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Maqom: A School for Adult Talmud Study Presents

A Talmud Tale

(A Musical)

Book by David Schechter and Ned Paul Ginsburg

Lyrics by David Schechter

Music and Additional Lyrics by Ned Paul Ginsburg

Literary Dramaturgy by Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams, Ph.D.

A Project of Maqom, Inc.

SHORT FORM SCRIPT

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A Talmud Tale is a project of Maqom, supported by grants from The Covenant Foundation, The Houston Jewish Community Foundation of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston and many other generous donors and foundations whose names can be found at Maqom's website: www.maqom.com and <http://www.maqom.com/musical.html>. Please contact Maqom (maqom@compassnet.com,) (713) 723-2918) for more information about the musical or any of Maqom's numerous on-going projects.

Producer's Preface by Judith Z. Abrams

"Shivkuha! Sheli, v'shelachem—shela hu!"

Said Rabbi Akiba to his followers: Leave Rakhel alone, for my Torah learning and your Torah learning are due to her.

(B. Ketubot 63a)

Who can learn Torah with joy? Anyone can! Especially when they have the support of their spouse. The quote, above, is said by Rabbi Akiba to his wife, Rakhel, telling all the world that it was she alone who saw that he could become a great sage and sent him off so that he could learn Torah.

This musical is meant to be a continuation of Rakhel and Rabbi Akiba's commitment to a joyful and engaging way of learning Talmud so that everyone feels comfortable. After all, Rabbi Akiba did not know the aleph-bet when he began his studies. So truly, anyone, no matter what their background, can learn Talmud with joy.

This musical touches on modern themes (e.g., parent-child conflict, ridiculously overdone celebrations when children reach maturity, rigid standards of "success" that reveal parents who see their children as extensions of themselves rather than as independent individuals). Then it shows how these issues existed thousands of years ago and how our ancient texts can help us navigate our own life's trials. In this musical, we meet them: our eternal support group. These ancient friends show us how to live honestly and faithfully, love romantically and passionately and listen to that still small voice inside us rather than to the loud chorus of voices that tells each of us, 'You can't!' Instead, our ancient friends sing out, "Anyone Can!"

This musical was designed to be an entertaining and educational way to introduce learners to the Talmud. From the start, I envisioned it being used by synagogues, Jewish Community Centers, Hillels, Jewish camps, youth groups, Jewish day schools and community performing groups. The script and score are accompanied with educational materials about the characters and stories referred to in the musical. These passages of

rabbinic literature can be found at Maqom's web page

<http://www.maqom.com/previous.html>. These passages, accompanied with explanations and discussion questions, can be used as a curriculum and then the show could be performed as a summary project of the course. They could also be used by performers who want to know more of the background of their character's life.

This is the one-act version of the show. (Longer and shorter two-act versions are available.) All three versions need only keyboard accompaniment although woodwind parts and guitar chords are included as well and greatly enrich the music. The show can be staged with very few performers or as many as you'd like. Adaptations to accommodate performers whose voices have not yet changed are also available in the score. (See the Composer's Preface for more detailed information.)

The musical's book is by David Schechter and Ned Paul Ginsburg, lyrics by David Schechter, with music and additional lyrics by Ned Paul Ginsburg. I know you will enjoy their brilliant work.

This project is supported by grants from The Covenant Foundation, The Houston Jewish Community Foundation of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston and many other generous donors and foundations who are listed at this website:

<http://www.maqom.com/musical.html>. Without their support, this project could not have been achieved. I am grateful for their generosity. Jeff Dine and others worked long hours to bring this show to you. I am deeply grateful for their generosity and devotion. For more information about this project, contact Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams, Ph.D., Founder and Director of Maqom at maqom@compassnet.com or (713) 723-2918.

Composer's Preface by Ned Paul Ginsburg

The score of "A Talmud Tale" is an amalgam of styles representing multiple influences in my life: American musical theater, jazz, Ashkenazi (Yiddish) folk music, and Sephardic music heard while I was a teenager living in Israel. Some musical choices came completely intuitively, others were made with a conscious effort to be inclusive of the wide sphere of music that the Jewish people have taken part in over the centuries.

This piano/vocal score is provided with a woodwind line and chords for guitarists. Some words of explanation may be helpful here:

Vocal lines/tempi:

The vocal lines have been notated in different clefs, depending on the range of the singer and the number of singers in a given song. This is SATB writing, for the most part. Occasionally I have provided lower, "optional" notes in melodies which are rangey. Transpositions of solos and duets are certainly possible. I have chosen to use tempo descriptions instead of specific metronome markings, trusting that musical directors will find tempi that work for the ensembles they are leading. Swing rhythms have been notated in simple eighth notes, with the understanding that the first eighth note gets two-thirds of the beat and the second eighth one-third. Dynamics are indicated, where necessary, above the staff.

The piano part:

The piano music is intended to be playable on its own, meaning, without woodwinds or guitar. There is a fair amount of melody doubling, and also, doubling of the woodwind lines. However, it was not possible to double every woodwind line in the piano part. Obviously if a woodwind artist is available (see below) the music becomes richer and more satisfying. I have chosen to leave out pedal markings since in my experience pianists tend to have an innate sense of where and when to use the sustain pedal.

The woodwind part:

In staged readings that were part of our developmental process, a woodwind doubler was employed who played flute, clarinet and alto sax. There is roughly an equal amount of flute and clarinet music. If local communities cannot find a suitable doubler it is certainly possible to use separate flute and clarinet players. I would not recommend having a flutist play clarinet music or a clarinetist play flute music. The alto sax is used in only two or three of the loudest songs, and it is possible (though not preferable) to replace the sax part with clarinet.

The guitar chords:

The guitar chords provided are intended for solo guitarists who are providing accompaniment for piano-less productions. There is a frequent use of extensions: 9ths, 11ths, 13ths, and suspended chords. A chord with a slash followed by a letter of the alphabet means “play that chord over a particular bass note.” To the extent that any guitarist can capture these harmonic features and subtleties, he/she should do so. Some harmonies may be simplified; a capo may be helpful on some songs.

Underscores:

There are a number of underscores in addition to the sung songs of the score. These are provided in some cases with repeats or safety vamps to cover unknown amounts of transition time between scenes.

Your feedback:

If you have performed any part of the score, and certainly if you are mounting or have already mounted a full production, I welcome your feedback. I can be reached through my e-mail address: ned@nyct.net

Ned Paul Ginsburg, composer

New York City, 2004

AUTHOR'S PREFACE by David Schechter

A musical is like a page of Talmud. It can be interpreted many different ways. One can pick out a variety of themes to emphasize. What is told can be taken as literal or metaphorical or both. Characters may be perceived as symbols or as actual living, breathing beings.

Like a page of Talmud, our musical, A TALMUD TALE, exists in several different historical periods simultaneously. First there is the modern layer, peopled by the bat mitzvah girl, Rachel, her family and friends. Their cultural perspective would be closest to ours, as present day students of Jewish tradition. Rachel's opening song, "So Many Questions," strives to give comic voice to the ambivalent struggle between the sacred and the secular in our modern Jewish world.

The next layer is ushered in by Rashi and Razi, both visitors from the different eras. They serve as guides and bridges between the modern and the ancient worlds, much as the commentaries of Rashi (which hail from the twelfth century) do on an actual page of Talmud. This historic figure and his companions woo Rachel into the past with a song comparing "An Open Book" to a door into other realms of learning.

Finally, the show leads us back to the First Century, C.E., the period of Jewish study and religious debate that existed right after the destruction of the Second Temple, a time of profound Jewish scholarship that gave rise to the Talmud in the first place. There we meet the fabled Rabbi Akiba, a shepherd until the age of forty, his beloved Rakhel, the legendary Rabbi Eliezer and many others.

The historical multi layeredness of A TALMUD TALE is intended to reflect the patchwork quilt of perspectives one finds in the Talmud itself, where opinions of rabbis from different centuries sit side by side on any given page.

Just as the stories and directives on a page of Talmud may be followed to the literal letter or interpreted metaphorically, so the production style of A TALMUD TALE may be historically specific and literal or as expressionistically abstract as the director and designers choose. Akiba's flock of sheep, for example, may be represented as anything from a group of small kids (merrily bleating) to projected film or slides of an actual flock, to the pantomimed apparitions of a skilled actor playing Akiba, accompanied by recorded or live sounds. I personally tend to be of the "less is more" school of theatrical design. Since the show shifts frequently from present to past and from place to place, I am inclined to suggest that a few simple props or pieces of furniture aided, if possible, by an inventive lighting design, can accomplish a lot with a little. But if the resources and desire are there, one could create a more elaborately designed representation of Akiba and Rakhel's ancient world and of Rachel's abundantly materialistic present day reality.

A TALMUD TALE can even work quite effectively as a sort of staged cantata, with all of the performers onstage and visible at all times, seated until they are called upon to enact a scene. This approach emphasizes the ritual nature of the event, connecting it in yet another way to the religious traditions it speaks about.

The show is written to be performed either by a cast of actors whose ages are appropriate to those of the characters or by a cast of imaginative younger performers in an educational environment. It is our hope that whoever performs it will feel their humanness enriched and their Jewishness deepened by putting on the robes, figuratively and literally, of this passionate and colorful array of characters, soaking up their history from the inside out, meeting them, as they themselves sing, "Halfway" between the present and the past.

I would be remiss to end this author's preface without offering my heartfelt thanks to my co-librettist, the composer of A TALMUD TALE, Ned Paul Ginsburg, whose discipline and creative gifts are of the highest order. And to Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams for inviting me to dive into the deep world of Talmud in the first place, where she enthusiastically and tirelessly guided me and Ned toward the wealth of theatrical

characters who live there. It was Rabbi Abrams who first had the wild and wise notion that we might find a way to express the voices of this soulful and ancient Jewish crew in song.

