

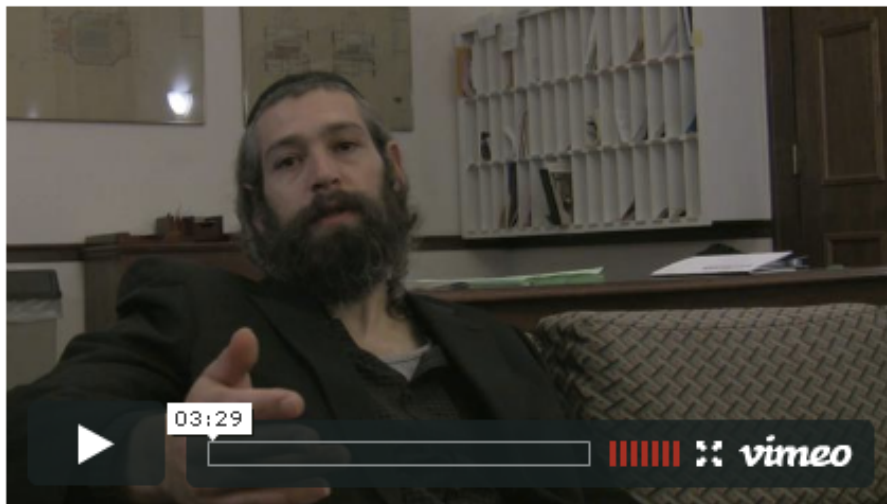
S.P. SULLIVAN

a journalist with awful penmanship.

An interview with Matisyahu.

Last weekend I had the opportunity to meet musician [Matisyahu](#) and shoot some footage at his [surprise performance](#) at Smith College.

After the performance, I sat down for an interview with the him about his new record, [“Light.”](#)



I spent a few days before the concert and the interview doing some homework on Matisyahu, and he seemed to be a pretty interesting guy. But I noticed something peculiar about the tenor of the interviews I read: They all seemed to focus much more on his Hasidic Jewish faith than his music, and some even tried to bring in Jewish identity politics into the equation, even though Matis has, on [numerous occasions](#), said that “music and politics is two different things.”

As a secular writer I was much more interested in finding out about his use of the Torah’s thematic elements than I was in how his faith complicates his career as a musician. Sure, that’s interesting, but you can only ask the same questions so many times. And as he mentions in the interview, I found the inspiration he drew from [The Story of the Seven Beggars](#) by Rabbi Nachman to be particularly interesting.

I think it's unfortunate that an artist, by the nature of his faith, is expected to be an ambassador from that faith to the mainstream, and be held accountable for members of that faith entangled in some messy geopolitical issues. Are we going to blame country music star [Alan Jackson](#) for the War in Iraq? But a cursory [Google search](#) shows that not everybody agrees with me.

But I closed the package with something Matisyahu said towards the end of the interview, which I think we – the secular and non-secular alike – tend to forget. I asked him if he found the Torah to be a particularly useful thematic template because of its similarities with the texts of other monotheistic faiths.

“It’s all basically coming from the same place,” he said. “It’s all trying to get to the same place.”

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