

details, that “I’ve misbehaved,” the congregation might offer the rabbi an opportunity for *teshuvah* (repentance)—but only if the rabbi has acknowledged, at least to board members and the CCAR Ethics Committee, that he/she has engaged in improper behavior—and assures them that it will stop.

Judi Ratner: Part of the difficulty here might have been avoided had the president called the rabbi when this first surfaced and said, “I don’t know if you are aware, but it has come to our attention

that....Can you tell me what this is all about? If we don’t address this quickly, it will spread, as though it were true.” The leadership will have a better indication as to what steps might be needed based on what is shared at that point. If the rabbi acknowledges impropriety, giving assurances of a change in behavior and a genuine desire to repair damage caused, then one option would be for the rabbi to get up in front of the congregation and apologize. This approach is not easy and takes a lot of courage, but it can help to diffuse the situation. Judaism recognizes

es that we are all imperfect, and our tradition allows for *teshuvah* when we do veer off the path.

To respond to members who refuse to believe that their rabbi could have acted so egregiously, the leadership could call for an open congregational meeting and, to be fair, invite the rabbi to participate. During such a potentially emotion-fraught exchange, a fair, impartial moderator will need to act as a mediator, creating a safe, nonjudgmental space for everyone to air their perspectives and feelings.

Rabbi Wolfman: While individuals do fall out of love with their spouses, infidelity on the part of a moral exemplar of a sacred community is unconscionable.

That said, the leadership’s suspension of the rabbi based on rumors of adultery seems not only premature and punitive, but possibly illegal. The board needs to presume innocence and take action only after a proper investigation. The CCAR’s Ethics Committee should be contacted immediately.

Shirley Gordon: I would suggest that two people (president and vice president or ritual chair) meet face-to-face with the rabbi to underline the seriousness of the situation. At this meeting and at every step of the process, Jewish values must be scrupulously upheld.

If legal counsel advises that an “investigation” be conducted, I strongly advise that the leadership *not* initiate its own investigation, but refer the matter to the CCAR Ethics Committee to conduct the appropriate investigation. If counsel recommends that the rabbi be separated from the congregation during the process, it is best to place the rabbi on personal leave rather than on suspension. As the facts remain unknown and the allegation unsubstantiated, personal leave keeps the conflict at the lowest level possible for the congregation, while still attesting to the seriousness of the allegations and allowing the rabbi to “save face.” Counsel should help the board write a letter that is promptly sent to the membership to explain why their rabbi is away. Doing so communicates to members that they are valued by the leadership—which, after all, is essential for any healthy congregation. □

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