

"The Play's the Thing":
The Use of Creative Plays to Explore Biblical Text



Painting "Reunification" by Greg Schindler, Ink and Gouache 2006

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2009/5769

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Introduction

It is 2 o'clock in the afternoon on Yom Kippur. This is usually a sleepy time of day at most synagogues, a time when all but the most stalwart congregants have drifted off for a nap or a walk. But at Beit Chaverim Synagogue in Westport, Connecticut there is a buzz in the air and the synagogue has actually been filling up with people for the last half hour.

Makeshift curtains line the bimah. A man enters from behind one of the curtains, humming the theme song from the "Indiana Jones" movies -- "Bam-ba-dum-dum bam-ba-dum..." He beckons the congregation to join in, and they respond enthusiastically.

After a few rounds of "Indiana Jones" he announces, "Welcome to the Beit Chaverim Yom Kippur play. This year our play is entitled -- "Indiana Jonah"!

For each of the past nine years, I have written a play based on the Book of Jonah to be performed at the end of the *Mussaf* service on Yom Kippur. The shows are generally based on popular movies or television shows and the actors are members of the congregation. I have also written plays for other seasons of the Jewish calendar, including Chanukah, Passover, Purim and Shavuot. In some cases, these plays stay very close to the Biblical text, in others they follow the text but use current entertainment icons to carry the story, and in still others they take the events surrounding the holiday as a mere starting point for a more creative approach. I believe that these plays are part of the exciting growth in creative Midrash that can help to bring people closer to Judaism.

Part I: Rationale for The Use of Creative Plays

Getting Under the Table

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov used to tell this story:

Once there was a prince who thought he was a turkey, He sat naked under a table, pecking at crumbs. The royal physicians had given up hope of curing him, and the king was greatly distressed. One day, a sage came and offered to cure the prince. The king quickly accepted his services. The sage undressed and sat naked under the table with the prince, picking at crumbs.

"Who are you?" asked the prince. "What are you doing here?"

The sage replied: "And you, what are you doing here?"

"I am a turkey," said the prince.

"I am also a turkey," said the sage.

The two sat together like this for many days, and became friends. One day, the sage asked the king's servants for two shirts.

"What are you doing?" asked the prince.

"Where does it say that a turkey can't wear a shirt?" answered the sage. With that, the two of them put on shirts.

A few days later, the sage asked the servants to bring him two pairs of pants.

"What are you doing?" asked the prince.

"Where does it say that a turkey can't wear pants?" he told the prince. With that, they both put on the pants.

Then the sage requested some regular food from the table.

"What are you doing now?" asked the prince.

The sage said, "Where does it say that a turkey can't eat good food and still be a turkey?" And so, they both ate regular food.

Finally, the sage said, "What makes you think a turkey must sit under the table?"

The sage continued in this way until the prince was cured.¹

¹ Rabbi Nachman's Stories, Aryeh Kaplan (Transl), Breslov Research Institute (Jerusalem: 1993), pp. 479-480.

Why did the sage succeed where all the physicians had failed? Rabbi Nachman teaches that we can only reach people if we go to them where they are; if they are under the table pecking at crumbs, then we must get under the table with them.

So where are Jews today? While they're not under the table acting like turkeys, they also are probably not in synagogue. Surveys indicate that, in most communities, between one-third and one-half of American Jews attend synagogue either "Never" or "Only on the High Holy Days".² A 2006 Gallup Poll found that fewer than 17% of Jews claimed weekly synagogue attendance, next-to-last in weekly worship attendance amongst major U.S. faiths, and surpassing only those who claim "No religious affiliation."³ While most Jews enter the synagogue's doors at some time in their lives, many do not stay. While an estimated 75-80% of American Jews join a synagogue at some point in their adult lives, in 1999 only 46% of American Jews belonged to a synagogue.⁴ What happened to the other 30-35%?

"How to attract Jews into the synagogue and retain them as congregants?" has become one of the great questions in the modern Jewish world and a plethora of approaches have been advanced.⁵ As we explore what we should offer to potential congregants, perhaps we should examine what they seem to want when they are not in synagogue; in other words "to meet them where they are." And, in large measure, "where they are" when they are not in synagogue is seeking entertainment.

² Wertheimer, Jack. *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America*. New York: Basic Books (A Division of Harper Collins) (1993); pg. 48.

³ "Synagogues Must Experiment to Remain Vital to Jewish Life", Edgar Bronfman, JTA, March 28, 2008 (<http://www.thesbf.org/pdf/SynagoguesMustExperiment.pdf>).

⁴ Ron Wolfson, *The Spirituality of Welcoming*, Jewish Lights (Woodstock, VT: 2006), p. 16.

The average American spent nearly 2,000 hours watching movies or television in 2007.⁶ Meanwhile, 27% of Americans did not read a single book in 2007; a similar study from 2002 put the figure at 43%.⁷ If we are going to energize our congregants to attend synagogue, then one approach is to employ tools similar to those utilized by the entertainment industry. Rabbi David Wolpe has noted the benefits of innovative, entertaining approaches to Judaism:

*"At Sinai Temple we have instituted services that draw 1,000 people on a Shabbat morning and once a month, over 1,000 young people to Friday Night Live. It is through a combination of education, music and passionate preaching and teaching. There is no single, successful formula, but the best Jewish minds of our generation need support and aid in reversing this crisis."*⁸

Biblical Plays as Story

One of the reasons we appreciate the lessons of the "Turkey Prince" story is because it is a *story*. Rabbi Nachman understood the power of story, noting, "Many hidden meanings and lofty concepts are contained in the stories that the world tells...[P]eople may be asleep all their lives, but through stories told by a true tzaddik, they can be awakened."⁹ Humans seem hard-wired to learn from stories. According to Carol Ochs, story is at the heart of Judaism. In Our Lives as Torah, Ochs writes, "What the Israelites received at Mount Sinai was not simply the law, in the narrow sense of the rules and regulations, but the Law, in the full sense of the story of our people. The rules

⁵ See e.g., Ron Wolfson, The Spirituality of Welcoming and R. Sidney Schwartz, Finding a Spiritual Home, Jewish Lights (Woodstock, VT: 2000).

⁶ "Entertainment Industry Market Statistics", www.mpa.org/USEntertainmentIndustryMarketStats.pdf.

⁷ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/21/AR2007082101045.html>.

⁸ "Poll: US Jews Uninterested in Shul", Jerusalem Post, April 20, 2006

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1143498880827&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>.

⁹ Rabbi Nachman's Stories, Aryeh Kaplan (Transl), Breslov Research Institute (Jerusalem: 1993), pp. 8-9.

are embedded in the story, just as almost every story we know comes with implicit expectations and values."¹⁰

Jews have long experienced Torah as public performance of the story; the Torah has been read aloud to congregants for millennia. In the Book of Nehemia, Ezra reads aloud from a scroll of the Torah before the people:

"Ezra opened the scroll before the eyes of all the people, for he was above all the people, and when he opened it, all the people stood silent ...Jushua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelia, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah and the Levites helped the people understand the Torah, while the people [stood] in their place. They read in the scroll, in God's Torah, clearly, with the application of wisdom, and they helped understand the reading." (Neh. 8:5-8).

While Ezra read from the scroll, what were Jushua, Bani and the others doing? Most commentators believe that they were translating, explaining and expounding the Torah to make it understandable to the assembled people. This verse is often cited as the beginning of the overlap between translation (*Targum*) and exposition (*Midrash*). It is often hard to tell where translation ends and exposition begins, as the *Targum* is not merely a translation, but also an explanation and also an expansion of the Bible by means of story.¹¹

This method of presenting and explaining the text extended for centuries, as the reading of the Torah was simultaneously translated into the vernacular by a translator called a "*meturgeman*". The *meturgeman* did not limit himself to a mere literal translation, but expounded upon the Biblical text, bringing in stories, historical

¹⁰ Carol Ochs, *Our Lives as Torah*, Jossey Bass (San Francisco: 2001, p. 32.

