

ליל תורת ארץ ישראל

THE NIGHT OF TORAT ERETZ YISRAEL

Salach Shabati: Adapting to the Land

דף הנחיה

“ Driver: Big guy – a kibbutznik!
Sallah: But his trac...his vehicle is bigger.
Driver: It’s not his, it belongs to the kibbutz.
Sallah: And who does the kibbutz belong to?
Driver: To the kibbutznikim, who else?
Sallah: So why isn’t that his?
Driver: It’s not his! ...Well, it’s his, but it’s not his.
Sallah: Mister, do you even hear what you’re saying?
Driver: Sure! Look at ‘em...living together, eating together,
working together...all the property belongs to everyone.
Sallah: Really? To everyone? And our house is there too?
Driver: No no, it’s a little further up.
Sallah: Baruch Ha-Shem.

”

The following is a summary of the main topics you can touch by analyzing the movie “Salach Shabati”. You can decide on which one of them you prefer to focus: in this file we are presenting five main themes, with the leading questions that you can ask in order to facilitate the analysis with the group, and with some insights that might be useful during the discussion.

Remember: even though Salach Shabati can be analyzed through many different perspectives, our goal is to focus on the relationship with Salach and his new life in the Land.

Important! You might have watched and enjoyed the movie previously. Remember to watch the movie before you deliver the session on LTEY. Watching a movie for educational reasons is not as watching a movie for entertainment!



The movie

Salach Shabati (1964), directed by Ephraim Kishon. Started as a TV series, began a movie and in the end a musical - in its three formats, Salach Shabati managed being a huge success and object of a very wide criticism at the same time.

The film begins with Sallah Shabati, an Oleh coming from an arab country, arriving with his family in Israel. Upon arrival he is brought to live in a “ma'abara”, transit camp. He is given a broken down, one room shack in which to live with his family and spends the rest of the movie attempting to make enough money to purchase adequate housing. Salach gets to Yisrael and meets different groups: he meets local bureaucrats, tourists, the other people in the transit camp, Kibbutznikim. These encounters/clashes are an example of Yisrael as a junction between streams that are based on the essential idea that the Jewish people should be in Yisrael, but that implement the idea in different ways.

Relevant themes

Ideologies and Belief

Main questions

Which different groups of people does Salach meet? What are the differences between them? What are the differences between him and each one of them? How does he relate to them?

Does Salach's ideology change during the movie? Is it because he got influenced by the environment or he's still consistent with his own culture? Which expressions does Salach keep repeating?

Which different ideologies do you think are part of the Yisraeli discourse today and what are the relationship between them?

Insights

- Life in Kibbutz is absolutely unthinkable for Salach. When the driver tries, at the beginning, to explain him how it works, he thinks that it makes no sense at all. The different ideologies are based also on different cultures: Salach's culture includes a strong component of ownership, which is totally absent in the Kibbutznik culture.
- In the scene of the voting in the Kibbutz, the sarcasm over the Kibbutznik ideology and lifestyle is clear. What is not clear and it's worth to discuss is whether the movie stands for one of them. Even more interesting is to discuss this under the perspective of Yisrael as a new-born country: which ideology is the most relevant for the State of Yisrael? This question is even more relevant after the scene in the chicken coop: when Salach argues with the two representatives from the Kibbutz, it's very hard to understand which side sounds more illogical, and therefore which side the director of the movie wanted to hit with his sarcasm.
- Salach argues with his wife, who says that he doesn't do anything to improve the situation, and when he leaves (to go drink with his daughter's money), he stumbles and falls. Desperate, he starts shouting to G-d and asks him to help. The first thing he says is "You that took us out of Egypt, look at me". Salach is used to believe in G-d's help, but not to act and solve problems. The best he can do is to seize opportunities.

Family and Society

Main questions

Who are the components of Salach's family? How does he behave to them? How do they behave to him? Is there a difference between how Salach behave to his family and to the other people he meets?

Why does Salach reject the idea of having his daughter marrying a Kibbutznik? Is it a matter of money value for real or there's something else behind it? How does the Kibbutz relate to the same matter?