(David Schechter may be contacted via email:DLS54321@aol.com)

Cast of Characters
(in order of appearance)

FROM THE PRESENT:

ROSE COHEN, Rachel's mother
 RACHEL COHEN, 13 years old
 DAVID COHEN, Rachel's younger brother
 SARAH, Rachel's school friend

FROM THE PAST:

RASHI, a medieval Jewish scholar (short for Rabbi Shlomo bar Yitschak) (Note: Check the Jewish Encyclopedia's entry on "Costume" for his wardrobe, www.jewishencyclopedia.com.)
 RAZI, a timeless Jewish angel (short for Razi'eil, the angel of secrets, a woman in a long flowing robe of light blue)
 AKIBA, a shepherd, 40 years old
 RAKHEL, a wellborn young Jewish woman
 BEN KALBA SAVUA, Rakhel's father
 RABBI ELIEZER, head of a famous study house
 MEIR, a student
 MARTA, a wealthy Jewish woman
 STAMMA, a "voice" in the Talmud
 ANCIENT ENSEMBLE (playing assorted roles)

TIME:

Now and the First Century, C.E.

PLACE:

13-year-old Rachel's modern world and in the land of Israel as it was almost 2,000 years ago. (Note: the Beit Midrash should be a table piled high with scrolls and books and some chairs to sit on.)

List of Musical Numbers:

1. "Overture: Welcome to the Talmud"Chorus of "Ancients"
2. "So Many Questions.....Rachel, Rose, David and Sarah
3. "An Open Book"Rashi, Razi
4. "An Open Book (Underscore)"
5. "I Am Not Myself Today"Rakhel
6. "Both Sides Of An Issue"Rabbi Eliezer, Akiba
7. "An Open Book (Reprise)" ...Rashi
8. "Anyone Can"Akiba, Meir
9. "Both Sides of an Issue"Stamma
10. "Both Sides Of An Issue (Reprise)" ...Rabbi Eliezer, Akiba
11. "Halfway"Ben Kalba Savua, Rakhel,
Rachel, Mother
12. "Anyone Can (Finale)"Mother, Rachel, Ensemble
13. "Curtain Call: Welcome to the Talmud"

[Song: "WELCOME TO THE TALMUD!"]

(A lone voice begins the song in the dark and the singers set up the stage and make it "home.")

SOLO MALE ANCIENT

WELCOME AND PLEASE
CONSIDER IT HOME.

(Lights up as the singers dress the set. During the "mishnah" verse, the basic set pieces are brought in. During the "gemara" verses the extras are filled in.)

ANCIENTS

WELCOME TO THE TALMUD
WELCOME TO OUR CHOIR
WE COME TO ENLIGHTEN,
INFORM AND INSPIRE

THE MISHNAH IS THE BASE
A VERY HOLY PLACE
IT LOOKS YOU IN THE FACE
AND TELLS YOU THIS IS SO

IT'S THE ROCK ON WHICH TO STAND
A PLACE ON WHICH TO LAND
IT HELPS YOU UNDERSTAND
THE LAWS YOU NEED TO KNOW
(more people appearing)

ALL ANCIENTS

BUT CHORUSES ARE NOT ALL BASS
THERE'S OTHER VOICES, TOO
THAT JOIN IN THE CHORALE
OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A JEW...

SO, WELCOME TO THE TALMUD
WELCOME TO OUR CHOIR
WE COME TO ENLIGHTEN,
INFORM AND INSPIRE

WELCOME TO THE TALMUD
IT'S A MAGICAL TOME

OH WELCOME, AND PLEASE
CONSIDER IT HOME

FEMALE ANCIENTS

EMBELLISHING A THEME,
GEMARA JOINS THE TEAM,
CONNECTING ALMOST SEAMLESSLY
TO MISHNAH'S SONG

ALL ANCIENTS

THE TWO TOGETHER BECOME ONE
AND TALMUD IS ITS NAME
EMBRACE IT WITH YOUR HEART
AND YOU WON'T EVER FEEL THE SAME

ANCIENTS

WELCOME TO THE TALMUD
WELCOME TO OUR CHOIR
WE COME TO ENLIGHTEN,
INFORM AND INSPIRE

WELCOME TO THE TALMUD
IT'S A MAGICAL TOME
OH WELCOME, AND PLEASE
CONSIDER IT HOME

SO MANY VOICES
SO MANY POINTS OF VIEW
SO MUCH RHYME AND REASON
SO MUCH STUDY TO DO

SOLO FEMALE ANCIENT

SO WON'T YOU JOIN THE SONG?

SOLO MALE ANCIENT

AND WON'T YOU JOIN THE DANCE?

ALL

WE HAVE SO MUCH TO OFFER YOU
SO TAKE THE CHANCE

OH, WELCOME TO THE TALMUD
WELCOME TO OUR CHOIR
WE COME TO ENLIGHTEN,
INFORM AND INSPIRE

WELCOME TO THE TALMUD
IT'S A MAGICAL TOME
OH WELCOME, AND PLEASE
CONSIDER IT HOME.

[End of song.]

(RACHEL and her MOTHER, brother DAVID and friend SARAH are gathered around a table. They are hashing out details for her upcoming bat mitzvah.)

MOTHER

Well, that was the party planner.

SARAH

(Interested and curious)

Did you finally pick a theme for the party? Let me guess! American Idol, right? I wonder how much it would cost to have Simon, Randy and Paula come and judge the music and dancing?

RACHEL

(Gives her a look of withering contempt.)

SARAH

"Survivor!?"

RACHEL

(Rolls her eyes while shoulders sag.)

DAVID

Spongebob Squarepants?

RACHEL

I was thinking about something really original....a theme no one's ever done before!

(They hang on her words)

(Sarcastically) Tele-tubbies!

DAVID

You are too weird.

SARAH

(Trying to be positive) It *is* original.

MOTHER

(Sarcastically) Nice. (Now angrily) You know, when I was your age, most girls didn't even *have* bat mitzvahs. I certainly didn't. My father didn't think it was important. Oh, *bar* mitzvahs, sure! *Both* my brothers had them. But, not me. So don't go taking all this for granted!

RACHEL

Why can't that be *your* problem...not mine?

[Song: " SO MANY QUESTIONS"]

RACHEL

I just want to stop thinking about this whole bat mitzvah deal...that's my dream!

I'M DREAMING OF THE DAY WHEN IT'S OVER
I'M DREAMING OF A WAY TO SURVIVE
I'M DREAMING, LIKE JACOB, A LADDER WILL APPEAR
TO GET ME OUT OF HERE ALIVE

I'M DREAMING OF A MONTH IN ARUBA
BUT I'M SENTENCED TO A YEAR IN JAIL
THE RABBI SAYS TO READ BETWEEN THE LINES I SEE
BUT IT MIGHT AS WELL BE IN BRAILLE

AND THERE ARE SO MANY QUESTIONS
I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN
WHO'S THERE ABOUT
WHO CAN HELP ME OUT
OF THIS BIBLICAL MAZE I'M IN?

SO MANY QUESTIONS
AND ALL I CAN DO IS CRY
MAYBE I'LL GET LUCKY
AND DIE

(MOTHER appears, walking through, in "to do" mode with DAVID and SARA.)

MOTHER

We have a lot of choices to make..

(takes out a list, ticking off items)

We still have to choose the band, the centerpiece, the kippas...

RACHEL

THERE'S SO MANY THINGS TO BE "CHOSEN"
 IS THAT HOW THE JEWS GOT THAT NAME?
 WILL FRIENDS SAY: "HOW CLEVER,
 HOW CHARMING AND HOW CHIC!"
 OR WILL THEY WISH THEY NEVER CAME?!

MOTHER
 I'VE NARROWED IT TO SUSHI OR PRIMERIB
 BUT I'M STUCK ON CHOCOLATE MOUSSE OR FLAN
 THE CATERER IS COMING AT ELEVEN TEN
 AND THE FLORIST IS DUE AT ONE

AND THERE ARE SO MANY QUESTIONS

RACHEL
 (overlapping)
 SUCH POINTLESS QUESTIONS

MOTHER
 SO MANY THINGS TO DECIDE!

RACHEL
 I NEED A TACK
 TO GET OFF TRACK
 OF THIS ROLLER COASTER RIDE!

(The following all overlap.)

DAVID
 I know this awesome DJ! Want me to call him?

SARAH
 I heard this girl actually had 'N Sync at her party!

MOTHER
 Are you even listening to me?!

RACHEL
 SO MANY QUESTIONS!

ALL except RACHEL
 (singing in counterpoint)
 SO MANY QUESTIONS

RACHEL
 WITH NO ONE TO SHOW ME THE WAY

I'M ON MY KNEES
 WON'T SOMEBODY, PLEASE,
 CLUE ME IN ON WHAT I SHOULD SAY?

ALL except RACHEL
 SO MANY QUESTIONS!

THE MUSIC DAVID and SARAH

THE FOOD MOTHER

THE HALL MOTHER, DAVID and SARAH

RACHEL
 BUT IF THOSE ARE ALL THE QUESTIONS
 THEN IT LEAVES ME WITH ONE QUESTION:
 SHOULD I EVEN GET BAT MITZVAH'D AT ALL?!
 AHHHHH!!!!

[End of song.]

RACHEL
 Look, the rabbi told me the first draft of my speech is due this week and I have to study my Torah portion. So could you all please leave me alone so I can get to work?

(MOTHER, DAVID and SARA all exit. RACHEL shuffles through the papers on the table until she finds a booklet with the Torah portion in it.)

RACHEL
 (MUSIC "AN OPEN BOOK" under. She reads from the Torah portion Vayeitsei, Genesis 28:10-16, summarized here.)

"With a stone for a pillow, Jacob lay on the ground. And he had a dream. He dreamed of a ladder reaching all the way up to heaven, with a stream of angels climbing down and up it. And a heavenly voice promised to stand by Jacob always. When he awoke he sat up and said: 'Surely God was in this place and I did not know it!'

I just don't get this. Not at all.

(She turns her head heavenward and pleads with hands open wide)
 Help? Please?

(A magical musical chord strikes, a flash of fire and smoke and a ladder drops down out of the ceiling. From out of the smoke, RASHI and RAZI appear, coming down the ladder. RASHI is holding a book.)

RASHI

Let us introduce ourselves. I'm Rashi, a well-known commentator on the Torah and Talmud, if I do say so myself.

RAZI

And I'm Raziël—Razi for short—the angel of secrets.

RASHI

I'm down to earth.

RAZI

And I'm fun. (SHE produces a cloud of fairy dust or other special effect.)

