

Hustler, Color of Money: integrity better than wealth

Rabbi Herb
COHEN



KOSHER MOVIES

As a youth, I played basketball every Sunday at the local JCC on the Spartans, who were Spartans in name only. We had a mediocre record. Opposing us were much better teams and one player outshone everyone. Robby regularly scored more than 20 points a game, and when he reached high school, he was a superstar. Watching him was poetry in motion.

I expected to read about Robby in the newspapers, but it didn't happen. Robby dropped out of college, never fulfilled his potential and played basketball in local recreation leagues as an adult. The snapshot in time that I saw in high school was no predictor of future success. Only in retrospect do we possess clarity. That's why I chose to review two movies that present the same character, 'Fast Eddie' Felson (Paul Newman), as a young charismatic pool hustler in *The Hustler*, and then as a successful liquor salesman 25 years later in *The Color of Money*. Watching both films gives us a rare opportunity to see the evolution of a character over a span of years. Has he changed and in what way?

There is a scene in *The Hustler* when Eddie, a pool-playing virtuoso, is told that he has talent, but lacks character. Eddie, self-absorbed and arrogant, pursues money. To him, it indicates success; and he admires Bert, a wealthy gambler. When Sarah,



Paul Newman as 'Fast Eddie' Felson in *The Hustler*

Eddie's girlfriend, asks Eddie how he knows that Bert is a winner, Eddie responds, "He has things." It is a shallow perspective on life and it takes a tragedy to remind Eddie that there are more important things than money and fame.

The Color of Money depicts 'Fast Eddie' 25 years later, still a flawed character. He renews his passion for pool through a young protégé, Vincent (Tom Cruise); and offers to take Vincent on the road and teach him how to make money by playing pool in venues where he is unknown. Eddie still wants fame vicariously, and the temptation to hustle still motivates him.

Eddie, however, eventually begins to see in Vincent aspects of his younger self, which repel him. Money is now irrelevant to Eddie; what is important to him is simply being the best and winning fairly. There is a moment where he sees his reflection in a pool ball and what he sees he does not like. Eddie's newfound integrity reinvigorates his pool game, and his ultimate challenge is not winning a game of pool under dubious circumstances, but rather beating Vincent in a private game.

Ethics of the Fathers says that "every man



has his hour" of prominence and success in life. Eddie had his in *The Hustler* and now Vincent has his in *The Color of Money*. The question we all face is what happens after our hour in the sun. Do we allow old age and self-doubt to emotionally cripple us or do we redefine ourselves in light of our new reality? Abraham, our forefather, is a role model. The Bible tells us that "Abraham was coming in days," an unusual way to inform

us that he is old. The commentators tell us that this indicates that, despite his age, he was vigorous and productive on each day of his life into his senior years. He never retired until G-d retired him. Change for him was a constant.

Making changes is never easy, but in a moment of reflection, Eddie changes his perspective and desires integrity to crown his life. King Solomon instructs us, "A good name is better than precious oil." Eddie Felson finally understands this time-honoured maxim that integrity is better than wealth.

Rabbi Herbert J. Cohen, PhD is the author of *Kosher Parenting: a Guide for Raising Kids in a Complex World*; *Walking in Two Worlds: Visioning Torah Concepts through Secular Studies*; *Texas Torah: the Interface of the Weekly Torah Portion with Everyday Life*, and *The One of Us: a Life in Jewish Education*.

ESTATE AND TRUSTS SEMINAR

Is disinheriting Jewish?

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

TORONTO - Howard and Martha have two children, Sam and Laura. Sam is married to a Jewish woman; Laura is on the cusp of marrying a Christian man. Howard and Martha like Laura's fiancée, but are distraught about their family's role in the continued existence of the Jewish people; they know that only 33 per cent of children from intermarried parents are raised as Jews. They remember our matriarch Sarah's declaration that wicked Ishmael would not inherit, and our matriarch Rebecca's arrangement excluding murderous Esau from his birthright, and they threaten to write Laura out of their will.

