



FILM.COURSE

FILMS AND TEACHING RESOURCES

OUTSIDERS
SUGARLESS



THE OUTSIDER IN SOCIETY

By Frumah Laor
psychotherapist & educational consultant

Who is the "other" in society? Is he/she an illegal immigrant, an overweight child, a person with a physical disability, an abused teenager? In order for us to understand what is perceived as "otherness" in our communities, we need to be familiar with some sociological and psychological concepts.

Norms

Norms are accepted patterns of social conduct or accepted social responses to a given situation. Norms vary from group to group and provide the vital framework for a code of expected behavior in that group. The more closed the society, the greater the obligation of the individual to conform to its norms.

Stigma

Stigma is the negative and damaging designation of a person as different from others. A stigmatized person is perceived as evil, weak, limited, or blemished in some way and is transformed, in the eyes of society, into an inferior and unvalued human being. Different communities and countries have different norms of accepted behavior, and as a result the stigmas of those societies also vary. A social behavior that is considered normal and appropriate in one group can be stigmatized in another.

Stereotype

A stereotype is a widely held and oversimplified image of the identifying characteristics of a segment of the population. A stereotype is usually based on ethnic, communal, religious or racial perceptions. As in the case of a stigma, a stereotype is used by the individual as a way of sharpening and clarifying his understanding of the social phenomena that surround him. A stereotypical perception is by definition a narrow and limited one, as it lacks depth and complexity and is based on generalizations that pay no attention to nuance in a particular group or person. Stereotypical thinking is a superficial attempt to categorize human beings into easily recognizable and identifiable sub-groups.

The Shadow

In Carl Gustav Jung's psychoanalytic school of thought, known as Analytical Psychology, the concept of the shadow refers to every facet of an individual's life that she consciously experiences as disagreeable or negative, and very different from herself. Because of a discrepancy between the disturbing or alien qualities of the shadow as the individual experiences them and the values and convictions with which she consciously identifies, the ego tends to repress shadow experiences, consigning them to the unconscious. Deep within the unconscious, inaccessible and unrecognized as essentially one's own, shadow feelings nevertheless continue to exert their effect and influence on the conscious mind. It is the role of awareness to lift parts of the shadow out of the unconscious and into consciousness, releasing the negative energies they emit, integrating them in some revised way, and redirecting them towards personal development. But this is exceedingly difficult to do. Our tendency to project our shadow (that is, some kind of denied and repressed emotional pain) onto other individuals or groups explains, according to Jung, why we blame, criticize and bear grudges against others, act violently against groups whose views or behavior we cannot accept, or experience boredom in the presence of ideas or persons whose true capacity to excite us we cannot tolerate. This process can operate in the reverse as well. We often project positive feelings from our own unconscious onto others, which enables us to adore and to love them — yet, occasionally, we then experience our own selves as somehow depleted, or even envy or hate the object of our love for what we think they possess that we do not. Ultimately, because we cannot change others until we change ourselves, change in many of our relationships is only possible when we can acknowledge that many of those elements that we dislike in others are actually projections of the "shadow" dimension of our own unconscious. As long as these elements lie buried within us we cannot reveal them, understand them or work to heal them.

The purpose of this film kit is to bring up for open discussion some of the complex psychological and emotional challenges that people face in their day-to-day lives. Observation and exploration of the life challenges of the individuals in these films allows us to gain insight into the prejudices and stereotypes of the different societies in which we live. It is suggested that the films be analyzed from the standpoint of the universal issues that they address, such as inter-generational conflict, the difficulties and coping tools of the "other" in the community, and so

on. Because these painful or controversial issues are presented in the unfamiliar context of Israeli cultural phenomena, they are less threatening and less immediate to the audience than films very specific to their own social background. We recommend that the audience not explore the film's connection with their own social and cultural background until it has discussed most of the universal issues in the film. This enables those watching the films to see the problems in the wider context and internalize them.

Audiences may notice that an element common to all of the films is the lack of sensitivity that individuals and communities display towards the predicament of the "other." We recommend exploration of this topic in order to discuss with the audience some of the skills that we all need to acquire to ease the burden of the outsider. Screening the films in a communal setting for mixed-age audiences also provides an excellent opportunity to discuss inter-generational conflict in which parents and children are free to express themselves respectfully and without constraint.

