Rabbi Paul 1:

Australian author Tim Winton recently waxed poetic about the gentle innocence of boys, reminding us, "...It is easy to forget what beautiful creatures [boys] are. There's so much about them and in them that's lovely. Graceful. Dreamy. Vulnerable. Qualities we either don't notice, or simply blind ourselves to...There's great native tenderness in children. In boys, as much as in girls. But so often I see boys having the tenderness shamed out of them." ¹

And then, observing the behavior of young men on the beach, Winton lowers the death knell:

...Boys and young men are so routinely expected to betray their better natures, to smother their consciences, to renounce the best of themselves and submit to something low and mean...Some of it makes you want to cry. Some of it makes you ashamed to be a male. Especially the stuff they feel entitled or obliged to say about girls and women.²

Winton argues that many boys are predestined for a societal understanding of masculinity that promotes patriarchy, misogyny, and creates a toxic male culture that dismisses and denigrates women.

Morah Barbara 1:

Songwriter Harry Chapin understood the danger of stereotyping behavioral expectations long before it became fashionable. Among the eye-opening lyrics from the song “Why do the Little Girls?” he asks,

“Why did the little girls grow crooked while the little boys grew tall? The boys were taught to tumble while the girls told not to fall.

The girls answered the telephone, while the boys answered the call. That’s why little girls grew crooked, while the little boys grew tall."³

This song was released in 1978.

In a slow, subtle and cumulative manner, the images to which we are exposed from infancy begin to shape what we know and what we understand about the world. Lev Vygotsky was one of the first theorists to emphasize that children’s thinking does not develop in a vacuum but rather is influenced by the sociocultural context in which children grow up. It is imperative for us to examine and to change the constant barrage of societal messaging that is thrust upon us all every waking moment of the day. Subtle and not so subtle hints subliminally find their way to our

¹  https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/apr/09/about-the-boys-tim-winton-on-how-toxic-masculinity-is-shackling-men-to-misogyny
²  Ibid.
children, proscribing the norm where girls must seek out for themselves beauty, docility, domesticity, kindness and grace, while boys are urged towards being rough, tough, strong, secure, loud, present and dominant.

From the clothing we buy to the toys we all play with, we are influenced. We are inundated with messages more today than ever, from our books, television, movies, advertisements and a tremendous amount of digital media. While media can be empowering, they can also send confusing, limiting or even harmful messages about gender roles and expectations. Children, especially, need explicit strategies for viewing media critically, and for sorting through the myriad of messages being transmitted.

Rabbi Paul 2:

American journalist Faith Salie notes the widespread nature of the problematic messages being transmitted, recognizing, "A man uses his car to assassinate an anti-Nazi protestors. A man shoots a congressman at his baseball practice. A man commits mass murder at a Vegas concert. A man massacres worshippers in their church..." Notice the pattern in Salie's words. A man, a man, a man. Over and over again.

The statistics related to violent crimes, school shootings, domestic violence and sexual assault are damning. The number of men incarcerated outweighs the number of women by approximately 10 to 1. Between 1982 and 2018, there were 99 mass shootings conducted by men, only 2 by women. More than 75% of the victims of domestic violence are women and experience violent and abusive behavior from men, from partners, from people who they know. Last year, when Alyssa Milano wrote, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too'" on Twitter, her hashtag was tweeted nearly one million times in 48 hours, providing women with a means to come forward and raise awareness of the way in which sexual harassment and sexual abuse pervade our culture.

Morah Barbara 2:

Data gathered in a study conducted by The Observer, along with the market research company Nielsen, confirmed the overabundance of casual sexism in children’s literature by conducting an in-depth analysis of the 100 most popular children’s picture books of 2017. The study found that the majority of characters within the books were dominated by males, often in stereotypical masculine roles. 40% of gendered characters were human – the rest were an assortment of animals, objects and plants. Gender bias was even more of an issue amongst the non-human characters, who were 73% more likely to be male. Male animals were more likely to be large, powerful, or predatory creatures such as bears or tigers, while female animals tended to be smaller and more vulnerable creatures such as birds, cats and insects. In the surveyed texts, female adults were more often than not shown in caregiving roles, with twice as many female teachers than males. Mothers were present twice as often as fathers, with lone fathers

