

Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if we only take time to look.

Questions to ask yourself

What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?

Which incidents made you *think* or *feel* most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?

What issues did the film raise for you?

What character(s) do you most identify with and why?

Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christian values?

Some facts about the film

- The film was released within Israel in March 2008, where it performed poorly. Eran Riklis, who wrote, directed and produced the film, has said that Israelis have the “false impression” that the film is pro-Palestinian and polemical, though it was praised by the film critic of *The Jerusalem Post* who wrote “it’s hard to ask for more—you will leave the cinema craving a glass of the lemonade Salma so lovingly prepares in several scenes”. Palestinian reaction was generally very positive and when the film was internationally released in 2009 it was very well received across the world, the general consensus being that this was “a positive and personal Israeli film that offers an understated and thought-provoking vision of the West Bank troubles.”
- The plot is based on a real life incident. Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz moved to the border within Israel and the occupied territories and security forces began cutting down the olive trees beside his house, arguing that the olive grove could be used by terrorists as a hiding place. The Palestinian family who owned the trees sued the minister and took the case all the way to the Israeli Supreme Court. Riklis picked up on the case and developed the story further in a fictional setting.
- Eran Riklis explicitly created the role of Salma for actress Hiam Abbass, with whom he had worked in his previous film, *The Syrian Bride*, a very successful film exploring personal relationships between Arabs and Middle Eastern Jews.
- The film was shot in the cities of Kalkilya and Ramallah and the Jalazone refugee camp in Palestine, as well as on location at and around the Supreme Court building in Jerusalem.



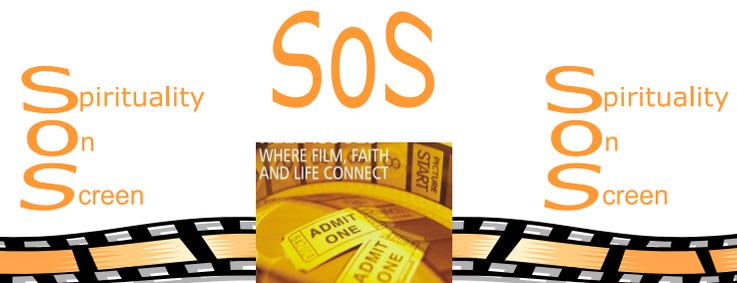
**A chance to watch films together.
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

**3rd Jul Never let me go
7th Aug The Illusionist (2010)
4th Sep Lemon Tree
2nd Oct Freedom Writers
6th Nov Sophie Scholl
4th Dec Nativity!**

**Films start at 5:30pm
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchingdon Road
Islip**

**Further details from Jonathan (Ox 842214)
Email: info@spiritualityonscreen.org.uk
Web: www.spiritualityonscreen.org.uk**



Lemon Tree

*Lemon tree very pretty
and the lemon flower is sweet
but the fruit of the poor lemon
is impossible to eat.*

Lemon Tree (Etz Limon) is a film of quiet power, the kind of film that does not find it necessary to expose the audience to violence and conflagrations to make its point. It tells the story of a Palestinian widow's David-and-Goliath battle against the Israeli government as well as examining the status of women on both sides of the Green Line between Israel and the West Bank.

Widow Salma Zidane, whose husband has been dead for about 10 years, lives alone. Her son is now living in the States and her daughters have married. Meanwhile, she continues to tend the family's lemon grove, barely making enough money live on. Then, one day, on the Israeli side of the border, the government builds a house for the Israeli Defense Minister Israel Navon and his beautiful wife Mira Navon. They make strange neighbours, more under the influence of the Israeli Secret Police who are assigned to guard the Minister than sensitive to the basic kindness of human decency. The Secret Service decides the lemon grove must be cut down to guard against possible terrorist access to the Minister, a declaration that sets off Salma's fear of losing her land and income. The local village elder advises her to give in, but Salma seeks the help of young lawyer Zaid Daud and together they fight all the way to the Supreme Court to save the lemon trees. Fences are built, soldiers abuse the privacy of Salma, and the increased publicity in the media divides not only the peoples on both sides of the border but also the Navons: Mira empathizes with Salma and champions her rights.

Officialdom on either side is not portrayed favourably in the film. As one critic put it, "all versions of Middle Eastern authority are depicted with a cheerful, agnostic cynicism", the Palestinian government being shown as "corrupt and obsessed with status and protocol" and the Israeli gov-

ernment as "hypocritical and mindlessly bureaucratic." Instead, this is a story of those caught up in the middle.

Will justice be seen to be done?

Moments of grace

Riklis designed the film to be essentially apolitical, focusing on character development rather than exploring the issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He has said that he created a 'fairy tale quality' to the film in which the audience can sympathize with all of the people featured in it. He stated that "I wanted to populate this film with a lot of faces and give each character their own moment of grace, even when, on the surface, it's one of the 'bad guys,' so to speak... This film does address the ugly side of occupation perhaps, yet no blood is spilled." What do you think about the way the story was portrayed? Did he succeed in his aim? And has that influenced you in the way you look at the conflict?

Feminist bias?

The film has been criticised as being overly feminist in giving a uniformly negative portrayal of its male characters, both Israeli and Palestinian. Do you agree? Or is there some truth in the view that women may more easily be able to break through the barriers that men and history have created?

The future

The conflict in Israel/Palestine has deep historical roots. There are deep-seated prejudices on both sides and both sides have done things they perhaps shouldn't. Much hurt and bitterness has been caused as a result. How do you respond to what has been and what is going on in that part of the world? Where do you see hope for the future? What needs to happen to move things forward? And what role can we play, as individuals, as a church, to help move that process forward?