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When Melodies, Torah Scholars, and Abuse Collide

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Some extremely important questions have repeatedly been posed to The Awareness Center:

What should we do with Jewish melodies and songs (Nigunim) that became part of our lives, celebrations (simchos), and Shabbos tables, when these melodies were composed by an alleged sexual predator? To be more specific, we were asked, what should we--as a community--do with the songs and music of Shlomo Carlebach? Along similar lines, The Awareness Center was asked what should we do with teachings of highly respected Torah scholar who turn out to be pedophiles?



Sex offenders (and alleged sex offenders) come from all walks of life--some can be gifted and talented, capable of churning out music that makes our soul dance and teachings that make our spirit soar. But what are we to do with the products of their genius if these gifted persons turn out to be pedophiles or are alleged to have committed sex crimes? Does the value of their educational material go to waste? What should we do with their commentaries, some that our rabbunim have been quoting in their own teachings, in their own Musar (moral teachings) and D'vor Torahs?

Should these teachings be banned? Should the songs of alleged sexual offenders be sung? What if these tunes are dear to our hearts? Must we throw out our CD's, tapes and records? If not, would we be endorsing persons who crossed not only the lines of the Torah and ways of B'nei-Israel (children of Israel, Jewish people), but also those of humanity at large, by playing their songs, listening to their

lessons, quoting their Hidushim (brilliant insights)? These are extremely complicated questions that touch on incredibly tender issues, and the answers to them can be even more confusing. Gifts and talents are given to us by HaShem. How do we empower survivors of sexual violations by talented individuals who broke a sacred trust, who overlooked the teachings of HaShem by committing sexual offenses?

The answers to these questions may differ depending on who you ask. At conferences geared towards adult survivors, there are usually certain guidelines in place, designed to help give survivors choices and empower them. One of such rules is that you never take photographs without asking each individual if it is okay. Many conferences set up a specific area where photos can be taken so that no one's right to say "No" is violated. This precaution is in place because it is not uncommon for abuse survivors to have been used in some form of child pornography and therefore find photographing without consent reminiscent of past abuse. Other survivors may not want to be photographed because they may be in hiding from their abusers or people who supported their abusers. There could be as many reasons as there are individuals, and people do not need to justify their reluctance. The important issue here is that by asking for their permission, we give the abuse survivors a CHOICE, a choice that was taken away from them when they were hurt.

The Awareness Center believes similar standards need to be established for singing Carlebach tunes. One never knows if someone in a room was allegedly victimized by him, or may be related to or friends with someone who was. Shlomo Carlebach's music was a gift given by God, one that opened the hearts of many who listened to it and sang it. His alleged criminal sexual behavior, however, was a matter of his free will. It's difficult to balance the two, especially when the alleged offender isn't here to make amend. One suggestion we offer is that prior to

singing his music, you bring the discussion of his alleged crimes to your audience (or Shabbos table) and ask if anyone would object to singing his melodies. Then respect the wishes of any individual who might say no, without putting them on the spot or to blame.

Many individuals may feel uncomfortable to bring up the allegations made against Rabbi Carlebach--sexual abuse is indeed an uncomfortable issue--at the same time, try putting yourself in the shoes of one of his alleged victims. Can you see how difficult it might be to sit at Shabbos table in your rabbi's home while a song of your alleged offender is sung?

However uncomfortable the issue is, there is nothing wrong with talking about childhood sexual abuse. In fact, educating our communities is the only way we can make changes and put an end to the violent cycle that abuse takes. Talking about sexual abuse and assault will open doors to many have been kept silent, as well as allow you to be seen as a safe person. By opening these important lines of communication, you may help save another child (or many) from being harmed, you may help save another Jewish soul.

Nothing that happens in this world is without reason--Ribbono Shel Olom (the creator of the world) knows all that happens, and why it does. In order for us to get close to HaShem, we are called to mend the relationships between ourselves and others before we attempt to ask HaShem to judge us favorably. This is why during the High Holidays we need to ask each other's forgiveness before we come into Yom Kippur and pray to be written in the book of life. We are all connected. We are all B'nei-Israel. By helping to mend the wrongs done by one of us, we are helping to mend the Jewish community as a whole, we are actively engaging in "Tikun-Olam" (mending the world).

Who knows, maybe the sad reality of sexual offenses against our children, like the alleged crimes committed by a wonderful singer, can be turned into an opportunity for healing our communities, by using this as an example to increase awareness.

Along the same lines, we want to offer a suggestion for addressing the teachings of world-renowned torah scholars who have had allegations of sexual

misconduct with children, adolescents, and/or young adults. What should be done with their essays? Can their teaching be separated from their actions? Is the value of their words diminished because of the sour choices they made outside the shul? Are their Hidushim (brilliant insights) and Psakim (Jewish laws) still relevant?



