

A Serious Man

Directors: Joel and Ethan Coen
2009 (100')



Larry Gopnik, a physics professor, lives in Minnesota with his family and he is a serious man. So why does his wife want to leave him for his best friend? Why are his kids such a mystery to him? Why is someone trying to make him lose his job? Why won't his brother get off his sofa? Why is his life suddenly going so wrong? Maybe his rabbi can help him find some answers in this darkly funny film.

"A Serious Man"... has a way of creeping into the spirit. It's not an easy movie to shake off, even days later, even if you want to. San Francisco Chronicle
Dark, dry and masterfully restrained, "A Serious Man" is plotted with the peculiarities of life. Chicago Tribune
Admirers of the Coens will rejoice in their best film for a long while.... It's also their most personal film, and their most Jewish. The Independent

Vocabulary and expressions:

Dybbuk: In Jewish folklore a dybbuk is a spirit (usually bad spirit) which is believed to be the soul of a dead person. The dybbuk then attaches itself to a living person.

A dybbuk doesn't eat.

Mitzvah: Mitzvah is a word used in Judaism to refer to the 620 commandments of the faith.

Bar Mitzvah: According to Jewish law this is the age (12 for girls, 13 for boys) when children become responsible for their actions. Bar Mitzvah also refers to the ceremony that occurs at this time.

Rabbi: In Judaism, a rabbi is a religious teacher.

Tenure: If you have tenure in your job you are guaranteed to keep that job until you retire.

Credence: If you give credence to a story or theory, you believe it.

We give them (the allegations) no credence.

To jest: To tell jokes or say funny things.

Larry... you are jesting.

Glib: If you say what someone says is glib you disapprove of it because it implies that it is too simple and that there are no problems involved.

I don't mean to sound glib. It's not always easy, deciphering what God is trying to tell you.

HaShem / Hashem: A word used to refer to God in the Jewish faith.

With the right perspective you can see Hashem.

Cut it out!: Stop it!

Hanky-panky: Hanky-panky refers to improper (but not serious) sexual activity between two people.

There hasn't been any hanky-panky.

Goy: A goy in Hebrew or Yiddish refers to a non-Jewish person.

Lines from the film:

Receive with simplicity everything that happens to you.

God has cursed us.

Actions have consequences.

You have to see these things as an expression of God's will.

'The Uncertainty Principle.' It proves we can't ever know what's really going on.

Larry: I want an answer.

Rabbi Nachtner: Sure! We all want the answer! But Hashem doesn't owe us the answer, Larry. Hashem doesn't owe us anything. The obligation runs the other way.

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