**Lens on Israel: Encounters with the Other**

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### Amy Kronish

Amy Kronish is a freelance film consultant from Jerusalem who has lectured, written, taught, and produced extensively and internationally. For 15 years she worked at the Jerusalem Cinematheque/Israeli Film Archive, where she eventually served as Curate of Jewish and Israeli Film. She is previously the author of *World Cinema: Israel*, and the co-author of *Israeli Film: A Reference Guide*.  She has an MA in communications from NYU.

* + - 1. Introduction. Amy studies films as if they were texts.

1. Two approaches (out of four “classical” Jewish approaches).

Peshat.  (P'shat, פשט) is one of four classical methods of Jewish biblical exegesis used by rabbis and Jewish bible scholars in reading the Hebrew Bible, also known as the Tanakh. It is the first of the four exegetical methods known together as PaRDeS. Rashi is the interpreter of the simple or surface interpretation).

Midrash. In Judaism, the Midrash (Hebrew: מדרש‎; plural midrashim) is the body of exegesis of Torah texts along with homiletic stories as taught by Chazal (Rabbinical Jewish sages of the post-Temple era) that provide an intrinsic analysis to passages in the Tanakh.

1. The four approaches.

* [**P**esh**a**t](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peshat) (פְּשָׁט) — "surface" ("straight") or the literal (direct) meaning.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pardes_(Jewish_exegesis)#cite_note-1)
* **R**emez (רֶמֶז) — "hints" or the deep (allegoric: hidden or symbolic) meaning beyond just the literal sense.
* **De**rash (דְּרַשׁ) — from Hebrew *darash*: "inquire" ("seek") — the comparative ([midrashic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midrash)) meaning, as given through similar occurrences.
* **S**od (סוֹד) (pronounced with a long O as in 'sore') — "secret" ("mystery") or the esoteric/mystical meaning, as given through inspiration or revelation.

1. Topics. Amy will accomplish two things.
   * + 1. Make distinctions. She will distinguish between what the film means to us, and what the filmmaker intended.
       2. Film and issues in Israel. She will focus on topics that are bothering Israelis.
       3. The Topic of Settlements. “Ha-hesder” (“The Arrangement”) or “Time of Favor” (as it was popularized in English), is a film by Joseph Cedar, a graduate of the Beni Akiva youth movement. In the movement, boys and girls “don’t touch.”
2. The characters live in a settlement. Aki Avni is the male lead.

A young military officer returns to the Israeli settlement where he grew up and meets a rabbi who was his teacher. The rabbi offers the officer the best of the yeshiva students as recruits for his military company, which will become known for its piety.

Second scene: the yeshiva students enthusiastically welcome the officer.

Third scene: the daughter of the rabbi says that her father has indirectly offered her as a bride (a kind of prize) to the best yeshiva student. She and the officer play a game of shadow touching (but without actually touching).

Fourth scene: The girl tells the officer that her mother is going through chemotherapy, but her father, the rabbi, won’t relent and allow her to live in the city. The daughter dislikes the settlement. She asks whether he would go to the city with her. The couple looks out over the land. Her father, the rabbi, feels that it’s the land of the Bible.

1. Discussion.
2. Bedding: it’s settlement ideology over human rights.
3. Dulock. The father is thinking of the settlement, not his wife.
4. Janelle. She, the daughter, is a “resource” to her father, a prize for the best student. He tells her, “The land of Israel is bought with pain and suffering.”
5. Amy: Living on a settlement is dangerous, and there’s more to life than sacrificing. The daughter asks, “Don’t you have any doubts?” Cedar (the filmmaker) said, “In a chauvinistic and militaristic society like the settlements, the voice of criticism must come from a woman.”
6. James Cassidy: Officers see things in black and white.
7. John Michalowsky: Her question, “Will you come with me?” means “Will you be different from my father?”
8. The film aims to show that a black and white world view is too simple.
9. The rabbi tempts the officer to break discipline, even offering him something to eat (in this case, a spicy pickle).
10. Mary Guido: the rabbi is dangling a prize in front of the officer’s eyes.
11. Craig: Are you loyal to your rabbi or your commanding officer?
12. Anne Jordan. The daughter said that the beautiful land is not enough.
    * + 1. Bereavement. At the end of the second intifida, a film entitled “Broken Wings” was made by Nir Bergman. It was commercially successful.
13. Introduction (Amy Kronish). If someone dies in a terrorist incident, it is an honor to your family. It is considered heroic to be in the military, and heroic to suffer such a loss in your family. There’s a “hierarchy of death.” Amy’s daughter in New York is handicapped. She parks in a handicapped spot. Someone says, “I want to save this spot for my daughter, who has a more serious handicap.”
14. Summary. The children of a nurse, Daphne, at the Rambam hospital are suffering the loss of their father. The high school daughter has become the mother. The teenage son is working as a handbill distributor, dressed as a mouse. All try to cope with the abrupt death of husband/father. As the family seems to fall apart, a sudden incident gives them a chance to heal their 'broken wings'.
15. Scenes.