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4 http://time.com/5045028/raising-boys-faith-salie/
5 https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/genderinc.html
8 https://www.cbsnews.com/news/metoo-more-than-12-million-facebook-posts-comments-reactions-24-hours/
appearing in just four books. The lead characters were 50% more likely to be male than female and villains were eight times more likely to be male.\textsuperscript{9}

What happens when the primary message to boys, both implicitly and explicitly, is that men should view women as objects of pleasure or as servants to please them? Is there anyone here who has never seen a Disney movie? How are the main characters featured? The female faces are almost identical spheres with oversized baby eyes and tiny button noses. The heroine is always slim. The leading man is usually well chiseled, with a dreamy, symmetrical face. Men with any other body type are generally sidekicks who are outcast or portrayed as weak and subservient. The climactic scene in the typical Disney movie is usually a violent battle between two males to either win the love of a female or to maintain pride and status. This is the most important part of the movie, where we establish which of these characters is "the better man". In addition, an unwillingness of a male to fight or prove dominance is often depicted as pitiful.\textsuperscript{10}

What does it mean when sexism, strength and dominance are the primary portraits of masculinity that boys see? Until the wider media begin to break this cycle, there will continue to be boys who cannot relate, and are subsequently left feeling physically inadequate and emotionally detached. This, in turn, may very well perpetuate the cycle of sexual harassment and sexual, physical and emotional abuse.

\textbf{Rabbi Paul 3:}

We can have the conversation, "Not all men," and we can say, "Not me," and can attest, "I never would." But maybe we need to dig deeper. I'll go first.

I, too, have episodes where I have been verbally abusive and emotionally insensitive to women.

I, too, don't always listen to women as well as I should.

I, too, often seek to solve or minimize a woman's pain, rather than being present and allowing it to be.

I, too, associate women simply because of gender as caregivers and nurturers.

I, too, have yelled and become upset at my wife, daughters, friends and colleagues, and need to own these troubling behaviors because they are "not on."

I, too, need to acknowledge that I wish to be a better husband, father, son, brother, and rabbi, a healthier man, and that I am open to receiving gentle and constructive feedback that will help me to continue to move beyond these tendencies and become a better ally.

In general, we men have problems with open communication, safe emotional expression and vulnerability, with anger and aggression. We pretend to be tough guys and macho men. And then there are the comments, glances, looks, innuendo, and the way we speak, regarding women as lesser, as objects. Ours is a culture where from a young age playing video games

\textsuperscript{9} McDowell, Laura Blaise. 23 January 2018. \url{https://www.bookstr.com/study-childrens-books-reveal-gender-bias-favor-male-protagonists}

\textsuperscript{10} Veritas, Vicki and Cowan, Matt. \url{https://www.cracked.com/article/2017/01/04/5-ways-modern-disney-is-even-more-sexist-than-the-classics}
we are led to believe that we are a prince in shining armor needing to rescue a distressed princess, and where men regularly download inhumanely abusive pornography presenting women in ways that rob them of their own sexual expression, creating unreal expectations in relationship.

In our workplaces, we must confront the reality of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and the way in which women are passed over for promotions time and time again. We must address pay inequity, and recognize the inappropriate ways in which we comment about women's bodies and women's voices. We see women as wives and mothers, as weaker, gentler, and fairer, rather than seeing women as human beings, as equals, as empowered, resilient, strong, courageous, endlessly devoted leaders. The toxicity extends to the Jewish community, where less women are hired for the highest of professional roles, are belittled and demeaned when they serve on the boards of communal organizations, and have their words regularly repeated, restated and "man-splained" by other men, seeking to take credit for themselves.

Unless we men become more aware of our behaviors and we work together in partnership and ally-ship with women, the problem is only going to grow worse. We would do well to recognize that this problem extends from the beginning of time, and is present biblically, where we don't find particularly good male role models. Moses knew God face-to-face, but even he had moments of blistering anger and rage. Moses' father-in-law Jethro is all ready and willing to solve Moses' problems by saying, "Do it my way." And consider the sexual exploitation of King David and the number of concubines known to Solomon.

