

Philip Rubenstein | Great Jewish Moments at the Movies, Part 2

Welcome, everyone. welcome back and welcome to Great Jewish Moments at the Movies, take two. We had take one. Gosh, it was just a month ago. And our theme then was Jewish identity and culture, so the movies we looked at were everything from "The Jazz Singer" to Jimmy Cagney speaking Yiddish in "Taxi," to Woody Allen, to Mel Brooks. And today, I just want to divide the session into two. So it's a two parter, loosely called inside outside. So the inside bit is going to be a look at the Jewish family on the screen, and the outside bit is going to be antisemitism on screen, and responses to antisemitism on screen. Really, I mean, like last time, this is just an excuse just to show some great movie clips. So I hope you'll enjoy the comedy and the drama, and the song that we have in the next hour. Many of these films, probably most of them will be familiar to many of you, but it may be quite a long time since you watched them. So hopefully, in the case of some of them, it might encourage you to hunt them out and and give them a re-watch.

We start, as I said, with the inside, which is the portrayal of the Jewish family on screen. And the question for a filmmaker is, how do you capture the drama and the dynamics of a Jewish family on celluloid? And the answer so often is that you show them around the dinner table. So our first clip is going to be from a 1990 movie, so I'm just going to get this up. This is "Avalon," which was directed and written by Barry Levinson, and it's one of his, it's one of a series of films that he did on growing up in suburban Baltimore. And it's the story of the Krichinsky family. I mean, really it's the story of Levinson's own family and he puts a lot of himself in it. There's a character, a young kid in it who's the young Levinson, but this is a Jewish family who were originally emigrated from Poland and they find their way to Baltimore. It's the story of four generations who experience the good and the not so good of pursuing the American dream. The Krichinsky family get together every year for Thanksgiving dinner. And this is a scene where Sam Krichinsky, who's played by Armin Mueller-Stahl, tells, or tries to tell the family story as to how they all got there to all the kids. The reason I'm putting this on the first clip is I think this scene captures perfectly the way that when you tell a story at a Jewish dinner table, it's never a solo effort. It's always a collective piece of work because someone starts, but inevitably another person interrupts, someone contradicts, someone starts another story, and so on and so on. So the choreography of the way this story is told is just a lovely thing to watch. So, let's start the clip.

(A video clip of the 1990 film "Avalon")

- The kids should hear this story.
- Eva, this is very tender.

- Yeah, of course it is.
- Yeah, it is a beautiful bird.
- The turkey was at the place still alive.
She killed it.
- Ew.
- He brought my father over in '25.
- '25?
- William died 1990.
- '25? It was later than '25!
- He came the same year that we brought Belle
and Enid over.
- Belle and Enid came after!
- After?
- Yeah, after.
- [Both] It was '26.
- Eh, Gabriel, what's the difference? He came
to America, right?
- It's a big difference between '25 and '26.
One is 25 and the other is 26.
- Alls I'm saying is who cares if it was 25 or
26, huh?
- Jules, Jules, if you stop remembering, you
forget.
- It was '26. I remember the excitement when you
went to meet him. Finally, the father
was coming. We saved the money and sent
him. The whole family went to the boat.
The whole family. Jules, you were just
a little kid. A very little kid.
- [Group] It was cold!

- [Sam] You went through the marketplace. It was, it was cold. It was cold!
- Yeah, what are you talking about, it was cold?
It was May, it was late May.
- May, yeah.
- I remember cold.
- No, you're thinking of when Irene was getting married.
- It was cold.
- Yeah. It was bitter cold then. No, it was May 17th when your father came.
- Anyway, we went, the whole family, the brothers divided the kids.
- I didn't go and all the kids didn't go. We waited in the house. There was such excitement.
The father, father the father.
- All I ever heard was "Wait until the father comes," the head of the family. I pictured this big powerful man because all I'd heard was "Wait until the father comes." The father's word when he speaks. So I'm there, I see him. He's shorter than me and I'm only six.
- He was this little!
- He was barely there.
- He was a little, little man.
- He was Jewish too.
- No, I never said he was big, but I said he was the father.
- The father, see? The father, the father.
- From the day. From the day he came to America, he never had to work. Not a day in his life.
Each of us would give him 10%.
- [Group] 10%.

- Right, right, right?
- Yeah, 10%.
- He was the father.
- The father!
- He never drank water. The entire time he was in America from the day he came, he drank whiskey or seltzer water. Never drank water, and oh boy, could he drink!
- Was that stuff called he always used to drink?
- Slivovitz.
- Oh, slivovitz!
- He used to call it block and fall. You have one drink of that, you walk one block and you fall! If you have one drink of it!
- A strong drink, it's pouring the gums out.
- Funny, he was funny. Very funny, very funny.
- How often did he drink water?
- Never, ever touched it! You know how many times I've seen in the closet, there he is! Never. He never drank water.
- It means he doesn't drink, I got it.
- See, I told you.
- Now, don't you come over.
- Occasionally maybe he had some water.
- Oh, never!
- [Woman] To you.

I mean, I like that clip because I just think you get all of the warmth of the family and it's a really good rendition of how a family works around the table.