Yair. The high school counselor speaks to the teenage son, Yair, who is coming back to school after nine months He passed the exams without going to school He’s a smart aleck. He and the counselor start a game of “catch,” throwing a ball back and forth, and each has to say a word. “Morning,” “Flower,” “Mouse.” After the counselor says “father,” the conversation stops. The counselor asks, “Are you angry?” The boy responds: “How can I be mad with you? You don’t exist.” “We can play ball forever but you are a speck of dust.” *The son’s teenage existentialism (“you don’t exist”) stands in tension with the reality of the counselor, who quite obviously does exist*.

Mikush. The teenage daughter, Mikush, is in a recording studio in Tel Aviv. The female recording engineer says goonight to her own child over the phone. The engineer knows that Mikush is writing lyrics for songs. What are they about? About her father. Mikush says, “He got stung by a bee.” Nine months ago. The daughter suggests that he died from the bee sting because she needed to pee.

1. Discussion.
2. Amy: dying of a beesting is preventable. The film was lauded because it’s universalistic – applicable to Euyrope as well as Israel. But Amy felt that the “bee sting” makes it particularly Israeli. It’s preventable. It’s absurd. It’s not heroic, to be stung by a bee. It’s not expected.
3. Bedding: This is a kind of amateur psychologizing. As if the troubles in Israel are easily preventable.
   * + 1. The Holocaust as a Cultural Event.
4. It overshadows all of the lives of Israelis, perhaps too far. There are lots of stories that are told. Fifteen years ago, when Amy’s daughter was in the Israel Army, she had an experience.

She was doing military service on a base with other kids. They sat around and talked about current events. An officer said, “I’m glad I’m a Jew, and I’m glad I’m not a woman.” Amy’s daughter said, “I don’t believe that.” The officer said, “You Reformed Jews are worse than the holocaust.”

The daughter went to the head of the youth movement. A radio journalist called Amy. “Your daughter can’t talk to me, but you can.” The daughter was told to go to the Chief Information Officer of the army in Tel Aviv, for a hearing with the officer and the head of the base. On TV, it was announced that the officer was stripped of his rank because: (1) he spoke falsely, (2) he spoke before students, and (3) he is cheapening the memory of the holocaust.

Today, said Amy, the memory of the holocaust is cheapened all the time. Yad Vashem is in good taste, but there is a lot of tastelessness. On TV, Saturday Night Live Program (Israel) talks about travels to Turkey. One day there was mock “package” to Auschwitz.