RASHI

(RASHI rolls his eyes.) Could we focus on *her* for a bit? Let's get down to the diagnosis. Physical?

RAI

Looks healthy.

RASHI

Emotional?

RAZI

(Taking her time to read all the clues as to RACHEL'S state.) Frustrated, angry, confused and—just now—intrigued.

RASHI

Intellectual?

RAZI

An open mind, I think.

RASHI

Spiritual?

RAZI

Searching...as are we all.

RACHEL

You're searching, too?

RAZI

Once you stop searching you stop changing.

RASHI

And the only things that don't change are dead.

RACHEL

Well, you guys are dead, aren't you?

(RASHI and RAZI both shrug.)

RAZI

Sure, physically we're dead. But obviously we've alive for you.

RACHEL

Just for the sake of argument, let's say I believe you. Why are you guys so...normal? Shouldn't you be like coming down all serious and impressive?

RASHI

Well, you know what they say about why angels can fly.

RAZI

Because we take ourselves lightly.

RASHI

Got it?

RACHEL

OK. I can go with this for a while. So...you're here to help me?

RASHI

Indeed, yes. You asked and we responded....sort of like calling for a spiritual 911. And we're the emergency service...here to help you with your text, your relationships, your speech...and your soul.

[Song: "AN OPEN BOOK"]

RASHI

LET'S JUST SAY I'M GOOD AT READING THINGS
THERE ISN'T VERY MUCH THAT ESCAPES MY EYE
FROM A MILE AWAY, YOU WERE CLEARLY NEEDING THINGS
AND I CAN GIVE YOU WHAT YOU NEED, IF YOU'LL LET ME TRY

RACHEL

Try if you want. But it's hopeless.

RASHI

EVEN THE HOPELESS CAN KEEP HOPIN'
AS LONG AS THEY STAY OPEN

(HE opens the book of Talmud which HE brought down with him
on the ladder and which he is holding. He gives it to RACHEL.)

Don't judge it by its cover.

AN OPEN BOOK
IS LIKE A DOOR
TO TAKE YOU PLACES THAT YOU'VE NEVER BEEN BEFORE
IT'S LIKE A RECIPE FOR EV'RY DISH YOU'D LOVE TO COOK
THAT'S WHAT IT IS--
AN OPEN BOOK

YOU MAY FEEL STUCK
OR OUT OF PLACE
FEEL THAT A FROWN'S THE SOLE EXPRESSION ON YOUR FACE
STILL THERE'S A REMEDY TO ABSOLUTELY CHANGE THAT LOOK
AND HERE IT IS:
AN OPEN BOOK

RAZI

(referring to the volume of Talmud in RACHEL's hands:)
TALES OF ADVENTURE SO INVOLVING
YOU'LL LEAVE YOUR WORRIES FAR BEHIND
SECRETS TOLD, MYST'RIES FOR SOLVING,
KICK YOUR FEET UP, UNWIND!

RASHI

AN OPEN MIND
AN OPEN HEART
THERE CAN'T BE ANY BETTER WAY FOR YOU TO START
AND WE ARE HERE TO PERSEVERE UNTIL YOU
FINISH OFF THE TASK YOU UNDERTOOK
BY HOOK OR CROOK
THERE'S HELP IN THE LAND
AND IT'S IN YOUR HAND:
AN OPEN BOOK!

(MUSIC continues under.)

RASHI
YOUR TIME IS NOW

RAZI
NO TURNING BACK

RASHI
AND ALL THE SIGNS WOULD INDICATE YOU'VE GOT THE KNACK

RAZI
BUT IF YOU LOSE YOUR WAY, WE'RE HERE TO STAY
UNTIL YOU'RE OFF THE HOOK
BY HOOK OR CROOK

RASHI AND RAZI
THERE'S MAGIC AROUND
ALL BECAUSE YOU'VE FOUND
AN OPEN BOOK

RAZI
AN OPEN BOOK

RASHI
AN OPEN BOOK

RAZI
AN OPEN BOOK

RASHI
AN OPEN BOOK

RAZI
AN OPEN BOOK

RASHI
AN OPEN BOOK

RAZI
AN OPEN BOOK

BOTH
AN OPEN BOOK!

[End of song.]

RASHI
So...how can we help you?

RACHEL

(Tentatively) I do have this speech to write about my Torah portion.

RASHI

Yes, the proverbial speech! Wonderful!

RAZI

This will be *fun!* (More special effects)

RASHI

Now, to express yourself in speech means you've arrived at certain conclusions.

RACHEL

Yes, yes, but *I* only have questions!

RAZI

Wonderful! (More confetti/special effects)

RASHI

(HE points to the book in her hand. MUSIC under: "AN OPEN BOOK", grand and mysterious.)

This book, the Talmud, is a place where all your questions are welcome. It's like a beautiful land of words and stories.

RAZI

Of legends and law. Of arguments, (Crashing sound effect)

RASHI

And solutions. (Crashing stops)

RACHEL

(examining the book)

Is there anything in the Talmud that can help me write my speech? (Suddenly inspired)
Could it make my mom less of a pain?

RAZI

There's magic strong enough even for that in the Talmud. We just have to jump into the right page.

(RASHI and RAZI consult with each other.)

RASHI

We have parent/child issues, a struggle for independence, the search for meaning...

RAZI

We could go with the story of Rachel and Akiba.

RASHI

Perfect!

RACHEL

Wait! *I'm in there?!*

RASHI

No. This is another Rachel. From long ago. Let's use her Hebrew name, "Rakhel."
(*Pronunciation: rah KHEL*) Come, let's get going!

RACHEL

Where are we going?

RASHI

To Jerusalem, about 2000 years ago.

RACHEL

Wait! I'm not dressed...and what about my cell phone?

RAZI

(RAZI does some more magic and an "ancient" robe for Rachel falls from the ceiling.)

RACHEL

(Putting it on)

Thanks!

RAZI

(RAZI takes the cell phone and tosses it up to the ceiling where it disappears.) You won't need a cell phone in the first century.

RACHEL

OK, let's go!

(They all exit.)

(Magical time-travel MUSIC. The year is about 60 C.E. AKIBA, a shepherd, appears over a hill outside Jerusalem. A man in his forties, he is rough and weathered, but attractive. SOUND EFFECT: the bleating of a flock of sheep. The sheep are mimed. In some productions, directors may choose to have small children play sheep. Using his crook, HE ushers his flock across the stage. Before disappearing, HE notices one stray lamb.)

AKIBA

Don't daydream, little one, or you'll be left behind!

(HE ushers the little one off and exits. Enter Downstage RASHI followed by RACHEL and RAZI. RASHI is surveying the surroundings. RACHEL has put on the lovely robe. AKIBA sits down to rest and RASHI, RAZI and RACHEL sit behind him.)

RASHI

Okay, let's seat ourselves here. We're outside the city walls of Jerusalem around the year 60 C.E.

RAZI

And here comes our Rakhel now.

(RAKHEL, the well-dressed daughter from one of the wealthiest Jewish families in Jerusalem, runs on. SHE is in an agitated state.)

[Song: "I AM NOT MYSELF TODAY!"]

RAKHEL

AH---

AH---

HOW COULD I HAVE TALKED BACK TO MY FATHER?
HOW COULD I HAVE THOUGHT HE'D UNDERSTAND?
HOW COULD I EXPECT HE'D LET HIS DAUGHTER
GET COMPLETELY OUT OF HAND?

DID MY FATHER THINK IT WOULD BE EASY,
TRYING TO ARRANGE A "PERFECT MATCH"?
STILL, I REALLY OUGHT NOT TO HAVE CRIED OUT:
"I'M A WOMAN, NOT A CATCH!"
I AM NOT MYSELF TODAY! AH---

TODAY, I AM RECKLESS AND WILD
BEGUILED BY THE POWER I HOLD
TODAY, I'M NO LONGER A CHILD
AND I WON'T BE BOUGHT AND SOLD
OH-----
AH-----

PROBABLY HE'S WOND'RING WHERE I'VE RUN TO
PROBABLY THEY'RE SEARCHING FOR ME NOW
PROBABLY I OUGHT TO SAY, "I'M SORRY"
BUT I'M NOT AT ALL, SOMEHOW

AND IF THEY SHOULD FIND ME ON THIS HILLSIDE,

TELLING ME I'VE GOT SOME NERVE TO STRAY
 WHEN THEY ASK ME WHY MY FATHER'S DAUGHTER
 THINKS THAT SHE CAN ACT THIS WAY
 I'LL SAY:
 "I FORGOT MYSELF
 BUT I AM NOT MYSELF!"
 NO, I AM NOT MYSELF TODAY!
 AH-----

[End of song.]

(RAKHEL remains transfixed in thought; her arms folded, scowling.)

RACHEL

(absorbed in RAKHEL's story)

I know how she feels. You know, if *my* father tried to fix *me* up with some stupid guy, I swear, I'd stand up to him.

AKIBA

(AKIBA comes forward to Rakhel.)

Are you all right, miss? You seem upset.

RAKHEL

I am but I'm beginning to get a grip on myself. Excuse me, I forgot my manners. I am Rakhel and you are...

AKIBA

Akiba, the shepherd of Ben Kalba Savua's flock.

RAKHEL

You work for my father!

AKIBA

Really! Can I be of assistance? (Puzzled) I'd have thought a girl as rich and beautiful—excuse me, I didn't mean to be so bold—I just thought you'd have everything you'd want.

RAKHEL

As long as I want what my father wants I have plenty. Otherwise (she uses her hand to pretend a knife cutting her throat), uh-uh.

AKIBA

Well I hope you find what you want with your father's blessing. (Pause.) A high society match? Someone rich and, perhaps, even learned?

RAKHEL

How did you know? Did he send you out here to talk to me?

AKIBA

Not at all. I just overheard you singing.

RAKHEL

I feel as if he's forcing me into a marriage *he* wants instead of one *I* want.

AKIBA

You know, God is the best matchmaker.

RAKHEL

(Looking hopeful) Tell me more!

(They wander offstage with the sheep.)

RACHEL to RASHI and RAZI:

Do they get together? Do they just like each other or do they "like like" each other?

(RASHI and RAZI look blankly at each other and then at her.)