The next clip is a Thanksgiving dinner in the same movie a year or two on. But now Sam's son, Jules, has moved out of the city in Baltimore and he's now living in the suburbs, and not only that, but Jules has also Americanized his family name. So they're no longer Krichinsky, they're now Kaye, and as we'll see, this ignites broigus between Sam and Gabriel, who was the other brother we saw in the clip who's played brilliantly by Lou Jacobi. Now, this word broigus is interesting. This is a Yiddish-ized word of a Hebrew phrase, 'b'rogez', which literally means "in anger" or "in agitation". And this word b'rogez appears in the Torah, in the Bible several times, and for example, in Deuteronomy, in Devarim, there's a reference to 'lev ragaz' which is an agitation of the heart that the Jews will feel if ever they go back into exile. So the question is, what what do we mean by broigus? And broigus is not to be confused with a farible. A farible, I would say, is more of a petty grudge that you can't let go of. Your cousin invited you to a party 20 years ago and they stuck you on the table next to the fire exit and you've never forgotten. That's a farible, but a broigus is something worse and something darker. A broigus is a bitter feud, and often there's a deep-seated issue underneath the broigus. And it only takes one small thing to light the fuse and then, boom. And the impact can last for generations. This scene between Sam and Gabriel shows painfully and beautifully how a broigus can start. And in this case, it's all about the carving of the turkey.

(Another video clip of the 1990 film "Avalon")

- It's a family holiday. If you ask me,
it makes no sense.
- I want to eat.
- In a minute.
- Gabriel should be here any minute.
- Yeah, that man will be late for his
own funeral.

(Family laughing)

- Dad, Dad, why don't we eat?
- [Children] Yeah!
- I'm hungry!
- We want to eat something.
- No, no, no.

- We're hungry.
- We should wait for Gabriel. We
should wait for Gabriel.
- Every year we have to go through the
same thing. We can't cut the
turkey because of Gabriel.
- Jules, cut the turkey!
- I hate when food touches.
- What's the difference? It all ends
up in the same place.
- I hate that! I hate when it touches.
- Michael.
- Ugh!
- Sorry we're late.
- Gabriel.
- You started without me? You cut the
turkey without me? Come on,
we're leaving. They start
without us, we go.
- Every year you are late, Gabriel. We
were hungry. The kids wanted
to eat. We were ready. We
couldn't wait.
- Your own flesh and blood and you
couldn't wait? You cut the
turkey? That's it! That's
the last time we come for
Thanksgiving!
- Gabriel, come here for God's sake.
Gabriel! Gabriel!
- Such a lunatic.
- Ridiculous, it's the same thing
every year. You know, we wait
for him and he shows up late

and then we cut the turkey.

- You cut the turkey! It took us hours to get here. You live miles from nowhere. It's too far, for God's sakes. Too far for relatives. Get new relatives, get relatives that live near you, and who you wait for.
- Gabriel, for God's sake. Let's not make an issue out of the turkey.
- You know what it is? That's what happens when you get to be wealthy. You got a wealthy son, so you don't even wait for your brother to come before you cut the turkey. To hell with you!
- To hell with me?
- [Gabriel] Yeah!
- Jules making a good living has nothing to do with when we cut the turkey. Nothing!
- When we lived in Avalon, nobody ate. You wait for everybody before you eat, much less cut the turkey without a brother. You move out here to the suburbs and you think it doesn't matter anymore?
- The young ones are hungry, they carry on, they make a commotion. What do you want to do? Stand on ceremony with the family?
- There's always young ones. There's always young ones that are hungry, and to carry on in about a week. They've got to wait 'til every relative is there before the turkey is cut! I said enough!

It's a powerful end to that scene with one brother driving away from the screen and the other walking across in the opposite direction.

But as we've seen, where there's a dinner scene, there's also a Jewish home. And one issue for filmmakers is how do you make a house look like a Jewish home on screen? This is a question that got the full comic treatment from a British Jewish filmmaker called Gary Sinyor in his debut movie in 1992 called "Leon the Pig Farmer." There's an unlikely plot, which all revolves around Leon, who's a nice Jewish boy from the suburbs of Jewish North London. Thanks to a mishap with artificial insemination, Leon discovers to his horror that his real parents turn out to be pig farmers in Yorkshire. So he meets his real family, but he feels completely alienated by their home. It's a Yorkshire pig farm, and desperate to make Leon feel comfortable, they set about recreating Jewish North London in the heart of the Yorkshire Dales. And here they are trying chicken soup for the first time. And just watch the actor Brian Glover negotiate his way around a knaidel, a matzo ball. So, here we go with their attempts to make the home Jewish.

"Leon the Pig Farmer."

(A video clip of the 1992 film "Leon the Pig Farmer")

(Family sits around a table eating chicken soup)

(Family taking down taxidermied pig heads off the walls)

(Family changing home decor)

(A man in a pig pen)

It's now time to look at all the members of the Jewish family. So, we start with the mother. And for those of you who saw Trudy's two-parter on the way that Jewish women are portrayed in the cinema, of course the Jewish mother is so often shown as a stereotype. Strong, yes, but also domineering, controlling, and overprotective. The clip we're about to see is an example of the stereotype. It's not from a Jewish film at all. Actually, it's from "Goodfellas," which is a 1984 movie about a New York Sicilian crime family, but the main character in the film, Henry Hill, marries a Jewish woman from Long Island called Karen Friedman, who's played wonderfully by Lorraine Bracco. And in contrast to the Sicilians, the Friedmans are nice, decent run of the mill Long Island Jews. And in this scene we meet Karen's mother who is appalled that her gangster son-in-law routinely stays out all night. Karen's mother, as I say, she's the stereotype of a Jewish mother and she dominates the household and she knows just how to turn the right kind of guilt buttons up on her daughter. But this is a Martin Scorsese film, and the mother is played by the wonderful Suzanne Shepherd, and so I think it's a great piece of cinema.

