

ORTHODOX STANCE (2007)

INFO / SUMMARY:

Russian immigrant Dmitriy Salita is the “greatest Jewish fighter since Samson” and the subject of director Jason Hutt’s documentary *Orthodox Stance*. The film follows Dmitriy as he goes pro and attempts to balance his strict religiosity with his boxing career, shepherded by spiritual advisor Israel Liberow, trainer Oscar Suarez, and mentor/trainer Jimmy O’Pharrow. As he starts a winning streak, he electrifies a community not usually accustomed to even thinking about boxing.

QUOTES:

“Having spent so much time with Dmitriy and his trainer Jimmy O’ Pharrow, as well as observing other fighters and their trainers, you realize how close and complex this relationship is. Many people think a trainer is a father figure but I think it’s more of a mother figure (at least a Jewish or Italian mother) because no one rides your ass more than your mother!” –Director Jason Hutt

“You’re representing, D.” –Matisyahu

“Dmitriy is as committed to his faith as he is to the ring.” –NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg

“Thank God everything turned out well. You have dreams. With faith, hard work, dreams come true, a little bit at a time.” –Dmitriy Salita

TEXT:

Samson, the Jewish hero to whom Dmitriy Salita is compared, may be known for his hair and for putting his trust in Delilah—for, in other words, his vulnerabilities—but he was also one seriously able guy.

“The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands. Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men. Then Samson said, “With a donkey's jawbone, I have made asses of them. With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men.” (Judges 14-16)

Samson leads the Jewish people for 20 years and is unequalled in strength. According to the text, it is from the “spirit of the Lord” that Samson derives his strength.

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Does Dmitriy seem to operate in a similar fashion? How does his religion set him apart and help him in his career? How do Dmitriy's vulnerabilities appear on screen and how do those vulnerabilities—his youthful appearance, for example, and the fact that, unlike Samson, he doesn't seem to have a girlfriend—help, hurt, and generally define him? Is his religiosity a vulnerability or a help to him in boxing?

ALTERNATE TEXT:

Sports stars have a unique ability to unite people. Why do you think that is? How does boxer Jim Braddock in *Cinderella Man* compare to Dmitriy in terms of their effects on the morale of the people?

Director Jason Hutt lists *Rocky* and *Raging Bull* as two of his favorite boxing movies, the later because it showcases the “beautiful and artistic portrait of a great fighter but flawed man” and the former “because it’s the ultimate underdog story but [also] because of its portrayal of the fighter-trainer relationship.” How do these movies seem to influence Hutt’s approach to Dmitriy’s story? And what do the three films have in common in terms of their portrayal of masculinity?

QUESTIONS:

- 1) There are almost no women in *Orthodox Stance*—the two worlds Dmitriy inhabits, boxing and Orthodox Judaism, are both very male spheres. How do the worlds vary in their definitions of what men are and what they should be and do? How does Dmitriy exist within both? Is he equally comfortable in both spheres: the one where he’s the only Jew and the other where he’s the only boxer?
- 2) After Dmitriy’s mother dies when he is around 13, the age where a Jewish boy traditionally becomes a man, Dmitriy finds God and starts boxing.

Jimmy O’Pharrow and Israel Liberow, his boxing and spiritual advisors, take their roles in Dmitriy’s life very seriously. Jimmy cautions Dmitriy to “stay away from beer and girls,” and makes sure his fights, to the extent possible, are free from both. (“I laid the beer down ‘cause I got a little Jewish boy and he’s religious,” says Jimmy.) Israel cooks for Dmitriy and fusses over him in their apartment. He also prepares Dmitry for fights using the traditional blessing given by parents to children on Shabbes: *May God bless you and guard you; may God make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; may God lift up his face to you and give you peace.*

Do Jimmy, Israel, and Dmitriy’s trainers Oscar and Hector function as mother substitutes? How do they color your view of Dmitriy? And how do they represent different archetypes of masculinity even as they play such a pivotal, typically-feminine part in Dmitriy’s life?

- 3) Hands feature prominently in *Orthodox Stance*. Dmitriy prepares his hands for fighting by wrapping them with tape and for praying by wrapping them with the black leather straps called *T'fillin*. What role do a man's hands play in defining him as a man and as a Jew? What role do Dmitriy's hands play in particular?

LINKS:

Film site: <http://www.orthodoxstance.com/>

Interview with Jimmy O'Pharrow: <http://vimeo.com/2434730>

Q&A: <http://www.myboxingfans.com/2009/01/q-a-director-takes-an-orthodox-stance/>