

**When no one can hear you scream: After complaining that a senior rabbi harassed her, a settlement resident becomes an outcast**By Ruth Sinai

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They warned her mother that her sisters' chances of a good match would be damaged, claims B.G. They tried to turn her brother and her husband's family against her. Over 100 rabbis, she says, including at least three candidates for the post of chief rabbi, signed notices that appeared in newspapers calling her a liar. Speeches have been made denouncing her, she claims, while Rabbi Moshe Bleicher, head of the Shavei Hebron Yeshiva, has published an article saying she suffers from mental illness and from hallucinations.

This is only part of the degradation B.G., a settlement resident, has suffered since a newspaper interview five months ago in which she alleged that she had been the victim of "improper behavior of a sexual nature," as she puts it, on the part of Beit El rabbi, Shlomo Aviner, who also heads the Ateret Cohanim Yeshiva.

A second woman also alleged in the same interview that Aviner had sexually harassed her, both physically and verbally, and that she had been forced to move away.

"The mask of abuse and scheming that we lifted simply astounded us - 123 rabbis claimed that the two women were crazy and liars without knowing a thing about them, just because of what Rabbi Aviner and Rabbi Bleicher said," says Hannah Kahat, head of "Kolech" ("Your Voice") a forum for religious women that seeks to improve their status within the community.

The mass mobilization of the rabbinical institution to defend Rabbi Aviner has been coupled with a campaign not meant merely to silence the allegations, but also to eject these women from their community. Their full names have been diffused throughout the settlements along with supposed details of their lives.

B.G. felt like she had been backed into a corner. The two women filed a complaint with the police, but it was made clear to them that in this case, the matter was only borderline on the criminal. Even their appeals to a number of top rabbis, including Mordechai Eliahu, former Sephardi chief rabbi, were rejected. Only Rabbi Eli Ben-Dahan, head of the Rabbinical Court, was prepared to look into matters, but only on condition that they did not go to any other body. By talking to the papers, and thus exposing the allegations against Aviner, however, they broke the rules.

"Everything that I underwent emotionally until it all came out is steeped in pain," said B.G. a few days ago. "But what hurts most can be summed up in six words - my voice is not being heard. No one in my camp ... people I grew up with, whose opinion and honesty I always valued, is willing to listen to me."

The mere thought that these allegations will be hushed up and that Rabbi Aviner will be protected and remain a favorite of the Hassidim, while she is left with all the pain and embarrassment, has given B.G. little rest. Just last week, she filed a petition with a district court of the Kiryat Araba religious council in which she alleges that Aviner caused "severe and prolonged emotional distress ... involving sexual innuendo, prohibited affectionate touches and expressions." She also alleges that Aviner and Bleicher have given her a bad name and she asks the court to order the rabbis to publicly recant what they said and to compensate her. When it comes to such petitions in religious courts, however, the defendant must be in agreement before a trial is launched.

Aviner said in response that he is happy that there will finally be some sort of clarification of the case. He claims to have suggested such a discussion in a rabbinical court or some other such forum before the case was made public, which would have saved a lot of suffering on both sides, he adds, but his suggestion was rejected.

In her interview with the Ma'ariv newspaper, B.G. relates how 15 years ago, she went to Aviner seeking marriage counseling. This continued over the course of eight years, involving dozens of conversations, often late into the night, frequent meetings and letters. In the article, it is alleged that Aviner told B.G. that she had a beautiful body and allegedly said that "penetration is a very nice thing."

Aviner in response did not deny some of the statements attributed to him, but claims that they were taken out of context. He told Haaretz that the claims were all lies that had already been investigated by rabbis and other officials and found to be totally groundless.

B.G. is stunned by this claim, which also appeared in a statement by Bleicher, as neither she nor the other woman were asked to testify. What kind of investigation could have been held without consulting the two women, she asks. Sources close to Rabbi Aviner said in response that Rabbi Bleicher knows a thing or two about the complainant as he knows her brother-in-law and one of her brothers. Bleicher himself was unavailable for comment.