

March 3, 2018

Dear BQLI Region Friend,

Don't you just love a good movie...a movie that leaves you thinking? I recently had the opportunity to view two Israeli movies, *The Wedding Plan* (at home with Saul, cozy on our couch) and *The Women's Balcony* (at Temple Beth Sholom Roslyn with my special Sisters). Though seemingly very different movies with very different themes, both tell a story about inspiring women and both moved me deeply.

In *The Wedding Plan*, we meet Michal, a 32-year-old Orthodox Jewish women whose fiancé, at the tasting for their wedding, confesses that he doesn't love her. Michael breaks off the engagement but decides to go through with the planning of the wedding, paying for the catering hall in full and preparing for her marriage as planned...leaving it up to God to choose another groom for her in the four weeks remaining before the big day. Michal, refusing to waiver in her faith, submits to a series of restaurant dates set up by a matchmaker. But, she is no pushover! Though she desperately craves the sort of intimate companionship and social respectability being married would provide, Michal challenges her dates with probing questions and unnerving honesty. She would never settle. Our heroine's steadfast belief in the face of potential disaster raises the stakes of the outcome significantly!

The Women's Balcony, about a small tight-knit Jewish community in Jerusalem, is an eccentric portrayal of an already devout congregation suddenly under pressure from a super Orthodox rabbi to observe their faith in a more rigid way. During a bat mitzvah in their synagogue, the women's balcony collapses rendering their building unsafe. The elderly rabbi is thrown into a state of shock and this becomes a congregation without a home or a leader. Enter the charismatic Rabbi David who looks upon this collapse as a judgment from God. Rabbi David urges the men to make their women wear headscarves and dress more modestly. And, if that weren't bad enough, the women come to learn that Rabbi David has no intention of re-building the women's balcony in the new synagogue and that they will in fact, be banned from the main room entirely! The gender rift widens and mayhem ensues. The women, led by powerhouse Ettie, question Rabbi David directly, "Is that what a rabbi is supposed to do? Enter a community of good people and fill them with fear?" Although the tone of *The Women's Balcony* is that of a warm-hearted comedy, the film makes some extremely sharp points about religious fanaticism, sexism cloaked as holiness, and tolerance among the faithful.

No spoiler alerts will be needed in this letter since I want you to be able to enjoy these movies as completely as I did. What I will say is that these films share a message of belief, endurance, family and belonging. And, as we most certainly already know, when a woman lives her authentic truth, when women join together as a community to accomplish the seemingly impossible, we triumph!

B'Shalom,
Grace