RACHEL

(With a "forget about it" gesture with her hands)
C'mon! Let's go see! Say, can we fast-forward in time?

RAZI

Your wish is my command! Say, three months later?

RACHEL

Cool!

(Time travel chord, sound effects)

(AKIBA and RAKHEL reappear, strolling together.)

RAKHEL

I have decided to stop resisting my father, and agree to be wed.

AKIBA

(Visibly disappointed but then collecting himself)
And who is the lucky groom to be? He must be a wealthy man for your father to approve.

RAKHEL

Did I say my father approved? How could he?...when he hardly knows you....yet.

(AKIBA basks for a moment in what she has said. Then a cloud crosses his face.)

AKIBA

Rakhel...your father will be so angry.

RAKHEL

(hushing him)

That's as may be but we're getting married and I'm going to go tell him now.

(RAKHEL and AKIBA exit while RASHI, RAZI and RACHEL watch eagerly, moving around the outskirts of the set.)

(SHE exits.)

(RAKHEL'S father, BEN KALBA SAVUA, enters, followed by RAKHEL. HE is wearing glorious robes and dripping in gold jewelry and sits on a throne-like chair.)

KALBA SAVUA

You have my attention.

RAKHEL

Thank you, Father.

KALBA SAVUA

(SHE hesitates.)

Well? What is it, Rakhel? Speak up.

RAKHEL

It's a subject dear to your heart. And one about which I know I've been very uncooperative.

KALBA SAVUA

(Clapping his hands together in delight)

Well, this is a blessed day! I must say, it hasn't been pleasant feeling, thinking I'd have to force you to wed. Who's the lucky groom?

RAKHEL

His name is Akiba.

KALBA SAVUA

I don't think I know him. What does he do?

RAKHEL

He tends your sheep.

KALBA SAVUA

(angrily and unbelieving)

You want to marry an ignorant shepherd? Have you completely lost your senses?

RAKHEL

You have to meet him!

KALBA SAVUA

I don't want to hear another word *about* him. My son-in-law will have the resources to provide a fine home for my grandchildren. And their mother.

(There is a tense silence.)

RAKHEL

Father, I am going to marry him...with or without your blessing. But I'd much rather have it.

KALBA SAVUA

If you marry him, as God is my witness, I will no longer have a daughter.

(HE turns and leaves. RAKHEL is shaken, but resolved. The throne is removed. After a moment, AKIBA appears. RACHEL, RASHI and RAZI continue watching from the sidelines.)

RAKHEL

(Thoughtfully)

Why couldn't he just say "yes"? Just one time, once in my entire life, why couldn't he respect my choice?

AKIBA

You know you cannot live for his blessing. Not if we are to marry.

RAKHEL

We'll have a different kind of blessing.

AKIBA

What kind?

RAKHEL

The blessing of Torah study. I want you to go to the Beit Midrash and study Torah.

AKIBA

Leave you? And go to the Study House? Why, I can't even read!

RAKHEL

I won't marry you if you won't go.

AKIBA
(doubtfully)

All right then.

RAKHEL

It's a deal?

AKIBA

Done!

RACHEL

Wow, she's brave! What happens next?

RASHI

We can only follow one part of the story at a time. Would you like to follow Akiba or Rakhel for now?

RACHEL

I think....Akiba.

RAZI

Buckle your seatbelt.. Here we go!

(BLACKOUT. Time travel music. Scene shifts to the Beit Midrash, some time later. It is late at night. RABBI ELIEZER sits studying a scroll. He is cranky, but lovable.)

(There is a knock at the door. RABBI ELIEZER shouts to be heard.)

RABBI ELIEZER

Who is it? It's late!

AKIBA
(through the door)

My name's Akiba. Please let me in!

(RABBI ELIEZER opens the door.)

AKIBA

Thank you for opening the door.

RABBI ELIEZER

What is it?

AKIBA

Are you Rabbi Eliezer?

RABBI ELIEZER

I am.

AKIBA

I'm honored.

RABBI ELIEZER

(HE looks skeptical.)

And I, Stranger, am exhausted. So please tell me why you've come. (Evaluating him.)
You don't seem like our usual sort of visitor.

AKIBA

I'm sure I'm not. I've come to study Torah, unlikely as it seems. Please, hear me out. (Rabbi Eliezer gives him a suspicious look.) I've been walking for days. I've already been turned away from three other study houses!

RABBI ELIEZER

Why did the others turn you away?

AKIBA

At the first, they said I was too old. The second, too dirty. The last one was simply too crowded. And they all gave me the same advice: "Go back to your flock!"

RABBI ELIEZER

(Shaking his head and then holding his head in his hands in disbelief)
A shepherd!

AKIBA

All my forty years.

RABBI ELIEZER

So why come to study at this late date? Mid-life crisis?

AKIBA

I've come because I've made a vow to my bride to learn Torah. How can I break my vow and be worthy of calling myself her husband?

RABBI ELIEZER

A vow to one's beloved is not something to be taken lightly. You are a wise fellow for knowing that at least. (Looking at him closely) You know the study of Torah is a life-long commitment. A road that only begins here at the Beit Midrash.

AKIBA

I'm a shepherd. Patience comes with the territory.

RABBI ELIEZER

You're an unusual man, Akiba.

(HE considers him a moment.)

I presume you can read and write?

(AKIBA doesn't answer.)

Or, at least...read? (AKIBA shakes his head.)

I begin to see why the others suggested you go back to your sheep. To begin from scratch at this late date...

AKIBA

I've never been afraid of hard work!

RABBI ELIEZER

I believe you Akiba. But there is another problem. Here at the Beit Midrash, everyone must have a study partner. And, considering you can't even read, with whom, in good conscience, could I pair you?

[Song: " BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE"]

RABBI ELIEZER

IN THE FIRST PLACE, YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING
SO WHAT KIND OF PARTNER WOULD YOU BE?
ON THE OTHER HAND, THAT COULD MAKE YOU CURIOUS
DYING TO LOOK AND SEE

SO ON THE ONE HAND, YOU MIGHT BE A BURDEN
A TRULY UNNECESSARY JOB
ON THE OTHER HAND, THIS COULD BE A BIT OF A MITZVAH
EVEN A GIFT FROM GOD

SEEING BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE
IS WHAT STUDYING'S ABOUT
YOU CAN NEVER KNOW THE ANSWER
TILL YOU'VE TURNED IT INSIDE OUT
LOOK AT BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE
AND BEFORE THE DAY IS THROUGH
YOU'LL SEE SIDES, AND SIDES OF SIDES,
YOU NEVER KNEW

(HE dances a little dance as HE sings a niggun)

LAI- LAI- LAI- LAI LAI LAI
 LAI- LAI- LAI- LAI LAI
 LAI- LAI- LAI- LAI LAI LAI

SO, SAY I TAKE A CHANCE
 ATTEMPT A DIFF'RENT WAY
 PRESUME THAT SINCE YOU'VE LIVED A LOT
 YOU HAVE A LOT TO SAY

YES, IF I TAKE A LEAP
 INTO THE GREAT UNKNOWN

AKIBA
 SINCE YOU HAVE ME WITH YOU
 YOU'RE NOT DOING IT ALONE!

RABBI ELIEZER
 Not alone...I like that! (Pause) How would you like to be *my* study partner?

AKIBA
 Thank you so much, my teacher and my friend.

BOTH
 SEEING BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE
 IS WHAT STUDYING'S ABOUT
 YOU CAN NEVER KNOW THE ANSWER
 TILL YOU'VE TURNED IT INSIDE OUT

START ON ONE SIDE OF AN ISSUE
 AND BEFORE YOU'VE REACHED THE END
 YOU MIGHT FIND THAT YOU HAVE FOUND
 YOURSELF A FRIEND!

LAI- LAI- LAI- LAI LAI LAI
 LAI- LAI- LAI- LAI LAI
 LAI- LAI- LAI- LAI LAI LAI!

[end of song]

RACHEL
 (A brilliant thought comes to her.) Say....if Akiba can get into the study house...could I?
 I even know my aleph bet!

RAZI
 (Special effect: a light bulb goes on over RACHEL'S head)

Now that's my kind of girl—one magical time travel ticket coming up!

RASHI

OK. When we enter the study house, you'll find Akiba seated next to Rabbi Eliezer. You'll take your place next to--

RACHEL

--my place?

RAZI

You'll take your temporary spiritual place next to Rabbi Eliezer.

RACHEL
(nervously)

Okay.

(AKIBA and RABBI ELIEZER reappear at the Beit Midrash. In mime, they are engaged in heated debate. The theme of "BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE" plays.)

RASHI

It's several months later. Akiba has learned to read and write, and he and RABBI ELIEZER are discussing Jacob's story. Relax, Rachel. And remember, this is a place where all your questions are welcome. Ready?

RACHEL
(taking a deep breath)

Ready.

(RACHEL enters the study house and cautiously moves closer to a seat next to RABBI ELIEZER and AKIBA. THEY don't seem aware of her yet. MUSIC out.)

AKIBA
(exasperated)

No, no, no, no. You still don't see my point!

RABBI ELIEZER

I'm listening!

AKIBA

It's simple. Jacob wakes up. He's confused. He's frightened. He's shaken by the power of his own dream! (HE smacks his forehead.) So he says, "God really must have been right here in this place, and how could I not know it?"

RABBI ELIEZER

Nu? How *could* he not know?

AKIBA

I...don't know.

RABBI ELIEZER
(HE chuckles.)

You don't know? Try this: maybe Jacob thinks too much about Jacob! So he is saying, "God was here all along, and the reason I didn't notice is I was too busy paying attention to myself!"

AKIBA
(impressed, bowing his head to say, "You win.")

(With these words, RACHEL feels moved and is poised to contribute to the discussion. Similarly, RASHI and RAZI, feeling compelled to be involved, move closer to the others.)

RACHEL

May I say something?

(RABBI ELIEZER and AKIBA turn and see her)

AKIBA

There are girls here at the Beit Midrash!

RABBI ELIEZER

Oh yes. Who are you, Child?

RACHEL

I'm Rachel...uh.... "Rakhel."

RABBI ELIEZER
(To AKIBA)

Your Rakhel?!

RACHEL and AKIBA

No!

