

# The New York Times

MOVIE REVIEW

## Praying With Lior (2007) NYT Critics' Pick



Lior Liebling in the documentary "Praying With Lior," directed by Ilana Trachtman.

## An Obsessive Love of Prayer

BY JEANNETTE CATSOULIS

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*Opens on Friday in Manhattan.*

*Directed by Ilana Trachtman*

*1 hour 28 minutes; not rated*

**S**hot over three years in a close-knit Jewish Reconstructionist community in Philadelphia, "Praying With Lior" documents the extraordinary life of Lior Liebling, a rabbi's son with Down syndrome and an obsessive love of prayer.

While family and friends marvel over Lior's putative spirituality, the director, Ilana Trachtman, captures a larger story. As the Lieblings engage in exhaustive preparations for Lior's bar mitzvah, we see a sweet-natured, high-functioning young man enjoy a level of assimilation -- and attention -- granted to few of the mentally disabled. A near-celebrity within his neighborhood,

Lior seems unaware of his real-world limitations -- a fact that worries his stepmother, Lynne Iser, though not his father, Mordechai.

Patently and delicately, Ms. Trachtman teases out the tricky dynamics of a family dealing with a disabled child. Lior's devoted brother, Yoni, sometimes resents being expected to take on parental responsibilities ("This is not my job"), while his older sister, Reena, recalls becoming a surrogate mother after the death of their mother in 1997.

Most touching is the 11-year-old Anna, who, as the youngest, laments her displacement as the center of attention. "It's kind of annoying," she tells us with charming candor. And watching everything in the household revolve around Lior, it's clear that the price of his happiness may be steeper for some than for others.