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Rushkoff Reviews “When Do We Eat?”

by [Douglas](#) // June 9th, 2006
[Arts & Culture](#)

So I finally watched a tape of a new movie that was sent to me, gosh, two or three months ago, called [When Do We Eat?](#) The producers wanted me to see it because, first off, they figured as a somewhat controversial Jewish thinker/writer, I'd be more inclined to “get it” than the average Joe or Jew, and because they were interested in what I thought of the horrified reactions from critics as trusted as those of the New York Times - who saw this film as yet another example of crass anti-Semitism.

What's so interesting about the film, and the varied reactions, is that flaws that might be interpreted as uneven filmmaking in any other film are here considered to be some sort of Jewish self-loathing.

True enough, the film suffers a bit from not knowing exactly what kind of movie it wants to be. In the comic film tradition of the Christmas Eve family movie, the members of a rather varied American Jewish family are gathering for the annual Passover Seder. And their antics and professions (one is a sex worker, another is a dot.com exec-turned-Chabadnik, one is a publicist of some kind, one is a lesbian) are all the stuff of typical farce.

In terms of pure movie-making, the farcical antics of the first half of the movie force us as an audience to treat the characters as “types” we don't really care about - so the more transcendent message of the rest of the film can get lost. I mean, it's hard for Laverne and Shirley to make deep, resonant messages, as well. And we don't expect it from Meet the Parents.

But, because this is a Jewish-themed film, it's even harder for those of us with a connection to Judaism to make the leap from farce to allegory. And that's what for me makes the film, itself, an interesting experience - and something I'd suggest you do when the DVD comes out later this summer.

The real message of the movie is that the Seder can become as transformative a ritual as a great acid trip; this stuff goes deep. But the experience of the film forces a certain kind of modern viewer - people like those of us who read Jewschool - to consider the state of Jewish storytelling, our own reactions to Jewish stereotypes, and our intolerance of people making light of our holy days. (I find it hard to imagine people taking offense - on religious grounds - to a version of ‘Miracle on 34th Street’ that may have displeased them.)

Can we stand a Pesach movie with both some flaws and some genuinely poignant realizations about the timelessness of this tradition? In era of Heebification, the successes and failures of this film are worth examining.



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1. [deb](#) Says:
[June 9th, 2006 at 6:57 pm](#)

I absolutely agree with you. I found this film to be much more provocative than the more positively received “Keeping Up With the Steins.” “Steins” has it's examination of alienation of young American Jews (“What's your favorite thing about being Jewish,” asks grandpa. “Lox and bagels” says the kid. “well there's more to it than that.” Later, a bit of mumbling by the rabbi about “tikkun olam” and well, don't want to give anything else away. On the other hand, “When do We Eat” honors Jewish ritual and examines the “doing.” “Stein” is just about “being” Jewish.

2. [Esther Kustanowitz](#) Says:
[June 12th, 2006 at 11:30 am](#)

I agree. And I actually just did my own unrelated post about my confusion as to the difference in how the two films were received. I was shocked, actually, and thought that the independently produced WDWE

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had a lot more meat on its bones than the studio-inflected Steins.

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"I may attack a certain point of view which I consider false, but I will never attack a person who preaches it. I have always a high regard for the individual who is honest and moral, even when I am not in agreement with him. Such a relation is in accord with the concept of kavod habriyot, for beloved is man for he is created in the image of God." — Rav Joseph Soloveitchik



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