1. Yehuda Poliker is an Israeli rock star. We watch a film clip, “This is the Treblinka Station.” The band was called Benzene. They made a holocaust album. His father is from Saloniki (Sephardic). His lyricist/sound technician is his mother (an Ashkenazi).
2. Poliker is a stutterer. His father used to “shovel his food into his mouth.” One time his father almost choked on his food. Since then he has stuttered.
3. Poliker had hit singles like: *Hofshi Ze legamre Levad*(Free is Totally Alone), *Geshem*(Rain) and many more. After Benzene broke up, Poliker turned to a solo career and in 1985 he released his first solo album *Einaim Shely* (My Eyes). All the songs on the album were well-known songs in Greek literally translated into Hebrew. In 1986 Poliker released his second solo album *Holem Behakitz* (Daydreamer), with songs not included in *Einaim Shely* In 1988, Poliker released his third album, *Efer Ve Avak*(Dust and Ashes) which dealt mostly with the children of Holocaust survivors. The album sold more than 70,000 copies. To this day the album is considered by many to be one of the most respected albums created in Israel.
4. “Dust and Ashes” spoke to the second generation, the children of the survivors. “We in Israel speak about ‘That War,’” not “World War II.” Mary Guido: When Noomi Stahl mentioned her parents, the children laughed, “How long did it take mom to get to that topic.”
   * + 1. “Survival and the Art of the Joystick” (2002)
5. Introduction. Two sisters are traveling from Tel Aviv to Bethel during the intifada. “When I go to my parents’ house in Beit-El, I take my fear with me, as well as my love and many question marks. The drive there is like a video game – you either make it through or you don’t… Just close your eyes until the nightmare is over.”
6. Two sisters are driving together. They pray. They hear the muezzin. They hear lullabies. They hear truck horns. They fear being shot. They have flashbacks. One daughter has left Beit-El and gone to Tel Aviv. One is biting her nails. They never talk to each other. “You’re so vigilant, you don’t talk.” But repeatedly they have said these things to each other. There is no dialogue between two points of view. Things are thought but not said. One daughter has moved out, because she is afraid. The other says, “I’m closer to our parents than you.” “We’re two sides of the same coin.” On the one hand, I live in a settlement (Beit-El). On the other hand, you live in Tel Aviv. The Beit-El house is like a “castle” where the residents are afraid to take out the garbage.
   * + 1. Arabs and Jews in Film.
7. “To Die in Jerusalem” is about two girls, a terrorist bomber and her victim, whose two mothers meet.
8. “Avanti Popolo” (1986), by Rafi Bukai. June 11, 1967, the Six-Day War is over and the cease fire has just begun. We follow the journey of Gassan and Haled, two Egyptian soldiers whose only wish is to make their way through the Sinai desert and safely reach the Suez Canal. Thus begins a comical, almost surrealistic saga during which they meet various groups of people across the desert, including Israeli soldiers on patrol and a pushy news reporter.
9. Scenes.

Two Israeli soldiers are shooting at the Egyptian inebriates. One of the drunk soldiers is a comic actor. He approaches the Israelis. The Israelis have guns, but not the Egyptians. They run for the water container. But the Israelis pull them away. One says, “I am a Jew.” He gives the speech from Shakespeare’s “Merchant of Venice.” Finally he drinks. The two Egyptians then start laughing. The actor who plays “Shylock” is an Israeli Palestinian. Sabim Dou is the Palestinian actor.

“Arabs have become the new Jews,” said Amy. The message of Rafi Bukai’s film was not well realized in Israel at first, but it is now.

Bedding: Shylock is an inauthentic Jewish voice. It is Shakespeare’s stereotype. So the Egyptian soldier is speaking “inauthentically.”

Philip: “Bukai was saying something the Israelis didn’t want to hear – namely, we Israelis have become the conquerors and the occupiers.”

Vince. The Palestinians look ludicrous. Amy: but the Israelis and Egyptians have become friends. They sing, “Avanti popolo.” The Russians taught the Egyptians to sing the sing, and the kibbutzim taught kids to sing it too.

* + - 1. Sayed Kashua. Sayed Kashua is an Israeli-Arab author and journalist born in Tira, Israel, known for his books and humoristic columns in Hebrew. He has written a series, *Avoda Aravit*, or in English, “[Arab Labor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Labor).” It is a satirical sitcom written by Kashua and aired on Israel's [Channel 2](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Channel_2_(Israel)). A large part of the dialogue is in [Arabic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language) with Hebrew subtitles. The show is about a young Arab couple, Amjad ([Norman Issa](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Norman_Issa&action=edit&redlink=1)) and Bushra ([Clara Khoury](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clara_Khoury)), and their young daughter, who live in an Arab village on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Amjad is a journalist working for a Hebrew newspaper (much like [*Haaretz*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haaretz)) who desperately seeks to assimilate into the prevailing Israeli Jewish cultural milieu with mixed and hilarious results. The show holds a mirror up to the racism and ignorance on both sides of the ethnic divide.

1. The scenes.

The Palestinian is driving his family through a checkpoint. The father is telling the mother to speak in Hebrew but the daughter greets the checkpoint officer in Arabic.