¹¹ Strack and Sternberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, Fortress Press (Minneapolis: 1982 (orig. printing), p. 236.

illustrations and references to current topics.¹² The role of *meturgeman* and preacher overlapped, and the *meturgeman* may have included dramatic renderings of the text to render it understandable to the congregation.¹³

The creation of plays based on Biblical texts follows this long tradition of using story to help explain the text.

Biblical Plays as Midrash

Midrash is a process of interpreting Biblical texts.¹⁴ There are two basic types of Midrash -- *Midrash Halakhah* and *Midrash Aggadah*. *Midrash Halakhah* seeks to derive laws from Biblical texts. *Midrash Aggadah* is a broader category, including all the narrative literature, parables, ethical statements and homilies that have been developed based on the Bible.¹⁵ These two types of Midrashim highlight the creative tension in Rabbinic Judaism between the fixed (the law and practice) and the flexible (interpretation and theological underpinnings), where the fixed is more than offset by the open flexible.¹⁶ The Rabbis who wrote Midrash understood that the Bible is a *living* document; it can have different meanings in different contexts and it can respond to the particular challenges of each age.¹⁷

Further, Midrash helps to fill in the gaps in the Bible, as the Bible often does not describe the motivations, feelings and thoughts of its characters.¹⁸ What did Abraham think as he took Isaac to be offered as a sacrifice at the *Akeida*? What did Rachel and

¹² "Meturgeman," Jewish Encyclopedia, Solomon Schechter and Caspar Levias, p. 521; <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?letter=M&artid=523>.

¹³ Strack and Stemberger, p. 236.; www.storahtelling.org/june03strategicplan.pdf.

¹⁴ Barry Holtz, *Back to The Sources*, Touchstone (New York : 1984), p. 178.

¹⁵ Holtz, p. 178.

¹⁶ Lawrence Schiffman, *From Text to Tradition*, Ktav Publishing House (Hoboken. N.J.: 1991), pp. 187-188.

¹⁷ Michael Katz and Gershon Schwartz, *Searching for Meaning in Midrash*, The Jewish Publication Society (Philadelphia: 2002), p. 11.

Leah say to one another when their father Laban tricked Jacob into marrying Leah and not Rachel? Why did Moses try to convince God not to make him the leader of the Jewish people?

Midrash is no fringe activity. According to Barry Holtz, "In many ways it can be seen as the central enterprise of almost all Jewish religious writing until the modern period".¹⁹ Midrash has the power to be more engaging than any lectures on theology or Halakhah; indeed, stories involving Biblical characters are an essential entry point into Judaism and are especially effective in the ongoing Jewish "remedial education" program in the United States.²⁰

Over the last three decades, many Jews have turned to more creative modes of religious expression.²¹ Accordingly, we are witnessing a creative explosion in the field of Midrash as people try to make ancient texts meaningful to their lives:

- Women including Phyllis Trible (Texts of Terror), Ellen Frankel (The Five Books of Miriam: A Womans' Commentary on the Torah), Anita Diamant (The Red Tent), Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and R. Andrea Weiss (The Torah: A Women's Commentary) and Aviva Zornberg (The Beginning of Desire; The Particulars of Rapture) have helped introduce a chorus of women's voices to Biblical texts.
- "Storahtelling" has revived the tradition of the *meturgeman*, with music and story-telling to complement the Biblical text.
- Carol Ochs has sought to help people to ground their life experiences in Torah.²²

¹⁸ Holtz, p. 180.

¹⁹ Holtz, p. 177.

²⁰ Jody Myers, *The Midrashic Enterprise of Contemporary Jewish Women* (California State University, Northridge, p. 119

²¹ Jody Meyers, p. 122.

- Peter Pitzele has helped to create the method of Bibliodrama, in which a director/leader helps participants to inhabit the roles of Biblical characters and to give voice to these ancient texts.²³

It is within this creative midrashic explosion that plays based on Biblical texts falls.

Biblical Plays as Narrative Criticism

In recent decades, commentators have applied a variety of techniques to elucidate Biblical texts. These techniques include Historical Methodology (reading the Bible against the backdrop of history), Source Criticism (seeking the different possible strands of Biblical authorship) and Form Criticism (analyzing the standardized formal language utilized in Biblical texts). A new, broad category called Narrative Criticism emerged in the late 1970's. Among the methodologies utilized in Narrative Criticism is an analysis of the plot, the characters and the narrative arc of the story.²⁴ Actual reported speech provides further insight into the characters, their motivations and feelings. David Gunn notes, "What characters say and how they say it tell us much about the kind of people they are."²⁵ Narrative Criticism also examines the context in which the words are said and the actions that accompany the words. Gunn further observes, "Matching speech and action (as the narrator recounts it), or observing how speech and action are retold by characters, may enable us to see below surface simplicity to underlying complexity."²⁶

²² Ochs, *Our Lives as Torah*.

²³ Pitzele, Peter, *Scripture Windows: Toward a Practice of Bibliodrama*, Torah Aura Productions (Los Angeles: 1998).

²⁴ David H. Gunn, "Narrative Criticism" in McKenzie and Haynes, *To Each Its Own Meaning*, Westminster John Knox Press (Louisville, Kentucky: 1999), pp. 212-213.

²⁵ Gunn, p. 224.

²⁶ Gunn, p. 224.

The creation of plays based on Biblical texts may be placed within the large camp of Narrative Criticism. In such plays, the plot, characters, narrative arc, speech, context and actions of Biblical stories come to life before our eyes, thereby opening a window onto Biblical texts.

Biblical Plays as Education

"Educate a child according to his own path, and even when he grows old, he will not stray from it." (Proverbs 22:6).

One of the foremost questions facing Jewish educators today is how to teach children in ways that are meaningful and make a lasting impression. As the Proverb above elucidates, we must educate in a path best suited the student. In 1932, Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto, considered this verse and concluded, *"The education of each and every child must therefore be different, depending on his nature, mind, character, and all his other unique qualities... For what we are seeking is not the student's intellect alone; we are interested in the whole student."*²⁷ Today, modern educational psychology is coming to the same conclusion. Psychologist Howard Gardner coined the term "Multiple Intelligences" to describe the various mental abilities that a person may possess. According to Gardner, there are at least eight such intelligences, including linguistic, musical, spatial, logical-mathematical, bodily, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist; he even contends there may be a spiritual intelligence and an existential intelligence.²⁸

Educators need to address these various intelligences in educating students. In addition, students may possess a variety of cognitive and learning styles. Renzulli and

²⁷ Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, A Student's Obligation, Aronson (Northvale, N.J.: 1991 (orig. publ. 1932), p. 6.

Smith's Learning Style Inventory considers student's preferences for a variety of types of instruction including lecture, discussion, projects and games.²⁹ Other educators analyze as many as 126 different learning styles, including environmental factors, motivational strategies, physical characteristics, and visual versus auditory materials.³⁰ As Proverbs understood, there are as many learning styles as there are students. Effective education must provide opportunities to address multiple intelligences and various learning styles.

Learning through theater provides an opportunity to access an often-untapped mode of learning. Howard Gardner notes that drama reflects life and, in so doing, employs multiple intelligences in its practice; therefore, the process that drama models is useful to all students.³¹ Theater provides a means for students to make meaning about the world in an all-encompassing, holistic way.³²

Theater as a vehicle for learning is at the heart of Peter Pitzele's "Bibliodrama" method. In Bibliodrama, a skilled director invites participants to inhabit the roles of Biblical characters, using first person ("I") language. The director facilitates the action and moves the story along, prodding actors for the emotional reactions of the characters they inhabit. Bibliodrama helps to "flesh-out" Biblical personalities, presenting them as real live people experiencing real life problems. The approach presented in this paper differs from Bibliodrama in several respects. Where Bibliodrama is improvisational, the approach taken in this paper is to present fully-scripted plays -- we know in advance where the action is headed and the lines the actors will speak (although ad-libbed lines often add to the success of the play!). These plays share Dr. Pitzele's central goal:

²⁸ Woolfolk, Anita, *Educational Psychology*, Pearson (Boston: 2004), pp. 108-10.

