

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

WHY WATCH ISRAELI MOVIES?

In addition to being fun to watch for entertainment, or as a social activity, movies can be powerful lenses through which to examine society. There is so much that can be learned about history, language and culture just by watching a movie—especially if it is a movie which takes place in a society different from your own. Whether you are looking to teach about Israel, or learn more about it yourself, the movies in this guide may be used for the following purposes:

EXAMINE UNDERLYING THEMES

To provide a foundation for a better understanding of Israeli society, including an ability to identify and explain major recurring themes, preoccupations and challenges facing Israel over the last half-century.

DEVELOP A MORE NUANCED VIEW OF ISRAEL

To move past superficial impressions to gain an understanding of Israel as a real place with real people and real problems.

BRING HISTORY TO LIFE

To learn about history from an Israeli perspective in an engaging way.

EXPAND CULTURAL HORIZONS

To experience and enjoy the cinema of Israel; to be exposed to Israeli culture including societal values, Hebrew language and sense of humor.

THINK CRITICALLY ABOUT FILM

To improve analytical skills and delve deeply into the movies' content and societal implications.

WHY THIS GUIDE?

Movies often rely on cultural references, which someone coming from a different culture may not understand or may miss entirely. This guide provides relevant historical and cinematographic background critical for a full appreciation of these movies.

The ultimate purpose of this guide, however, is to spark a dialogue with the viewers of these movies. Rather than treating film as a passive medium, the guide enables active, critical thinking through thought-provoking activities and questions for discussion. We hope that this information can be used to enrich your experience with these movies and make it more rewarding.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS GUIDE?

Because its goal is to create dialogue, the guide is probably best used in more intimate settings, where a dynamic discussion is most likely to flourish. With this guide, you can lead discussions at synagogues, community centers, classes, film groups and Israel clubs. The information could certainly also be adaptable for a large audience, such as a film festival.

*Please note that the last film in the unit, **Wisdom of the Pretzel**, is **for mature audiences only**. The other films should also be used with discretion with younger audiences (younger than high school) as they may cover themes that are not age-appropriate. **If you are looking for a movie suitable for a younger audience**, please use *Sallah*, *James' Journey to Jerusalem* or *Ushpizin*. Always watch a movie yourself before screening to children (including high school age) to make sure you are comfortable with all of the content that will be shown.*

HOW DO YOU USE THIS GUIDE?

This guide is organized thematically into four different units, each of which covers a major theme in Israeli society. Each unit contains two chapters, each on a different movie which fits under the unit theme. The themes are: **outsiders and integration into Israeli society**, **Jewish-Arab relations**, **the role of religion** and **forging interpersonal relationships in Israeli society**.

There is more than one movie provided per theme for two reasons:

- It gives you more of a selection if you only have time or interest for one movie;
- It allows for an in-depth comparison of the two movies using that theme, if you do choose to screen them both.

In order to select which movies to screen, please read the **Unit Introductions** to get a sense for the overall themes and to decide which theme(s) you would like to cover. Then read the **Chapter Introductions** of the chapters listed under your theme(s) to decide which and how many of the movies you would like to screen. Depending on time and interest, you could choose to screen one movie from each theme, or both movies from several themes.

Each chapter is divided into a **Before the Movie** section, and an **After the Movie** section. The “Before the Movie” section contains information that will be helpful for you to know before beginning to watch, including historical background information and cinematographic background information. The “After the Movie” section contains discussion questions and activities which will help you think about and critically analyze what you have seen. For some of the movies, critical analysis is included, which explores the movies’ themes and societal implications. These pieces of critical analysis represent the viewpoint of the author of this guide and should never be taken as the only (or the best!) answer to the questions about the movies they address.

WHY THESE MOVIES?

There are a variety of strategies one can take in deciding how to go about selecting Israeli films for screening and study, such as choosing only the classics, or only the most recent and most popular.

These movies were selected according to the following two criteria:

- **They have educational value:** They provide a better understanding of Israeli society, its preoccupations and challenges—what matters to Israelis today. Such movies may deal with significant historical events or themes, or they may simply give a better idea of day-to-day life in Israel.
- **They are well-done, quality films:** They can stand on their own artistic merit. Someone not previously interested in or knowledgeable about Israel could perceive them as good films which just happen to have been made in Israel and enjoy them as such.

WHERE CAN I FIND THESE MOVIES?

These movies are readily available for purchase online. Try searching for titles at www.israel-catalog.com or www.amazon.com. Prices may vary between \$12 – \$30 per movie. The only exception is *Channels of Rage*, a special documentary available exclusively through Ruth Diskin Films (www.ruthfilms.com). E-mail ruth@ruthfilms.com for ordering information.

Many of these movies may also be available at your local library. University libraries and Jewish community libraries are especially likely to carry these titles.

If you have any questions about the guide or its usage, please e-mail Deborah Fishman at dfishman@azm.org.

B'Hatzlacha, and enjoy!