One way to look at these questions is through the eyes of our children. "Ve-a-hav-ta Le-re-a-cha Ka-mo-cha" (love thy neighbor as you love yourself), we teach them. In an ancient, famous Jewish story, Hillel, one of the great mentors and rabbis of all times, told a man who wanted to learn all of the Torah while standing on one foot, that the teaching of loving thy neighbor as you love yourself is the whole Torah, and the rest he can go and learn later. What we tell our children when we teach them this important rule, is that they are not to wrong each other, and that if they err and do, they are to make amends the way they'd want someone else to make amends with them. It is a simplified view of the Torah's teachings, of course, but one that can apply not only to the children among us, but also and especially to those among us to whom we look up to, from whom we learn, to whom we go to when we need advice about Jewish life and laws.



When leaders, great teachers, and torah scholars offend, we need them--even more than we need and expect of others--to make amends, to make right, to be an example for how we should all deal with errors of free will, however grave and devastating they might be.

The Awareness Center's position is that if a Torah Scholar is accused of sexual offenses, and committed such atrocities against children, that he/she must follow the following guidelines:

1. *The offender will admit publicly of his offenses.*
2. *The offender will agree to stay away from children and put a plan into action for how he/she will do this.*

3. *The offender will enter into therapy with a psychotherapist who has specialized training working with sex offenders.*
4. *The offender will apologize to his/her victim(s), and pay for the treatment (psychotherapy, medical) of those they violated.*
5. *The offender will turn themselves in to law enforcement officials (since a criminal act has been committed).*



While these measures may seem extreme or potentially humiliating, shaming is not the intention. Rather taking responsibility, for no matter how high one's position in society may be (in fact, the highest someone's position is, the more important this is), one is first and foremost a person capable of error and needing of T'shuva (repentance and correcting

erroneous ways). A great scholar whose teachings we want to keep and share is one to whom we can look up to, not only in intellect, but also in heart and actions. There'd be no need to put aside the teachings of a scholar who wronged and made T'shuva, who acknowledged his/her fallibility and made sure no additional harm--emotional or otherwise--was done to those already harmed by their deeds. On the contrary, such a person would be all the more so one to look up to as one who fought his will and came out stronger.

When a Torah scholar commits sexual offenses and then refuses to make amends, effectively punishes the victims by denying them a voice, hides behind his scholarly abilities and rabbinical contacts as if those alone are proof of his righteousness--the validity of all his teachings need to be scrutinized. HaShem does not want our words to be empty of meaning, nothing but lip service. If a Torah scholar commits social evils yet does not make amends, in effect does not practice the essence of the spiritual life he/she preaches, what basis is there for his/her teachings?

Let us look at Isaiah 1:11-20, where the prophet scolds Israel for going through the motions of sacrifices when their social evils aren't amended:

"The multitude of your sacrifices--what are they to me?" says HaShem, 'I have more than enough of

burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened animals. . . . New Moons, Shabbats and convocation-- I cannot bear your evil assemblies.... I will not listen when your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight. Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless plead the case of the widow...

'Come now, let us reason together,' says HaShem. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land...."

For more information go the following web pages:

- * **Spiritual Abuse**
www.theawarenesscenter.org/spiritualabuse.html
- * **Rabbis, Cantors and Other Trusted Officials**
www.theawarenesscenter.org/clergyabuse.html
- * **Case of Rabbi Ephraim Bryks**
www.theawarenesscenter.org/Bryks_Ephraim.html
- * **Case of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach**
www.theawarenesscenter.org/Carlebach_Shlomo.html
- * **Case of Rabbi Moshe Eisemann**
www.theawarenesscenter.org/Eiseman_Moshe.html
- * **Case of Rabbi Mordechai Gafni (aka: Marc Winiarz, Marc Gafni, Mordechai Winiarz)**
www.theawarenesscenter.org/Gafni_Mordecai.html
- * **Case of Rabbi Eliezer Eisgrau**
www.theawarenesscenter.org/Eisgrau_Eliezer.html
- * **Case of Rabbi Baruch Lanner**
www.theawarenesscenter.org/Lanner_Baruch.html
- * **Case of Cantor Howard Nevision**
www.theawarenesscenter.org/Nevision_Howard.html
- * **Case of Rabbi Ben Zion Sobel**
www.theawarenesscenter.org/Sobel_BenZion.html
- * **Case of Rabbi Mordecai Tandler**
www.theawarenesscenter.org/Tandler_Mordecai.html
- * **Case of Rabbi Matis Weinberg**
www.theawarenesscenter.org/Weinberg_Matis.html