(A video clip of the 1984 film "Goodfellas")

- He didn't call?
- He's with his friends.
- What kind of a person doesn't call?
- Ma, he's a grownup. He doesn't have to call every five minutes.
- If he was such a grownup, why doesn't he get you two an apartment?
- Oy, don't start. Ma, you're the one who wanted us here.
- Listen, you're here a month and sometimes I know he doesn't come home at all. What kind of people are these?
- Ma, what do you want me to do?
- Do? What can you do? He's not Jewish. Did you know how these people live? Did you know what they were like? Your father never stayed out all night without calling.
- Stay out? Daddy never went out at all, Ma! Keep out of it! You don't know how I feel!
- Feel? How do you feel now? You don't know where he is. You don't know who he's with.
- He's with his friends! Dad!
- Will you leave him out of this? He's suffered enough. The man hasn't been able to digest a decent meal in six weeks.

So, in the best tradition, the Jewish husband there has a non-speaking part and I do want to show a Jewish husband with a speaking part though. And in this case, it's a Jewish father who schleps nachas from his child. And in case you don't know what schlepping nachas means, it's deriving extreme pleasure and pride from your child's accomplishments, no matter how modest they be. So this is Dustin Hoffman, who you can see, and Robert De Niro in the clip. This is "Meet the Fockers" from 2004, which was the sequel to "Meet the

Parents." Pam and Greg are engaged and they decide that their parents should meet, and the whole comedy of the movie is that Pam's parents are conservative WASPs, and particularly Jack, who is very straight, right-wing and an ex-CIA operative. Whereas Greg's parents are fun-loving, liberal Jewish Miami family, and they're a complete contrast, and that's where all the humour comes from. So we're about to see Dustin Hoffman, who is Bernie, who is about to reveal to everyone the Wall of Gaylord. Gaylord is the real name of Greg Focker, but Greg had changed his name because he was too embarrassed, so here we go.

(A video clip of the 2004 film "Meet the Fockers")

- And now, for the piece de resistance.
- Oh my goodness!
- A little something I've be working on.
- Ah, I see, huh.
- Mom will be in in a sec. What's that?
- It's you, it's the Wall of Gaylord.
- The Wall of Gaylord?
- Isn't it nice to finally display your accomplishments, son?
- Honey, look at all your awards. That's great.
- He's my champion.
- Oh, I didn't know they made ninth place ribbons.
- Oh, Jack, they got 'em all the way up to 10th place.
- Hey, anybody want to get a drink out by the lagoon?
- This one looks impressive.
- Mazel tov, Gaylord M. Focker, World's Greatest Nurse. Very nice.
- We have always tried to instil a sense of self in Gaylord without being too

goal-oriented.

- [Both] Mm.

- It's not about winning or losing, it's about passion. We just wanted him to love what he's doing. You know what I mean, Jack?

- Not really, Bernard. I think a competitive drive is the essential key that makes America the only remaining superpower in the world today.

So we met Jewish parents and now it's time to meet the children. The first that we're going to meet is the Bar Mitzvah boy. Now again, there's a filmmakers challenge here, which is how do you make a Bar Mitzvah scene interesting? And the answer so often is you introduce a sense of jeopardy, you put everything teetering on the brink and show that it can all go horribly wrong, and in this case, we have a clip from "A Serious Man," which is the most Jewish movie that the Coen Brothers have made to date. It depicts the life of the Gopniks, who are a Jewish family from suburban Minnesota. Danny is the Bar Mitzvah boy and he's nervous, so he decides to get stoned. But the problem is he's smoked too much, and the drama of this scene is the, will he, won't he actually complete his portion? So, let's see what happens.

(A video clip of the 2009 film "A Serious Man")

(Danny walking, rabbi singing in Hebrew)

(Danny stares at the Torah)

(Rabbi singing softly)

(Danny singing in Hebrew)

(Danny's father and mother smiling)

- I'm sorry. Things have been so hard for us.

- It's okay.

- Sy had so much respect for you, Larry. He wrote letters to the tenure committee.

(Rabbi singing in Hebrew)

(Everyone singing in Hebrew)

(Man lifts the Torah up)

- [Man] (quietly) Jesus Christ
- [Rabbi] Taking your place as a member of our tribe.
Now you will go and see Rabbi Marsha.
Afterwards, you will celebrate in a
reception downstairs in Shanfield Hall,
and then you will be a member of B'nai
Abraham and the Nation of Israel. Danny
Gopnik, the sisterhood makes a gift to
you of this Kiddush cup so that you'll
remember this blessed day on the next
Shabbas and the next, and on every
Shabbas of a long and fruitful life.
And until that wonderful day, when you
stand under the chuppah, we say amen.