We hope that, at the very least, the films will encourage people to be more open, loving and respectful in difficult social settings which demand the highest levels of our engagement and empathy.

SUGARLESS



Scriptwriter and director: Chaim Elbaum | Drama | 10 minutes | 2005

Film synopsis

On the eve of his bar mitzvah, while busy with last-minute errands and fitting in a final practice of his Torah reading, Daniel goes out on his bike and is attacked by another child. When Daniel returns home it seems as if his father, who is blind, cannot perceive his distress, but this is not so. Daniel learns from his father that observation is a matter of the heart and not just of the eyes.

Topics for discussion raised by this film

- **The "different" person in society:** What are the stereotypical views we have of people with physical disabilities?
- **Physical vulnerability or weakness:** How have the sages treated this issue in Jewish philosophy and law over time?



CINEMATIC TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS

1. THE CHARACTERS

The main character

Daniel, a thirteen-year-old boy on the eve of his bar mitzvah, wants to be seen as independent and free to make his own choices. But Daniel cannot be free — not yet, at least. Though he is involved in the day-to-day care of his blind father, he is still, in many ways, a boy who needs the protection of those older than himself, as he discovers when he is attacked by another child in the streets of his own neighborhood. The attack is a crisis, and also a turning point in Daniel's life, highlighting his father's weakness and intensifying the pain and helplessness he sometimes feels as the child of a disabled parent. Daniel must make his own journey toward adulthood, come to terms with his father's disability and appreciate that there is more than one way for a parent to protect his child.

Supporting character

Daniel's father, who is blind, lives an active and independent life as a working man and father. He helps Daniel prepare for his bar mitzvah and sets limits for him when necessary. In the film we see two versions of Daniel's father; a vulnerable, challenged adult and a caring and proactive father who cherishes the task of raising his child.

Relationship between the characters

In the first part of the film, Daniel is portrayed as the "responsible adolescent" in his relationship with his father, accompanying him on a shopping trip and deflecting the attentions of an annoying neighbor. On the way home, Daniel's father realizes that he has forgotten to buy a sugarless cake for his wife, and Daniel tells him that he looked for such a cake in the store but could not find one. At this early stage, we see the father's helplessness and his son's care of him. But back at the house, we see their relationship in a different, more

ordinary setting: Daniel's father rehearses his bar mitzvah portion with him and hesitates to give him permission to go out alone on his bicycle. By this second stage of the film, the more conventional father-son dynamic has been restored. These two juxtaposed scenes, which are only several minutes long, show us the complexity of the situation.

Ultimately, because Daniel's father is emotionally attuned to his son, he can in fact "see" Daniel's distress after the attack. Though he could not have protected him physically during the incident, he uses other tools of protection that are just as important: physical affection and verbal reassurance.

Daniel's mother, an absent character, serves no dramatic purpose other than to justify several elements in the script and show that Daniel's family life is normative and stable. The focus on Daniel and his father as the only characters in the film allows us to observe the fine threads of mutual support that they have spun between them over the years, and to experience the subtle fluctuations in their responses to one another when conflict arises.

2. THE DRAMATIC CONFLICT

Daniel deals with two challenges: a constantly demanding household situation and an acute apprehension over his coming bar mitzvah. These two sources of tension collide when Daniel is attacked. This is a coming-of-age moment for Daniel: he realizes that although he is responsible and mature for his age, he is still vulnerable, and grownups may not always be able to protect him.

3. FILM STRUCTURE

Exposition: Daniel guides his father home from the store. The visual images here illustrate a role reversal in which the child leads and protects the parent.

Crisis: When Daniel and his father realize that they did not buy a sugarless cake for Daniel's mother, the stage is set for Daniel to do so by himself. His desire to find a store that sells the cake they need and to ride there on his bicycle, without adult supervision, is the result of his growing need for trust and independence. The long shot of Daniel riding his bicycle gives us a sense of how free he feels when he is not accompanying his father. But just as he experiences this joy



and freedom, he is attacked — an experience that emphasizes not his newly acquired adult identity but his vulnerable, childhood one. This sets up a classic adolescent internal conflict where just as he seeks to loosen the tight bond between his father and himself, he finds that he needs his father more than ever. The pain he feels over his father's blindness, repressed for most of the time, surfaces with unexpected force.