RACHEL

Rakhel *Cohen*.

RABBI ELIEZER

Oh, a "bat Kohein!" (*"Daughter of the priestly class."*) Where are you from?

RACHEL

Lower Manhattan.

RABBI ELIEZER and AKIBA

Where?!

RAZI

(stepping into the fray)

Maybe you should ask her "*When* she's from!"

RABBI ELIEZER

You two again!

RASHI

Miss Cohen is a new friend of ours.

RABBI ELIEZER

And this is Akiba, a new friend of *mine*, since you last came.

RASHI

A pleasure to meet you, Akiba. The name's Rashi.

RABBI ELIEZER

One of our very active colleagues from...which century will it be again?

RASHI

From the year, 4850.

(turns to RACHEL)

Eleventh Century, C.E., as you call it.

(To the OTHERS)

And Rachel here comes some nine hundred years later.

RAZI

And I'm Raziel, Razi to my friends. Since I'm an angel, I've always been around.

RASHI

Show off!

AKIBA

What's happening!?!

RABBI ELIEZER

Don't look so stupefied, my friend. Torah study is quite unbound by time or space.

RACHEL

So...may I sit at the table with you?

AKIBA

Here, why don't you look on with me?

(HE shares his book with RACHEL.)

AKIBA

Could we go back to the beginning, Rabbi? Why does Jacob see God only in dreams?

RACHEL

(Raising her hand, as if in school.) I think I might have an idea why God could only talk to Jacob in his dreams.

RABBI ELIEZER

Go on.

RACHEL

Sometimes people just dig in their heels and they won't budge. But when they're asleep, their minds are more open.

(Pause.)

RABBI ELIEZER

I love it!

RASHI

Thank you. It's been a pleasure as always. Rachel, come. I think it's time we revisited the future.

RAZI

(An aside to Rashi)

Her present.

RACHEL

(to RABBI ELIEZER and AKIBA)

Thank you!

RASHI and RAZI

(to RABBI ELIEZER and AKIBA)

Shalom Aleichem.

RABBI ELIEZER and AKIBA

Aleichem Shalom.

(AKIBA and RABBI ELIEZER exit the Beit Midrash.)

RAZI

You may have messages to check on your cell phone. Seriously, you might want to see what's going on in your world. We have to go check in on ours. But don't worry. Just ask for help when you need it...and make sure it doesn't fall on your head when it comes down! (RAZI performs more magic, the ladder appears and "poof" RASHI and RAZI are gone up the ladder.)

(Scene to bring Rachel to present and put her back into modern clothing.)

(LIGHTS UP on RACHEL who is at home with her friend SARAH. They are talking about RACHEL'S adventures and her MOTHER'S recalcitrance.)

SARAH

How cool was that, traveling in time? Hey...maybe that could be your party theme! You could invite all the greatest people in Jewish history: Moses, Miriam, Golda Meir, Barbra Streisand. The sky's the limit!

RACHEL

You better go now. I have to figure out how to communicate all this excitement to my mother.

(SARAH leaves. RACHEL looks heavenward with outstretched hands.)

I need help!

(Special effects: the ladder comes down out of the ceiling and RASHI and RAZI appear with it, through the fire powder and smoke. RAZI holds the book this time.)

RASHI

You need help with your mother?

RAZI

She needs a touch of Talmud's magic!

(MOTHER, well-dressed, enters down left and faces audience. She is talking on a cell phone to a close friend, consulting her appointment book.)

MOTHER

(into phone)

Right! I'll tell her that she must acknowledge that this is a family affair, not just her day. Listen, thanks, sweetie, I'll keep you posted... Okay, bye!

(SHE pushes "end" on her cell phone. SHE dials a new number and begins a new conversation.)

RACHEL

She won't listen!

RAZI

She has to experience the magic of Talmud for herself. She has to go back with us.

RACHEL

(Sadly) She'll never do it.

RASHI

(sharply)

There is no other way!

[Song: "AN OPEN BOOK (Reprise)"]

OPEN HER EYES TO WHAT'S INSIDE HERE
SHE'LL BE SURPRISED BY ALL SHE SEES
NOTHING'S GAINED IF NOTHING IS TRIED HERE
SO BE WISE, DEAR:
SAY PLEASE

(MUSIC continues under.)

RACHEL

Mom, help me understand you. Please? (RAZI causes MOTHER'S appointment book to fly into RACHEL'S hands.) Well...at least it's a book we can open together.

RASHI

Rose?

MOTHER

(stopping in her tracks, looking around.)

RAZI

Rose Cohen?

(MOTHER looks all around. Still doesn't "see" RASHI or RAZI.)

MOTHER

Who's there?

RAZI

(stepping forward to where she can be seen)

Let's just say we're friends of your daughter.

(MOTHER sees RASHI and RAZI and for a moment is frozen with incredulity. SHE can't imagine who it is.)

RACHEL

Relax mom! This is Rashi, a great commentator on the Torah and the Talmud. And this is Raziel. (We call her Razi for short.) She mystical and magical.

(RAZI steps forward.)

RAZI

We were introducing Rachel to one of the great stories of the Talmud. Are you familiar with the tale of Rakhel and Akiba?

MOTHER

(Warily) I can't say that I am.

RASHI

Not a problem. May I fill you in?

(HE extends his elbow in a gentlemanly manner.)

MOTHER

Rachel?

RACHEL

What?

MOTHER

Is he--

RACHEL

--Yes, he's dead! Only right now, it's as if he's completely alive!

MOTHER

This is what I get for buying you *Harry Potter*.

RAZI

Think of this as a bit of temporary journey of time travel. You'll be back in no time at all.

RASHI

No real time.

RACHEL

Mom, do this for me. Please?

MOTHER

But I have an important meeting with the party planner.

RAZI

You'll be able to keep your appointment. And you'll have so much fun! It will take you away from the stress of planning Rachel's bat mitzvah for a while.

RACHEL

Please, Mom?

MOTHER
(acquiescing)

Well, I could certainly use a break from making all these arrangements.

(SHE accepts RASHI's arm. RASHI begins to slowly promenade across the stage with MOTHER on his arm, ultimately exiting.)

RASHI

Have you ever been to Israel?

MOTHER

Ages ago.

RASHI

We're going there but it really will be "ages ago." (Special effects, time travel music, Rachel's and Rose's costumes drop from the ceiling. RASHI helps ROSE put her coat on while RACHEL already knows how to do it herself. RAZI, RASHI, ROSE AND RACHEL all move to the side of the stage. Rashi explains to Rose.)

The year is now around 100 C.E., and Akiba, a former shepherd, is now a great teacher.

(Scene changes to the Beit Midrash, some "ancient" years later. Several books and scrolls lie open on the table. MEIR, Akiba's student, is frustrated.)

MEIR

Don't go over it another time. I just can't do it.

AKIBA

Yes you can. *Anyone* can!

[Song: "ANYONE CAN!" MUSIC under.]

MEIR

Anyone?

AKIBA

Anyone. (Thinking) All we have to do is organize it...make it easier to use.

MEIR

What are you talking about?

AKIBA
(HE sings.)

WHY SHOULD THE TORAH
BE KEPT FROM THE AVERAGE MAN?
WHO GAINS FROM TORAH?
ANYONE CAN!

WHY SHOULD GOD'S TEACHINGS
BE CLAIMED BY A PRIVILEGED CLAN?
WHO CAN BEST LEARN FROM THEM?
ANYONE CAN!

IF WE'D OPEN WIDE THE BOOK
IT COULD BE SUCH A BLESSING!
SHOWING PEOPLE WHERE TO LOOK
FOR GUIDANCE THAT THEY NEED
COVER WORSHIP, FARMING, FOOD,
THE FINE DETAILS OF DRESSING
I'M GUESSING,
BUT THEY JUST MIGHT FEEL FREED!

JUST AS WHEN MOSES
FIRST MOVED US WITH GOD'S HOLY PLAN,
WE CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS
IF ANYONE CAN!

MEIR

And what mountain would you have us move? Mount Sinai?!

AKIBA

I am serious, my friend. Just imagine a poor man picking olives on a Friday. Shabbat is coming soon, but he still has a lot of harvesting to do. So, he needs to know how late he is permitted to work. But, how's he to know when exactly Shabbat begins?

MEIR

Well, he could find the answer in the Torah.

AKIBA

He doesn't have a Torah scroll out there with him. And even if he did, he wouldn't have time to sift through it and find the answer.

MEIR

You have a point.

AKIBA

Now

(HE holds up his finger for silence. For a moment, HE is lost in thought, formulating a concept.)

...what if.... he had a book!?

MEIR

What do you mean, "a book?"

AKIBA

(both impatient and excited)

A book! Where all he had to do.... was turn to the section on observing the Sabbath....call it "Holidays" or "Seasons" and there's his answer!

MEIR

Is there such a book? I haven't seen or heard of anything like that in the Beit Midrash.

AKIBA

(emphatically tapping his own head)

It is here, My Friend!

(HE points to MEIR's head, as well.)

And *here!*

(HE sings)

ALL THROUGH THE TORAH
ARE LAWS LAID SINCE EDEN BEGAN
LIST HOW TO FIND THEM
SO ANYONE CAN

MEIR

(trying it on for size)

Anyone can?

AKIBA

HIDDEN IN HIST'RY,
THOSE LAWS COVER QUITE A WIDE SPAN
SHOW HOW TO LIVE THEM
SO ANYONE CAN

MEIR

(echoing)

ANYONE CAN!

AKIBA

IF WE PUT THEM INTO GROUPS
THEY'RE EASIER TO FOLLOW
SHOULD OUR PEOPLE JUMP THROUGH HOOPS

TO SIMPLY KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT?
 I SAY: SERVE IT ON A PLATE,
 IT'S EASIER TO SWALLOW!
 AND I KNOW,
 AFTER A TASTE, THEY'LL BITE!

LIFE IS CHAOTIC
 UNLESS YOU HAVE FAITH IN A PLAN
 SURELY GOD MADE ONE,
 AND WE'LL HAVE CONVEYED ONE,
 SO ANYONE,
 ANYONE CAN!

(HE begins to play-act.)

Say, Farmer!

(MEIR looks around. HE is confused.)

Yes, you!