²⁹ Renzulli and Smith, "The Learning Style Inventory", cited in Woolfolk, p. 121.

³⁰ Woolfolk, p. 121.

³¹ Salazar, Laura Gardner, *Teaching Dramatically, Learning Thematically*, New Plays Incorporated (Charlottesville, VA: 1995), p. 2.

*"Today and tomorrow the Bible will need teachers who are passionate as well as literate, savvy as well as scholarly, street-wise as well as book-wise, and who can, without degrading it, make the Bible come alive as living myth, relevant, disturbing, and still capable of taking our breath away."*³³

Creative Plays as Outreach

I have maintained above that presenting Biblical texts as creative plays may be justified as Story, as Midrash, as Narrative Criticism and as Education. However, in this era where attracting Jews to synagogue life has proven exceptionally difficult, presenting Biblical texts as creative plays may be justified on an even more important basis -- Outreach. According to Midrash, the tent of Abraham and Sarah was open on all sides so that they could welcome visitors approaching from any direction. Creative Biblical plays provide at least two additional tent openings -- for the actors and the audience.

When casting Biblical plays, I usually take two approaches: 1. I put out a general casting call for actors, emphasizing that no experience is necessary. 2. I approach people who I think might welcome the opportunity to participate in the life of the synagogue in a new way. People who can't lead services, or even read Hebrew, can still offer their skills to the synagogue in a semi-liturgical way. Participants in these plays often become much more active and committed members of the synagogue.

I also create interesting advertisements for the Biblical plays that are sent to Synagogue members and run in local newspapers (excerpts are provided in the plays that follow). Audiences for these plays tend to come from a different demographic than

³² Salazar, p. 7.

³³ Pitzele, p. 13.

typical synagogue attendees, with far greater numbers of children and persons unaffiliated with the synagogue in attendance.

In Part II of this paper, we turn to new creative plays based on Biblical texts.

Part II: Two Original Plays

Set forth on the following pages are two original plays that I have written and presented combining Biblical texts and popular culture.

In selecting a modern television show or movie to adapt to the Biblical text, I generally look for some connection between the ancient and modern texts. The following plays seemed like naturals. "Jonah-gan's Island" a play based on the Book of Jonah, utilizes the cast(-aways) of the 1960's television show "Gilligan's Island. "Star (of David) Wars" takes the Star Wars characters (Episodes 4-6 only, please) and imagines them as Jewish freedom fighters in the time of Judah Maccabee. The audience's immediate knowledge of the modern text helps them to access the ancient text: For instance, it is not much of a leap of faith to imagine Luke Skywalker as Judah Maccabee ... or even ship-wrecked Gilligan as Jonah!

Many choices are required in adapting the text to fit the modern characters without losing the text's essential meanings. The author needs to decide how much liberty to take with the Biblical and modern texts in order to honor both the ancient text's message and the audience's expectations for the modern text's characters. I often try to use actual quotes from the television show or movie to add to the sense of veracity. In the "old days", I would log many hours watching re-runs or videos to find such dialogue. Today, however, such quotes may be more easily located on the internet at sites such as "www.imbd.com" - the Internet Movie DataBase.

And now, without further ado...



Jonahgan's Island

“Jonah-gan’s Island” is based on the Book of Jonah and was presented on Yom Kippur afternoon. Here, I have stayed close to the Biblical account, but taken obvious liberties with the characters and dialogue, injecting humor in many scenes. The “Gilligan’s Island” characters seemed a natural to me for the story’s depiction of sailors suffering the perils of the sea. I attempted to retain Jonah’s essential themes of second chances and God’s Sovereignty over the whole world and all its peoples. The catchy theme song from Gilligan’s Island was easily transformed into an opening and closing theme song for the play.

Jonahgan's Island³⁴

[All signs in special Gilligan's island font]

Overture.

Narrator: Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale
A tale of a fateful trip
That started from a tropic port
Aboard a tiny ship

Jonahgan was a might prophet man
God's message to him came pure
"Tell the people of Nineveh to change their ways
Or they'll be sorry, for sure
Or they'll be sorry, for sure."

But Jonahgan tried to run away
He didn't think Nineveh should be spared
He hopped aboard the tiny ship
Yeah he was runnin' scared
Yeah he was runnin' scared.

So now its' time to begin our tale
We hope you get a smile

From Jonahgan	<i>[Jonahgan ENTERS framed behind lifesaver]</i>
The Shlepper, too	<i>[Shlepper ENTERS framed behind lifesaver]</i>
The Millionaire	<i>[Thurston ENTERS framed behind lifesaver]</i>
And his wife	<i>[Lovey ENTERS framed behind lifesaver]</i>
The movie star	<i>[Ginger ENTERS framed behind lifesaver]</i>
And the rest	<i>[Lifesaver Removed; Professor and Mary Ann ENTER and are MAD that there is no intro for them]</i>

Here on Jonahgan's Isle!

Scene 1

[Jonahgan ENTERS]

Jonahgan: I'm pooped from a hard day of prophesying.
I think I'll take a little snooze under this palm tree.
[FALLS ASLEEP. SNORES.]
[WAKES UP with a start. JUMPS UP to his feet. LOOKS all around.]
All right, who's there? What? It's God? THE God?

³⁴ © Greg Schindler 2008. All rights reserved.

BOOM! I mean I know there's only one and all, but ...

Ok, Ok.

But how do I know it's really God? Ok, here's a test: I'm thinking of a number between 1 and a thousand. What? 613? Yeah, 613, my birthday, June 13. Lucky guess.

Ok, try this: What's my favorite color. Green? No, it used to be green, but lately I've been partial to blue. But then again, I kinda do really still like green. All right, we'll call that a tie. One more test.

BOOM!

[Jonahgan DUCKS for cover]

Ok, Ok. It's You.

But what do You want with me?

What? You want me to go somewhere. OK, I could use a little vacation. Maybe the beaches at Eilat?

What? Nineveh?! Oh no, I'm not going there. Those people are really mean. The last time I was there they gave me mega-noogies. My head hurt for a week. *[Rubs head]*

BOOM!

[Jonahgan FALLS down]

OK, Ok. But what do I do there? What? Tell them to change their evil ways. Ooooh, they're not gonna like that.

BOOM!

Whoa, I gotta get outta here. I gotta get outta here.

[RUNS away, screaming]

Scene 2: The Port of Jaffo [Sign says "Port of Jaffo"]

[A sign post points one way and says "Tarshish and points the other way and says "Nineveh". An old sailor with a sailor hat, eye patch and corn cob pipe sits before the sign]

[Jonahgan ENTERS, running, arms flailing, screaming]

Jonahgan: I gotta get outta here! I gotta get outta here! Hey, which way is it to Nineveh?

Sailor: Nineveh's that way. *[Points per sign]*

Jonahgan: And where is that boat going?

Sailor: To Tarshish.

Jonahgan: Which way's Tarshish?

Sailor: That way. *[Points opposite way, per sign]*

Jonahgan: Then I'm going to Tarshish.

Sailor: Sorry. That boat's full. It's a tiny ship. But we do have room for a "mate".

Jonahgan: A mate? You mean like on Noah's ark. Like there's some beautiful woman who wants to marry me? *[Jonahgan is dreamy-eyed]*
Cool.

Sailor: No. Not that kind of a mate. A ship's mate. You work.

