

Hatikvah



Target population: adults

Technical needs: computer projector, internet access, good speakers

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Introduction

When a people takes hold of its fate in its own hands, when a nation builds its own country when before it had none, it needs to take on the characteristics of a modern State. Among other things, this means that the Jews needed to find or create symbols that would unite and represent the country to the outside world.

What was the musical symbol – the anthem - that Israel chose for itself? In what way is it like other nation's anthems, and in what way is it different? Does Hatikvah, Israel's national anthem, serve its unifying and symbolic purpose?

This program aims to explore Hatikvah – its history, its meaning, and its artistic function. In order to do so, it's worth developing our thinking and our language by first exploring the meaning and history of the US anthem, the Star Spangled Banner...

Star Spangled Banner

Quick quiz – possibly in small groups

1. Can you write down all the words of the first verse?
2. Can you remember any of the other verses?
3. What event do the lyrics refer to? (Defence of Fort Henry, Baltimore MD 1814)

[At this point, you can play an [official version](#) of the anthem]

4. When did the Star Spangled Banner become the official anthem of USA? (1913)
5. What are the origins of the tune? (An English drinking song composed by John Stafford Smith. Original boozy lyrics [here](#).)

To discuss – music and words:

What feelings arise when you sing the anthem?
Do you stand/put hand on heart when singing it?
If you don't put your hand on heart, what do you think when others do?

How do you understand/relate to the words?
[are they difficult to understand?]

What affects you more: the words, or the music?
[It would seem that the words to this song say little about American values, make no reference to any American history beyond independence, and use a particularly ancient vernacular... perhaps the words to an anthem aren't important? And if they aren't, then what is?]

[is it the rousing music, the drum rolls, and the major key that gives this song grandeur? Is it then not the text but the art that makes it special?]

Knowing the tune comes from an old British drinking song, does this affect your attitude to the Star Spangled Banner?
[is authenticity important for this national symbol? Does something have to be made in America in order for it to be 'ours'? Is the history of where the song came from important, or is the importance attached to our use of it? In this sense – did the song make the nation, or does the nation make the song?]

Is the national anthem important? For what?

[There is no right answer here. What is important is for the group to develop a common language about national anthems, and to allow them to throw an interested eye on their own heritage.]

The first person to perform his own adaptation of Star Spangled Banner was Jose Feliciano. As this [short film](#) recounts, his original adaptation almost destroyed his career. Ever since, from Hendrix onwards, the adaptation business has prospered.

What is your attitude to these adaptations to the National anthem? Do they adversely affect the power of the original, or to they add to its splendor? [we think [Marvin Gaye's version](#) is rather splendid...]

[This is, in essence, a question about the sacred. Can a song be sacred? Is this holiness, or specialness, accorded to it by the people? In which case if someone changes it, 'desecrates' it, then the holiness is gone. Or is the sacred inherent? In which case it doesn't matter what people 'do' to it, the song will remain holy. As we will see, these questions of the sanctity of the national anthem are equally relevant in Israel.]

Before moving on to Hatikva, it may be worth some kind of summarizing. What have we learned about our different approaches to and understandings of our National Anthem? What place does the music, the words, the history, have in its significance to us?

*Oh, say, can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, thro' the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watch'd, were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof thro' the night that our flag was still there.
O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*

Hatikva

Play the famous [Barbra Streisand version](#).

The music

Hatikvah is one of the very few national anthems in a minor key. To a western ear, this sound somewhat sorrowful.

- Does this add to its significance for you, or does it detract from it?
- Thinking back to our responses to the music of Star Spangled Banner – should an anthem be triumphant?
- What does it say to you, that Israel's anthem is minor?

Development of the tune

An early 16th century song [Ballo di Montova](#) displays many elements of the song we know as Hatikvah, but the most direct source would be Smetana's piece [Ma Vlast – My Fatherland](#). It is fascinating to realize that this quintessential song of Israel was originally written in praise of Czechoslovakia!

The lyrics

As long as the Jewish spirit is yearning deep in the heart,
With eyes turned toward the East, looking toward Zion,
Then our hope - the two-thousand-year-old hope - will not be lost:
To be a free people in our land,
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.

Two questions about the lyrics:

- The lyrics talk of the Jewish spirit. Do you see yourself as part of the Jewish spirit? How does this song speak to you?
[it is worth trying to reincorporate the thoughts and sentiments expressed about Star Spangled Banner, and encouraging their application in this conversation. Are there points of comparison?]
- The song talks of a longing and a hope. Do you think the hope has now been fulfilled? Do you think this song is now a little out of date?
[you may want to interject at this point and talk about the song Jerusalem of Gold – *Yerushalayim shel Zahav*. The song was originally written as a sad lament for the loss of Jerusalem in early 1967. It was a great hit. But some months later Jerusalem was conquered and Jews could once again enter the Old City. In response, Naomi Shemer added an extra verse, celebrating Jews' return to Jerusalem. So there is a precedent for updating Israeli national songs when appropriate. Perhaps the 'hope' is not yet fulfilled?]

Further Text study

Naftali Herz Inber wrote the original poem in 1878 that was set to music by Samuel Cohen. The poem itself was seven stanzas long, but traditionally only the first verse and the chorus are sung. The then-Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rav Kook, suggested a more religious lyric, but it was not accepted. After Inber had since left Israel, a change was made to the words of the chorus. It is this altered version that we sing today.

Split into groups, and study the three different lyrics for ending of the Israeli national anthem. All were to be sung to the same tune. What are the differences between the three versions, and what do they say to you?

Suggested lyrics of Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel

Eternally living within our hearts,
The Faith, the loyal faith to return to our holy land,
The city where David settled.

Original lyrics of Hatikvah

Our hope is not yet lost,
The ancient hope
To return to the land of our fathers,
The city where David encamped

Final version

Our hope is not yet lost
The hope of 2000 years
To be a free people in our land
The land of Zion and Jerusalem

[In particular, you may want to encourage people to consider what is the difference between a 'return to the land of our fathers', and 'to be a free people in our land'...]

The controversy over the lyrics

Israel's ultra-orthodox Jews, making up around 10% of Israel's population, do not sing Hatikvah at public events. It offends their religious sensibilities. Arab citizens of Israel, who make up nearly 20% of Israel's population, also do not sing Hatikvah at public events. It offends their national sensibilities. Thus over a third of all Israelis are alienated by their own national anthem.

You may wish to read and discuss the following article:
[Hatikvah in Arabic](#) – a fascinating suggestion from a Canadian writer

Hatikvah - From Holocaust to Rebirth

When Bergen-Belsen was liberated in 1945, a BBC reporter recorded the surviving Jews sing Hatikvah. Even before the establishment of the State, this tune was an anthem of the Jewish People. (You'll notice they sing the original version of the lyrics).
<http://il.youtube.com/watch?v=syUSmEbGLs4&feature=fww>

For further listening

In 2008 a project brought together some of Israel's top musicians to record their own versions of Hatikvah. [Dudu Fisher](#) sings to a 'human beat box' backing, pop star and broadcaster [Kobi Oz](#) gives his rendition, and [Daniel Zamir](#) creates an entirely unusual jazz version. From the women, [Zehava Ben](#) sings with her oriental lilt, and [Rivka Zohar](#) sings from the heart.