MEIR

(catching on, after a moment)

Oh!... Yes?

AKIBA

Do you have that new book?

MEIR

The book... Why, yes, Neighbor,.... it's right here.

(HE pulls out imaginary "book." His play-acting is awkward.)

AKIBA

I need to know: shall I plant seeds next year or let my fields lie fallow? What does your book say?

MEIR

It says, well, let me look under--

AKIBA

--"Seeds!"

MEIR

Yes, "Seeds!" That would be a good place to find information on seeds.

AKIBA

I agree, but wait! Something's come up! In our oven, we found a dead cockroach!

MEIR

What a shame!

AKIBA

For the cockroach?

MEIR

For the oven! You'll have to make it ritually pure again!

AKIBA

Are you sure?

MEIR

(pointing to a new "spot")

Well, it says so right here. In..."Purities."

AKIBA

(as himself, for a moment)

"Purities!" Excellent!

MEIR

Where would you look to find out whether a chicken is kosher or not?

AKIBA

I'd look under "Holy Things."

MEIR

(humbled)

That's also good.

(MEIR, suddenly competitive, turns to yet a new "spot.")

Say, have you seen this section yet? "Civil and Criminal Law!"

AKIBA

And look how thick this one section is!

MEIR

What's it about?

AKIBA

"Women."

(THEY laugh together. AKIBA sings.)

AKIBA

(sings)
IF WE'D OPEN WIDE THE BOOK

MEIR
IT COULD BE SO EXCITING!

AKIBA
SHOWING PEOPLE WHERE TO LOOK

MEIR
FOR WHEN IT'S PRIME TO PRAY.

AKIBA
LIKE A LANTERN IN A STORM

BOTH
THE DARKNESS WE'D BE LIGHTING

AKIBA
IGNITING

BOTH
SOMETHING AS BRIGHT AS DAY!

WHY CAN'T THE TORAH
BE USED BY THE AVERAGE MAN?
WE'LL SPREAD THE TORAH
FROM S'FAT TO GOMORRAH
SO ANYONE, ANYONE CAN!
ANYONE, ANYONE CAN!

[End of song.]

(THEY exit. RASHI, MOTHER, RACHEL, and RAZI emerge from the wings. MOTHER separates herself from the rest, and goes looking around inquisitively. SHE becomes increasingly agitated during the following:)

RASHI
And so, in the months and years to come, Akiba and Meir continued to give shape to their ideas--

RAZI
--and others joined in--

RASHI

--Until they settled on the six sections, or orders, that, to this day, comprise the Mishnah, the basis of the Talmud we study today.

RAZI

Gemara is the rest of the Talmud.

RACHEL

(Smacking her forehead.) I get it! Akiba's not just *in* this book, (holding up the book that has been brought down the ladder) he *wrote* it!

RASHI

Yes, he began it. Then, people like me come along, and it keeps growing and growing.

(The tables, chairs and books disappear in smoke or other special effect.)

MOTHER

What happened to the table? And the chairs?

RAZI

They're gone. We've left the Beit Midrash.

RASHI

We go wherever Rachel leads us.

MOTHER

I see. Then...

(grabbing Rachel's arm)

...lead me home!

RACHEL

No! You have to see Rakhel!

RAZI

Rakhel is indeed an impressive woman, Mrs. Cohen. Not unlike yourself. You might be surprised.

MOTHER

All right. This I have to see.

RAZI

Your wish is my command!

ROSE

(to Rachel) I love the service!

(Special effect, travel music. ALL exit. Scene shifts to a small shop. RAKHEL is organizing, humming contentedly. SHE is surrounded by baskets filled with skeins of spun and dyed wool. A richly-dressed, haughty woman, MARTA BAT BAITUSI, appears in the doorway. The “Moderns” appear on the side, observing the scene.)

MARTA

Shalom, Rakhel.

RAKHEL

Marta, what a surprise!

MARTA

Are you open for business?

RAKHEL

I have never known *you* to do your own shopping.

MARTA

I wanted to see how you were doing.

RAKHEL

Never better.

MARTA

(looking around)

You needn't put up a front for my benefit, Rakhel. I do have eyes.

RAKHEL

(sharply)

And a tongue! I'm sorry. You didn't deserve that. (Pause) Now, what can I do for you? I have yarns of many colors.

MARTA

Why don't you give me...five skeins of each.

(RAKHEL begins to collect the wool.)

MARTA

You know, Rakhel, I have made some inquiries...and Rabban Gamliel says that this...marriage of yours...did not really “take.” It is could easily be annulled. After all, the shepherd abandoned you right after the wedding--if you can call it a wedding--without a single witness.

RAKHEL

God was our witness. And my husband did not “abandon” me. I *sent* him away to study Torah with my blessing.

MARTA

Your blessing perhaps, but not your father’s.

RAKHEL

Did he send you?

MARTA

We *are* friends, you know. And he’s so concerned about you!

RAKHEL

(Hotly) Well he can come and see me himself. (Sadly) I’ve tried to visit him. He won’t see me.

MARTA

Can you blame the man? You’ve humiliated him! You could have had everything! A house with gardens! And servants! Instead, you’re condemned to *this*!

RAKHEL

Not condemned...*blessed*!

(RAKHEL hands MARTA a basket full of yarns she has selected.)

MARTA

I just can’t understand you, Rakhel.

(SHE hands RAKHEL three large purses filled with coins.)

Here...will this be enough?

RAKHEL

(returning all but one of them)

I don’t need your charity, Marta.

MARTA

(Sarcastically) I’m glad to hear that.

(MARTA leaves.)

(RAKHEL throws down the purse of coins. MUSIC out. RAKHEL disappears. There is an awkward pause as RACHEL stares at her MOTHER. Finally, RACHEL speaks)

RACHEL

So?

MOTHER

It all makes sense.

RACHEL

Isn't she amazing! Thank you, Mom. I know you really didn't want to come here, but aren't you glad now that you--

MOTHER

--It makes sense that you would be so affected by the girl's story.

RACHEL

Huh?

MOTHER

The brashness, the flying in the face of common sense--

RACHEL

--wait, wait, wait! Are you saying Rakhel should have agreed to dump him?!

MOTHER

No, I'm just saying that I can see how you would think that Rakhel would be right to reject the annulment.

RACHEL

And you think she was wrong?

MOTHER

You want to know what I think? I think she's crazy! Is this your idea of a role model, Rachel? A woman who has to stay at home and support the man while he studies? And she clearly hasn't given a thought to how her poor father must feel. Imagine, raising a fine young woman and what does the daughter do? She throws all that good breeding away.

RACHEL

You *so* don't get it!

(A short pause. RACHEL and her MOTHER face each other angrily, with arms akimbo.)

RASHI

(Stepping in)

I can see we may have a difference of opinion.

RAZI

(Also separating RACHEL and her MOTHER.)

Those are fine in the Talmud. We just need to hear another voice.

Oh Stamma!
RASHI and RAZI call together:

RACHEL and her MOTHER stop arguing, surprised.

STAMMA

(STAMMA enters with great energy and eagerness.) Here I am! Ready to find a solution that will include everyone. So, what problem are we facing today?

Who is *this*?
RACHEL

RASHI
This is one of the Talmud's strongest voices. It's a voice that comes many centuries after Akiba and Rabbi Eliezer and it's quite distinctive. Just watch this demonstration!

RAZI
This is a rebellious daughter.

RASHI
And this is her embattled mother. How can we get them to coexist peacefully?

STAMMA
(sings "BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE")
ON THE ONE HAND, RACHEL'S SERIOUS
SHE'S TIME-TRAVELLED WITH YOU TWO
ON THE OTHER HAND HER MOM IS DELIRIOUS
TRYING TO SEE THIS THROUGH.

SO ON THE ONE HAND YOU COULD SAY THAT RACHEL
IS RIGHT AS RIGHT CAN BE.
ON THE OTHER HAND YOU COULD SAY THAT HER MOTHER
DESERVES SOME RESPECT YOU SEE.

SEEING BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE
IS MY FORTE EXTRAORDINARE
AND I HAVE A GREAT SOLUTION
THAT IS BEST BEYOND COMPARE

RACHEL LEARN FROM YOUR MOTHER
IT'S THE PROPER THING TO DO
MOM LEARN FROM YOUR DAUGHTER
YOU'LL FIND INSPIRATION, TOO!

(HE dances with both RACHEL AND ROSE as HE sings a niggun)

LAI- LAI- LAI- LAI LAI LAI
 LAI- LAI- LAI- LAI LAI
 LAI- LAI- LAI- LAI LAI LAI

(After dancing RACHEL and her MOTHER can't help smiling at each other. The STAMMA leaves.)

RASHI

Well done!

RAZI

(Emitting a cloud of gold stars) Four stars! Two thumbs way up!

RASHI

Well, now that we've cleared that up, I think we may want to go back to the Beit Midrash. They're seeing both sides of an issue there, too.

(RASHI and RAZI escort the RACHEL and Rose across the stage to the Beit Midrash. AKIBA and RABBI ELIEZER appear to be in the midst of an argument.)

RABBI ELIEZER

So, this is all about the wife, then?

AKIBA

Not just the wife. But yes, I want to see my Rakhel. Rabbi Eliezer, you're my teacher, my soul mate. But she is my heart mate and I miss her so!

[Song: "BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE (Reprise)"]
 RABBI ELIEZER sings:

THE DAY I TOOK YOU IN
 I NEVER WOULD HAVE GUESSED
 THE SHEPHERD WHO COULD BARELY READ
 WOULD SOON BECOME THE BEST

AKIBA

OH, HOW THE TABLES TURN

BOTH

JUST LOOK AT US TODAY

RABBI ELIEZER
YOU, INTENT ON LEAVING

AKIBA
YOU, ENTREATING ME TO STAY!

RABBI ELIEZER
(In a rare show of vulnerability) I'm going to miss you, too!

AKIBA
Me too.

BOTH
SEEING BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE
CAN BE PAINFUL FOR A FRIEND

AKIBA
WHEN ONE SEES A NEW BEGINNING

RABBI ELIEZER
WHILE THE OTHER SEES AN END

BOTH
THOUGH THESE PARTNERS NOW ARE PARTING
AT A PLACE THEY DON'T AGREE
WHEN YOU'RE GONE
YOU'LL STILL LIVE ON
INSIDE OF ME

(A clarinet continues the plaintive melody under.)