Jonahgan: And Nineveh's that way *[Points across chest]*

Sailor: Yup.

Jonahgan: And Tarshish is that way? *[Points opposite way, Twisting arms]*

Sailor: Yup.

Jonahgan: Then I'm your mate.
[Aside]: I'll be safe from God out on the sea. *[Arms still twisted]*

Sailor: One last thing. It's a three-hour tour.

Echo: A three-hour tour.

Jonahgan: *[Looks all around]*
Wow. Cool echo. Um, can you help untangle me? *[Arms twisted]*

[Jonahgan and Sailor struggle to untangle his arms; fall down, etc.]

Scene 3. Onboard the Ship

[Jonah ENTERS]

[Ship name is "Minnow-ra"]

Jonah: Hmm. Where is the boat? *[Looks around. Sees "Minnow-ra" sign]*
This must be it -- "the Minnow-ra"

Shlepper: Ooh. Ooh, Little buddy, I'm the Shlepper.
Are you Jonahgan, the new first mate?

Jonahgan: I don't know? Is there a last mate?

Shlepper: You mean the last first mate?

Jonahgan: I don't know. Is there a first last mate?

Shlepper: *[Flustered]* Well, no... I mean... *[Throws up his arms]*
There's just the one mate, Jonahgan. After all, this is a tiny ship. And this is only a three-hour tour.

Echo: A three hour tour!

Jonahgan: *[Looks all around]* Cool echo.

Shlepper: Here come the passengers. Help them with their bags.

Jonahgan: Well, that's not a nice thing to say, Shlepper. I mean, she may be an older woman, but I wouldn't call her a bag.

Shlepper: Their baggage, Jonahgan! Their trunks!

Jonahgan: Trunks? How are we gonna fit elephants on this boat?

Shlepper: *[Flustered]* Oh. Oh. *[Hits Jonahgan with his hat]*
Just help them on the boat, Jonahgan.

[Shlepper EXITS]

[Thurston. and Lovey Howell ENTER]

Lovey: *[Looking around]* Oh, Thurston! It's so much smaller than our yacht at Compo Marina.

Thurston: Now don't you worry yourself, Lovey. I'm sure it's perfectly safe. Why look at that mate – he looks like a mighty sailing man. And the Shlepper – he looks brave and sure.

Lovey: But Thurston, where will they put the bags?

Thurston: Bags, my pet? How much did you bring?

Lovey: Just the two steamer trunks, Thurston. After all, it's only a three hour tour.

Echo: A three hour tour!

Thurston: *[Looks all around]* Hmmm, you wouldn't think they could afford such a big echo for such a small ship.
Say, you there, boy. Come take our things! Here's a little something for your troubles. *[Hands Jonahgan some bills]*

Jonahgan: Yes, sir. *[LOOKS at the money]*
Wow! A hundred shekels!

Thurston: Yes, I'm sorry, my boy. I left the larger bills in my other wallet.

[Thurston and Lovey EXIT]

Jonahgan: *[Struggles to lift the giant trunks]*
You people sure brought a lot of stuff for a three-hour tour.

Echo: A three-hour tour. *[Jonahgan looks all around]*

[Professor ENTERS]

Professor: Excuse me, is this the scientific expedition to the geologic formations of the eastern Mediterranean basin?

Jonahgan: *[Slowly and Loudly]* I'M SORRY. I ONLY SPEAK ENGLISH.
CAN I HELP YOU WITH YOUR CASE?

Professor: No. I'll transport this myself. It contains invaluable scientific equipment that can create a short-wave radio from a coconut, seaweed and a matzah ball.

[Professor EXITS]

[Mary Ann ENTERS with two large bags]

Mary Ann: Oh, hi! Is this the boat to Tarshish?

Jonahgan: Yes, ma'am. Can I help you with your bags?

[Jonahgan lifts bags]

Mary Ann: Oh, you are sweet. I've saved all my money for this trip and ...

[Ginger ENTERS. Jonahgan sees Ginger, drops bags and stares at Ginger]

Jonahgan: Are you Ginger Grant? The famous movie star? Why you're my biggest fan, I mean you've seen all my movies, I mean can you help me with my bag?

Ginger: Oh, you 're so cute! *[Pinches Jonahgan's cheek]*

[Jonahgan takes her tiny purse. Ginger EXITS and Jonahgan FOLLOWS]

Mary Ann: Hrmmpphh! *[Hands on hips, she Lifts all the bags and DRAGS them offstage]*

Scene 4: The Storm

[All actors SWAY in unison to wand waived at rear of auditorium]

[Shlepper and Jonahgan ENTER stage LEFT in yellow raincoats and rain hats. The Howells, Ginger, Mary Ann and Professor are huddled stage RIGHT.]

Shlepper: The weather's starting getting rough!

Jonahgan: The tiny ship is tossed!

Shlepper: If not for the courage of this fearless crew!

Jonahgan: The Minnow-ra will be lost.

Echo: The Minnow-ra will be lost!

[Shlepper and Jonahgan look at each other, then look all around. They lose control of the wheel]

Shlepper: We better get below and warn the others!

[Shlepper and Jonahgan STRUGGLE to EXIT]

Lovey: Oh, Thurston! It feels as if the ship is going to be broken up!

Thurston: Don't worry, Lovey. We Howells are too rich to drown in a boat that doesn't have room service.

Professor: And I'm too smart.

Ginger: And I'm too beautiful.

[All look at Mary Ann]

Mary Ann: What? *[looks at everyone, palms upraised]*
What?!!

[Shlepper and Jonahgan ENTER. Jonahgan goes to SLEEP stage LEFT.]

Shlepper: *[Flustered]* Oooh, oooh. The storm is getting worse. Everyone pray to your gods to save us.

Lovey: Oh Thurston! Do something. I wouldn't be found dead without my good jewelry on.

Thurston: Money, don't fail me now. Here, make the storm stop.
[Throws money out of boat onto water]

BOOM!

Lovey: Oh, Thurston, it's getting worse!

Thurston: I knew I should have brought my wallet with the larger bills!

Professor: *[Looks up from his books]*
My science has never failed me. Shlepper, by my calculations, if we steer in a counterclockwise direction, we should be free of this disturbance.

Shlepper: Thanks, Professor.

[Shlepper EXITS]

BOOM!

[All are tossed. Shlepper RETURNS]

Shlepper: It's no use, Professor. It's getting worse.

Ginger: Well, the sea god Poseidon is a man, right? And no man can resist my charms. After all, my art has never failed me.
I'll just act the love scene from "The Trojan Woman".
I played Athena in the out-of-town run, you know.
[Dramatically] "May I address the mighty god Poseidon, whom Heaven reveres..."

BOOM!

[Ginger FALLS DOWN].

Ginger: *[Stands up, hands on hips.]* Well! I've been to some auditions where I didn't get the part, but you don't have to be so mean about it!

[Mary Ann RUNS IN carrying a pie]

Mary Ann: I baked a pie. This will appease the storm gods! My food offerings have always worked. And it's pareve!
[She TRIPS over Jonahgan and drops pie in Shlepper's face.]

Mary Ann: Oh no!

[Shlepper LICKS pie off face.]

Shlepper: Mmmmm. Pomegranate.

Lovey: Oh, Thurston, look at Jonahgan!

Thurston: Why the dear boy is sleeping like a baby with a trust fund.

Professor: It's scientifically impossible to sleep through such a storm.

Ginger: And no man can sleep through my acting.

Thurston: *[Crouches over Jonahgan]* Jonahgan, Jonahgan, my boy, wake up.

[Jonahgan wakes up]

Shlepper: Little buddy, how can you sleep so soundly? Get up! Call to your God to save us. We've all tried our gods and nothing has worked.

Mary Ann: It's getting worse!