Development of narrative and turning point(s): Daniel's choice not to tell his father that he has been hurt shows his belief that his father cannot protect him from physical harm. Consciously or not, he burns with anger at his father's failure. This anger gives rise to his outburst, in which he says he will not read the Torah portion at his bar mitzvah service the following day. Daniel's scornful tone baffles his father.

A second turning point is when Daniel leaves the house knowing that his father cannot cope in his absence. With great difficulty and at risk of harming himself, his father goes down to the street and calls for Daniel. Daniel observes his father searching for him, stumbling and suffering with the effort.

Denouement and resolution: Daniel lets his father know that he is standing right next to him. The constantly fluctuating roles between father and son are reversed once more as the father shows himself as active, dependable and loving in a time of crisis. Daniel feels empowered to lean on his father and be supported by him.

Final scene: Daniel allows his father to help him home. We close with a conventional portrayal of the relationship between father and son, in contrast to the film's opening scene.

FILM LANGUAGE

1. The narrative

This short film is a “snapshot” moment in the process of a child's coming of age. The child's multi-layered encounter with the adult world puts a strain on his relationship with his father, which is already complex because of that father's disability.

The drama unfolds just before Daniel's bar mitzvah, when he will read his Torah portion in the synagogue. In Judaism, a boy's bar mitzvah is his quintessential rite of passage; the age at which his parents are released from responsibility for his actions and he becomes responsible for himself. In the film, this dilemma is compressed into the moment when Daniel is physically hurt and realizes that his father cannot protect him and will never be able to do so.

We could say that any child of this age in any family would be growing more aware of his parents' lessened ability to protect him. But this narrative contains an extra element — a parent with a disability. In film scripts, a life situation is often deliberately made more complex in order to create drama and sharpen the crisis for the protagonist.

One of the film's themes is “leaving Eden” — the loss of innocence. As Daniel moves toward independent thought and action and away from the supervision of those who have his best interests in mind, he encounters the adult world where good struggles with evil, where the weak are the victims of the strong and anger and forgiveness are no longer opposites, but exist alongside one another in a complex arrangement of human resentment and guilt. Once these things have been brought home to Daniel he cannot return to his former innocence.

The film's subtext is partly about how the balance of power between parents and children starts to change when the children reach adolescence. In the case of a disabled parent who needs his child's help a delicate balance must be maintained between the parent's dependence on the child and his authority to set limits for him. It is important to keep in mind that while Daniel's father's blindness is not the theme of the film, it is the window through which we view Daniel's coming of age and his mixed feelings of empowerment and vulnerability.

2. Genre, visual imagery and sound

When Daniel's father searches for him outside, he doesn't know that Daniel is watching him. Of course, the viewer knows — so for a few seconds, the viewer has the same advantage over Daniel's father that Daniel has. The viewer can also identify with both father and child, each of whom is dealing with different kinds of blindness. The viewer is the “seer” in the story, the observer present at the scene.

The film's soundtrack shows that Daniel is the protagonist. It does not give



equal weight to Daniel and his father as the two characters of the film. No special music signals the highly sensitized hearing of the father's world. The director chose not use the soundtrack to show us the father's mind because his state of mind is not the subject of the film.

The settings of the various scenes are symbolic as the story moves between the interior setting of the household and the exterior setting of the street. Within the four walls of the house, the family structure of father, mother and son is a "normal" one. The father is involved in the discipline, guidance and education of his son. He has not allowed his blindness to detract from his parental responsibilities. But outside the house, both father and son are exposed and compromised, though for different reasons.

These contrasting visual symbols of helplessness and strength, affected by the relative maturity and fitness of both characters, alternate throughout the film. The first scene shows the son leading his father and offering him some level of protection, including shielding him from an annoying neighbor. In the attack scene, the child is alone and has no protector, and in the final scene the apartment building in the background ostensibly signifies home but offers none of the protection that is available inside the apartment.

