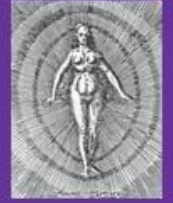


CHARLYNE GELT, PH.D.

Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment

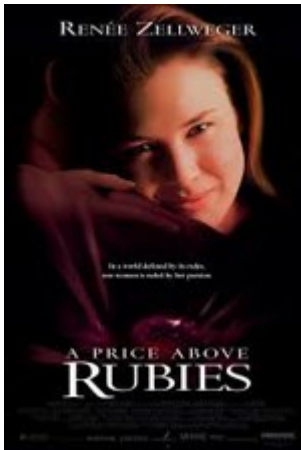


CINEMA THERAPY

Star Wars – Reviewed by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

A Price Above Rubies – Reviewed by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

The 1998 film, *A Price Above Rubies*, starring Renée Zellweger, Glenn Fitzgerald, Christopher Eccleston, and Allen Payne, explores issues that present in therapy and that occur within an enmeshed family system, in this case a Hasidic community: incest, power, control, emotional submission, manipulation, emotional merger, and lack of self-agency. It also explores boundary violations that cross emotional, physical, spiritual, relational and sexual limits. The title refers to a biblical quote "Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies" ([Proverbs 31:10](#), in the [King James](#) translation).



On the surface, *A Price Above Rubies* explores the world of Sonia (Zellweger), a young Hasidic Jew, whose father has educated her to be a jeweler. She is “matched” to Mendel (Fitzgerald), a very strict religious scholar wrapped up in a relationship with Scriptures but pays no mind to his marital relationship. She is unhappy and unfulfilled in her marriage and finds her Judaism controlling and lacking in soul. Mendel’s brother Sender (Eccleston), a “macher” — big shot — of the Hasidic community, zeros in on Sonia’s desperate loneliness and brings her into his jewelry business as a buyer. He then uses his power over her to satisfy his sexual needs. To keep her job, she keeps the sexual relationship secret.

However, Sonia’s job as a buyer has a payoff, it allows her to explore a world outside her own and gets her away from the severe restrictions of the Hasidic community.

Throughout the film she has a spiritual channel of communication with her deceased younger brother as well as multiple encounters with a mysterious wise woman, an old crone. As a buyer, she meets a talented Puerto Rican jewelry designer, Ramon (Payne) and encourages him to continue his artistic trade. His ways, his values, and his kindness are contrary to everything she has experienced growing up. Though conflicted, her repressed sexuality gets awakened by his compassion and his sensual loving. Conditioned for years to filter reality through her religious lens, this crisis forces Sonia to begin viewing her world through a different mindset, making her life in the Hasidic community more difficult. She is followed and found out by her jealous lover/brother-in-law, Mendel, who then destroys her life. She creates a firestorm of controversy Abandoned by everyone in her Hasidic community, forced to give up her son, she finds a new life in the ashes and sets out to pursue her dreams.

We can apply a psychological lens to this story to further explore the emotional crisis that leads Sonia to view her world from a new mindset. So focused are we on loss, destruction, and chaos, and the end of life as we know it, that we ignore possibilities, the hidden truths waiting to be revealed. Sonia feels trapped by duty which she has always understood as love. In order to survive, and feel she belongs in this enmeshed family system, she has allowed herself to be used as a pawn . . . by her husband, her brother-in-law and by her strict religious rules. Her intuitive self, seen through the characters of her deceased brother and her inner wise woman, knows she must leave home to save her soul. In terms of metaphor, home and security is not a location, it is a feeling, and she acts on it. The mythologist Joseph Campbell’s describes the hero’s Journey as a process: Lunar birth-home; leaving home-going beyond (departure); a search for what’s missing (the gold); finding the treasure (the booty); then coming home reborn, meaning a transformation of consciousness. Sonia’s journey, our heroine’s journey, exemplifies this

transformation of consciousness — her departure from the known, her crisis (of conscience), temptation, her punishment — abandonment — and finally her fulfillment, uncovering what has been hidden, revelation of a new truth, rebirth, bringing forth a new stage of psychological maturity and development. The many emotional trials and challenges she faces help her transcend the enmeshed “family” system. Sonia gets out of the “bowl of noodles” that kept her trapped. Ultimately, she slays her fears, her inner dragon. Her adventure evokes the priceless quality of her character, *a price far above rubies*.

Use of Films in Therapy

The process of cultivating more awareness in one’s life can be confusing, exciting, or challenging — sometimes all three at once. Using cinema therapy can be a powerful tool that leads a client to discover their own story, their own personal myth, expose unconscious obstacles, and even reveal how that myth holds answers to the meaning of their lives, reflects their beliefs, feelings, and the images they hold about themselves. What are the core beliefs that have dominated the family dynamic? How has the client been influenced by their family, friends, and culture? And, as the hero of their own story, what are they willing to do about it to create a different ending?

Isn’t the desire to grow from the pain, face our fears head on, find the courage to imagine life anew what brought them into therapy in the first place?

*Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D. (PSY22909) is a clinical psychologist who practices in Encino. She leads **Women’s Empowerment Groups that help women learn the tools to move beyond self-destructive relationship patterns.** She may be reached at 818.501.4123 or cgelt@earthlink.net. Her website is www.drgelt.com. Her office address is 16055 Ventura Blvd. #1129 Encino, CA 91436.*