Ginger: Wait, I was in a play once, Attack of the Killer Asparagus. And when they were being chased by the giant vegetables, they drew lots to see whose fault it was.

Professor: Ginger. I'm surprised at you. That makes absolutely no scientific sense. How can lots determine...

BOOM!

Professor: I'll get the straws.

[They each draw a straw. Jonahgan gets the short straw. They all look Jonahgan]

Everyone: Jonahgan?! *[They all point at Jonah, who backs away]*

Shlepper: Oh, oh. What is it, Little Buddy? Why is this happening?

Jonahgan: Oooohhh, Shlepper. It's all my fault. I was sleeping under this palm tree and then this voice came and then it was like BOOM, and then I heard God, and God guessed my number between one and a thousand and then God tried to guess my favorite color, only I just changed it from green to blue, but I still kinda like green, and ...

[Shlepper hits Jonahgan with his rain cap]

Shlepper: Jonahgan, get to the point! We'll all be swimming to Tarshish before you finish.

Jonahgan: Well, God told me to go to Nineveh, but I went the other way, to Tarshish on this boat. I thought I'd be safe if I ran away to sea.

Professor: Jonahgan, do you know what we must do to make the storm end?

Mary Ann: It's getting worse!

Jonahgan: It's all my fault. You've gotta pick me up and throw me into the sea. It's the only way.

Lovey: Oh, Thurston, the dear boy is delirious.

Thurston: Don't worry, Lovey. We'll get him the best doctors money can buy. Why I know a shrink up in Westport who's a veritable miracle worker. He straightened out my cousin Winifred who believed he was a chicken.
[PAUSE]
Then again, those were some of the best Eggs Benedict I ever had.

Shlepper: We can't throw you over, little buddy.
C'mon everybody, let's all try rowing as hard as we can.

Lovey: Oh, you can't mean manual labor!

Thurston: Shlepper, we Howells can't possibly perform manual labor.
I callous easily.

Ginger: And I just got my nails done.

Shlepper: We've got to try.

[All row. Ginger and the Howells halfheartedly. Jonahgan the wrong direction. Mary Ann with tremendous effort. They all STOP, EXCEPT Mary Ann who continues rowing. All look at Mary Ann]

Mary Ann: We can't move the ship at all. *[She is oblivious they all stopped]*

Professor: The storm is intensifying. I'd estimate these winds at hurricane force!

[Mary Ann looks around, sees all have stopped. She stops rowing, too.]

Mary Ann: *[Annoyed]* Hey!

Jonahgan: I told you Shlepper, you gotta throw me in. It's the only way.

Shlepper: Oh, oh, Little Buddy, we can't do it.

BOOM!

Shlepper: Oooh. Oooh.
God, if we do this, don't blame us. We're only doing like You said.

BOOM!

Shlepper: Everyone, do like Jonahgan said. Help me pick him up and throw him overboard.

[All lift Jonahgan and TOSS HIM into the sea]

Shlepper: Sorry, Little Buddy!

Professor: The storm is ending.

Ginger: Oh, I'm afraid of Jonahgan's God! He's more powerful than Zeus in Return of the Cyclops.

Lovey: Quick, let's offer a sacrifice to God

Maryanne: I know. I'll bake another pareve pie!

Shlepper: Ooh. I wonder what'll happen to the little guy.

Scene 5: In the Great Fish.

Jonahgan: *[Wandering around.]*
Wow. I can't believe I'm still alive. But where am I? And why do all these little fish keep washing in?
And P-U! It stinks in here. It smells like the Tarshish tar pits.
Hey, is that someone else? Hello? Hello?

[Gepetto ENTERS, SEARCHING, carrying a lantern.]

Gepetto: *[Looking around]* Pinocchio! Pinocchio!

Jonahgan: Hey, who are you?

Gepetto: *[Sees Jonahgan. Throws arms open wide]*
Oh, it's-a my little-a wooden-a boy! Pinocchio! I've-a found you at last!

[Gepetto runs over to Jonahgan. Hugs him. Jonahgan remains with arms at his sides.]

Jonahgan: Umm, I'm not your little wooden boy. And you're dripping all over me.
And you smell like everything else in here.

Gepetto: Well, you no-a smell-a like a roses youself.
Ah, I've-a gott-a to keep-a looking. Pinocchio! Pinocchio!

[Gepetto starts to EXIT]

Jonahgan: Wait! Where am I?

Gepetto: Didn't-a the Blue-a Fairy a-tell a-you? You're-a in a bigga fish-a.

[Jonahgan is SHOCKED]

[Gepetto EXITS]

[SIGN APPEARS: "3 DAYS LATER"]

[Jonahgan SITS. Hands on chin like "The Thinker"]

Jonahgan: What do I so now? I've been in here for days.
God, I guess I'm to blame for all this. You wanted me to go to Nineveh
and I ran the other way. But there's no running away from You.
I sure made a mess of everything.
You threw me into the sea. I thought I was a goner.
But You saved me and put me in this big stinky fish.
So I'm praying to You, God. Please be kind.
I'll bring offerings to You. And I'll do whatever You say.

[Rumbling starts. Jonahgan is SHAKEN.]

Jonahgan: Hey, what's going on? It feels like this big fish ate Shlepper's cooking.
Uh-oh, I think he's gonna blow.
WHOA!

[Jonahgan tumbles out onto the land.]

Jonahgan: *Wow! I'm free. I can't believe it. And I'm on dry land, too!*
[Sniffs shirtsleeve]
P-U. I better do something about these clothes.
[Looks up]
What? Who is it?
God? How do I know it's really You? I know, I'll make a little test.

BOOM!

Jonahgan: *Ok, Ok. But what do you want now. What?*
You want me to go to Nineveh?

Oh, alright, I'll go to Nineveh - even if they give me another dose of mega-noogies. *[Rubs head]*
I wonder how long it will take me to get there.

BOOM!

[Sign APPEARS: "Nineveh 3 Days ' Journey" with arrow]
[Jonahgan SEES sign]

Jonahgan: Wow! That's better than Mapquest! Three days, huh? Better get walking.

Scene 6: Nineveh.

[Sign says "Nineveh"]

Jonahgan: *[wearing a sandwich board sign saying, "Repent"]*
Wow! I made it fast! It only took a day and here I am. Now what do I call these people from Nineveh. Wait, I know.
[Calls out] Hey Nincompoops! Forty days more and Nineveh will be overturned!

[Person 1 and Person 2 ENTER]

Person 1: Who is that guy? Doesn't he know cardboard-sign wear is so last season. Hey, let's give him some noogies. *[Gets hand in noogie position]*

Person 2: Wait. He must be a prophet.... they don't care what they look like.

Person 1: *[Holds nose]* Or smell like.

Jonahgan: Forty days more and Nineveh will be overturned!

[Jonahgan EXITS]

Person 2: You know, there could be something to what he says. We better ask the King to declare a fast and tell everyone to wear sackcloth!

[Person 2 RUNS OUT]

Person 1: Oh, not sackcloth, it makes me look so fat.

[Person 1 RUNS OUT]

Scene 7: The Palace

[Person 1 and Person 2 ENTER, breathlessly]

Person 2: Your majesty, a prophet from God has come to say Nineveh will be overturned in 40 days!

King: How do you know he's a prophet?

Person 2: He's wearing a cardboard sign that says, "Repent".

King: Hmmm, cardboard sign-wear is so last season.

Person 1: And he smells like a man whose been sitting inside a great fish for three days.

King: He's a prophet, all right.

[King RISES from his throne. Removes his robe. Puts on shopping bag as cloak]

King: Then I must cover myself with sackcloth and sit on ashes.
Tell everyone in Nineveh,
"By order of the King:
Man and beast shall not eat or drink anything:
They are to cover themselves with sackcloth -- both man and beast -- and
let them call out to God: each person is to turn back from his evil ways.

