

Freedom I – Identity, Creativity, and the State

Introduction

This is the start of the second section of our work: Freedom. After having explored aspects of Jewish Peoplehood, we are now moving into the intricacies and fascinations of Israel's freedom. This first piece looks into the arts. It is likely to be upbeat and enjoyable on the one hand, and thought-provoking and challenging on the other hand.

Goals

- Participants will experience a taste of the variety and power of Israeli arts and their interface with Israeli society
- Participants will begin to appreciate the way in which Israel's public space is governed according to unique guidelines
- Confusion and complexity will begin to feel familiar and even enjoyable!

Big Question

What happens when Jews “come out of the closet” and feel free to express their Jewishness in a public made up of a majority of Jews?

Guiding Questions

- Is Israel even trying to maintain any separation between Religion and State? (No..!)
- Should governments have a say over the nature of artistic creation?
- Can I think of parallels in North America?
- What would happen if this took place in North America?

Preparation for the Facilitator

1. Make sure you have watched the videos and the images yourself.
2. Make sure the internet connection is broad enough to screen the videos, or download them beforehand. www.keepvid.com
3. Check that you have a computer, projector, screen, and EXCELLENT speakers connected to your computer
4. Print and cut out the different “bluffs”, and the lyrics to Out of Egypt
5. Print out the quotation from Rabbi Marder
6. Set up a flip chart, with working marker pens of different colors.
7. Download large hi-res versions of Da Vinci’s and Nes’ Last Supper, so you can screen them large.

Make it Modular

Ideally, the session is done in its entirety. However, if time is limited, you should feel free to be selective about which components of this session you cover. To ensure alignment to the session's goals do not eliminate:

Part 3: Call your Bluff

Planning Tip: when planning the session it is important to not only think about timing but also about what activities and materials are going to resonate the most with your students. It’s important to have a variety of activities for the variety of learners in the group and we recommend being thoughtful about this as you decide how to set up the session.

Session Outline

<i>Segment</i>	<i>Suggested Time</i>	Description
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>15 minutes</i>	Briefly review last session. Israel update through the prism of 4HQ. Introduce this session
<i>Part 1: Jewish Public Space</i>	<i>15 minutes</i>	Sharing responses to the Jewish nature of Israel's public space
<i>Part 2: The Entrance Sign</i>	<i>15 minutes</i>	Exploring the notion of "coming out of the cultural closet" – advantages and disadvantages
<i>Part 3: Call your Bluff</i>	<i>60 minutes</i>	Three amazing cases of where creativity met Jewish identity, and clashed in Israel's public sphere.
<i>Conclusion</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Wrap Up</i> • <i>Looking Ahead</i> 	<i>15 minutes</i>	Close this session and briefly look to next session

Session Implementation/Description:

Note: At the beginning of each session you will give an introduction. This section is important as it functions as a bridge between sessions – reminding students about the material that was covered in the prior session and framing the material for the current session. Below are some suggested points to help you create that bridge between sessions. Note that don't need to read the points below word for word!

Israel Update – 10 minutes

Before launching into the session, selected participant(s) present an update on Israeli current events. Remind them to present their findings through the prism of 4HQ. Help the group to hone their understanding and application of these four ideas. It may well be that all four questions crop up in all news headlines, but even then you will find that opposing parties involved probably place different emphasis on the four issues and/or have different answers to the four questions.

Introduction

So having explored dimensions of Jewish Peoplehood in the last three sessions – what does it mean to be Jewish? What obligations come with being Jewish? And What differentiations are expected of us? – we are now moving on to explore the idea of Freedom as it plays out in Israel. “To Be A People, Free In Our Land”. What does it mean to be a free people?

In the next two sessions we will look at where Freedom intersects with Jewish creativity in Israel.

Part 1 – Jewish Public Space

Have someone read out this quotation from Rabbi Jane Marder, and then have them stick it on the top of the clip board:

R. Jane Marder – Israel as Jewish Public Space, 2007

“Some of what I love is the reality of Israel: the automatic teller machine that spits out a receipt wishing me a happy Sukkot; the taxi drivers with tehilim (psalms) taped to the dashboard; street signs in Hebrew, named for sages and poets and great figures in our history; concerts that begin with the crowd singing “Hatikvah”; public lectures, literature, films, plays, and even rock music that wrestle with Jewish themes; the siren that announces Shabbat on Friday afternoons in Jerusalem; the buses that stop running, the quiet that falls over the city, and the streets full of people carrying flowers home or walking to synagogue. Israel is the only place in the world that offers me public Jewish space—an external environment that reflects my inner identity. I belong there, in a way that I belong nowhere else.”

