

ing a higher purpose, the professional always shoulders the burden of maintaining self-awareness and professional standards and checking any inappropriate ego-needs that could compromise a sacred trust.

Precisely because of the potential for abuse, we have to appreciate the erotics of pedagogy. Like a good meal or novel, a fine learning experience is a seduction, raising expectations, teasing, surprising, and satisfying. Projection and transference create confusions: "Isn't *midrash* wonderful? My *midrash* professor was thrilling." But if the teacher of Shakespeare can be confused for the Bard, who might the rabbi be in the unconscious? Alan Bennett's play, *The History Boys*, tells a story about the ease with which charismatic teachers can become God in their students' imagination and the case of teachers who need to be God and take advantage of that identification.

Who doesn't remember being in love with a teacher, even if the only exchange of words were those submitted in a term paper and the comments returned on the final page? Students know their teachers' passions, and teachers can look into the wide eyes of a fine student and mistake the object of love. Managed selfdisclosure contributes to feelings of intimacy. A rabbi may speak annually from the pulpit on the High Holidays with an uncomplicated faith in the God who gave the Torah on Mount Sinai, but the students in her adult education class, especially those who have attended with devotion for years, harbor a privileged knowledge of the rabbi's more nuanced understanding of God and Sinai, and the congregant who had her own theological crisis and had long, helpful conversations in the rabbi's study, smiles with an inner awareness of the complexity of the rabbi's beliefs and doubts.

In the past few years, scholars have asked what should be next on the agenda of Jewish feminism. In preparation for one such deliberation, I queried my rabbinical students, who reported that high on their list was what they called "rebbe-ism" — neo-hasidic educational models that espouse democratic values and the inclusion of women even as they maintain old-world hierarchies. In other words, charismatic leadership needs a feminist analysis.

We do know that the classroom in the round does not undo hierarchy. We should also admit that life well lived is often erotic, made of masked selves and multiple personae; and relationships are inevitably hierarchic, even if there are playful shifts in dominance. We therefore depend upon our professionals to police their boundaries. Historically, when a rabbi was guilty of violations, he often left his position to do the same work elsewhere under the cover that we need to retain our most charismatic leaders. (The community — like a victim of domestic abuse - can feel complicit, loyal, or voyeuristic toward such leaders.) Today, conventional wisdom suggests a several-year suspension, time for analysis and introspection, and after serious teshuvah — a return to the job may be possible.

I disagree. When we support a charismatic teacher in the belief that he alone is needed to be a teacher of Torah, we support the very hubris that allowed that teacher to confuse himself for the object of love. Only by abdicating his role can the charismatic rabbi who has violated sexual boundaries begin the work of teshuvah. The rabbi's professional history must remain transparent in future employment searches, and he must do work where his history has little potential to have traumatizing effects. There is good work that rabbis can do without the title rabbi. Just as an alcoholic should forever avoid strong drink, it is precisely because the rabbinate and teaching are erotic businesses that healing from abusive behavior is signaled by leaving the profession humbly and for good.

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December 2006 Tevet 5767 To subscribe: 877-568-SHMA www.shma.com Since the days when the rabbis chose to omit Moses' name from the haggadah, charismatic leadership has been seen as having a dangerous dark side, carrying a risk of *avodah zarah* — worshipping a leader instead of God. It may be that the association to *avodah zarah* comes from the roots of the word charisma, which are Greek and Christian. Charisma comes from the Greek root "charis," meaning "grace" or "favor." Interestingly, in Greek, the word charisma is mostly found in the New Testament, meaning "a gift from God," i.e., Jesus. By the time the word comes into English, it is defined more ecumenically as "a gift bestowed by God." There is no Hebrew word for charisma; the Alcalay dictionary translates charisma as *kedusha*. (When I asked Israelis to translate for me, the answer I inevitably got was "kareezma.")

—Anne Ebersman