



LEMALE ET HA'HALAL (FILL THE VOID) is an LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Following is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

Israel 2012, 2013 color 90 minutes subtitled live action feature drama in Hebrew Sony Pictures Classics / Norma Productions / Israel Film Fund / Reshet Broadcasting / Hot / Avi Chai Foundation / Sundance Institute Producer: Assaf Amir

11 of a possible 20 points

***** of a possible *******

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

Points:

- 1 Direction: Rama Burshtein**
 - 0 Editing: Sharon Elovic**
 - 1 Cinematography: Asaf Sudry**
 - 1 Lighting: Michael Berdugo, Reuven Rozenberg, Sezar Berger**
 - 1 Written by: Rama Burshtein**
 - 2 Music: Yitzhak Azulay**
 - 1 Art Direction: Ori Aminov**
 - Set Dressing: Daniel Didi**
 - Props: Shimon Cohen**
 - Costume Design: Chani Gurewitz**
 - 2 Sound Design: Aviv Aldema* Supervising Sound Editor: Aviv Aldema***
 - Sound Effects: Neal Gibbs, Nin Hazan**
 - Dialogue Editor: Keren Biton**
 - Sound Recordist: Moti Hefetz***
 - 1 Acting**
 - 1 Creativity**
- 11 total points**

Cast: Hada Yaron (Shira, age 18, prospective bride), Yiftach Klein (Yochay, a widower), Irit Sheleg (Rivka Mendelman, Shira's mother), Chaim Sharir (Aharon Mendelman, Shira's father), Razia Israely (Aunt Hanna), Hila Feldman (Freida), Renana Raz (Esther, a plain Jane), Yael Tal (Shifi), Michael David Weigl (Shtreicher, a matchmaker), Neta Moran (Bilha), Ido Samuel (Yossi), Melech Thal* (Rabbi), others

A fascinating drama from Israel, winner of numerous Ophir awards (Israel's equivalent to the Oscars), LEMALE ET HA'HALAL (FILL THE VOID) provides insight into the conflict between attraction and duty in a young Orthodox prospective bride.

An unexpected death in childbirth leaves Yochay a widower. Since he is still a fairly young man with a newborn child, his Orthodox Jewish community conspires to find him a new spouse. Hmm. Shira Mendelman, younger sister of his late wife, is just arriving at marital age. She might be a possibility. A kindergarten worker, she has an affinity for young children. However, an arranged marriage for her is being advanced by a friendly matchmaker and Shira's parents.

The young man is apparently agreeable. So everything seems to be working out fine. Until Esther's sudden death on Purim night.

That event precipitates a period of mourning, causing a delay in Shira's nuptials. During the waiting period to meet demands of propriety, her potential husband's family has second thoughts. They revoke their offer of marriage, causing a young woman who already considers herself "evil" and unwanted to plunge deeper into isolation.

With Yochay's mother making overtures to a Belgian Jewish family to obtain a new spouse for her son, the possibility of Esther's infant boy Mordechay leaving Israel forever causes Rivka Mendelman to desperately throw Shira out as bait. She is frantic to prevent loss of her family's only grandchild. Even if it means forcing Shira to marry her former brother-in-law.

This scheme is obstructed by Aharon, Rivka's husband. It's plain to him that Shira is unwilling to cooperate, not being especially zealous to wed an older, more sexually experienced man, one already a father.

When friend Freida informs the besieged surviving Mendelman daughter that Esther wanted Yochay to take her for a second wife should anything fatal overtake his first, Shira is faced with potential betrayal of sisterly wishes and friend's apparent desire.

What does duty demand? Should she sacrifice her own happiness in order to maintain a friendship. Is the most important thing to please Mother? In a culture giving priority to decisions and aspirations of fathers, what role ought women to play? Who should be in control of her life?

Trapped by tradition, feeling extreme psychological pressures from both inside and outside the family, Shira has no objective counselor to offer suggestions. Everyone, even her synagogue's rabbi, has a personal stake in this dilemma. If Yochay emigrates, there will be two fewer members of the congregation and a drop in total income. To propose hesitation might be perceived by Yochay as inappropriate meddling in personal affairs. Not to urge caution and reflection would equate to ceding a baby to a family with only a single blood connection. Nearly total strangers. That might be kosher. Would it be fair to the mother's kin?

Further developments in the lives of Freida, Yochay, Shira, and professional matchmaker Shtreicher occur, causing relationships among them to shift and realign. What moral obligations do each have to the others? What is legal? What would be the will of God?

With each personality a sympathetic one, audiences hear all viewpoints objectively. Intelligent scripting insures whatever solution is presented conveys credibility, being emotionally satisfying for all parties. While not quite a Gordian Knot situation, the film does resemble a sort of moral maze requiring assistance from circumstances as well as personal actions in order to reach a universally agreeable goal.

Effective acting keeps the focus on ethics and character, rather than plot or visual effects. Protracted scenes of minimal dialogue or silence lend gravity to interactions, making a virtue of slow pacing. Lighting and cinematography, designed to enhance faces, hands and body language, often utilize profile shots where half the subjects are left in shadow or darkness. Even the softest of sounds is audibly recorded, integrating expertly interior and exterior atmospheres, reminding at intervals that a larger drama is playing offscreen in the city of Jerusalem.

Juggling festive episodes and sorrows parallels real life. Grief follows immediately upon celebration, sometimes with shocking absence of transition, replacing one with the other faster than mental adjustments can be made. The reverse also occurs, keeping viewers tantalizingly unbalanced, making prejudgments risky or foolish. Such editing and scripting maneuvers require audiences willing to suspend quick conclusions. *FILL THE VOID* is definitely not suited for sensation seekers or inflexible thinkers.

Traditional Jewish holiday music is chanted with gusto by cast members who need no orchestral swellings to communicate vitality and joie de vivre. Yitzhak Azulay's scoring welds sacred themes to rhythmically driving melodies, an irresistible combination.

FILL THE VOID is recommended viewing for thoughtful adults unafraid to confront difficult ethical quandaries. It's too sluggish and complex for teen and preteen screeners. Dialogue is in Hebrew with optional English subtitles provided.