Two Palestinians, father and son, visit an Arab garage mechanic, who is a tax evader. One of the Palestinians, the son, wants an expensive, non-Arab car, a Rover. His father speaks to Walid. Walid calls one of his friends, who will steal a Rover, and charge the man $20,000. So the father tells the son, “Walid wants $30,000 – you pay $20k and I’ll pay $10k (for my grandson).”

1. Discussion.
2. The father can’t afford what his urban son can pay. By lying, he doesn’t wrong his son, but gains honor in his son’s eyes. The father hasn’t done anything wrong, he’s just gaining the status that is due him.
3. James Cassidy. The film is patronizing. It patronizes Arabs from a viewpoint that does not respect them. Amy: But Sayed Kashua does know the Arabs.
4. Janelle: The series exploits a culture for the sake of ratings. It’s like Spike Lee’s “Bamboozled.”
5. Bedding: Satire that is accepted by the public enables minorities to gather power.
6. It reminds me of the opening scene of “Paradise Now.” In a Palestinian auto body shop, a man complains because his new bumper isn’t straight. The repairman says, “the bumper is straight, but the ground isn’t level.”
   * + 1. “Divine Intervention” ([Arabic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language): يد إلهية‎) is a 2002 film by the [Palestinian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_people) director [Elia Suleiman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elia_Suleiman), which may be described as a surreal [black comedy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_comedy). The film consists largely of a series of brief interconnected sketches, but for the most part records a day in the life of a Palestinian living in [Nazareth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazareth), whose girlfriend lives several checkpoints away in the [West Bank](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Bank) city of [Ramallah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramallah).
7. Scene.

A man throws a date pit, and an Israeli checkpoint explodes.

His girlfriend. One lyrical section features a beautiful sunglasses-wearing Palestinian woman (played by Manal Khader) whose passing by not only distracts all eyes, but whose gaze causes Israeli military checkpoint towers to crumble.

A balloon painted with the face of Arafat is released by a beautiful woman. It rises toward the checkpoint. The soldiers are mesmerized by it. Should they shoot? When they are talking, the beautiful woman and her boyfriend cruise through the checkpoint.

1. Discussion.
2. Janelle: it helps to be beautiful if you want to go through a checkpoint.
3. Amy: She makes eye contact with the soldiers, and the soldiers lower their guns.
   * + 1. “Noodle” is an award-winning 2007 [Israeli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel) film directed by [Ayelet Menahemi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayelet_Menahemi), written by Shemi Zarhin and Ayelet Menahemi, and starring [Mili Avital](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mili_Avital), Chen Baoqi, and [Alon Aboutboul](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alon_Aboutboul).
4. Plot. When the Chinese woman working in Israel for Miri Kalderon, an Israeli flight attendant, is suddenly deported for overstaying her work visa, her lack of Hebrew-language skills makes it impossible for her to convince the Israeli authorities that she has a young child with her.
   * + 1. Miri, twice-widowed because of the ongoing Arab-Israeli wars, has been going through the motions of living, somehow detached from a real connection to life itself.
       2. Her decision to help reunite the child—nicknamed "Noodle"—with his mother, now back in Beijing, ends up helping her, not just the boy and his mother, in ways Miri herself could not have expected.
5. Discussion.
   * + 1. Amy. Miri is trying to make a statement about doing the right thing. One can indeed make a difference. That is an essential conviction in a lot of Israeli films. So Miri doesn’t adopt Noodle, but returns him to his mother. The woman in “The Lemon Tree” is an example.
       2. James Cassidy. Is Miri trying to be a “Jewish mother”?
       3. “Bus Station” (2008) by Lily Shefy. In this short film, a Muslim and an ultra-Orthodox woman meet at a bus stop. Their shopping bags tip over and their tomatoes get mixed up. The Jewish woman says, “I can only buy kosher products,” so she refuses to take “her” tomatoes, which are now confused with the woman’s tomatoes.
6. A young Jewish man comes to the “rescue” of the Jewish woman. He accused the Palestinian woman of stealing from her. In return, the Jewish woman lies to the young man, sayng that they know each other. One Muslim kid said, “The tomatoes represent the hope the two women had, but they couldn’t take that hope with them.”
7. Discussion.

Craig: The Muslim woman did not want what wasn’t hers. She left her tomatoes behind.

Michael Flattery: One had a son named Ibrahim, and the other’s was Abraham.