Person 1: Um, Your Highness, about that sackcloth...

[King EXITS]

Person 1: *[Calls after King]* Your Majesty, don't you think something in worsted wool would be nice this time of year? Your Majesty?

Person 2: You think that's bad, he said sackcloth on both man and beast.
How are we gonna put sackcloth on the bulls?

Person 1: In two words: Very carefully.

Scene 8. The Outskirts of Nineveh

[Sign reads "The Outskirts of Nineveh"]

[Jonah SITS alone outside the city, DEJECTED..]

Jonahgan: Oh great. Everyone in Nineveh is running around in sackcloth and sitting on ashes and praying. I even saw a cow wearing sackcloth.
Sure. Now God has forgiven all those mean people of Nineveh.
It's just like I figured. I knew that You are a kind God, but how could you forgive a people that gives such powerful noogies.

[RUBS head]

So now God, just take my life. It would be better if I were dead than alive.
I'll just sit here under this hot, blazing, scorching, burning, fiery sun.
Oh, did I forget to mention that it's like unbelievably boiling hot out here?!

[The kikayon plant GROWS over his head]

Jonahgan: Hey, wait a minute. What's this?
It's a nice kikayon plant. It's a miracle. It must have come from God.
Wow, this is great shade. So cool and refreshing. Maybe I'll just take a little snooze instead.

[Jonahgan LIES under the plant and is CONTENT. He FALLS ASLEEP.

[He SNORES.]

[He WAKES and STRETCHES. Looks up at plant, SMILING.]

Jonahgan: What a great plant. I haven't slept that good in weeks.

[LOOKS UP. Worm APPEARS.]

Jonahgan: Whoa, what is that? He, you, get off of there! Hey, that's my kikayon plant!

DROOOOP! *[Kikayon FALLS OVER]*

Jonahgan: Oh no! My poor kikayon is gone.
And now that blazing sun is out again. Oh man, it's hot. Why it's so hot, I saw a dog chasing a cat and they were both walking. You could fry an egg on my forehead here.
Without my kikayon plant, life isn't worth living.

Jonahgan: *[Jonahgan LOOKS up]*
What's that, God? Am I upset about the kikayon plant?
You know I am. I loved that little plant. I can't go on living without that plant.
What's that God? How could I care so much about a little kikayon that I didn't plant, that I didn't make grow? That sprung up one day and was gone the next.
What, God? Shouldn't I care more about the great city of Nineveh?
A city with over a hundred thousand people in it.
Oh, you're right God. I'm the nincompoop, not them.

[Shlepper, Professor, the Howells, Ginger, Mary Ann and Professor ENTER]

Shlepper: Little Buddy, Little buddy, we found you!

Lovey: Oh, dear boy! Thurston, he's as roasted as a red pepper.

Thurston: Don't worry, Lovey. We'll buy the boy something cold, like Antarctica.

Jonahgan: Oh, Shlepper, you'll never believe all that happened.

Professor: *[Holding radio made of coconuts, seaweed and matzah ball]*
We heard it all on the short-wave, coconut, seaweed, and matzah ball radio, Jonahgan.

Maryanne: How you got everyone in Nineveh to change.

Ginger: You're a hero Jonahgan. My studio wants to do a movie about your life.

Jonahgan: I owe it all to God. God was really kind to the people of Nineveh. They all fasted and God gave them a second chance and they all gave up their evil ways and became good and don't even give noogies anymore, not even little ones. I've been fasting and I guess God gave me a second chance, too.

Mary Ann: Oh, you must be starved, Jonahgan. Here, I brought you some little fish to eat.

[She hands Jonahgan a pot. He LOOKS inside. SMILES.]

Jonahgan: My favorite! Yum! Kippurs!

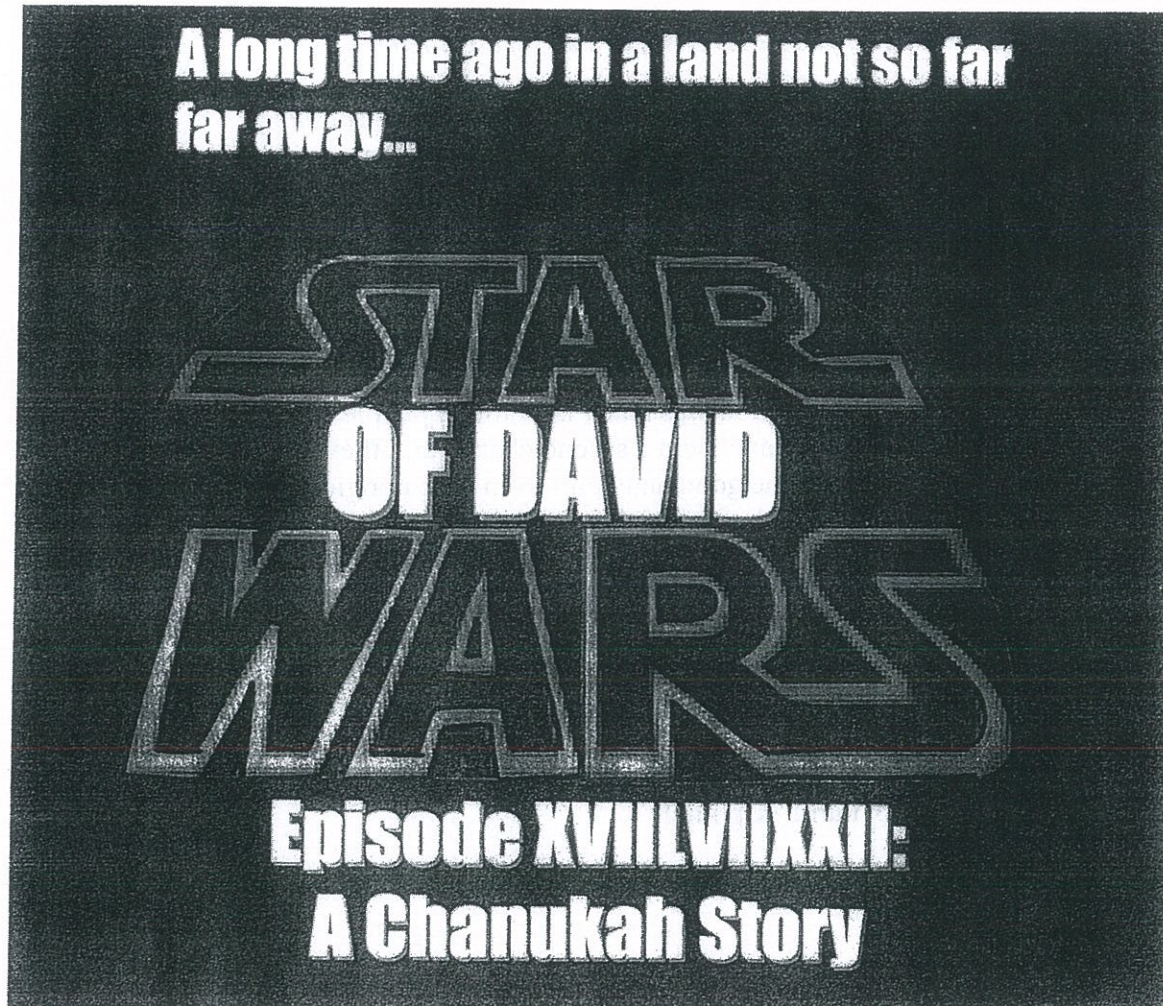
Grand Finale.

[All CAST ENTERS]

All Sing: So now our little play is through.
We hope we've made you smile.
Remember Yom Kippur's a day to change *[All SPREAD ARMS]*
HERE ON JONAHGAN'S ISLE!