Which kind of community shown in the movie do you think would fit more a country which is just being built? Which would be relevant today?

Insights

- Every member in Salach's family knows exactly how to react to Salach's behavior. His son knows exactly when to bring him the backgammon table, his wife doesn't need to many words to keep up with Salach's expectations. The only person that question his absolute authority is his daughter, and that's what actually leads him to clash with the society around him.
- Who is the old woman?? We see her throughout the movie and we're never sure about her role. It symbolizes a different approach to family: whoever joins us is family. It's interesting to see how the same mechanism works in the transit camp: whoever gets there, automatically becomes part of the big family. Also in Kibbutz the idea is the same, but Salach can't renounce on his authority over his family: he sees them as his private property.
- Salach can't accept that a member of his family lives for a different environment. It's a paradox: they are all allowed to leave their homeland (which is not clear what it is, see afterwards) to reach their ideological homeland, but no one is allowed to leave the family nucleus. They are searching for a new life in Yisrael, but without too many changes in their habits. When he goes to the Working Desk, he first makes sure with his kids: "You won't abandon me, right? We'll stay together".

Land

Main questions

How does Salach relate to the Land where he just got? What is the first thing he does when he lands in Yisrael? How long it takes him to feel like a local?

Where is Salach coming from? From what do we know that? What's his background and why did he come to Yisrael?

How Salach and his family actually get a house in the end? Do all his attempts succeed or affect the outcome at all?

Insights

- The first thing Salach does when he lands is blessing Shehecheyanu, and the movie marks that pretty strongly by putting it in contrast with the tourists' arrival. Almost every person that we meet shows a feeling of connection or ownership toward Yisrael: as if it's obvious that they can live there, and they expect life and society to work their way. Salach in his way, the rich tourists that come to check the forests they paid for, the Kibbutznikim who see their ideology the only logic way to settle the land.
- We have no clue where's Salach coming from. His family name, Shabati, is not a typical family name of any area. It just sounds oriental. The director of the movie explains that his name is just a mispronounced version of the phrase "Slicha she bati/Sorry I came": as if the fact that Salach came to Yisrael is actually a burden for the State. The movie wants to show the difficulties of integrating different cultures in one new society, by playing with different stereotypes.
- At the end of the movie, after everything that happened to Salach and his family, they finally get a house. We don't know why, we don't know how - but they do. As if in order to get accepted to a stable life in Yisrael, Salach had to go through a sort of initiation process: getting to know the people, the new way of life, etc. Only then he gets the right to settle.

Adaptation

Main questions

Why does Salach keep repeating "Rega, Choshvim/Wait, I'm thinking"? He seems to work out almost every issue. What's so difficult for Salach?

What's peculiar about Salach's meeting with the psychologist? How does it end?

Does Salach understand how life in Yisrael works? Is he ready for life in a new Land?

Insights

- The meeting with the psychologist starts with Salach showing-off what he learned about his new society: if I'll proof that in middle of many disgraces and that I'm a Zionist ("My son's name is Ben Gurion")
- Salach understands after a few phrases which language he's supposed to talk with the psychologist and ends up consoling her and talking to her exactly how she started to talking with him - just with a strong salachshsabatic influence ("Such a sociological girl...").
- The only person that convinces him to start working is his son, when he offers to get a job, but he gets fired within one day. But when he imagines how he'll speak to the new Olim when they'll go to his future shop, he speaks about how hard he worked, but we know that he refuses any kind of job: "We'll also trick the newcomers".
- New land, new life: "I'm a shoemaker". He's not! But since he states that, at the beginning of the movie, he becomes one. Every time they offer him a new job, that's his default answer: he doesn't want to do something else, because he's a shoemaker. When he go visiting his "new house", he already decides in which room he's going to work. Salach convinced himself that with the arrival in Yisrael, he also deserves a new identity.

Conclusion

"Salach Shabati" shows us how at the beginning of the state, the journey toward the Land of Yisrael was not only complicated, but rich of encounters with different perspective and ideologies. The unavoidable consequence is a powerful process every Oleh and Olah went through. By analyzing the movie we want to understand what are those processes, their consequences, and most important - whether they are still relevant for us today and how.