



# SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

VAYAKHEIL- PEKUDEI • ויקהל-פקודי

When is it Kosher to Break Tradition?

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**VAYAKHEIL- PEKUDEI / ויקהל-פקודי**

**SERMON TITLE:**

**WHEN IS IT KOSHER TO BREAK TRADITION?**

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In loving memory of

ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל  
Emil W. Herman אה who loved and supported Torah learning.



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## VAYAKHEIL- PEKUDEI

### When is it Kosher to Break Tradition?

Matisyahu. This name has become a household name in the last two years or so. As you probably know better than me, he is the most popular Jewish singer in America and perhaps in the world. I once heard his album and I did not understand one word! To me it's just a big mumble-jumble of words. Yet all the mavens say that his music is extra special!

Who is he? Matisyahu Miller is a chabadnik who just recently returned to Judaism. Upon his return he dedicated a full year to Torah study, only after that did he come back to the music world – with his rabbi's permission.

However, within the Chassidic community there is a debate whether Matisyahu's rabbi was wise to let him get into the big music world. After all, bars and clubs are not quite the best place for a good Chassidic boy, and the people in the bars are probably not expecting to see a bearded, "hatted" Chassid. Also the mode of dancing is rather "unorthodox".

On the other hand, he has the ability to influence more people than any other chabadnik through the Torah messages in his music. Millions of people are drawn to this Chassid and his songs about G-d and Chassidic thoughts. Still, as always, there is the question of what is the right thing – stay home and be a good Chassid or get out there and teach the world through music?

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I say "as always" because this is not a new question. Fifty-some years ago when Chabad had begun creating shows on the radio and television to teach Judaism, many orthodox Jews were incensed. They felt that these "treifa" things must be shunned! But the Rebbe responded by quoting the Mishna, "G-d created everything for His own glory." The message is that although some foolish people use these things for unholy, sometimes downright evil purposes, we can still turn them into conduits for holiness. This is illustrated well by another Mishna, "They asked the elders, 'If G-d does not want idol worship why doesn't he destroy the idols?' They answered, 'Some people worship the sun and moon, should G-d destroy his whole world because of a few fools?'"

It is with this attitude that every Jew must approach the whole world. The Midrash gives an example of this, "The world was not worthy of having gold yet G-d created gold to be used in the *Mishkan* and the Temple." Once gold was created it could be used for anything and it is up to us to make the choice to use it for good. And nobody ever suggested that since gold was used for building a golden calf it should be banned from ever being used in the service of G-d.

Still the comparison is lacking. A radio will be, after all, whatever you make of it. But singing in a bar where everyone is drunk and "partying hard" is a different story all together.

In this week's parsha, we read about the mirrors that the women brought as their participation in the construction of the Mishkan. Some women did not own silver or

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gold, their only shiny possession were the mirrors they used to fix their hair etc. and they did not hesitate to give even that away for the Mishkan. However when they approached Moses with their mirrors he refused them. "Mirrors are made for bodily pleasures and earthly enjoyment," he said. "They have no place in a home for G-d."

But G-d intervened and told Moses to accept the women's mirrors. "They are more precious to me than all the other gifts." G-d told Moses, that it was with these mirrors that the women would encourage their tired husbands to continue having children with them despite the slave labor and intense suffering that they experienced. So though it is true that mirrors are for worldly pleasures, the woman in Jewish Egypt used theirs to build the Jewish nation. In other words they used their "earthly enjoyment" in the service of G-d. They knew that they wouldn't be able to convince their husbands to have babies by lecturing them on the importance of Jewish continuity because the men were in no shape to listen. They didn't even listen when Moses told them they were going to be freed from their slavery! But the women were smart. They utilized the *Yetzer Harah*, the evil inclination to build an entire generation. And this is what G-d enjoyed so much. They used their most basic, unholy traits to serve G-d.

This may be the reason for the custom of saying L'chaim at Chassidic Farbrengens. Even though, consumption of alcohol is generally shunned upon in Jewish tradition, still at Farbrengens, the Rebbe, who was an opponent of drinking, would often instruct certain Chassidim to say L'chaim. Sometimes a small L'chaim takes you above your limitations, and helps you accomplish spiritual feats you may never

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otherwise achieve. This is another example of Jews taking something made for purely worldly pleasure and using it in the service of G-d by shaking their inhibitions and often resolving to increase their observance of mitzvos

The bottom line is that everything in the world was created for the sake of G-d and should be used as a vehicle to serve G-d. Let it be mirrors, Mashke or Matisyahu, each has its own path. What is Reggae music for if not to teach about morals and values?