A Dream of Zion: American Jews Reflect on Why Israel Matters to Them

Leave room for participants to express their agreement or otherwise with Marder’s comments, and then ask the group to brainstorm on the clip-board any other aspects of Jewish Public Space that the group noticed when they were on Birthright.

It is worth asking a member of the group to be the person to write down the comments. Unless your handwriting is particularly beautiful...

Transition:

The Jewish nature of Israel's public space is not by chance. Some would say that it is at the heart of the Zionist enterprise. This short video offers us a little historical perspective about this kind of Jewish freedom.

Part 2 - The Entrance Sign

Screen this short video:

http://youtu.be/t_V43ULk6fs

Write up on the flip chart this quotation from Taub:

“In order to be free one must have a public dimension to one's identity”

Some questions for general conversation:

- In what way would you say there is a public dimension to your Jewish identity on campus? In your country?
- Are there elements of your Jewish identity do you prefer to keep private? What are they? Why?
- In North America, where there are so many religious and ethnic identities in play, is it possible for everyone to have a public dimension to their identity? What would/does that look like? Is it a good thing, or should the public sphere be left “neutral”?

Allow for many different opinions, and encourage different voices and perspectives.

Transition:

There are certainly advantages and disadvantages to the way in which Israel has few separations between religious identity and the public space. On the one hand, everyone can feel liberated that they do not need to be “closeted”, but on the other hand it means there are many more people with an opinion about the way in which you choose to express your identity...

We are now going to examine three different case studies, three different examples of where religious identity meets with public expression – and responses from the public in return...

Part 3 - Call My Bluff

Split everyone into three groups.

Everyone is going to be exposed to three different cases of Israeli art – all of which touch on themes of Pesach – Passover – the Jewish Festival of Freedom.

After each piece, we will ask the question:
What was the response in Israel to this piece of art?

Group 1 will answer for the first example

Group 2 will answer for the second example

Group 3 will answer for the third example

I will give to each group three different answers to the question. Two of these answers will be fabrications – lies – and one of these answers is correct.

It will be the responsibility of each group to present all three answers in as convincing a fashion as possible.

It will be the job of the other two groups to decide which of the three answers offered is the correct one.

The group that manages to convince everyone of the **wrong** answer, wins.

At the end of each example, I will tell you which was the correct answer....

[Correct answer below in italics]

Example one - Ehad Mi Yodea

Before screening the video, make sure that everyone in the group is familiar with the traditional Seder Night song, Ehad Mi Yodea. If they are not, it will be important to go through its cumulative nature, and its place in Pesach culture:

The song itself first appeared in Jewish tradition in the 16th Century, and has been sung in different languages throughout the Jewish world.

"Echad Mi Yodea" is a cumulative song, meaning that each verse is built on top of the previous verses. There are thirteen verses, to correspond with the magical number of God's attributes, and that crops up on Bar/Bat Mitzvahs...

The first verse runs:

Who knows one?
I know one.
One is our God, in heaven and on earth.

The second verse:
Who knows two?
I know two.
Two are the tablets of the covenant;
One is our God, in heaven and on earth.

...and so forth. The last verse is:
Who knows thirteen?
I know thirteen.
Thirteen are the attributes of God;
Twelve are the tribes of Israel;
Eleven are the stars of Joseph's dream;
Ten are the Commandments;
Nine are the months of pregnancy;
Eight are the days of circumcision;
Seven are the days of the week;
Six are the books of the Mishnah;
Five are the books of the Torah;
Four are the Matriarchs;
Three are the Patriarchs;
Two are the tablets of the covenant;
One is our God, in heaven and on earth.

This is a performance of Israeli Dance Company Batsheva. This piece was choreographed by their Artistic Director, Ohad Naharin, and is built around the song “Ehad Mi Yodea” as performed by Nikmat HaTraktor (Revenge of the Tractor). The video is from a performance overseas.

Play this video from 4:14 minutes in. (The link should jump to that point automatically)
<http://youtu.be/GleYHU7pEYc?t=4m14s>

In 1998 it was Israel’s 50th year. There was a huge televised performance of all of Israel’s best arts and culture, to be broadcast throughout the world. Batsheva Dance Company was invited to perform Ehad Mi Yodeya as part of the show. (The video we saw was of a different performance of the same dance piece.)

How was this received in Israel?

A:

On the night, when the time came to throw their jackets into the ring, everyone in the audience stood up at the same time, and also threw their own clothes into the air. The cameras caught it all, and there are records of viewers laughing in surprise and respect throughout the world. The dancers themselves saw what was going on in the audience and were caught giggling throughout the rest of the performance. By the time they reached “13”, instead of throwing off another piece of clothing, some of the dancers went and put on some of the jackets thrown from the audience. The evening went down as one of the highlights of Israel’s public relations of the entire decade. (After the performance some people sued Batsheva because they never got their jackets back...)

