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Story last updated at 12:17 am on 12/21/2007

Filmmaker hails from OR, documents Mideast

By: John Huotari | John.huotari@oakridger.com

The West and Israel don't understand the Islamic world view and are making mistakes that lead to war, said Joel Gilbert, a filmmaker who grew up in Oak Ridge.

Believing that greater understanding could lead to less war, Gilbert has set out to explain the "reality of the Islamic world view" in a political documentary that he wrote and directed. The movie, called "Farewell Israel: Bush, Iran and the Revolt of Islam," is billed as an historic journey, from the birth of Islam to modern times.

"It's a wake-up call," said Gilbert, a 43-year-old who graduated from Oak Ridge High School in 1982.



Gilbert

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The documentary has been released on DVD, and it will be shown at 4 p.m. Sunday at the Beth El Synagogue, 101 W. Madison Lane. Admission is free, and Gilbert will be there for a question-and-answer session.

Other screenings have taken place or are scheduled in Los Angeles, where Gilbert now lives, as well as in Toronto and Tempe, Ariz.

Gilbert studied the Middle East and Islam at the University of London, and he has also lived, studied and traveled in countries like Egypt, Israel, Morocco and Pakistan. In a Thursday interview at The Oak Ridger, he cited examples of concepts like peace and freedom that he said are understood differently in the West and in Islamic countries.

Among other things, Westerners are not asking the right questions about the Middle East and they mistakenly view the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks as an attack on freedom. The main goal of the attacks was to change American policy in the Middle East, said Gilbert, whose parents still live in Oak Ridge.

"We have simplistic views of the world," he said. "It's a natural tendency to dismiss ideas and values that aren't shared."

But the dangers and consequences of misunderstandings can be great, Gilbert said.

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Middle Eastern peace agreements that are based on Western concepts are "irrelevant and doomed to failure," he said.

Gilbert, who is Jewish, said he is not promoting a political point of view but rather understanding.

"There's an Islamic world view, and they behave according to their world view for important historical and theological reasons," he said. "You have to step back and look at the world from their point of view."

The soundtrack to "Farewell Israel: Bush, Iran and the Revolt of Islam" includes Bob Dylan's band members. Gilbert, who is also a musician, has previously made documentaries on Dylan's life, music and career.

More information on "Farewell Israel," which runs about two and one-half hours and was released in November, is available at www.farewellisrael.com.

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