I'm really fond of this clip just because of the loving attention to detail that it gets you and it's everything from, from the step for the younger kids when he gets onto the bimah, to Danny's bored look after he's finished his portion, to the guy who has hagbah and raises the Sefer Torah, and buckles under the weight and mutters "Jesus Christ," to the rabbi, who at the end, is already anticipating Danny's chuppah even before his Bar Mitzvah has finished.

The final member of the family we are going to meet is the Jewish daughter, and again, this is a movie stereotype. This is the Jewish princess or for the South Africans who are watching, the kugel. We're going to meet Judy Benjamin, who is a Jewish princess par excellence, and this is where Judy joins the US Army after she meets an army recruiter who has mis-sold the army as being a luxury getaway akin to a spa vacation. So in this scene, Judy's going to get a rude awakening when she arrives at basic training. Now I have to say, you know, it's very easy to depict the princess in unflattering tones, but I think what has made this movie work is Goldie Hawn as "Private Benjamin" because she plays the role with such warmth, and charm, and wit and guts, that it becomes something else and it becomes quite a triumph. The humour in the scene though we're about to see is a mark, I think, of Goldie Hawn's generosity because she plays it straight down the middle and she gives all the laughs to the wonderful Eileen Brennan, who plays her new captain.

(A video clip of the 1980 film "Private Benjamin")

- Sergeant Ross, this is the most pathetic
group of trainees I have ever laid
my eyes on, wow. Ladies, my companies
are the best trained, the best
disciplined soldiers on this base.

- Excuse me.
- Huh?
- Um, I hate to interrupt you, but could I speak to you for a sec?
- Oh my Lord, Sergeant, would you look at this?
- I've seen it, ma'am.
- What's your name, princess, huh?
- Judy.
- Judy?
- Judy Benjamin.
- Judy Benjamin.
- Um, I think they sent me to the wrong place.
- Uh-huh?
- See, I did join the army, but I joined a different army.
- Uh-huh.
- I joined the one with the condos and the private rooms. What? No, really, my, my, my recruiter Jim Ballard told me that-
- I don't care. I don't care what your lousy recruiter told you, Benjamin. Now I'm telling you there is no other army.
- Wait a minute. I don't want to have to go to your boss or anything, okay? I just, look, to be truthful with you. I can't sleep in a room with 20 strangers.
- Oh dear.

- And I mean, look at this place. The army
couldn't afford drapes? I mean, I'll
be up at the crack of dawn here. And
I have to tell you, I am frankly a
little shocked.
- You're shocked?
- Yes.
- Why?
- This place is a sty.
- It's a sty?
- Yeah. I mean, look, look, look at, look at
these stains. God knows where this
has been.
- Yeah.
- And have you seen the bathroom?
- What, uh, do you think that the latrine,
do you think that it's unsanitary?
- Oh, it's disgusting!
- It's disgusting?
- There are urinals in there.
- Well, that's because this is the army,
Benjamin, it's not a sorority house.
May I see your toothbrush please?
Please?

(Judy cleaning toilets with her electric toothbrush)

Private Benjamin. But we're now going to have a change of tempo and theme because as I said at the very start, this is a two part session. The first part was inside, which was the Jewish family.

Now the second part is about outside, and it's how antisemitism is shown on screen and also responses to antisemitism. And the place I'd like to start with that is of course, "Gentleman's Agreement," which was the first major movie in Hollywood to deal with the subject and the prevalence of antisemitism in middle class America after the war.

And it's the story of a journalist who decides he's going to write about antisemitism by pretending to be Jewish and experiencing it firsthand. Gregory Peck plays the journalist. The film was important for all kinds of reasons. And Trudy also has talked about "Gentleman's Agreement" often in the past and has lectured extensively on it. So I'll be fairly brief, but I mean, arguably more interesting than the film, is the story of the film. It was a best selling novel in 1946, and so it seemed ripe for someone to buy the screen rights, but of course the Hollywood Jewish moguls, the Louis B. Mayers, the Sam Goldwins, the Warners wouldn't touch it with a barge pole, and they didn't want to touch the subject. So it was left to the non-Jewish Darryl Zanuck, who was the head of Fox, to buy the rights and to make the film. Zanuck was born into a Dutch Protestant family in the marvellously named Wahoo in Nebraska, but he believed that movies could be both entertaining and could have a role in exposing the ills of society. Before filming started, Sam Goldwin and all the other Jewish film execs all approached Zanuck and they asked him not to make the film. They said, the reason they gave, is it's only going to stir up trouble. Now, typical Darryl Zanuck, how does he respond? He puts a scene into the movie where the journalist is in a room with his editor and publisher and they ask him not to go through with the story because quote, "It'll stir up trouble." Zanuck has the last laugh because the film wins that year's Oscar for best picture, and it becomes one of the commercial successes of the year and one of the highest grossing films of 1947. It was Darryl Zanuck's Dutch surname that made him a target for discrimination because people often assumed he was Jewish. And there's a story that he tries to book into a restricted hotel and they won't let him book in, because they assume because of his surname he's Jewish, and again, this is how Darryl Zanuck used that experience and put it into the film.