Symbolically, the "inside" and "outside" scenes represent our "inside" and "outside" sight. Our eyes are not only organs of sight; they also reflect our inner thoughts and emotions and communicate much about our state of mind even when we are not speaking.

The decision to call the film "Without Sugar" hints at how the age of thirteen is when adolescents start to leave behind the sugar-coated world of their childhood and begin to encounter some of the harsh realities of the grownup world. But just as a sugarless cake is healthier, adolescents develop new strength and maturity as they meet those challenges. There is no shortcut: without difficult and unnerving events to shape them, they will remain always children.

A second point the title makes is that the lives of children with disabled parents tend to be less carefree than those of their peers. Their lives are more complex and demanding, and they often mature earlier than their peers.



POINTS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Disability

About a million people who are physically, mentally or emotionally disabled live in Israel today. (Teachers outside Israel may wish to provide the statistics from their own country.) Twenty-three thousand of them are either blind or seriously sight-impaired, and discrimination against them results in a much higher rate of unemployment compared with that of the wider community. Many public places are not designed or equipped for the blind, and some institutions and special accommodations for the blind are far away from important stores, services, social amenities and varieties of public transport. This can isolate blind people far more effectively than the disability itself, and reinforces stereotypes in the wider community about the helplessness of the visually impaired.

The nature of helplessness

Helplessness is part of life. A newborn baby is helpless and experiences helplessness often during childhood. As adults, temporary helplessness of all kinds affects us when we are sick, injured, shocked or grieved. These episodes remind us that we do not control all aspects of our lives, and they can cause us to feel anger, anxiety and depression. Helplessness also makes us dependent on others — a dependence we often do not desire or welcome. In later years, our helplessness increases as we age, and many of the most elderly among us would be unable to function without support from family or community.

Biologically speaking, we are physically and psychologically wired to protect ourselves in times of danger (the fight-or-flight adrenaline response, for example), and we instinctively avoid or flee situations in which we feel helpless. Humans are the only animals in nature to introduce helplessness into their environment artificially (bungee jumping, paragliding, roller-coaster rides) to induce the rush of

brain chemicals that accompanies it. For the most part, however, the experience of helplessness is unpleasant and threatening.

In this film, Daniel's father seems helpless in certain situations, such as when he stands outside his home trying to find his son and cannot see him. But at home and as a parent he is not helpless at all. Conversely, Daniel is young, strong and independent but is rendered helpless when a bigger boy attacks him. Sighted people need light to navigate, but blind people do not. In a dark room, a sighted person is more helpless than a blind one.

While it is a rare disability that renders a person totally helpless (the case of physicist Stephen Hawking dispels notions of helplessness in those suffering from ALS, for example,) we should still respect the circumstances or periods of time in which we feel helpless. Some of the awkwardness and anxiety we feel around disabled people, together with some of the discrimination against disability in everyday life, stems from our unwillingness to confront our lack of control over our bodies and our environment.



MORE SOURCES & RESOURCES

The bible

"Do not place a stumbling block before a blind person." (Leviticus 19:14)

This biblical commandment protects blind people by forbidding anyone to take advantage of them. Later in Jewish tradition, the sages expanded the prohibition to include not only physical but intellectual blindness as well. We may never take advantage of anyone else's blindness, of whatever kind. Instead, we must recognize others' vulnerabilities and help them.

Talmudic sources

Midrash Rabba on Leviticus, an ancient collection of sermons and stories based on themes from the book of Leviticus, is thought to have been written in the land of Israel sometime between the sixth and seventh centuries CE. Its redactor drew on various ancient sources such as *Genesis Rabba*, the *Jerusalem Talmud* and the *Babylonian Talmud*. It is believed that these legends were transmitted orally as sermons in the synagogues on the Sabbath, and written down in manuscript form only later.

Rabbi Ishmael said: There is a parable of a king who had an orchard with beautiful fruit. He placed a lame man and a blind man at the entrance as guards, and told them: "Don't touch the fruit." A few days later, the lame man said: "You should see the beautiful fruit in this orchard!" The blind man replied, "Let's eat it." The lame man said, "Can a lame man walk?" The blind man retorted, "Can a blind man see?" The lame man climbed onto the blind man's back, and they went off to pick the fruit and eat it.