I have been invited by The Estate and Trusts Group, Lawyers Division of B'nai Brith Canada to participate in a seminar on June 5, 2012 as part of its continuing legal education program. At issue is whether a will disinheriting a child who marries outside the Jewish faith would be valid. I will testify, as an expert witness, on continuity, intermarriage and discrimination. The seminar addresses the propriety of disinheriting a child under Ontario law, but I wish to add a question: Is this acceptable in the eyes of Jewish tradition?

Jewish law outlines an order of inheritance, and altering it is considered a violation of Jewish law. Even in Talmudic times 1,700 years ago, though, agitated parents sought to remove wayward children from the chain of inheritance.

The Talmudic sages frowned upon this approach to parenting; as one authority, Samuel, taught a student: "Do not be among those who shift an inheritance, even from a bad son to a good son, for the sort of child who will emerge therefrom is not known."

He acknowledged the value of directing an estate to worthy children, but he was concerned about the limits of human foresight. Better to stay one's ignorant hand, in the name of hope.

Rabbis of later generations suggested a compromise, honouring estate-shifting bequests so long as a significant sum remained in place for all heirs. In the late 20th century, Rabbi Moses Feinstein and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef authored responsa approving total or partial disinheritance in extreme cases of misconduct.

Based on this tradition, it would seem that Howard and Martha could steer the majority of their estate to Sam, and satisfy the expectations of Jewish law. But is it a good idea?

The biblical book of Proverbs advises, "Listen, my son, to the instruction of your

father, and do not reject the teaching of your mother." In the 13th century, Rabbi Levi ben Gershon explained this verse to mean that parents are responsible for providing academic instruction and encouraging practical implementation of Judaism.

Certainly, punishment has its place in any educational process, but Proverbs knew that clauses in bequests are a poor way to promote the marriage of Jews to other Jews. Far more is accomplished by parents who provide education and encourage implementation, who present an inspiring example with their own healthy, positive Jewish lives, who educate their children in Jewish schools from the earliest ages through colleges like Yeshiva University, who engage their children in Jewish settings like youth groups and summer camps. Even following these steps guarantees nothing, but presenting the benefit of a Jewish lifestyle speaks more powerfully than a financial carrot and stick.

Howard and Martha are justifiably disappointed, but the better route is to start early and educate positively, and pray for the rest to follow.

The seminar will take place on June 5, 2012 at Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue, 470 Glencairn Ave., Toronto, ON M5N 1V8.

Registration is at 7:30 a.m. and the moot court will begin at 8 a.m. The event is open to lawyers and accountants. Those lawyers and/or accountants interested in attending, should contact Anita Bromberg, B'nai Brith Canada, at (416) 633-6224 ext. 130 and/or at abromberg@bnaibrith.ca.

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner is Rosh Beit Midrash, Yeshiva University-Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov.

Winnipeg film festival to screen 14 top Jewish films

WINNIPEG - The Winnipeg International Jewish Film Festival will screen 14 of the best contemporary Jewish-themed films from around the world at the Berney Theatre between April 28 to May 10.

The independent feature and documentary films portray the Jewish experience from historic to current global perspectives but people from all backgrounds will be able to relate to the stories they tell.

The films are: *Restoration*; *Footnote*; *In Heaven Underground*; *My Lovely Sister*; *Strangers No More*; *Teacher Irena*; *Eichmann's End*; *Love, Betrayal, Death*; *In Darkness*; *Israel Inside*; *How a Small Nation Makes a Big Difference*; *Mabul (The Flood)*; *Nicky's Family*; *My Australia*; *The Flat*; and *Remembrance*. For more information visit www.radyjcc.com.

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Senior Outreach Centre

Monday May 7 Fitness Fun

Tuesday May 8 TBA

Wednesday May 9 Seniors' Power Pump

Thursday May 10 Toronto Jewish Film Festival: Tony Curtis: Driven to Stardom. Pre-Registration Required

Friday May 11 ONEG SHABBAT

Hours: 11:30 a.m. - 2 p.m. at 15 Hove St. A light lunch is served.

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