(A video clip of the 1947 film "Gentleman's Agreement")

- I think you'll find this room more comfortable.
- Thank you.
- I have a reservation. Double room and bath today through Thursday.
- In what name please?
- Green, Phillip Green.
- Yes, Mr. Green.
- I won't be here tomorrow.
- Oh yes.

- And one more thing.
- Yes?
- Is your hotel restricted?
- Well, I'd hardly say it was restricted.
- Then it's not restricted?
- Would you excuse me a moment, please?
- How do you do, Mr. Green?
- How do you do?
- An answer to your question may I inquire
are you, that is, do you follow the
Hebrew religion yourself or is it
that you just want to make sure?
- I've asked a simple question, I'd like to
have a simple answer.
- Well, you see, we do have a very high class
clientele. And well, naturally.
- Then you do restrict your guests to gentiles?
- Well, I wouldn't say that, Mr. Green, but
in any event, there seems to be some
mistake because we don't have a free
room in the entire hotel. But if you'd
like, perhaps I can fix you up at the
Brewster Hotel down near the station.
- I'm not staying at the Brewster. Look, I'm
Jewish and you don't take Jews. That's
it, isn't it?
- I never said that.
- If you don't accept Jews, say so.
- Don't raise your voice to me, Mr. Green. You
speak a little more quietly, please.
- Do you or don't you?

- Mr. Green, I'm a very busy man. Now if you want me to phone for a cab or room at the Brewster, I'll do so otherwise...
- Otherwise what?

(Manager rings bell, slams door shut)

I mean, one of the interesting things about "Gentleman's Agreement," which is one of the reasons why it was controversial at the time, is because it deals with antisemitism, not at the fringes of society, but in genteel, well-heeled circles. And it's this establishment antisemitism that's also a target to some extent in Otto Preminger's "Exodus." And this is a scene early on in the movie of "Exodus" where we see antisemitism that's prevalent in the officer class of the British Army of the day. Here's the great Paul Newman who plays Ari Ben Canaan who is the hero of the film, and he's an officer in the Haganah, but here he's masquerading as a British officer and he's talking to the odious Major Caldwell, who's played by Peter Lawford.

(A video clip of the 1960 film "Exodus")

- Oh, I don't care about the Jews one way or the other. They are troublemakers, aren't they?
- Oh, no question about it. You get two of 'em together. You got a debate on your hands, and three you are putting out a revolution.
- Yeah, half of 'em are communists anyway.
- What's the other half, pawnbrokers?
- They look funny too. I can spot one a mile away.
- Do you mind looking into my eye, sir? It feels like a cinder.
- Certainly. You know, a lot of them try to hide under gentile names, but one look at that face, you just know.
- With a little experience you can even smell them out.
- Yeah, I'm sorry, but I can't find a thing.

- Hmm, must have been my imagination, thanks.

Major Caldwell said one look at that face and you just know, which brings us onto our next clip, which is an extraordinary film from 1990 called "Europa Europa," which was directed by Agnieszka Holland, and you have to imagine being a Jewish boy in Nazi Germany and finding that your only survival option is to hide in plain sight. In other words, to pretend that you're an Aryan, a good Aryan Jewish boy. And the hero succeeded to the extent that he was recommended to an elite academy for the Hitler-Jugend, for the Hitler Youth, to receive a first class Nazi education. Extraordinary thing about the film is it's the incredible true life story of Solomon Perel. He was a Jewish, German Jewish boy whose father's last words to him and his brother were that they had to survive come what may before he was taken off. As I say, the movie is based on his autobiography and it's an astounding story. At the very end of the movie, the real Solomon Perel comes on screen and very movingly he sings, "Hine Ma Tov umah na'im." But this is a scene at the academy where a teacher who's a so-called expert in racial science calls on our hero to the front of the class.

(A video clip of the 1990 film "Europa Europa")

(Teacher enters classroom)

(Students stand and give the Nazi salute)

- Heil Hitler.

- [Students] Heil Hitler.

- [Teacher] Peters.

(Teacher brings Peters to the front of the classroom)

- (Teacher measures Peter's face)

- [Teacher] (in German) Look at his skull.
His forehead. His profile.
Although his ancestors' blood
over many generations mingled
with that of other races, one
still recognizes his distinct
Aryan traits. It's from this
mixture that the East-Baltic
race evolved. Unfortunately,
you're not part of our most
noble race, but you are an
authentic Aryan.

Pretty chilling scene. And the movie that I have to say I re-watched

for this session that I think is the most potent of all of the films that are being shown today is "The Pawnbroker," and was directed by the great Sidney Lumet and it set in the East Harlem of the 1960s, the early 1960s. The main character is Sol Nazerman, who's played by Rod Steiger, who 15 years later would go on to play the rebbe in "The Chosen." Before the war, before World War II, Sol was a university professor in Germany and his family and he are taken to a concentration camp and he witnesses his two children die in front of him and also his wife being raped by Nazi officers and then being killed. The film is 25 years later in Spanish Harlem, and Nazerman is now a pawnbroker, but he's haunted by all of his memories. He's numbed and isolated and he's trained himself not to feel any emotion or get attached to anyone. He has a young Puerto Rican assistant called Ortiz, and in this scene Ortiz asks Sol, "How come you people come to business so naturally?" And this is Sol's reply.

