

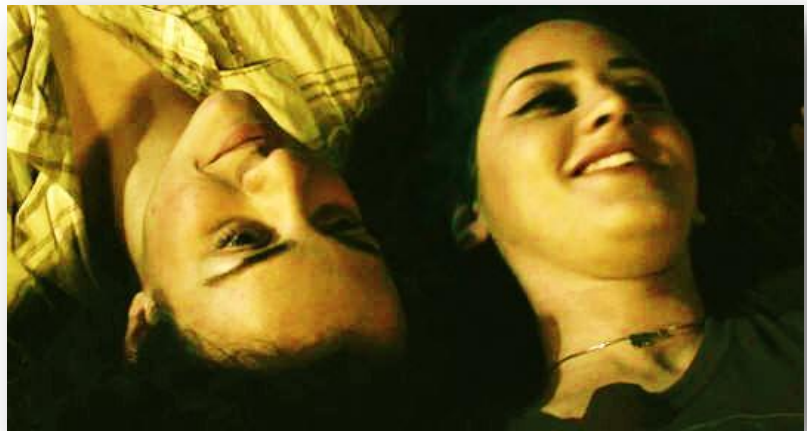


Joe and Belle

Tech things:

Make sure that

- the DVD player can play the disc,
- that the projector works,
- that you have a screen (films never look good simply projected on to a wall),
- and that the speakers are powerful enough for everyone to hear (LCDs rarely have strong speakers built in),
- and that you have printed out copies of the hand-out for everyone to look at prior to the screening



But before doing anything...

Make sure you watch the film yourself, and run through the questions for yourself. This isn't the kind of activity where you need to remain detached and objective. You are allowed and even encouraged to have an opinion – not in order to force it on others, but in order to find your own commitment to the subject. Running through the activity first, will also allow you to make the appropriate decisions for your group about productive avenues of discussion.

Important: At the end of the film, let the credits roll right until the very end, before turning the lights on. There are two good reasons for this. First, it is always valuable to give credit to all the people involved in the creation of a piece of art. But more importantly, the credits allow time for the swirling emotions and opinions to begin to settle. It is good to allow people to sit alone with their responses to a piece of art, before inviting them to share their thoughts with others.



After the screening, the guided questions.

[Depending on the size of the audience and their familiarity with each other, you might choose to run the discussion with everyone, or split into groups, or even call out the questions and ask people to respond in pairs.]

- **Do you think the film had a happy ending?**
[On the one hand, Joe and Belle are safe and secure in their new home. On the other hand, there is a sense that only outside of the mainstream, out of reach of the big city, in danger of falling rockets(!) could a relationship like this survive.]
- **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 move beyond cliché into something more meaningful and touching?**
- **Do you feel the film overall does 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?**
[Who is included in this perspective? Is there something disturbing or refreshing about the way the conflict is experienced as "back-drop" and only from the perspective of Israelis? This is something of a controversial topic, but one that is likely to be bubbling under the surface. Just as the conflict with the Palestinians is referred to in the background of the film, so in the back of people's minds it may continue to rage. The questions about this issue are legitimate, and a civil honest discussion of the many different answers is important. Don't aim for people with conflicting points of view to end up agreeing with one another. Aim to make sure everyone understands that there are conflicting points of view that are held with integrity...]





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?

[Is it a punishment, or a gift, or both? On the one hand, is it right to give shelter to a killer, albeit an unintended killer? On the other hand, is it fair for someone to endure exile for something they did unintentionally? On the third hand, is it fair for the bereaved family to have to see the killer of their loved one every day? (In the US, manslaughter brings with it a prison sentence of between 1-20 years, depending on circumstance and State jurisdiction)]


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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