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ARTHOUSE FILMS

'Praying with Lior'

BY BILL STAMETS

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Born into a two-rabbi household, Lior Liebling grew up impressing everyone with his enthusiastic praying and singing. He is a boy with "special needs," and one of those needs is attention. He gets lots from his family and from filmmaker Ilana Trachtman, whose affectionate documentary begins with a scene of Lior directing her to back up for a better shot.

Lior has Down syndrome. "I have Up syndrome," he quips. "He ain't stupid," says his father. "He's retarded. It's different."

His late mother appears in home videos. In voiceover segments, an actress reads excerpts from an essay that she wrote before her death in 1997, when Lior was 6

years old. "I am mystified as to why he likes to pray so much," she said.

One of Lior's admirers notes how Jewish ritual offers an outlet for his special needs. Trachtman does not ponder the religious implications of Lior's irrepressible love of worship. Instead, she devotes more than enough time on the preparations for his bar mitzah, which elicits tearful joy.

Trachtman acknowledges that living with the high-functioning, high-maintenance Lior can be a chore. His youngersister Anna gets the equivocal last word: "He's still pretty irritating, but he's getting better. Actually. Kind of."

No MPAA rating. Running time: 87 minutes.



Lior Liebling and his brother Yoni, as seen in "Praying with Lior," a film by Ilana Trachtman.