: Many women and children who stay at Bat Melech shelters are impoverished upon entering the shelter, and are often much worse off financially upon leaving. By "adopting" a family and offering them ongoing support, you will directly impact and improve their lives. If you're interested in supporting this work, contact Bat Melech-Miklat at office@batmelech.org.