Not even Abraham is a healthy man. While he shows hospitality to three passing strangers during his recovery from circumcision, and argues for justice in defending Sodom and Gomorrah his other behaviors are deeply troubling. He tries to pass his wife Sarah off as his sister. He dismisses his son Ishmael without so much as a goodbye. And he takes his supposedly beloved son Isaac, on top of Mount Moriah, binds him to the altar and prepares to kill him as a sacrifice in the name of God. When Isaac rightfully asks "why?" Abraham tells him that God will see to the ram for the burnt offering. Yikes.

Forget that the story works itself out in the end. Look at the behavior. Abraham is numbly and blindly going through the motions. With a lack of awareness, he doesn't stop to think about the potential impact of his actions. Even the Midrash teaches that when Sarah finds out what Abraham has done she falls to her death from a broken heart. And at the very end of the passage, we are told that Abraham returns to Beer Sheva with his servants. Where is Isaac? Maybe he found another way down the mountain. Wouldn't you?

What if the relationship between Abraham and Isaac played itself out differently? What would have happened if Abraham had been able to respond to Isaac's emotional needs? What would

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11 Deuteronomy 34.
12 Numbers 11.
13 Exodus 18.
14 II Samuel and I Kings.
15 Genesis 18.
16 Genesis 12.
17 Genesis 20.
18 Genesis 22.
19 Genesis Rabbah 58:5.
20 Genesis 22.
have happened if Abraham had spoken to Sarah about his decision, and rather than "keeping it all in," they talked it through with open, honest communication?

It is too late for Abraham. His sons are traumatized; his wife is dead. And even though we recognize him as one of our patriarchs we are to remember him and learn from him. The angel's reprieve on Mount Moriah comes with a huge price -- a warning, like the clarion call of the shofar - for us to go and be better men.

Morah Barbara 3:

Rabbi Paul spoke of Abraham's mental health, and his less than stellar behavior. But in chapter 24 of Genesis (which is only a couple of pages later), something very interesting happens. After Sarah dies and Abraham buys for her a burial place, Eliezer is sent out by Abraham to find a wife for Isaac. After passing the test put before her, Rebecca's brother Laban and father Bethuel agree that any matter decreed by God cannot be questioned, and that Rebecca who is neither consulted nor considered must be "taken as a wife for Eliezer's master's son."

Everyone goes to sleep for the night. In verse 55, upon awakening, Rebecca's brother and mother suddenly decide to stall, asking for more time before saying goodbye to Rebecca. Eliezer, not wishing to be further delayed, argues that he is unwilling to wait. So what do they do at this impasse? They decide to ask Rebecca herself. “And they said, ‘Let us call the girl and ask her for her reply.’ And they summoned Rebecca, and they said to her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ And she said, ‘I will go.”

Why is this verse here? The addition of this verse does nothing to change the outcome of the narrative. Why is it that Rebecca is suddenly given a voice, not to mention, a vote? Andy why, without the slightest hesitation does she say, “I will go.”? I suggest that this delay in our story is a literary device introduced to empower Rebecca. Attention is now being called to the power of her thought process, insight and decision-making.

Rashi, the famous medieval Torah commentator, interprets this text as follows: “I will go” indicates that Rebecca is answering in the affirmative of her own choosing, sending a very clear message that she intends to go whether her brother and mother approve or not. Taking it a step further, Rashi goes on to posit that from this statement we are being presented with a basic principle – according to Jewish law, a woman cannot be married against her will.

Rebecca is being given an opening to become an active participant in decisions which will not only affect her future, but will speak for all women moving forward. “I will go” is not a mere sign of obedience. Through this act, she displays the wherewithal to knowingly leave a house of idols to fulfill her destiny with the God of Abraham. This choice displays incredible faith, wisdom, conviction and trust, qualities not of a follower, but of a leader. I choose to find hope in this one perspective of this one tiny piece of Torah.

