

My friends, this Twitter thing has had an interesting impact on me. I have gotten into the habit of tweeting the title of my Friday night sermon to our followers.¹ Before I started tweeting, the titles only served as file names for my computer. Now I am putting more thought into the titles of my talks. Tonight, the talk you are going to hear is titled *The Rabbi's Speech: Why I Took My Kids To an R-rated, Obscenity-laced Movie*.

Let's start with a bit of history. I was always pretty strict about what movies our kids went to. Once they were 13, we let them go to PG-13 rated movies—that makes sense, right? At least I thought it did at the time. When they were older but not old enough for R-rated movies, those were pretty much off limits. Sometimes the kids would ask to see one, and Arlene and I would look into the particular film. Sometimes we said yes, but most of the time we said no.

¹ Follow us at twitter.com/CSTRabbi

Then I lost my faith. I've lost my faith, and I do not anticipate ever getting it back. I hasten to say that I am not talking about my faith in God or Torah. I'm talking about my faith in movie ratings.

I lost my faith because I saw a few movies that were rated PG-13. They were filled with gratuitous obscenity, sexual innuendos, even blatant sexual references and semi-nudity. This was what the motion picture industry decided was appropriate for thirteen year olds? Thanks anyway—but at the point, I only lost half of my faith in the ratings. A PG-13 rating was clearly not a guarantee that a movie was appropriate for kids, but that confirmed my faith in R ratings—if PG-13 could be that bad, clearly any R-rated picture would be worse yet.

Enter *The King's Speech*. As an R-rated film, I knew without seeing it what would be in it. I knew the former Prince of Wales would abdicate the throne for love of a

woman who was twice divorced and having an adulterous affair with him, thus rendering her unfit to be the Queen of England. I would have bet a quarter that whomever played the king's love interest would be nude in at least one scene. I was sure there would be, shall we say, a love scene with the King and his mistress. But even before I saw the film, I found out I was wrong.

It turns out that *The King's Speech* received an R rating because of one scene in which the stuttering younger brother who succeeded his brother on the phone used obscenities during a speech therapy session. There was one other scene in which obscenity was used, and at one point, the speech therapy mouthed an expletive without pronouncing it. Call it three scenes with foul language if you want. Even that is a bit of a stretch, but that was the sole reason for the R rating. Then I saw the film, and there went the rest of my faith in the ratings system.

My friends, call me cynical, but I believe that the only reason *The King's Speech* was rated R was that the industry believed more people would see it than if they rated it PG-13. I have seen PG-13 movies that were far, far worse in many ways than this one.

Now a word about obscenities. My friends, I was an athlete for many years. I spent a lot of time in locker rooms in those years, long before I ever set foot in a seminary. That's what I used to tell the deputies who would say some pretty salty things in my presence, never failing to conclude with a "Sorry, Chaplain." I've heard the words before, and I have said them before. Here is my philosophy regarding them: there is a huge difference between public and private cursing. I actually called a fellow Phillies fan on his language at a ball game, and he responded with an apology. I cannot think of an example of acceptable use of obscenities in public.

I also think it is not gentlemanly to curse privately, but it is a far lesser offense than doing it publicly.

Finally, call me a chauvinist if you want, but I do not think it seemly for men to curse in front of women. I've taught my sons all of the above, and they know that in some situations I'll not call them on using certain words in private, but I'll come down on them like a ton of fatherly bricks if they use those words in the presence of their mother or sister. Are they perfect about following those rules? Don't make me laugh—but they surely do know where their father stands on the matter, and I have every confidence that they will grow up to be not just men, but gentlemen.

It is through that lens that I saw the cursing scene in *The King's Speech*. I would be very interested to know if anyone who saw the movie disagrees with me on the following: that scene was not gratuitous in any way. It was

an important, perhaps essential scene in the movie. Beyond that, the messages this movie brings are important ones: a man learns to manage an affliction that had plagued him for most of his life; royalty are flesh and blood human beings with the same foibles and problems that commoners have; a common man is instrumental in helping the King of England—these are just some of the things I took away from the film. The film is entertaining, yes, but it is more than just entertaining. It is moving, uplifting, and inspirational. To stay away from this incredible picture because of one important scene in which obscenities are used made no sense to me. And so I took my kids to see this R-rated film with the two or three scenes with bad words in them.

How did it work out? The boys laughed during the main obscenity scene—and there was, in fact, a humorous element to the scene. Fine. When we drove home and talked about the picture, they made not a single mention of

that scene. They loved the movie, and not because they got to hear someone say the S-word. As it should have, that scene faded into the background and they saw this powerful film for what it was.

And so, my friends, that is The Rabbi's Speech. To summarize, don't trust the ratings system. There are unacceptable PG-13 movies and acceptable R-rated movies. Gratuitous obscenity is offensive and inappropriate, but not all obscenity on the screen is gratuitous. And in my humble opinion, *The King's Speech* is a film worth seeing for many young people who would not be allowed to see almost any other R-rated movie. In short, my friends, although I hope you found my talk tonight worth your attention, I can promise you this: *The King's Speech* is even better than The Rabbi's Speech, with one possible exception. Mine ends with the wish that you have a *gut Shabbos*.