

Night at the Museum: A movie fit for the Torah-Driven childhood

Dodi-Lee Hecht

It has, in the past few years, become more and more difficult to find a children's movie that is not rife with bathroom humour and allusive obscenity. Why is it that people seem to only fear a child's exposure to sexual content or swearing? The violence and jokes that pervade the modern children's movie are more subversive and, quite possibly, more dangerous. For, it is easy to pinpoint a word and tell a child that such a word is inappropriate; and a child can be taught that sex is something that he or she cannot really comprehend until reaching adulthood. But, in the delicate years in which a child learns what is funny and what is not funny, what is sacred and what is profane – it is not a simple task to separate the refined from the repulsive. Movies that seek to mix everything together and bombard their audiences with the resultant muck make the task near impossible.

So, it is with this thought in mind that I proudly declare *Night at the Museum* a modern-day miracle, an echo of that time when parents need not fear what their children might see flickering on the screen. The closest this movie gets to the muck of which I spoke is a brief moment in which a monkey urinates on another character. While that may be enough to keep some of you from the theatre, I excuse it because it is not realistic to think that animals won't do such things and, more importantly, *Night at the Museum* does not play the monkey moment up. No, the brave writers of this movie have chosen to actually write a children's comedy rather than rely, in an era when so much of children's entertainment takes the easy route, on the easy laugh. Without sinking to any offensive levels and, in fact, often travelling far in the opposite direction, *Night at the Museum* manages to be clever and witty, boasting a rare blend of humour that caters equally to children and their parents.

It is no small thing then to say, with certainty, that *Night at the Museum* is delightfully entertaining, but is it enough to warrant the time spent watching it? All children's movies, even the most unbearable, are replete with lessons. In this respect, *Night at the Museum* does not deviate from the crowd. Still, are these lessons worthy of complementing the Torah-driven lifestyle? None of the lessons are especially profound. Yet, they are not to be underestimated, either. The dominant theme of *Night at the Museum* – that greatness is a responsibility and not simply a character trait – is a rarely expressed notion in this age of rationalization and psychological coddling. Similarly, the secondary theme of co-operation, though much more common, takes on a fresh perspective in this film by being filtered through a thought-provoking historical lens.

Still, if *Night at the Museum* was intended for adults, I might say that the lessons contained in this film could be better accessed in far greater films (and, of course, found even more potently in Talmudic and Rabbinic thought). It is not, however, intended for adults. *Night at the Museum* is intended for children and it takes this very seriously. And since this is a children's movie in the style of classic children's movies, the lessons slip in without any pomp and declare themselves without any glitz or self-consciousness, ensuring that children will listen to the ideas almost before they hear the dialogue.

In other words, this film is a Noah, if not an Avraham – perhaps, if the quality of children's movies were more reflective of the preciousness of their demographic, *Night at the Museum* would be nothing more than an amusing blip on the radar. As it stands however, *Night at the Museum* finds itself without much in the way of competition and it rises to fill the void. Not only that, but it succeeds beautifully. Above and beyond the call – and while working with children and animals, to boot.