Movies? Boxing? Midnight Prayers?--Rabbi Marc Angel Replies to Questions from the Jewish Press

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Is it proper to let one's children watch movies?

It is proper to let parents decide for themselves if their children should watch movies, as well as which movies they should or should not view. The variables of the decision are significant: age and maturity of the child; content of the movie; the religious dynamics of the family and extended community. Responsible parents need to evaluate what is best for their children.

Many of our children and grandchildren grow up in relatively sheltered cultural environments. They have limited exposure to people and ideas outside their own circle of family, schools, and synagogues. Victor Hugo noted that “narrow horizons beget stunted ideas.” If we want our children to expand their horizons and to feel a connectedness with humanity at large, the arts—including film—can play a vital role.

Through books, films, and art, children are introduced to various perspectives. They grow as thinking and sensitive human beings. They become aware of the lives and concerns of people outside their immediate experience. They confront ideas, emotions and conflicts that help them cope with the complexities of life.

Parents have a huge responsibility in guiding their children so that they are exposed to the best that is available in our culture. Although many of the popular movies today are problematic from a religious point of view, other movies are powerful, instructive, or just plain entertaining.

Is it proper to watch or enjoy the sport of boxing?

Martial arts include a variety of forms—boxing, wrestling, krav maga, and a host of Eastern techniques. People participate in these activities as a means of building physical strength, developing self-confidence, and learning strategies of self-defense. Many find much value and enjoyment in their experience of martial arts. And that is fine.

When martial arts competitions are conducted under proper supervision, they can be positive experiences for participants and viewers.

A problem arises, though, when these sports go beyond healthy limits. Professional boxing, for example, puts two people in a ring with the express goal of having one of them knock the

other one unconscious. This transcends the realm of sport and becomes an expression of violence and blood-lust. While people might enjoy seeing two muscle bound boxers clobber each other, this is a kind of enjoyment fine people will want to pass up.

Et hata'ai ani mazkir: As a teenager I would sometimes watch boxing matches on television. In 1962 I saw a fight in which Benny Kid Paret was brutalized so badly that he was taken to the hospital…where he soon died. I—and all the thousands of viewers—literally saw someone being beaten to death…all legal and in the name of the sport of boxing. I don't think I've watched a professional boxing match since then. And I wouldn't recommend watching or enjoying such a "sport". It leaves a stain on one's soul.

Should an ordinary Jew endeavor to say *Tikkun Chatzos*? If not regularly, perhaps sometimes?

A person should endeavor to say Tikkun Hatsot only if one feels a spiritual need for these midnight prayers. The texts lamenting the destruction of the ancient Temples and the "exile of the Shekhina" may be meaningful to various individuals, especially those influenced by kabbalistic practice.

Many people, though, will not feel the need to say Tikkun Hatsot. Their religious life is full enough without requiring participation in this kabbalistic tradition. For them, waking up to recite midnight lamentations is unnecessary, unfulfilling, and counter-productive. It is better to conduct one's daily life with the steady consciousness of the presence of Hashem. Instead of excessive crying for what has been lost, it is preferable to pray for and work for a restoration of proper religious life in our society.

When I was a student in Yeshiva, one of my Rabbayim advised us not to stay up all night for the Shavuot learning. We should rather go to sleep at our regular time, wake up refreshed so we could say our prayers with proper kavanah, and then spend quality time studying Torah during the day of Shavuot. Most people who stay up all night have difficulty concentrating on their learning when overly tired; because of excessive tiredness they don't say the morning prayers properly; and they are exhausted the rest of the day. The losses of the custom of staying up all night can be much greater than the gains.

These arguments could equally apply to Tikkun Hatsot, except for rare individuals with a kabbalistic bent.