



Joe and Belle



- Do you think the film had a happy ending?
- Did anything surprise you about the Israel and Israelis we meet in "Joe + Belle"? Did any aspects confirm an understanding of Israel and Israelis that you already had?
- Did you feel the character of Belle - a suicidal lunatic lesbian - was a stereotype too far, or did the actress's portrayal and the film overall do good service for the LGBTQ community?
- The heroines flee to Sderot – a half-deserted Israeli town under constant fire from Gaza. In this sense the film addresses the conflict with the Palestinians in Gaza from the perspective of Israeli civilians rather than Gazans. How do you feel about this perspective?



City of Refuge

Joe jokingly refers to Sderot as a "city of refuge". This is a Biblical concept recorded in the book of Deuteronomy:

"Thou shalt prepare thee a way, and divide the coasts of thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee to inherit, into three parts, that every slayer may flee thither. (Deuteronomy 19:3).



In time of King David there were six cities in the kingdom designated as cities of refuge. These cities were safe havens for those who had committed manslaughter. In that time, killing someone – intentionally or unintentionally – meant that the killer owed a "blood debt". Killers would flee to cities of refuge, and there would be tried. If it was proved that the killing was accidental, they would be offered safe refuge in the city.

The Talmud (500 CE) further developed this custom, ruling that all roads to cities of refuge had to be specially maintained, so that flight could be expedited easily.

"The court is obligated to straighten the roads to the cities of refuge, to repair them and broaden them. They must remove all impediments and obstacles. . . . Bridges should be built (over all natural barriers) so as not to delay one who is fleeing to [the city of refuge]. The width of a road to a city of refuge should not be less than thirty-two cubits. "Refuge, Refuge" was written at all crossroads, so that the murderers should recognize the way and turn there. (Mishnah Torah, Laws Regarding Murder and the Preservation of Life 8:5)

What do you think of this concept?

Some rabbis have interpreted this series of laws spiritually, referring to an inner city of refuge one may retreat to in order to think through and fix one's mistakes.

- Have you ever wished for a figurative city of refuge to flee to?
- Have you ever hoped someone would exile themselves to a figurative city of refuge?



A Wider Bridge works to bring the LGBTQ communities of Israel and North America closer together. Our programs include educational and cultural activities here in the U.S., including this film series, LGBTQ trips to Israel, and our online magazine, www.awiderbridge.org.

A Wider Bridge commissioned these study guides from Makom, and consulted fully in their development. Makom is the think-and-do tank for adult Israel engagement. You can find Makom at www.makomisrael.org and at facebook.com/makomisrael.

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