



Gratz Insider, July 2013 - Story Continuation

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### **Movie Review: A Young Woman's Choice in *Fill the Void***

As the movie opens, Shira, an 18-year-old Hasidic girl, is giddy with excitement. She is poised to meet the young man who has been selected as a potential match for her. However, the official meeting never takes place because Shira's family is blindsided by an unimaginable tragedy: Shira's older sister, Esther, dies suddenly while in labor with her first child. Bereaved, Shira and her family help Esther's husband, Yochay, care for his infant son, Mordechai.

As time passes, a potential new bride is located for Yochay - in Belgium. Heartsick at the thought of being separated from her grandson, Mordechai, Shira's mother suddenly realizes that the solution is to arrange a marriage between Shira and Yochay. Shira, hoping for a new life of her own, yet reluctant to disappoint her family, struggles to choose the right path.

The audience is drawn into this struggle through Hadas Yaron's sensitive portrayal of Shira's emotional torment. With her soft eyes and expressive face, the actress is able to convey the young girl's feelings in a way that words alone could not. Shira is caught up in a torrent of confusion. She had always dreamed of sharing the excitement of marriage with a young man chosen for *her*, but at the same time, she feels pulled by family pressure to keep her nephew in Israel. Adding to this mix of emotions, the film intimates that Shira may in fact be developing some feelings for Yochay.

This taut emotional drama is made all the more powerful by the camera angles. Moviegoers expecting panoramic views of Israel will be sorely disappointed. Instead, the camera hones in on people's faces, forcing the audience to virtually experience the internal struggles of the characters.

Another salient feature of the film is its juxtaposition of life and death, joy and sorrow. For example, Esther brings a new life into the world but loses her own in the process. As a result, what should have been the baby's joyful bris is shrouded in the

pall of his mother's death. In addition, talk of marriage, usually associated with excitement and jubilation, becomes cause for doubt and confusion for Shira.

From a Jewish perspective, it is interesting that this upending of emotions in the movie takes place with Purim as the backdrop. As is explained by Joshua Guttoff, Gratz College professor and coordinator of the doctoral program in Jewish Education, Purim is traditionally observed in religious communities as a holiday that inverts the normal order of things, with rabbis' sermons being parodied and religious texts satirized. So it seems more than coincidental that in a film where life is turned on its head, Purim is represented, not only through the names Esther and Mordechai, but also by the fact that Esther's death and Mordechai's birth take place on Purim.

There are clearly many layers to this short 90-minute film, making it a great source for reflection. On its face, it offers a rare glimpse of life within the Hasidic community. It also provides a penetrating look into the heart and soul of a young woman. Although forbidden by her gender to join men in religious observances and celebrations, this young woman has the ultimate authority to make a decision that will shape her family's future.