

NEW YORK

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✓ Critic' Pick

Review

Lior, the subject of Ilana Trachtman's haunting, bittersweet documentary *Praying With Lior*, is a 13-year-old boy with Down syndrome and a fervent love of davening—the evocative Yiddish word for praying. In his prayers he is so bright-eyed, so joyful, that some congregants consider him a spiritual genius; his mother, Devorah, the rabbi of a Reconstructionist synagogue, says she rushes home from chemotherapy to daven with him. She hopes she'll be there for his bar mitzvah, but this is footage from the nineties; she died in 1997. Seven years later, his rabbi father, Mordechai, works to prepare Lior for the coming-of-age ceremony—and for what he fears will be a life of disappointment.

Mordechai plays the role of party pooper: It falls to him to warn people against projecting things onto his son, who is, he says, no rebbe. But is Mordechai, hyperconscious of his son's failings, going too far in the other, skeptical direction? I ask that with no disrespect: Mordechai emerges as a thoughtful and loving father, and he's probably right. The mystery at the heart of *Praying With Lior* is just how much this beatific young boy understands. Has he fully digested the meaning of his way of life, or is he parroting his father and devoted older brother? On the other hand, doesn't all prayer come down to parroting—to endless repetition that leads to a sense of transcendence?

Praying With Lior engages us on so many levels it transcends its middle-class Jewish milieu. It touches on the weird dynamics of family: Lior's little sister has not only lost her mother but she can't be the baby of the house—that's his role. It depicts a warm and nurturing community that gathers around Lior, both to protect him and to be transformed by his miraculous presence. It's about cruel limitations and sudden, blessed freedoms. — David Edelstein

GENRE

Documentary

PRODUCER

Ilana Trachtman

DISTRIBUTOR

First Run Features

RELEASE DATE

Feb 1, 2008

RELEASE NOTES

NY

OFFICIAL WEBSITE

www.prayingwithlior.com

10.0

“Highly Recommended”

Average Reader Rating
on a Scale of 10