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## SEPIDEH--Reaching for the Stars

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# SEPIDEH--Reaching for the Stars

## **Abstract**

This is a film review of *SEPIDEH--Reaching for the Stars* (2013), directed by Berit Madsen.

## **Author Notes**

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).

***SEPIDEH—Reaching for the Stars***

(2013)

Directed by Berit Madsen

World Documentary

This is a charming film about a 16 year old high school girl from Iran, Sepideh Hooshyar, who wants to study astronomy and become an



astronaut. She shares her thoughts and feelings with Albert Einstein, by writing him letters. She is a bit embarrassed and apologetic for writing to such a famous physicist, but she needs his help in reaching her dream—reaching the stars. She loves to look at the stars because they bring her closer to the one's she's lost, especially her father. She also finds that when she looks at the stars she feels a calmness or serenity that her ordinary world does not provide.

What make this charming film powerful are the various forces that work against this young girl reaching her dream. Her family is not supportive. Their economic circumstances will not allow Sepideh to attend college. As a young woman she should not be out at night alone—her culture and religion do not permit this. But, when else are you going to see the stars? Sepideh is not only persistent but also rebellious. She will not let her culture and religion determine her future. But her uncle threatens to kill her if she embarrasses the family—a

matter of tribal honor. After making the threat, he says: “I mean it.” Sepideh is not deterred.

At one point, Sepideh writes a letter to Iran’s first female astronaut, Anousheh Ansari, telling her that she admires her for becoming an astronaut. Unexpectedly, Sepideh gets a phone call from astronaut Ansari, encouraging Sepideh to follow her dreams. In the end, the astronaut makes it possible for Sepideh to attend college and study astronomy and Sepideh is able to reach for the stars.

—William L. Blizek