-THE END-

Star of David Wars



Star of David Wars was presented on Chanukah. With its theme of rebellion by a small, devoted and religiously-led band against an oppressive empire, Star Wars has great consonance with the themes of the Chanukah. Here, the text was the apocryphal Book of Maccabees. I have attempted to follow the main themes and utilize many of the characters of the Book, albeit with great license for general mischief and fun. Here I have also incorporated music into the play, re-writing the lyrics to familiar tunes.

Star of David Wars³⁵

Prologue

*[Aide carries in a scroll that looks like a Torah.
Aide turns it so it reads up and down and begins to unroll scroll so scroll faces audience.]*

Narrator: "A long time ago in a land not so far away...

*[Star Wars theme music begins.]
[Narrator READS as scroll unfurls]*

Narrator: "Star of David Wars
Episode XVIII LVXXII:
A Chanukah Story"
"It is a period of civil war.
Alexander the Great, conqueror of the ancient world and friend of the
Jewish people, has died and his Empire is divided among his generals.
Israel has been added to the Empire of the evil king Darthiokus who is not
content merely to accept the taxes of the Jewish people.

[Scroll UNROLLS FASTER and Narrator has trouble keeping up]

Darthiokus wants the Jews to lay aside their Torah and religion and, in
their place, substitute Syrian Greek culture and Syrian Greek idols.
Many Jews submit, but some courageous rebel remain loyal to their faith."

SCENE 1: Darthiokus' Headquarters

*[Darth Music Plays]
[Darth stands to one side while two Guards hold Chan's arms]*

Darth: So, Chana, you refuse to bow to my idols and join me on the Darth side?

Chana: Never! I'm a Jew and I'll never give up my faith.

Darth: I find your kind of faith disturbing.

Chana: You'll never win. You're evil!

Darth: Evil I live! But your people shall die.

³⁵ © Greg Schindler 2008. All rights reserved.

Guard 1: Say, that's a palindrome.

Darth: What?

Guard 1: "Evil I live." It's a palindrome.
You know, a sentence that reads the same forwards as backwards.
See -- *[He walks over to a big pad on an easel and writes, "Evil I live"]*
"Evil I live" -- works the same forwards as backwards.
You said a palindrome.

Darth: I did, did I?

Guard 1: Hey, that's another one!

Darth: Enough!

Guard 2: I've got one: "Madam I'm Adam".

Guard 1: Right!

Darth: Silence, fools, silence!

Guard: Close, but no cigar, O Microphoned One.
You see, a lot of people think that's a palindrome but it isn't. Every individual letter has to be read backwards, not just the whole word...

[Guard 1 stops in mid-sentence and starts to choke, grabbing his throat as Darth holds out his hand and telepathically chokes Guard 1 from several feet away]

*[Meanwhile, Chana SNEAKS AWAY and RJewDJew ENTERS.
Chana crouches next to RJDJew and gives him something.
RJewDJew EXITS.]*

Darth: She's getting away! She has the plans for the Death Fort in Jerusalem!
Get her!

*[Darth LOWERS HIS ARM and Guard 1 falls to floor. Guard 1 rubs throat, then gets up to chase Chana. Guards 1 and 2 bump into one another, etc.
Finally, Guard 1 captures Chana and hands her over to Guard 2.]*

Darth: And get her drone!

Guard 1: *[He starts to run, then turns and says]*
Again, it's "palindrome" sir, not drone.

Darth: Go!

[Guard 1 runs out]

Darth: You will find, Chana, that it is pointless to resist.

[Guard 1 returns]

Guard 1: The drone got away sir. But my men will catch it.

Darth: They had better.
 Now I will put my evil plan into effect.
 I will force the Jews to give up their faith and come over to the Darth side.

Chana: You can kill me, Darthiokus, but you will never kill Judaism.

Darth: I have other plans for you. I will keep you as an example to all those pesky Jews who refuse to do my bidding. Take her away.

[Guard 1, Guard 2 and Chana EXIT]

SCENE 2: THE CITY OF MO'DIN IN ISRAEL

[Skywalker Music Plays]

[Judah Skywalker ENTERS]

Judah: The Syrian Greeks are taking over everything. They forbid the study of Torah.

 I want to fight, but my father tells me I'm too young.

[RJWDJEW ENTERS]

RJDJ: *[making noises]*

Judah: Say, what is this thing? *[Judah examines RJDJ]*
 It says here that this is an "RJWDJEW unit". Hmm, what's this switch?

[Judah pokes at RJDJ; Chana ENTERS: RBJJ shines a light on her]

Chana: Help me, Obi Wan. You're our only hope.

[Judah goes over to touch her, but she is not real]

Chana: *[she repeats, exactly as before]* Help me, Obi Wan. You're our only hope.

Judah: Wow. She's some kind of hieroglyphics or something.
 I wonder if I can play the whole message.

[Judah pushes a button on RJDJ and Chana EXITS; RJDJ light on her goes out]

Judah: Hey! Where'd she go? I better show this to Dad.

[Judah runs out calling]

Judah: Dad!

[Kenobiah and Judah ENTER]

Judah: Dad, here it is. It's called RJewDJew and I saw it play part of a message.

[Kenobiah examines RJDJ; Pokes at RJDJ]

Kenobiah: I think I found it. *[Removes a Challah from RJDJ]*

Judah: What is it?

Kenobiah: It's a challah-gram. *[sound of drum rim shot]*
Let's play the whole thing.

[RJDJ shines flashlight on Chana as Chana ENTERS]

Chana: Obi-Wan, your whole life you have been a Kohain, a member of the Jewish priestly class... Aw, this speech is boring. I'd rather sing it!

[To Music of "Help Me Rhonda"³⁶]

Chana: So many years now, you're the best priest we ever had.
But now we need your help, cause the Empire's really bad.
Well Obi we're desperate this time
And I really don't want to whine.
You gotta help me Obi, help me get outta this bind.

CHORUS: *[RJDJ dances during chorus]*

Help me Obi, help help me Obi
Help me Obi, help help me Obi
Help me Obi, help help me Obi
Help me Obi, help help me Obi
Help me Obi, help help me Obi
Help me Obi, help help me Obi

This is RJewDJew, you gotta learn from him what you can
The Jews really need him
Cause he has the stolen Death Fort plans

³⁶ After "Help Me Obi_Wan" at TheForce.Net
(http://www.theforce.net/humor/music/h_mus_bf_helpme.asp)

This is our most desperate hour
Cause the Empire's got all the power
You gotta help me Obi help me 'fore they make us cower.

CHORUS: *[RJDJ dances during chorus]*
Help me Obi, help help me Obi
Help me Obi, help help me Obi
Help me Obi, help help me Obi
Help me Obi, help help me Obi
Help me Obi, help help me Obi
Help me Obi, help help me Obi
Help me Ob Wan, you're our only hope!

*[Chana ends song pleading on her knees.
Chana EXITS as RJDJ Flashlight goes out]*

Judah: Who is this Obi-Wan she speaks of?

Kenobiah: *[Wistfully]* A Yehud-eye knight.
No one has called me that for a looong time.

Judah: You, Dad?

Kenobiah: Yes, Judah Skywalkabee. They called me Obi-Wan Kenobiah then.
I was a Yehud-eye knight.
[Takes our light saber] Have you ever seen one of these?

Judah: What is it?

Kenobiah: It's a Yehud-eye saber. The weapon of a Yehud-eye knight.
And now the time has come to wield it again.

Judah: If you're fighting Dad, then I want to be a part of it.

Kenobiah: You shall, my son. You shall.

[Kenobiah and Judah EXIT]

SCENE 3: Darth's Headquarters

*[Darth Music plays]
[Darth, Guards 1 and 2 and Chana (in chains) ENTER]*

Darth: How are the plans for the Death Fort in Jerusalem coming along?

Guard 1: The Death Fort is almost operational, O Helmeted One.