Perhaps there is hope that the change of mindset that has slowly and laboriously edged its way into the 21\textsuperscript{st} century has been jumpstarted by a variety of factors, such as our continuing fight for pay equality, the blasting away of the notions that professions, hobbies and preferences are gender-based, and the loud and brave voices we’re hearing from the “Me Too Movement”.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Genesis 24.
\item[22] Genesis 24.
\end{footnotes}
What can we, as individuals, do to expedite the change? Look at the world around you through the eyes of children. The next time you’re watching television with your children or grandchildren, talk about what you see and hear. What is going on in the show or the movie or the commercial? How are the characters treating one another? Are characters showing equal respect for one another? Who are the dominant personalities and is their behavior predictable? Why or why not? What if you witness a blatant example of misogyny taking place? You can use this as a “teachable” moment by asking children if they notice anything wrong happening, or perhaps something that makes them feel uncomfortable. Take this opportunity to talk it out, explore the meaning and intent, and express your viewpoint as to why these behaviors are being portrayed despite their inappropriateness. Allow children a safe place to shape and voice their own opinions. These conversations can pertain to books your children are reading, music they may be listening to, and all different forms of advertising.

Rabbi Paul 4:

We must be careful how we parent our children, especially our boys. Faith Salie explains, "The boy taught from infancy to be tough is emotionally doomed...Sweet boys grow up to be men who recognize the strength in being vulnerable and empathetic...Sweet boys are children who've been given, by their parents and wider society, the permission to feel everything and to express those emotions without shame.”24 Salie argues, that we can create "sweet boys" and "healthier men" in our family homes with more discussion of emotion and feeling, holding forums at school and in our places of worship, and by teaching children, especially boys that they have avenues and people to turn to who they can rely on by asking for support.

The more that challenging feelings are shared openly, heard, accepted, and navigated, the more change we might see in our society. And perhaps, our efforts may lead more men to become better allies for women. Richard Moore explains:

Allyship means we recognize that the women in our lives don't need men to be “heroes” or “saviors.” They need us to be honest and accountable for the roles we've played, and for the ways in which we have benefited, from the oppression of women. Allyship means that we recognize that women are their own heroes and saviors, and support them in that work. That we are supportive of women in their efforts toward equity, understanding and leadership. Allyship means that we listen to hear and understand, not to provide answers or solutions. It means that we come to an awareness of some uncomfortable truths about what men teach and are taught in our society. It’s about celebrating women’s voices, not interjecting our own.25

This is the season of t’shuvah, a time for us to become aware, grow, develop, and nurture a new sense of who we wish to be, and what change we wish to see in the world. All of us make mistakes, but the opportunity to own our mistakes and our privilege is an awesome opportunity indeed. The chance to change our ways is profound.

Morah Barbara 4:

The next thing we can do is to outwardly and collectively demonstrate outrage when appropriate. Here’s an example:

24 http://time.com/5045028/raising-boys-faith-salie/
25 https://awareak.org
In 1963, “Babysitter Barbie” carried around a book entitled How to Lose Weight that offered the following advice: “Don’t eat!” Two years later, “Slumber Party Barbie” was still carrying around How to Lose Weight, only this time she had another accessory (I guess to bring to the slumber parties) – an all pink scale which was permanently set at 110 pounds. During this time, there was no outcry heard, and the dolls and accessories remained on the toy store shelves.

In 1992, however, Mattel came out with “Teen Talk Barbie”, which had a computer chip that, each of which, randomly selected four phrases out of a possible 270. One of those phrases was “Math class is tough”. The American Association of University Women became involved by loudly and communally demonstrating their indignation regarding the danger and of this terribly chauvinistic and clichéd message being sent to young girls everywhere. Parents were encouraged not to purchase the doll and to return any dolls that had already been bought. Not soon afterward the chip began randomly choosing phrases from among 269 possibilities.\(^{26}\)

In the APA handbook of Personality and Social Psychology, Toni Schmader, William Hall and Alyssa Croft speak to the theory of the power to change the cultural stereotypes that people hold on to:

>Situations lose their power to cue the experience of stereotype threat if those stereotypes cease to exist in people’s minds. Through small changes in framing or context, we can clear the air of stereotype threat and improve the performances of those who are stigmatized. When we live in a society in which all individuals truly have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their skills and advance to the levels of their ambition, everyone will reap the benefits.”\(^{27}\)