Each man then returned to his station. A few days later, the king entered the orchard and said: "Where is all the fruit?" The blind man said: "Your Majesty, I can't see, so how could I have picked it?" The lame man said: "I'm lame, so how would I have walked over to it?" What did the clever king do? He had the lame man climb on the blind man's back and walk around. He said to them: "That's how you managed to eat my fruit."

This is an analogy of how the Master of the Universe addresses our soul (when we



are called to account for our sins), saying: "Why did you sin against Me?" The soul replies: "Master of the Universe, it was not I who sinned, but the body! At the time of the sin I was not present, having left the body like a bird that flies through the air. So how could I have sinned?" God then addresses the body, saying: "Well, why did you sin?" The body answers: "Master of the Universe, it was not I — it was the soul! At the time of my sinning my soul left me, I was (as lifeless as) a stone cast upon the ground, So it couldn't have been me!" What does the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He judges body and soul as one, as it is written: "He shall call on the heavens above, and on the earth, to judge His people" (Psalms 50:4). "He shall call on the heavens above" means that he will call our souls to account, and "on the earth" means that he will call our bodies to account, "to judge His people." (Midrash Raba Leviticus, Chapter 4 Section 5).

In Jewish tradition, human beings are considered to be blind to truth in many circumstances. The sages say that the Hebrew word for "world," *olam*, comes from the same root as *ne'elam*, a verb describing how God is hidden in every day life. According to the midrash quoted above, the human soul has access to the truth but is bound to the body, which interprets truth through its own desires and limitations. Throughout their lives, human beings are expected never to give up on their search for truth, for God. But because so much is hidden from them, because they are "blind" and not celestial beings with direct access to the truth, they must do the best they can to choose good over evil, even as they know they will not always get it right. The extent to which human beings are blind in the world is a measure of their courage and determination at even trying to approach the truth — their own and the world's. Free will can exist only because there is no certainty so much of the time.

This midrash asks: Which is responsible for a person's actions: the body or the soul? If it is the soul, then the person's view of the world refers not to his eyes' physical function as organs of sight but to his inner perceptions, which arise from his psychological and spiritual state. The body is merely the means by which a human soul is empowered to act, the "legs" that the blind man provides for the lame man in the orchard.

The blind man of the parable is the body and the lame man is the soul, since the soul cannot carry out its actions in the physical world without the body. According to this understanding of the text, the blind man is not really blind because his sight is a spiritual attribute, not a physiological one. The blind man is as responsible as

the lame man for his choice to steal fruit from the orchard, regardless of whether he could see and pick the fruit. Even though he knows the king's instructions, he makes a moral choice to ignore them. Afterward, he takes no responsibility for his theft and tries to place the blame on the lame man. His physical inability to see is not nearly as relevant to the story as his flawed ethics. In the end, the king finds him guilty of spiritual blindness.

Jewish practices and philosophies in the film

"Honor your father and your mother" (the Fifth Commandment, Exodus 20:12); "Do not place a stumbling block in front of a blind person" (Leviticus 19:14); their implications in Jewish law, and the concept of bar mitzvah.

Films

The Color of Paradise. Dir. Majid Majidi. Iran, 1999.

City Lights. Dir. Charlie Chaplin. USA, 1931

Ma'aleh films

A Pure Prayer. Dir. Sara Beck Kaufman, 2000.

Elyokim. Dir. Miri Boker, 2002.

A Little Bit Different. Dir. Raheli Sheinfeld Gadot, 2003.

See our film catalog online at <http://www.maale.co.il/default.asp?PageID=73>



The short films in this collection are the graduate creations of our students. The films embody the passions, concerns and spiritual dilemmas of the young people who have written and directed them. The educational materials are a compilation of the classes, lectures and seminars that have been given with the films to Jewish audiences of every age and background over the past decade. This particular set is designed to bring you original and vibrant resources about those among us who are different and how we individually and collectively relate to them.

Writer: Cheli Rosenberg | Translation: Katie Green | Editor: Rachel Jaskow

2017

Courtesy of



THE YOREINU FOUNDATION • קרן יורנו



**The Maaleh School
of Film and Television**
in memory of Uri Elitzur

www.maale.co.il |  | 02-6277366