(A video clip of the 1990 film "The Pawnbroker")

- [Ortiz] So how come you people come to business so natural?
- [Nazerman] You people? Oh, I see, yeah.
I see, I see you, you want to learn the secret of our success. Is that right? All right, I'll teach you. First of all, you start off with a period of several thousand years during which you have nothing to sustain you but a great bearded legend. Oh my friend, you have no land to call your own, to grow food on or to hunt. You have nothing. You're never in one place long enough to have a geography or an army or a land myth. All you have is a little brain, a little brain, and a great bearded legend to sustain you and convince you that you are special even in poverty. But this, this little brain, that's the real key, you see? With this little brain you go out and you buy a piece of cloth and you cut that cloth in two, and you go out and sell it for a penny more than you paid for it. Then you run right out and buy another piece of cloth, cut it into three pieces and sell it for three pennies profit. But

my friend, during that time, you must never succumb to buying an extra piece of bread for the table or a toy for a child, no. You must immediately run out and get yourself a still larger piece of cloth. And so you repeat this process over and over, and suddenly you discover something. You have no longer any desire, any temptation to dig into the earth, to grow food or to gaze at a limitless land and call it your own. No, no, you just go on, and on, and on, repeating this process over the centuries, over and over. And suddenly you make a grand discovery. You have a mercantile heritage, you are a merchant. You are known as a usurer, a man with secret resources, a witch, a pawnbroker, a sheenie, a makie and a kike!

It's an extraordinary speech, and it's an extraordinary film. Rod Steiger said that of all of the amazing roles that he played over the course of his entire cinematic career, it remained the role that he was the most proud of.

But I'm just looking at the time, and we are not going to finish on the hour because I could cut a few things, but I'm inclined not to. So I hope for those of you who have time, you'll bear with me for, for possibly up to another 10 minutes beyond the hour. I mean, let's see, let's see how we go.

It's time for a song. And what better place when we talk about antisemitism than to turn to the marvellous film "Cabaret," which is the film of the Broadway show, which came out in 1972, directed by Bob Fosse starring Liza Minelli and Joel Grey, and music lyrics by Jewish songwriting duo Kander and Ebb. The song that I'm not going to play is this one, but I just wanted to put this up because the combination of Kander and Ebb's music and Fosse's direction means that speeches are not necessary in this film. It's just the simple power of the choreography and the music that depicts and communicates incredibly powerful ideas. And the idea in this song is the seductiveness of Nazi ideology. A young boy stands up at a cafe in an idyllic small alpine village and fresh faced with a sweet voice, he starts to sing, and he starts by praising the beauty of nature: "The sun on the meadow is summery warm. The stag in the forest runs free. The branch on the linden is leafy and green. The Rhine gives its gold to the sea." And

we, the audience are drawn in, but very soon he's joined by others, and the facial expressions change from innocence to aggression. And the camera pulls back and reveals that the young boy is wearing the uniform of the Hitler-Jugend and wears a swastika on his sleeve. And as the song reaches its crescendo, the young man leads an ugly crowd in Nazi salutes and a terrifying rendition of the chorus of "Tomorrow Belongs to Me." So, that's the song we're not going to hear. The song we are going to hear is one that takes place on the stage of the Kit Kat Club. And again, it's just done, this is done with lightness of touch. Ostensibly, this is a song about a man with an unusual girlfriend who turns out to be a gorilla. But this is the tail end of Weimar Germany, and this is not a song about a gorilla.

(A video clip of the 1972 film "Cabaret")

(A man dancing on stage with a person in a gorilla suit in a woman's dress and hat)

- [Man singing] ♪ I know what you're thinking ♪ ♪
You wonder why I chose her ♪ ♪
Out of all the ladies in the
world ♪ ♪
It's just a first impression ♪ ♪
What good's a first impression ♪ ♪
If you knew her like I do ♪ ♪
It would change your point of
view ♪ ♪
If you could see her through my
eyes ♪ ♪
You wouldn't wonder at all ♪ ♪
If you could see her through my
eyes ♪ ♪
I guarantee you would fall like
I did ♪ ♪
When we are in public together ♪ ♪
I hear society moan ♪ ♪
But if they could see her through
my eyes ♪ ♪
Maybe they'd leave us alone ♪ ♪
How can I speak of her virtues ♪ ♪
I don't know where to begin ♪ ♪
She's clever, she's smart ♪ ♪
She reads music ♪ ♪
She doesn't smoke, but drinks gin
like I do ♪ ♪
Yet when we are walking together ♪ ♪
They sneer if I'm holding her hand ♪ ♪
But if they could see her through
my eyes ♪ ♪
Maybe they'd all understand ♪ ♪

- Why don't they leave us alone ♪
- [Man speaking] Madams and monsieurs, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you, is it a crime to fall in love? Can one ever choose where the heart leads us? All we ask is a little understanding. Why can't the world blame or blame less? Live and let live.
 - ♪ Oh, I understand your objection ♪ ♪
I grant you the problem's not small ♪ ♪
But if you could see her through my eyes ♪ She wouldn't look Jewish at all.