Rabbi Paul 5:

We need to allow ourselves to be accountable to one another. Men need to hold each other accountable for what we say about women, for the way in which we might use controlling behaviors in relationships - either personal or in the workplace. We need to hold each other accountable when we witness behavior that is degrading and demeaning to women and girls. And more than anything, sometimes we men need to "...just shut up and listen."\(^{28}\) We need to step out of the "Man Box," embrace and express a full range of emotion, allow men and boys to cry and validate their feelings, insist that men never denigrate women or girls, never make sexist jokes, and most especially, listen to women and validate their experiences, modeling these behaviors for other men and boys.\(^{29}\)

Feminist playwright Eve Ensler, commented:

>Men need to decide whether they will continue with the privilege and power in a rigged and deadly system of patriarchy, which has been responsible for 1 billion women being raped, beaten and untold women being harassed, degraded and demented at the work place. Or whether they will move in large numbers to release themselves from the tyranny of patriarchy and to create a world of tenderness, vulnerability, equality, and respect. It begins, I think, with deep self-interrogation. Then actively educating oneself by reading feminists, being in groups


\(^{28}\)Winton article.

\(^{29}\)http://www.acalltomen.org/impact-healthy-manhood/
with men to tell stories and ask questions and then of course, standing up for women and understanding that as men, this is your struggle because men will never be free or safe or loved until your sisters are free and safe and loved. We need a highly activated, motivated massive men’s movement.30

Singer and songwriter Alanis Morissette offers that it is vulnerable men who have the presence and potential to be great men, and to inspire other men to be thoughtful, present allies. What if our efforts together led us to see vulnerability as a deep and open strength, a guiding force in our journey ahead? Maybe these are the men whom we should follow. Maybe we should start looking, in Morissette’s words, for those men who have "the grace that it takes to melt on through." "In praise of the vulnerable man," as Morissette sings, maybe we are the ones who should "lead the rest of our cavalry home."31

**Morah Barbara 5:**

The issue of boys and men acting poorly toward women, treating women as property and as “lesser” is a very old story. It is systemic; it is often rationalized away and it is very often completely ignored. It has been a part of our vernacular for so long that inappropriate and even disgraceful behaviors are overlooked, excused and tolerated. And until it is pardoned no more, in restaurant kitchens, sports casting booths, medical practices, classrooms, executive board rooms, within the airline industry, politics or the military – until we openly and consistently share our outrage – with each other and with the children in our lives – at each and every instance, it will continue to exist.

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**EDITOR’S NOTE:**

I felt uncomfortable addressing this subject alone and expressed to Morah Barbara that I did not like the idea or the image of a male rabbi simply espousing his own views on this very sensitive subject, as such a presentation would defeat the purpose of speaking about ally-ship. Morah Barbara and I crafted separate sermons, to give equal weight to what we understood to be the female and male perspectives, and then joined the sermons together thematically. I opened the speech, and we made sure that Barbara was the last voice, and that the sermons divided into equal parts (5 each), and nearly equal wording (1960 for Paul, 1874 for Morah Barbara).

Additionally, we “traded places” on the bimah. With the exception of Rabbi Paula Feldstein who served as Rabbi-Educator for 8 years, this congregation has only employed male rabbis, and the rabbi’s podium is nearly 6 feet high, whereas the cantor’s podium is only about 3 1/2 feet high. Morah Barbara and I purposefully changed positions so that she spoke from the “rabbi’s podium” and I moved to the other side of the bimah. We wanted to create a very different visual effect.

Our congregants commented that the sermon was impactful and they appreciated the extra effort and thought that went into a designing a sermon of this nature.

Morah Barbara can be reached at educator@avodatshalom.net if anyone wishes to contact her directly. I have relocated to Australia with my family, but am available via E-mail (rabbi.jacobson@gmail.com) for any discussion or follow-up.

30 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/from-metoo-to-men-too-how-men-can-prevent-harassment_us_5a05e669e4b0f1dc729a6a91