

I begin, this morning with a snippet of modern poetry:

Lollipop / Must mistake me, you're the sucker / To think that I / Would be a
victim, not another / Say it, play it, how you wanna? / But no way I'm ever
gonna / Fall for you / Never you, baby / Womanizer, woman-womanizer /
You're a womanizer / Oh, womanizer, oh / You're a womanizer, baby

In case you are not up on the latest pop hits, from 2008, that was from
Britney Spears' womanizer. And as upbeat and catchy as the actual song is,
these verses speak to the current awakening that the many in our society are
going through. There are quite a few men making mistakes out there. Yes, not
all men are womanizers and abusers. But over 90% of perpetrators are men,
and I will not temper my language in light of that. But this morning, I don't
want to focus on the men in Hollywood, nor the men in Government. I want to
talk about two men in Religious Leadership. One is the subject of our haftarah
this morning, **דוד המלך**, King David, a long since gone, Biblical figure, whose
character lies somewhere between fact and fiction. Sure, referring to the
improprieties of King David might push a button or two, but on the whole,
he's a pretty safe target. He's far removed from us. Virtually all our biblical
heroes have flaws, some which are quite deep. Plus, it's public knowledge, in
our very canon. David sees Batsheva bathing on a rooftop in the pale
moonlight, falls madly in lust with her, brings her to his court, and has his
way with her; we're not told whether she consented or not. She becomes
pregnant and to cover his indiscretion up, he attempts to bring home her
husband immediately from battle, so the pregnancy can be attributed to him.
However, this doesn't work out so David has him sent to the front lines to
die, which he does, and then David marries Batsheva. Yes, he repents after

being confronted by the prophet Nathan representing God, and God seems pissed, but it's not for Batsheva's sake. Punishments ensue, the story moves on. Life continues.

And it's all in there, second Samuel, chapters 11 and 12. One violent act among many in our history. But what about when the violence isn't in our history, but our recent past, and our present?

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, known as Rav Shlomo, passed away in 1994 at the age of 69. He was a teacher, singer, and composer of great renown. Orthodox rabbi, served as a shaliach, or messenger of the Chabad rebbe. Championed the cause of female religious leadership by ordaining the first Orthodox woman, Reb Mimi Feigelson. He was the only male rabbi present at the start of Woman of the Wall, which seeks to give women a voice and a place at the Kotel.

He also allegedly abused a number of women during his career. A few who went public during his lifetime. They were dismissed with a shrug and a sweep under the rug. In 1998, Lilith magazine did a piece documenting the history of abuse through interviews with many women who claimed various levels of sexual abuse, from violating boundaries, to groping, to a "hug which went too far." But of course, this isn't just one more man in a position of power who likely took advantage of that power. This is Carlebach, Rav Shlomo! Virtually every congregation, in every denomination, from Renewal to Haredi, sings his music on Shabbos. That tune you love so much for Mizmor L'David Friday night? Carlebach. Od avinu chai? Carlebach. He is so well incorporated into our liturgy that many of us, myself included, have no grasp on just how much of what we sing, is Carlebach. So, as a tribe of people who

love each other, who love Justice, who love the oppressed in our midst - Do we keep singing?

Well, as they say in my former yeshiva – what does the halacha say?

Rabbi Menashe Klein, z”l, lived in wrote a series of tshuvot, responsa, over the course of his lifetime. In them, he states, If the singer of a recorded song is a wicked person it is forbidden to listen to his music. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, also known as Rav Moshe, widely considered one of the greatest poskim, halakhic decisors or the 20th century, was asked about a composer of Jewish music who was rumored to have engaged in sinful behaviour, though the rumours were after his songs became popular. Rabbi Feinstein ruled that the songs may be sung, bringing proof from the Talmud about a rabbi who created a widely known halakha about tithing. This rabbi then became a Sadducee, enemy of the early rabbis, but his halakha was still followed. So since the songs were composed and used before the rumours, he says, keep on singing em.

What do we do? Follow the advice of Rabbi Klein and stop singing Carlebach? Go with Rav Moshe and keep the music alive? After all, when we sing his tunes, do we sing it for him, or because the music is beautiful in and of itself? Where is the line between artist and art? If a wrongdoer does something right, or creates something beautiful, or speaks something true, does it have any less meaning because of the source? Here’s a test: “We do not believe that there could ever exist a state with lasting inner health if it is not built on internal social justice.” Nice idea. I like that. I agree with that. Hitler said that in a 1920 speech in Munich. Cheap shot, I know, but the point stands. What do we do with that?

Our good friend, Miles pointed me to a beautiful teaching, of which we could not locate the original source just yet, of a rabbi humming a Christian melody. His students reproach him of course and he responds, the melody of a song is like the flowing water of a mikva, no impurity can attach to it. Gorgeous imagery and thoughtful. But true? I don't know.

Rabbi Klein, goes on in his responsa, by the way. He states that if the musician's name is removed from the music, if the art is completely separated from the artist, then it's totally permissible to listen to it. Maybe Carlebach doesn't matter. Maybe it's the melody which matters. Maybe it's the sound of the chords and the harmonies flowing over us as we sing together as a people. Praising God, praising Justice, praising Love. But maybe it's not. Maybe it's about the victims. When they hear Carlebach's tunes, do they feel the power of the notes? Or do they remember the trauma they endured?

Like we learn from this scroll time and time again there are no easy answers. There is no booming voice from Heaven to tell us what to do. It is in our hands. Every shul, every davening community will need to figure it out for themselves. There are no absolute answers. It is for us as a family, and a tribe, to decide. And I have faith, that with compassion in our hearts and openness in our minds we can have a productive conversation around this and all the complicated issues. If there's anything I have learned in my few short months here, it's that if there is any congregation that is up the task, it's this one right here. Shabbat Shalom.