The inimitable Joel Grey. I mean, it's a song we all know when we've, I mean most of us have seen it many times, but I don't think, I don't think you ever tire of that song or indeed of the whole movie.

For the last few minutes, having looked at some of the ways that antisemitism is portrayed on the screen, I just wanted to look at the way that responses to antisemitism are portrayed on the screen. And in particular, to look at three types of response that we get from Hollywood, and so the first type is the fantasy Jew, the second type is the tough Jew, and the third type is the Zionist Jew.

So if we start with a fantasy Jew, the movie I want to show, which I have to say, I hadn't come across before, is "The Hebrew Hammer" from 2003. The main character of this film is Mordecai who is the self-styled Hebrew Hammer. Now, I mean, this is a kind of mock film in the style of blaxploitation films from the 1970s. It is a deeply silly film, right? But it's great fun, and if you have an opportunity to see it, I do recommend it. The film starts with the flashback of the young Mordecai who's at school, and he's terrorised by his fellow pupils and teachers for being Jewish and for celebrating Hanukkah when everyone else is celebrating Christmas. And we now come back to the present day Mordecai, who is now a Jewish crime fighter called the Hebrew Hammer. And the enemy in the film is determined to wipe out Hanukkah so that everyone will celebrate only Christmas.

But this is my favourite scene. This is Mordecai, the Hebrew Hammer, who walks into a neo-Nazi bar looking for trouble, and before I play this, I have to make a little apology in advance because at the end of the clip, there is some bad language. So I do hope you will be forgiving.

(A video clip of the 2003 film "The Hebrew Hammer")

(A man in a trench coat walks into a bar)

- Let me get a Manischewitz, straight up.
Did you know that spitting is the

number one cause of germ transmission
in the continental United States?
Just a FYI.

- [Bartender] We usually don't serve your kind,
but since you had the balls to walk
in here, kike, I'll pour you one more
drink before we lynch you.
- Sounds good. You know what? Let me get the
black label. You guys take shekels?
I just got back from a trip to Israel.
All I got is a fist full of shekels.
5733, that was a pretty good year for
me.

(Hebrew Hammer hits bartender with a bottle)

- Shabbat Shalom, motherfuckers!
- [Man] Goddamn, brother, you kicking ass.
- Taking a page out of a Sweetback's book.
- [Man] Mm-hmm, they bled your mama, they
bled your papa, they won't bleed
you.
- That's it.
- Right on.

So, I apologize if anyone was offended, but I do like that clip and the Shabbat Shalom greeting will never quite be the same again after watching that. So we've talked about the fantasy Jew.

Now I want to talk about the tough Jew and Hollywood has a penchant for tough Jews portrayed as Jewish gangsters. And there's a surprising number of Hollywood movies which feature Jewish gangsters in, and most of them seem to be characters who were associated with Murder, Incorporated, which was the, as you know, it was the real life Jewish-Italian crime organisation that flourished during the '20s, '30s and early '40s in the US. Among the best of those movies are probably "Lepke" from 1975 with Tony Curtis, and an underrated film "Once Upon a Time in America." And of course, even though it's not a Jewish film, "The Godfather," which features two prominent Jewish characters who are shown here on screen. On the left is Moe Greene, and on the right is Hyman Roth. They're loosely based on the real life characters of Bugsy Siegel and Meyer Lansky.

But the tough Jew I wanted to show wasn't any of these. It was actually Sergeant Donnie Donowitz from the Quentin Tarantino movie "Inglorious Basterds." Now, this movie from 2009 has divided opinion, and many people quite understandably disapprove of it for a number of reasons, largely because they feel it trivialises the history of Nazi Germany because there's a fantasy element in it and it shows Hitler and the Nazi high command being blown up in a Parisian cinema. I have to say, I respect that view, but I find this quite an empowering film and I always have done.

"Inglorious Basterds" tells the story of a Jewish revenge squad in the US Army, which is put together by Lieutenant Aldo Raine, who's played by Brad Pitt. And except for Raine, all the squad members are Jewish and their mission is to strike terror into the heart of the Third Reich by killing as many Nazis as they can. And what makes the film interesting and the reason why I show the clip is although the story is a piece of total fiction, there was a real American battalion that was given a similar mission, which was called Operation Greenup. And we now know from the book that was published last year that in Britain, there was also a secret Jewish commando, which was called the X Troop, which fought against the Nazis on the front lines of many of the major battles of World War II. So here is Sergeant Donny Donowitz and he's called 'the Bear Jew' because of his size and because of his propensity to beat Nazis to death with a baseball bat. And notice, you know, this is pure Hitchcock, the whole scene is done with music and close up.

(A video clip of the 2009 film "Inglorious Basterds")

– Actually, we're all tickled to hear you say that, quite frankly, watching Donny beat Nazis to death is as close as we ever get to going to the movies. Donny?

– Yeah?

– Got us a German here who wants to die for his a country. Oblige him.

(Metal clanging in a dark tunnel)

(A man walks out of the tunnel with a baseball bat.)

(Troop claps)

– [Donny] Did you get that for killing Jews?

-"Inglorious Basterds."

