

TEN TIPS FOR THE SONGLEADING EDUCATOR

by Noam Katz

1. Create musical moments in “the space between”
 - Incorporate Jewish music during **transitions**: play it over the loudspeaker, welcome participants to Kabbalat Shabbat with a drum circle, etc.
2. “The words of the prophets are written on the subway walls”
 - Post song lyrics on walls, corridors, trees, etc. so that participants have educational ‘eye candy’.
 - Challenge participants to find **parallels** between Jewish texts and pop songs
3. “Music speaks louder than words”
 - Connect a piece of music to every thematic program
 - Use a new song as a **bookend**: teach during intro, review during wrap-up
4. If “a hard rain’s gonna fall”, use it as a learning opportunity
 - Focus on Hebrew words or **key themes** during your rainy day “sing-down”
 - Indoor campfire, sound symphony, teach meaning of popular camp song, etc.
5. “I woke up this morning, and I (re)wrote down this song”
 - Have participants write **new verses or melodies** to a song they already know
 - Psalm-libs, “I have a little dreydl”, and the genre-breaking wonder: *Adon Olam*
6. “Picture yourself” as a song on a poster
 - Create a **visual musical Midrash** (put words on a poster and kids illustrate)
 - Use this “song portrait” as an instructional tool for teaching others the song
7. “More than words” is all you ever needed
 - Use all of the **resources, program areas, and personnel** available to you: *rikkud* (dance), *omanut* (art), *teva* (nature), meditation, sports/recreation, etc.
8. “Start me up” with a set induction
 - **Introduce** a song as you would a content program, with a catchy skit or story
 - Use humor, pathos or personal anecdote to excite the group about new song
9. “Don’t ya know, they’re talkin’ ‘bout a (technological) revolution”
 - take advantage of newer **technology** that is at your disposal
 - Prepare powerpoint projections (w/graphics, lyrics, info about song, etc.)
10. “You’ve got the whole world in your hands” (i.e. Be innovative. Think of each song as a gift you are giving over to the group. Find a teaching method that resonates most with you. Open your **imagination** and it will come through...)

EIGHT IDEAS FOR JEWISH SONGWRITING by Noam Katz

1. **"Hit 'em where they ain't" – Wee Willie Keeler, NY Giants (baseball), 1898**
 - a. Try to find a Hebrew text that *hasn't* been arranged a million times
 - b. Seek out a text in need of a fresh, new interpretation
 - c. If you are writing original lyrics, explore themes that have not been widely covered in our repertoire (e.g. environment, new Hebrew slang)
2. **Let the text guide the melody.**
 - a. If you are using a Hebrew text, study it before you create a melody. Think about its message and the feelings it evokes and have those determine the type of melody you deem appropriate for that text.
 - b. Examples: Steven Sulzer's "Sh'ma" (conveys the majesty of the text), Craig Taubman's "Shabbat Shalom/Shir Hama'alot"
3. **Start with a killer hook.**
 - a. The chorus/hook is (usually) the most compelling part of a song, the section that will replay in the listener's head for the rest of the day. Find a hook that will excite, inspire and provide "ear candy"!
 - b. E.g: "Yerushalayim Shel Zahav" (Shemer), "B'tzelem Elohim" (Dan Nichols)
4. **Beware of trite English!**
 - a. If you are writing original lyrics, spend time composing thoughtful words, not tired clichés. Does it mean something to you? Is it generic or truly original?
 - b. Let yourself be inspired by a Jewish text—there are so many brilliant ones! e.g. "You Are The One" (Debbie Friedman, based on R. Nachman of Bratslav), "Yeish Kochavim" (Kol B'seder, from Chana Senesh poem)
5. **Decide on the audience and purpose.**
 - a. You may want to consider whether the song is intended for easy use and repetition (i.e. a sing-along or song session) or whether it is a performance piece. These are two very different animals.
 - b. Who is the audience for this song? Young kids? Teenagers and older? Knowing the intended listener will inform your songwriting process.
6. **Know what the Hebrew means!**
 - a. Don't break up phrases in unnatural places. Don't be arbitrary.
 - b. If you are going to use two or more Hebrew texts, try to find words or ideas that they have in common. (e.g. Debbie Friedman's "Im Ein Ani Li Mi Li", Leon Sher's "Heal Us Now")
7. **Find inspiration far and wide.**
 - a. Experiment with music from different genres, cultures and rhythms than the usual mainstream American fare. In this global age, Jewish music can reflect the diversity of musical expression that we have on our iTunes playlists
8. **"Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know!" – John Keats**
 - a. Don't write what you think others want to hear. Be true to yourself. That is where the beautiful music lies.
 - b. Don't be afraid to write and write and rewrite and write some more....