B:

The Ultra-Orthodox parties in the Government coalition heard about the performance, and threatened to bring down the government unless the Batsheva dance was removed from the program. In search of a compromise, the President of Israel, Ezer Weizmann, went to ask the dancers to wear long-johns underneath their clothes, so that when they throw off their trousers their skin would not show. The dancers refused. Batsheva Dance Company refused to perform. They were roundly condemned by members of the government, with threats of cuts to their funding. However within weeks their private donations increased massively.

C:

On the night, in a gesture towards the Holocaust, as the pile of clothes grew larger, images of Auschwitz were screened on the wall above the stage. Live cameras cut from the clothes on the dance floor, to images of piles of clothing and shoes in Auschwitz. As the dance ended, a huge slide saying “Tanz Macht Frei” (Dance sets you free) – a macabre reference to the infamous sign above the entrance to the Auschwitz Concentration Camp. The German Ambassador to Israel, who was in the audience, stormed out. It took many months for the controversy to die down.

Example two – The Last Supper

Try to ascertain if everyone is familiar with Leonardo Di Vinci’s original Last Supper. If they are not, first screen the original image, explaining that this iconic painting is a late 15th-century mural painting by Leonardo da Vinci in the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan. It is one of the world's most famous paintings, and

one of the most studied, scrutinized, and satirized. It presents a scene from the Christian Gospel, when Christ (center) eats what came to be known as The Last Supper with his disciples. This meal (widely acknowledged to be a Seder night Pesach meal) is where Jesus tells his disciples that one of them will betray him, and another will deny him.



This next image was staged and photographed by Adi Nes, in 2005. Screen this image.



Ask for at least 60 seconds of silence, as everyone takes in the details of the image.

How was this received in Israel?

A:

In a rare show of collaboration, Arab Christian leaders throughout Jerusalem and Nazareth joined with ex-Generals in the IDF to demonstrate outside the exhibition gallery. Some said the photo insulted Christianity, others complained it insulted the IDF. Unfortunately towards the end of the evening a fight broke out between the demonstrators themselves, as the exhibition continued uninterrupted.

B:

This was one of the most successful Israeli pieces of art ever. Massive success. Two copies have been sold, for almost a quarter of a million dollars. The photo is on permanent exhibition at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

C:

The photo remains a curio, happily used by Israel educators(!), but if we are being honest, it didn't really make an impact on Israel. Most people in Israel did not recognize the Christian references, and were not impressed with staged photography. His later work of Old Testament characters was far more successful and received much greater attention. Adi Nes himself acknowledges: "*The Last Supper* was a bit of a joke. A bit of a mistake. No one got it, and now I don't really remember why I went to all the trouble. All those guys wanted to be fed after the shoot!"

Example three – Out of Egypt

Continuing our Pesach theme, here is the final exhibit. A song that draws on another piece of the liturgy from the Seder Night Haggadah:

The Mishnah states, "***In every generation one is obligated to view himself as though he came out of Egypt***", as it says: 'Tell your son on that day saying, "Because of this God acted for me when I came out of Egypt"' (Shemot 13:8). Therefore, we are obligated to thank, praise, glorify, exalt, bless, and honor Him who performed all of these miracles for our fathers, and for us. He took us from slavery to freedom, from sadness to joy, from mourning to festivity, from darkness to light, from servitude to redemption, we shall recite before Him the Hallel" (Pesachim 10:5).

Play the following song by Alma Zohar: <http://youtu.be/ufW-Wb8F7NQ>

After playing the song, you may wish to hand out copies of the lyrics. [See appendix]

A:

When this song was released in Israel it went straight to the top of the charts. It was played constantly on radio, and at a subsequent rally for the rights of African refugees in Israel Alma Zohar was top performer. More fascinating was that the rally was noted for the number of orthodox religious campaigners in its midst, singing especially loudly at the chorus.

B:

While the song itself was not a great hit in the music business, it had a fascinating impact on Israel's religious realm. Nearly every new Haggadah that is printed in Israel (many!) now includes the lyrics of Zohar's song, together with suggestions for leaving a seat empty for African refugees. Her song, and its application of Jewish values to Israeli immigration/refugee policy, may not have changed Israeli policy, but it has certainly changed Jewish practice.