We now come to the final clip and to our third and final respondent to antisemitism on screen, and that's the Zionist Jew, and the movie that I've chosen for this is "Cast a Giant Shadow." This is a movie, I mean, I first saw this movie, I think probably 25 years ago, and at the time I remember being quite dismissive and thinking it wasn't a great movie. And I have to say one of the real joys I've had in preparing for this session has been to re-watch "Cast a Giant Shadow," and to rediscover it all over again, and I've very much changed my opinion, I have to say. "Cast a Giant Shadow" came out in 1966. I mean, what a year, right? So this is 20 years after the world finds out about the Shoah and one year before the Six-Day War. So I think it's fair to say this was probably the high point of the Western world's love affair with the nascent state of Israel. When we think of a great Zionist epic of the 1960s, we normally think of "Exodus." I mean, that's normally the, it's the first film that comes to mind. And so you could say that "Exodus" has somewhat cast a giant shadow over this movie over the years. But as I say, I re-watched it, it's not a perfect film by any means, but it is a real gem. I mean, in part, I think it's, you know, it's Frank Sinatra who's fighting for the Palmach. A big part of the joy that I got was seeing John Wayne, the Duke himself, toast a l'chaim to the new state of Israel. But actually the thing that really makes the film is the crackling dialogue and the performance of Kirk Douglas. Douglas plays the role of Colonel David "Mickey" Marcus, and you can see on the right, that's the real Mickey Marcus because it's a film that's based on a true story. Marcus was a Jewish American officer who after World War II was impelled to go to Palestine and to help the different factions of Israel's nascent army come together and to train them so that they were a proper fighting force. And the movie traces not only Marcus' struggles to modernise Israel's army, but also his own journey to realise his identity as a Jew. Earlier in the film, Mickey is told by the British ambassador that the Jews are too stiff necked to ever amount to anything and they'll never achieve anything as a result. And he's also told by no less bigger than John Wayne, who's his general, that that his weakness is that he's not prepared to stand up and be counted. And as for Marcus himself, he meets with Ben-Gurion and he's very critical of Ben-Gurion. He's rude to Ben-Gurion. He says he's running a tin can army and he cannot understand Ben-Gurion's obsession with attacking Jerusalem because as he says, Jerusalem has no strategic military value. So this is our last clip and it's one of the final scenes of "Cast a Giant Shadow," and I think it's Kirk Douglas at his finest.

(A video clip of the 1966 film "Cast a Giant Shadow")

- I must think of my men. You saw
yourself, the boys are worn out.

- [Mickey] We're all worn out, but we'll do it. We made it across a Red Sea, didn't we?
- It's the first time I ever heard you say we.
- [Mickey] Yeah, my people. Pipsqueak nation. Tin can army that fights with seltzer bottles. We. All my life I've been looking for where I belong it turns out it's here. The Catskill Mountains with air. I've been so angry at the world ever since I was circumcised without my permission. All of a sudden I find out I'm not so special after all. Everybody around me here is in the same boat and nobody's bellyaching. "Okay, stand up and be counted," the man said. Grew up, is more like it. I'm not fighting anymore because I'm ashamed of being a Jew. I'm fighting because I'm stiff necked and proud of it. Next week Ash, next week in Jerusalem.

-That's a very good note on which to end.

Q & A and Comments

So let's just very quickly get because we, "is "Avalon" on Netflix?"

I don't think it is, but you can find quite a few clips on YouTube.

"Interesting and successful casting of non-Jews, Plowright and [indistinct] in key roles."

Great movie, yes. Well, and so often you do get great non-Jewish actors in the roles.

It's not schlepping, it's shepping nachas. I'm sorry, gosh. I've been told, thank you Norma Kirsch. Thank you for that. And Sue Friedman as well, shepping nachas. Gosh, thank you.

Jeffrey says "in the Bar Mitzvah boy clip, the boy did not say the bracha before leaning. Did you notice, was there a reason? Would it have been against the halacha?"

I don't think it was a halachic issue, but I think they were taking a little bit of poetic licence with that film.

And nice note from Gita, thank you. Rose, thank you as well. Rose says, "I get chills of sadness on some of the clips. "Makes me want to cry."

Absolutely, absolutely, Rose.

And Clive Overland says, "it's quite amazing. A lot of people think that "Tomorrow Belongs to Me" from "Cabaret" was an old Hitler Youth song."

I mean, this song, it has quite a tricky history. I mean, it has been used by a number of neo-Nazi groups ever since. And I think when the film was first shown in Germany, very briefly, I think that they excised that scene.

And let's see, Clive Overland says "The Hebrew Hammer" is available on Freevee, a free service for Amazon Prime members. Oh, that's good to know. Thank you, Clive. I hope you enjoy that.

Claire Baum says, "I'm a hidden child survivor "from Holland who happily arrived in Canada in the '50s. Just as you portrayed in the movie "Gentleman's Agreement," and I noticed a great deal of antisemitism since I'm from Holland just as you portrayed in Darryl Zanuck's "Gentleman's Agreement." I was hired by a large corporation having a very selective quota. I had to hide my identity in order to be promoted."

Thank you, Claire. I mean, I think we forget how recently this was the situation.

And a few very nice comments.

Please forgive me, just in view of the time. I think we're going to stop there and I hope everyone enjoyed the presentation and my apologies for going somewhat over time, but thank you everyone. Okay, bye bye.