

Fire From My Tongue//a lesson plan by Charlie Schwartz

Goal:

To raise questions and frame a discussion around the paradoxically universalist and particularist identities of many Diaspora Jews.

Technical Requirments:

Large Sticky Notes/Half Sheets of Paper with Tape
Pens
LCD Projector/Screen
Computer with Internet
Lyric Sheets

Background:

With its distinctive reggae cadence, Matisyahu's song "Jerusalem" runs deep with biblical allusions, references to the Holocaust, exile and the hope of messianic redemption. In contrast, the video for "Jerusalem" beautifully depicts people from diverse backgrounds placing photographs on a wall, forming a literal Kotel of human experience. On an intellectual level, there is dissonance between the particular nature of the lyrics, and the universal themes of the video, yet on an artistic level the video and lyrics hypnotically integrate with one another. This session examines this apparent tension between the video and the song while exploring how participants integrate their Jewish identities into the non-Jewish world around them.

Activity 1: What is Jerusalem?

This activity is essentially a group brainstorm designed to get participants to start thinking about what Jerusalem means to them.

Suggested Steps:

- *Handout half sticky notes/paper and pens.
- *Ask participants to write a sentence about what comes to mind when they hear the word "Jerusalem"
- *Ask participants to post their sentences on the wall.
- *Ask participants if they see any patterns.
- *Have participants move sentences into groups according to ideas and themes.
- *Have participants explain their grouping of sentences.

Activity 2: Jerusalem, the Song.

In this activity participants listen to the Matisyahu song "Jerusalem," and try to understand the lyrics through *chevruta* (partner) study.

Suggested Steps:

- *Ask participants to think about the meaning of the lyrics while listening to the song "Jerusalem.
- *Play the song "Jerusalem." The song "Jerusalem" can be purchased on iTunes, and can be found on You Tube here: <http://bit.ly/FireFromMyTongue> Note: If using the video on You Tube, make sure to not to display the video so participants only hear the song.
- *Hand out the lyrics source sheet found at the end of this lesson plan.
- *Explain that the lyrics source sheet is laid out like a page of Talmud, with the biblical verses references the song on the right and a short commentary on the lyrics on the left.
- *Ask participants to break into pairs and discuss the questions, "Who does this song speak to?" and "What is the meaning of this song."



*Facilitate a discussion around the song, eliciting participants' thoughts and reactions, and if possible, trying to show how the song speaks with a particularly Jewish voice, whether through the use of biblical verse or explicit Jewish imagery.

Activity 3: Jerusalem, the Video.

In this activity participants watch the video for the Matisyahu song "Jerusalem," attempt to decode and decipher the imagery and its connect to the song.

Suggested Steps:

*Before showing the video for "Jerusalem," ask participants to focus on the specific imagery used in the video and to think about why this imagery is used.

*Show the video for "Jerusalem" which can be purchased on iTunes, or found on You Tube here: <http://bit.ly/FireFromMyTongue>

*Ask a participant to describe the imagery found in the video. Note: The primary image of the video is of a diverse group of people pasting photos of life experience on a wall, forming the image of the Western Wall.

*Ask participants what they think the meaning/purpose behind this image is.

*To go deeper into the imagery of the video, show the still shots from the video that are found on this flickr page: <http://bit.ly/FireFromMyTongue1>

Note: The screen shots of the video are meant to show how the video is focused on a universalist conception of the world, focused around struggles for social justice. The screen shots are of the following images in order:

1-The Western Wall made up of photos from a diversity of human experience.

2-Matisyahu with his head against the wall in a posture common at the Western Wall

3-Holocaust survivors immediately after being liberated from the camps.

4-A famous image of a protester handing military police a flower from protests against the Vietnam War

5-Images from the Civil Rights Movement featuring an photo of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

6-A second image from the Civil Rights Movement

7-Protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999.

8-Rally in support of immigrant rights.

9-Rally against the genocide in Darfur.

10&11-Images from Hurricane Katrina.

12-Three images from the video showing the diversity of the photos.

*Facilitate a discussion around what the images in the video have to do with the meaning of the song.

Activity 4: What Does This Mean?

The final activity for this lesson is a discussion bringing together the activities up until now. Have the participants discuss what they think the interplay between the song and the video is, what Jerusalem means in each of them, and for themselves, and if the tensions, contradictions and/or the synthesis found between the song and video resonate with them.