AKIBA
(extending his hand)
Well, I should go now, Rabbi--

RABBI ELIEZER
(interrupting)
Please, call me Eliezer.

AKIBA
(touched)
Eliezer...it has truly been an honor--

RABBI ELIEZER
(dignifying AKIBA for the first time with the title...)
--No, *Rabbi* Akiba...the honor has been mine!

(RAZI summons a scholar's mantel, resembling RABBI ELIEZER'S, from the ceiling and puts it on RABBI AKIBA'S shoulders.)

(THEY shake hands...then hug.)

[End of song.]

(BLACKOUT. RABBI ELIEZER and RABBI AKIBA exit. RASHI, RAZI, RACHEL and MOTHER move forward.)

RASHI

And from that moment on, Akiba-the-shepherd became Rabbi Akiba to all those who knew him.

MOTHER

What happens now?

RAZI

He will head to Jerusalem with many of his students.

RACHEL

And we're going. Right?

RASHI

Yes, but there are two ways to go. One, as dispassionate observers.

RAZI

The other, as passionate participants.

RASHI

The two of you must choose: either the first way...

RAZI

Or the second.

(RASHI places his hand on RACHEL's shoulder and gently nudges her towards MOTHER. RAZI does the same to Rachel's MOTHER.)

RASHI

Choose.

RAZI

Together.

(MUSIC under. RASHI and RAZI take a step back. RACHEL and MOTHER eye each other uncomfortably for a moment.)

MOTHER

We're better off watching.

RACHEL

No, Mom. Don't worry. It's a win-win deal. You have a chance to talk with ancient people. And when it's over, it's as if nobody even knew you were there!

(RABBI AKIBA enters wearing the colorful new robe RAZI conjured for him. He is followed by a weary MEIR. In mime, they carry on a heated conversation. One or two weary OTHERS trail MEIR. They are all carrying bags and walking sticks.)

RACHEL

(seeing RABBI AKIBA and MEIR)

Look! You see them there? You can't tell me you wouldn't like to just walk over and strike up a conversation. C'mon mom. Give it a try. Please?

MOTHER

(Gives a long doubting look, then nods, "Yes.")

RACHEL

All right! Major props, mom! Ahem! Rabbi Akiba?

RABBI AKIBA

(to MEIR)

Wait!

MEIR

What is it?

RABBI AKIBA

I thought I heard someone.

MEIR

You're always hearing voices. I hope it's God trying to convince you that we should stop and set up camp for the night!

(Pause.)

RABBI AKIBA

Right. OK.

(Clearly exhausted, MEIR slings his bag off his shoulder and eagerly sits down. HE signals OTHERS to sit. MEIR pulls out a gourd from his bag and drinks water. HE pours a little water on his face. RABBI AKIBA remains standing. HE is lost in thought.)

MOTHER

You see? He doesn't like us.

RACHEL

He doesn't *see* us!

RASHI

I'm afraid it will be difficult to engage Rabbi Akiba in conversation just now.

RACHEL

Why?

RASHI

He has a great deal on his mind. Word of the human caravan is spreading throughout the countryside. A large crowd is rumored to be congregating in Jerusalem to greet him. What will he say to the gathered masses?

RAZI

And more importantly, when he finally sees Rakhel, what will he do?

RASHI

And what of Ben Kalba Savua?

(RACHEL, MOTHER, RASHI AND RAZI stop talking to see RABBI AKIBA surreptitiously speaking to a messenger.)

RABBI AKIBA

It's a small yarn shop. Make sure to give it to her when there's no one else around. I don't want word to get back to her father. Not just yet.

(The Messenger nods and goes. LIGHTS UP to full revealing RABBI AKIBA beside a string of followers including MEIR and OTHERS.)

RAZI and RASHI to RACHEL

Where to?

RACHEL

Let's stay with Rabbi Akiba and his students for now.

RACHEL
(jumping out)

May we join you?

(RABBI AKIBA does a double-take.)

RABBI AKIBA

Do I know you? What village would you be from?

RACHEL

Village?

MOTHER

We're from Greenwich Village.

RACHEL

(An aside to her MOTHER) Way to go, mom! Rabbi Akiba, this is my mother.

RABBI AKIBA

Greenwich Village? Hmm, I once knew all the towns around Jerusalem.

MOTHER

It's pretty far away from here.

RABBI AKIBA

That would explain it. Care to join us? We will be entering the city tomorrow.

MOTHER

Certainly.

RABBI AKIBA

And if you wouldn't mind, I'd like the two of you at my side. Let all Jerusalem see that our followers come from near *and* far.

RACHEL and MOTHER

All right. (They "high five" each other.)

(RABBI AKIBA and his followers vanish as RAKHEL appears on another part of the stage, alone in her yarn shop. SHE has just finished reading the letter RABBI AKIBA has sent ahead and is dancing with delight.)

RAKHEL

At last!!

(MARTA BAT BAITUSI returns to the shop. SHE watches RAKHEL incredulously for a moment.)

MARTA

What are you doing?!

RAKHEL
(grinning mischeviously)

Oh nothing.

(MARTA stands awkwardly for a moment , unsure of how to interpret RAKHEL's mood.)

MARTA
Well...I have what I *hope* will be good news. When I told your father how dire your circumstances were, he agreed to take pity and help you out with a small stipend.

(RAKHEL is too ecstatic about her husband's imminent return to take offense.)

RAKHEL
(interrupting)
Marta, now I see that you really do mean well. Will you come with me?

MARTA
Where?

RAKHEL
(playfully teasing)
Haven't you heard? There's a great rabbi coming to Jerusalem! He will speak by the Western Wall this very day.

MARTA
I don't think that's quite my thing.

(RAKHEL grabs MARTA's hands and starts spinning her around.)

RAKHEL
--Oh, Marta, Marta! Come with me, and you *will* understand!

(RAKHEL threads her arm through MARTA's and escorts her out the door. The shop disappears, and the two women join others gathered in the streets of Jerusalem to hear RABBI AKIBA speak. As the scene opens, RABBI AKIBA is addressing the throng which includes RACHEL and MOTHER. There is a great burst of laughter from the crowd. His good-natured humor is winning them over.)

CROWD MEMBER
(shouting merrily)
No one told us the Great Rabbi was also a jokester!

RABBI AKIBA

Laughter opens the heart, my friends...and the ears! And now, a parable: One night, our blessed patriarch, Jacob, having fled from his brother's wrath, lay down, exhausted, in the wilderness. He could find only a hard stone for a pillow. But, so tired was he, that no sooner did he rest his head on it, than he began to dream. He dreamed of a magnificent ladder, connecting heaven to earth.

RACHEL

(aside, whispering)

Mom, it's my Torah portion! (MOTHER nods eagerly.)

RABBI AKIBA

I, too, had a dream--of another sort of ladder--one that also connects heaven to earth. And as a good ladder should, it will help anyone who needs a little leg up. When you climb it, and look back down, you will be able to see the very earth you trod upon every day with just a little more perspective. And the higher you climb, the more you will understand how your life on earth may best be led.

CROWD MEMBER

Where can we find this "ladder?"

MEIR

(excitedly)

It is a book! Of study!

CROWD MEMBER 2

A book?!

RABBI AKIBA

My friend speaks the truth. This "ladder" will be called the Talmud.

(RABBI AKIBA reveals a shiny book that he had been concealing.)

MARTA

But we already have five holy books. Why do we need another?

RABBI AKIBA

Why? (HE laughs.) Thank you for asking! So that everyone—not just sages—can see what's in the Torah. Why should the act of interpreting the holy books be given only to the scholars?

(Some hubbub among the CROWD.)

KALBA SAVUA

(loudly)

Because you can see what we cannot.

(Hushed silence in the CROWD.)

Or so we're told.

RABBI AKIBA

(holding up the book)

Yes, but with this "ladder" anyone can see as far as they wish.

MEIR

Anyone!

KALBA SAVUA

Anyone?!

RABBI AKIBA

(Looking him straight in the eye, with authority)

Anyone.

(KALBA SAVUA steps out of the crowd)

RACHEL

(whispering to her MOTHER)

That's Rachel's father!

MOTHER

(finding him appealing)

Very nice!

(KALBA SAVUA takes the Talmud book and reacts to how thick it is.)

KALBA SAVUA

This is an awfully big "ladder!" Aren't you afraid people may fall?!

RABBI AKIBA

People may...but the "ladder" won't! So, they can always climb back up.

KALBA SAVUA

(stepping forward again)

(Hesitating. He is not at ease with vulnerability.) So tell me, does this book show a way that two people—a father and a daughter, perhaps—who've been fighting for many years could be reconciled?

RABBI AKIBA

What were they fighting about...hypothetically?

KALBA SAVUA

She married a man who could never bring honor to her family name. She could have wed anyone in the land: a rich man or even a scholar. But instead, she chose an ignorant shepherd.

RABBI AKIBA

And where is she now? This daughter...with her ignorant shepherd?

(RAKHEL steps out of the CROWD.)

RAKHEL

She has come, with pride...

...to welcome the Great rabbi back to Jerusalem!

(Her eyes meet RABBI AKIBA'S. THEY are absolutely still for a moment, drinking each other in. Then, RABBI AKIBA smiles broadly and RAKHEL moves swiftly forward to embrace him. KALBA SAVUA is stunned to see her, and embarrassed by her apparent disrespect towards the Rabbi Akiba.)

KALBA SAVUA

Rakhel!

(A MALE FOLLOWER steps forward, between RAKHEL and RABBI AKIBA.)

MALE FOLLOWER

Woman!

(HE intercepts RAKHEL.)

Show some respect for the Rabbi!

(RABBI AKIBA moves to the FOLLOWER and gently frees RAKHEL from his grasp.)

RABBI AKIBA

No, my friend. It is *she* who deserves respect. For everything I am and all I have to give to you (holding up the book) is thanks to her.

RAKHEL

(Turns to KALBA SAVUA)

Father, don't you recognize your shepherd?

(KALBA SAVUA's face slowly registers his comprehension of the situation. HE falls to his knees and begins to sob.)