C:

The major radio station, to which over 40% of all radio listeners turn, is Galgalatz, run by the IDF. Although Zohar's previous two songs were smash hits, and she had earned the title of Best Newcomer to the Israeli music scene, it was decided that "Out of Egypt" would not be played on Galgalatz. It was not officially prescribed as "censored", but it was never heard, and so made little impact on the Israeli public. Its youtube views never reached higher than 60,000. (Her previous song received over one million hits).

Conclusion

Allow space for participants to share their observations from this game of “Call my bluff.”

The chances are that people will search for some consistency in Israel’s responses to these expressions of Jewish identity in public space, and will find none! This is in itself a key piece of information about the religion/state mix: since it is an undefined mix, consistency is rare. At the same time, as with all “mash-ups”, the room for creativity is inspiring....

Looking Ahead

- *Next week*, we will start to think about Freedom as it plays out in the democratic process of the country. When you have a Jewish state, how can or should Jewish values play out in democratic decisions? We’ll be looking at actual case studies of decisions made by the Knesset – the Israeli Parliament – and see what we think of them.
- *Homework*: Remind them they will receive an email with their homework for the following week the next day. See *Pre-Session Assignments* in Session #2 for homework.
- *Israel Update*: Make sure to assign the 4HQ update to someone else in the group.

Post-Session Reflection for Facilitator

Success Checklist

- Did participants experience a taste of the variety and power of Israeli arts and their interface with Israeli society?
- Did participants begin to appreciate the way in which Israel's public space is governed according to unique guidelines?
- Are participants beginning to enjoy the complexities of Israeli society?

How did it go? Reflection on the session:

In the "Success Checklist," if you aren't able to answer "yes," to the questions, why do you think these objectives weren't achieved?

What was one thing that surprised you during the session?

What was something that happened that you weren't prepared for?

Was there anything that happened in the group that needs to be addressed in the next session?

Is there anything you want to discuss with your mentor or supervisor?

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Out of Egypt

Music and Lyrics by
Alma Zohar

There's always war in Africa
What luck it's so far away,
We don't have to see or hear it,
from here
I too walked, once
Down lengthy paths of pain
From Egypt to Jerusalem,
Across a desert for many days,
Without water, no water,
With the same question in the eyes.
I, as they, encountered evil,
Striking out in all directions,
A falsely accused people,
People lacking all protection
Without a home, no home
Carrying small children as they go.
They come knocking at your door,
Crying out bitterly,
And you say – what do I need them for?
Foreigners from foreign lands.
Don't you know each day and age,
One and all must see himself,
As though having escaped Egypt,
So he won't forget how he fled,
How he was beaten, humiliated, murdered,
How he called out to the heavens.
I too vainly tried,
To save the little that I could,
With no place left to hide
Anyone could let my blood,
Mark of Cain, Mark of Cain,
People pleading on their knees.
They come knocking at your door,
Babes and bundles on their backs,
And you say – what do I need them for?

תמיד יש מלחמה באפריקה
מזל שהיא רחוקה
שלא רואים ולא שומעים
אותה מכאן
גם אני הלכתי פעם
בנתיב הייסורים
ממצרים לירושלים
במדבר, ימים רבים
בלי מים
עם אותה שאלה בעיניים
גם אני פגשתי רשע
המכה בלי אבחנה
אנשים חפים מפשע
אנשים בלי הגנה
בלי בית
עם ילדים קטנים בידיים
הם דופקים לך בדלת
הם בוכים בכי תמרורים
אל תאמר – מה לי עם אלה
אלה אנשים זרים
כי בכל דור ודור
חייב אדם לראות עצמו
כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים
שלא ישכח איך ברח
הוכה, הושפל, נרצח
איך צעק לשמיים
גם אני חיפשתי כוח
להציל מה שאפשר
כשלא היה לאן לברוח
דמי היה מותר
אות קין
אנשים נופלים לברכיים
הם דופקים לך בדלת
הם בוכים בכי תמרורים
אל תאמר – מה לי עם אלה אלה
אנשים שחורים

Who needs any more of those blacks?
Don't you know each day and age...
Ruler of the World
Save us please while you still can
And bless we'll never ever need
The mercies of another man
Don't you know each day and age...
There's always war in Africa,
What luck it's so far away,
We don't have to see or hear it, from here.
There's always war in Africa,
What luck it's so far away,
We don't have to see or hear...
The screams

כי בכל דור ודור...
אז שמור נא על כולנו
ריבוננו של עולם
שלא נזדקק אף פעם
לרחמים של בני אדם
כי בכל דור ודור...
תמיד יש מלחמה באפריקה
מזל שהיא רחוקה
שלא רואים ולא שומעים אותה מכאן
תמיד יש מלחמה באפריקה
מזל שהיא רחוקה
שלא רואים ולא שומעים
את הצעקה