Jerusalem

Matisyahu

3,000: The first Exile of the Jews/Israelites from the Land of Israel took place in 586 BCE at the hands of the Babylonians.

Milk and Honey: The milk and honey used to describe the Land of Israel in the Torah is most likely goat's milk and date honey.

Dwelling of his majesty: Traditional Jewish theology posits Jerusalem as the "dwelling place" of God's presence: the *shekhina*.

Rebuild the Temple: The temple mount in Jerusalem was the site of both the first and second temples.

About 60: A reference to the establishment of the The State of Israel in 1948, almost 60 before this song was written.

Burn in the oven: The memory and trauma of the Holocaust continues to shape Jewish identity.

Change your name: According to the Midrash Mekhilta when the Israelites where enslaved in Egypt they did not change their names or language.

Dark History: "Suffering is part of the destiny of the Jews, but so is repeated joy as well as ultimate redemption." –Salo W. Baron

Babylon: The kingdom that destroyed the First Temple in Jerusalem and the symbol for corrupt, oppressive systems in the Rastafarian religion.

Aint no one gonna break my stride: Quote from the classic reggae song "Break My Stride" by Blue Lagoon.

אם-אֶשְׁכַּחךְ יְרוּשָׁלַם-- תִּשְׁכַּח יְמִינִי. תִּדְבֶּק-לְשׁוֹנִי לְחִפֵי אֶם-
לא אזכרתי.

[Chorus]

**Jerusalem, if I forget you,
fire not gonna come from me tongue.**

**Jerusalem, if I forget you,
let my right hand forget what it's supposed to do.**

In the ancient days, we will return with no delay

Picking up the bounty and the spoils on our way

We've been traveling from state to state

And them don't understand what they say

3,000 years with no place to be

And they want me to give up my **milk and honey**

Don't you see, it's not about the land or the sea

Not the country but the **dwelling of his majesty**

[Chorus]

Rebuild the temple and the crown of glory

Years gone by, **about 60**

Burn in the oven in this century

And the gas tried to choke, but it couldn't choke me

I will not lie down, I will not fall asleep

They come overseas, yes they're trying to be free

Erase the demons out of our memory

Change your name and your identity

Afraid of the truth and our **dark history**

Why is everybody always chasing we

Cut off the roots of your family tree

Don't you know that's not the way to be

[Chorus]

Caught up in these ways, and the worlds gone craze

Don't you know it's just a phase

Case of the Simon says

If I forget the truth then my words won't penetrate

Babylon burning in the place, can't see through the haze

Chop down all of them dirty ways,

That's the price that you pay for selling lies to the youth

No way, not ok, oh no way, not ok, hey

Aint no one gonna break my stride

Aint no one gonna pull me down

Oh no, I got to keep on moving

Stay alive

**If I forget thee O
Jerusalem,** may my **right
hand forget** her cunning,
**let my tongue cleave to
the roof of my mouth** if I
remember thee not, If I not
set Jerusalem above my
chiefest joy.

-Psalms/Tehilim 137:5

חֲדָשׁ הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנִשְׁבָּח
יְמֵינוּ כְּקִדְמָם

Turn us to you God, and we
shall be turned; renew our
days as of old.

Lamentations/Eicha 5:21

וְאָרַד לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם,
אֶל- וְלִהְעֵלְתוֹ מִן-הָאָרֶץ הַהוּא
אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה וְרַחֲבָה, אֶל-אֶרֶץ
זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ

I am come down to deliver
them out of the hand of the
Egyptians, and to bring them
up out of that land unto a
good land and a large, unto a
land flowing with **milk and
honey.**

-Exodus/Shemot 6:5

הִנֵּה לֹא-יָנֹם, וְלֹא יִשָּׁן-שׁוֹמֵר
יִשְׂרָאֵל

Behold, the guardian of
Israel does not slumber or
sleep.

Psalms/Tehilim 121:4

עַל נְהָרוֹת, בְּבֵל-שָׁם יִשְׁבְּנוּ, גַּם-
בְּכִינוֹ: בְּזִכְרֵנוּ, אֶת-צִיּוֹן.

By the rivers of **Babylon**,
there we sat down, yea, we
wept, when we remembered
Zion.

-Psalms/Tehillim 137:1

Lyrics by Matisyahu
Source Sheet by Charlie Schwartz
MediaMidrash.org