KALBA SAVUA

(to RAKHEL) Forgive me! (HE turns his face to RABBI AKIBA) Forgive me, rabbi!

(RABBI AKIBA helps him up.)

RABBI AKIBA
(gently)

Father.

(KALBA SAVUA regains his composure and turns to the CROWD.)

KALBA SAVUA
(proudly pointing)

My son-in-law!

RAKHEL
(to RABBI AKIBA)

My husband.

RABBI AKIBA
(tenderly taking her hand)

My wife.

MOTHER

My God! (SHE chokes back tears.)

(The CROWD surges forward to get a closer look.)

MEIR

Make room, everyone, please! A little privacy for the couple!

(The CROWD steps back. A magical musical chord strikes, as RASHI and RAZI step forward. The CROWD then disappears. Remaining on stage are RASHI, RAZI, MEIR, RABBI AKIBA, RAKHEL, RACHEL, MOTHER and BEN KALBA SAVUA. RABBI AKIBA and RAKHEL are holding hands, gazing at each other lovingly.)

RASHI

Excuse me, Rabbi. May we have a brief word with you?

MEIR

Sir--

RABBI AKIBA

--Let him speak.

RASHI

Rabbi, we have come a long distance to be with you at this moment.

RAZI

In fact, we have traveled across centuries.

RAZI

And we are all returning shortly to our respective homes. When Rachel returns, she will be entering adulthood through a distinctly modern ritual known as the bat mitzvah ceremony. Do you have any advice for her?

RABBI AKIBA

(gently)

Don't grow up *too* quickly! Take it from me, sometimes growing up slowly is nice.

(The ADULTS laugh.)

RASHI

But, there's more -- unlike her daughter, Rachel's mother feels that the bat mitzvah ought to include a lavish party, complete with a feast fit for a king and dancing. What advice would you have for her?

RAKHEL

(RABBI AKIBA looks at RAKHEL and nudges her so she'll answer the question.)

You don't need lots of extras to make a moment meaningful. (Glancing at RABBI AKIBA) My wedding was fine.

RABBI AKIBA

Now, we have, on the one hand, Rachel and her mother, and, on the other, Rakhel and her father. My shepherd's instincts are telling me that though they are all of the same flock they've strayed too far apart.

[Song: "HALFWAY." MUSIC under.]

RAZI

Oh, I think they're all well on their way to getting back together.

BEN KALBA SAVUA

(Understanding, and stepping towards RAKHEL)

And it isn't as far as I'd feared.

(HE spreads his arms towards RAKHEL, beckoning her to hug him. SHE takes a few steps away from him. There is a moment of discomfort between them. Her back is half-turned away from him as HE lets his arms down and sings.)

I TRIED TO LISTEN
 COULDN'T ALWAYS HEAR YOU
 HAD SOME SORT OF FEAR
 YOU HAD TOO MUCH TO SAY
 CRAZY TO BE FRIGHTENED
 BUT SOMETIMES WE DON'T SEE
 THE PICTURE, COMPLETE
 THE HONEY, SO SWEET
 BUT LOOK! WE CAN MEET
 HALFWAY

RAKHEL
 (to KALBA SAVUA)

I TRIED TO TELL YOU
 COULDN'T SAY IT NICELY
 CANNOT SAY PRECISELY
 WHY I WENT ASTRAY
 BUT YOU DIDN'T NOTICE
 HOW I LONGED TO BE FREE

RACHEL
 (to her MOTHER)

I TRIED TO TELL YOU
 COULDN'T SAY IT NICELY

YES, I'M DIFFICULT
 DID YOU EVER NOTICE
 I'M JUST ME!

(together)

STILL, LOVE'S THERE, YOU KNOW
 AND SUN MELTS THE SNOW
 THAT'S HOW I CAN GO

HALFWAY

HALFWAY

RAKHEL/KALBA SAVUA

HALFWAY TO HOME IS CLOSER
 THAN NOT GOING HOME AT ALL

RACHEL
 (to MOTHER)

HALFWAY'S A WHOLE LOT BRIGHTER,
 IT SEEMS, IF YOU'VE HIT THE WALL
 WE COULD STALL...

(MOTHER joins her.)

BUT WE'LL BOTH FEEL BETTER
 MOVING ON

KALBA SAVUA

MOVING ON

RAKHEL

MOVING ON

KALBA SAVUA/MOTHER
I'LL TRY TO LISTEN
MAY NOT ALWAYS HEAR YOU

YOU

BUT YOU NEEDN'T FEAR
YOU'RE NOT WELCOME TO STAY
EVEN AS YOU LEAVE ME,
YOU'LL TURN AROUND AND SEE

RAKHEL/RACHEL
I KNOW YOU'LL LISTEN
STILL, I WILL BE NEAR

STAY, I WILL!
EVEN AS I LEAVE YOU,

YOU WILL SEE

(all four together)

THE LIGHT IN MY FACE
MY HEART STILL WILL RACE
WE'LL RUN AND EMBRACE

KALBA SAVUA/MOTHER
HALFWAY

RAKHEL/RACHEL
HALFWAY

(MUSIC under.)

(RAKHEL moves to RABBI AKIBA's other side. SHE pulls RABBI AKIBA away, moving in the opposite direction from KALBA SAVUA, as HE stands motionless. After several steps, RABBI AKIBA stops RAKHEL, and with his eyes, "tells" RAKHEL to acknowledge her father. RAKHEL's eyes lock with KALBA SAVUA'S. As the MUSIC swells, RAKHEL runs to KALBA SAVUA'S waiting arms. After hugging each other strongly but briefly, they let loose, but still holding hands, sing:)

RAKHEL and KALBA SAVUA

HALFWAY

(MUSIC under, quietly. RAKHEL and KALBA SAVUA let go of each other's hands. RAKHEL goes to RABBI AKIBA; THEY exit. MEIR exits. KALBA SAVUA exits.)

RACHEL

So, that's it?

RASHI

There's more to tell, just, not now.

RACHEL

(A sudden and unwelcome insight hits her.) You're leaving, too, aren't you?

(RASHI looks over at RAZI, who nods.)

RAZI

Our job is done.

RACHEL

Thank you.

RASHI

Thank *you*. Shalom, Mrs. Cohen.

MOTHER

Shalom.

RAZI

Sha--

RACHEL

--Wait! Will I see them again? Will I see you again?

RAZI

(Lifting her eyes to heaven, smiling.)

You will....just ask for help when you need it.

(The MUSIC under pauses.)

RASHI

You'll find us...as long as your book is open. Shalom. (The ladder appears from the ceiling and RASHI and RAZI climb up.)

RAZI

(Just before she moves out of sight she says) Shalom.

(MUSIC resumes, as RASHI and RAZI disappear. RACHEL and MOTHER eye each other. RACHEL leans her head on her MOTHER'S shoulder. MOTHER strokes RACHEL's hair fondly.)

[End of song. LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.]

(The stage is quickly transformed into the "bimah" at RACHEL's synagogue, weeks later. At center, a lectern, behind which RACHEL stands. LIGHTS FADE UP. RACHEL is in the middle of giving her bat mitzvah speech.)

RACHEL

You know, a couple of months ago, when I was trying to get ready for today, I couldn't imagine what Jacob's ladder, or any other four thousand-year-old story, could possibly have to do with my thirteen-year-old life. Then one afternoon something magical happened. I asked God for help and before I knew it there was a ladder at my feet. Only this isn't a ladder that you climb onto physically. This one is for your emotions, your mind and your soul. I met a whole crowd of people who will be my friends, role models and teachers for the rest of my life. See, it turns out that some of their stories are an awful lot like mine. I guess history does repeat itself. But, you know, much as I treasure all of these new...old...friends....maybe the most important "new-old" friend I met there was an unexpected traveling companion: my mom. Not only do I want to thank her today but I also congratulate her, because she told me something that makes me just as happy and proud of her as I hope I've made her proud of me. She's decided to do something she couldn't do when she was my age: study for her own bat mitzvah! Congratulations, Mom! And thank you for everything. (To the congregation:) And thank you all for coming!

(Song: "ANYONE CAN (Reprise)" MUSIC under. The SARAH and ROSE COHEN join RACHEL on the bimah, RASHI and RAZI beam from the sidelines, atop the ladder.)

(MOTHER joins RACHEL on the bimah and they sing)

WHY SHOULD GOD'S TEACHINGS
BE CLAIMED BY A PRIVILEGED CLAN
WHO CAN BEST LEARN FROM THEM?

MOTHER/RACHEL

ANYONE CAN!

(THE ANCIENTS reappear and sing)

ANCIENT MALES
IF YOU OPEN WIDE THE BOOK

ANCIENT FEMALES
YOU'LL FIND US THERE INVITING

ANCIENT MALES
SAYING: "COME AND TAKE A LOOK!"

ANCIENT FEMALES

YOU MAY DECIDE TO STAY

ALL ANCIENTS
ARE WE STRANGERS WHEN WE MEET?

Add RACHEL
OR ARE WE REUNITING?

ALL
DELIGHTING THAT WE HAVE FOUND OUR WAY!

TORAH AND TALMUD
TWO HALVES OF A MARVELOUS PLAN
COME AND BE PART
NEVER TOO LATE TO START IT

RACHEL
AND ANYONE,
RACHEL/MOTHER
(smiling at each other)
ANYONE CAN!

ALL
ANYONE, ANYONE CAN!

[BOWS: WELCOME TO THE TALMUD]

WELCOME TO THE TALMUD
WELCOME TO OUR CHOIR
WE COME TO ENLIGHTEN,
INFORM AND INSPIRE

SO MANY VOICES
SO MANY POINTS OF VIEW
SO MUCH RHYME AND REASON
SO MUCH STUDY TO DO

SO WON'T YOU JOIN THE SONG
AND WON'T YOU JOIN THE DANCE?
WE HAVE SO MUCH TO OFFER YOU
SO TAKE THE CHANCE

OH, WELCOME TO THE TALMUD
WELCOME TO OUR CHOIR
WE COME TO ENLIGHTEN,

INFORM AND INSPIRE

WELCOME TO THE TALMUD
IT'S A MAGICAL TOME
OH WELCOME, AND PLEASE
CONSIDER IT HOME.