Darth: Good.
We will use it to destroy that rag-tag bunch of Jewish rebels that has been
such a pain in my neck.
Who are they to test the power of the Darth side?
Why, the mere thought of their destruction makes me want to ... sing!

[To "If I Were King of the Forest" (from The Wizard of Oz)]

Darth: When I am king of Jerusalem
Not prince, not knave, not duke.
I'll rule all the Jews of Jerusalem
With a hand of steel, not silk.

I'll command each Jew
Tell them what to do
With the force of my will
Syrian Greek ways I'll instill.

As I click my heel
All the Jews will kneel
And their Kohains bow
Their High Priest eat sow

And to my idols they will sing
When I
When I
Am King.

All the Jews they will bow down to me
No more Sabbath candles will they see
And their Temple I'll defile
With pigs and crocodiles
And every vile thing

When I
When I
Am King
Just King.

[Guard 2 rolls out red carpet; Darth marches down carpet while Guard 1 throws rose petals; Chana looks away, disgusted]

Darth: *[To Guard 1]* Guard, listen carefully.
Go to Modin.
Bring her with you *[points to Chana]*
as an a example that it is futile to resist.

Round up that annoying band led by Obi-Wan Kenobiah and his sons in the town's central square.

Force them to bow down to my idol in public.

They will join is on the Darth side, or die! *[clenches fist and holds it aloft]*

Do you understand?

Guard 1: Could you just repeat one thing?

Darth: What's that?

Guard 1: Everything after, "Listen carefully."

[Darth holds out his arm and telepathically chokes Guard 1 from a distance. Darth releases grip.]

[Darth Music plays]

[Darth, Guards and Chana EXIT]

SCENE 4: Mo'din

[Kenobiah and Judah are there.]

Guards 1 & 2 ENTER with Chana chained to Guard 1.]

Guard 1: Kenobiah, I bring greeting from the King of all Asia and Israel, King Darthiokus the Great!

Your Lord and Master King Darthiokus cordially invites you to join him on the Darth side and you shall be made wealthy and powerful beyond your wildest dreams.

All you need do is bow down in public to this idol of your Lord and Master. King Darthiokus the Great.

[Guard 2 holds out idol - a plastic figure of Darth]

Guard 2: Hey, you can move his little arms and legs. *[He moves its arms and legs]*

Guard 1: *[aside to Guard 2]* Shhhh.

Guard 2: *[oblivious]* Wow, you can take off his little helmet. Ooh, he's one ugly dude.

Guard 1: *[aside to Guard 2]* Ix-nay on the ugly ude-day, OK?

Guard 2: Say, do we still have the box he came in? This is probably a valuable collectible. Hey, we could sell this on eBay.

Guard 1: Listen! There's no eBay yet! Al Gore won't even invent the internet for

another 25 hundred years. Now SHUT UP!
All right Kenobiahu, BOW!

Kenobiahu: You would have me, a priest of the Jewish people, bow to this...this...
doll!

Guard 2: Hey, it's a "posable action figure"!

Guard 2: Resist and you will be made a slave, like this woman here. NOW BOW!

Kenobiahu: Never! Come my son, may the Force of Hashem be with us!

*[BIG BATTLE ENSUES between Guards, Kenobiahu and Judah.
Kenobiahu and Judah prevail.
Guards 1 and 2 run away.
Chana is freed.]*

SCENE 5: Kenobiahu's Hideout in Mo'din

Narrator: Over the next few months, there were many battles.
Though tremendously outnumbered, Kenobiahu and his sons won great
victories against the forces of Darthiokus.
More Jews began to join the side of old Kenobiahu.

[Kenobiahu lies in bed. Chana and Judah stand nearby. Han stands off to the side.]

Kenobiahu: I am old, Judah Skywalkabee, my son.
The time comes when you must lead the Jewish people.
Here, take my Yehud-eye sword. *[He hands light saber to Judah]*
You must go up into the mountains and meet an old Yehud-eye master
who lives there. He is a great warrior.
He will teach you the ways of the Yehud-eye.

Judah: How will I find this Yehud-eye knight?

Kenobiahu: This is Han Shlomo. *[Kenobiahu points to Han. Han nods.]*
He has a chariot and knows the route up into the mountains.

Han: Cash up front, like we agreed?

Kenobiahu: Half now -- *[Kenobiahu hands a money bag to Han]*
-- and half when you reach the mountains.
[Kenobiahu hands the 2nd money bag to Judah]

Judah: Father, what is the name of this great Yehud-eye knight?

Kenobiahu: His name is ... *[coughs]*

Judah: *[Leans in]* Yes?

Kenobiahu: His name is ... *[coughs]*

Judah: *[Leans in closer]* Yes?

Kenobiahu: His name is... *[whispers something inaudible]*....

Judah: *[Crouching next to Kenobiahu on bed, leaning in to hear]*
What father? What?

*[Kenobiahu motions with hand for Judah to come closer to listen.
Kenobiahu whispers in Judah's ear.]
[Kenobiahu DIES dramatically.]*

Chana: What did he say, Judah?

Judah: He said *[sounding like Maxwell Smart]* 'Can you please get your knee of my chest.'

*[Judah and Chana both look at Judah's knee, which is resting on Kenobiahu's chest.
Judah removes his knee from his chest.]*

Judah: *[To Kenobiahu; again sounding like Maxwell Smart]* Sorry about that.

Chana: Oh Judah, what will you do now?

Judah: I must go and find this great warrior.

Han: Let's move, kid. The roads are crawling with the Empire's soldiers.

[Han and Judah EXIT]

SCENE 6: The Mountains

[Han and Judah sit side by side in a chariot]

Han: Whoa! *[pulls on reins]* We're here, kid. This is as far as I go.

Judah: Where are we? This is all wilderness.

Han: The job was to deliver you to the mountains.
Well, these are the mountains. The rest is all you, kid.

[Judah gets up out of the chariot.]

Judah: Come join us, Han. We could use a good chariot pilot like you.

Han: Sorry, kid. But I'm a businessman. I can't afford to take sides.
Speaking of business. *[Han holds out his hand for the money.]*

Judah: *[Hands over the money bag.]* Here you go. And thanks.

Han: Good luck, kid. *[Then, as an aside:]* You're gonna need it. Giddyap!

[Han Rides away]

[Spooky music plays. Jungle sounds. Judah wanders around, searching.]

Judah: I got a bad feeling about this.

*[Yenta sneaks up behind.
Judah spins around, saber in hand, ready to strike!]*

Yenta: Looking for something, you are. Yeeess?

Judah: Oh, it's just you, little fella. I'm looking for a great warrior.

Yenta: Wars not make one great. Hmm-hmm.
Name has this great warrior you seek? Yeeess?

Judah: Well, my father, Obi-Wan Kenobiahuh told me his name on his deathbed.
Only it couldn't be what I thought he said.

Yenta: Appear not many things as they truly are.

Judah: Um, Ok, whatever.
His name is...well, I think his name is...Yenta.

Yenta: Take you to him I will. Yeeess. Hmm-hmm.

Judah: You know Yenta?

Yenta: Yeeess. Only first eat you must. Come. Good food. Hmm-hmm. Come.
Come. Walk this way, you will.

[Yenta walks all hunched over, bouncing puppet-like.

Judah looks at him. Looks at audience. Shrugs shoulders and walks like Yenta, hunching and bouncing.

They go to Yenta's camp.

Yenta has a biog pot cooking over a fire.]

Yenta: Come. Essen tatalah, Hmm-hmm.

[Yenta hands Judah a bowl of stew and a spoon.

Judah spoons out some and looks at it.]

Judah: What is this stuff? It looks kind of, well...gross.

Yenta: Know you how chicken soup on second day always taste better? Yeess?

Judah: Well, yeah.

Yenta: Then muuuch better this taste. Yeess. Essen.

Judah: Better, huh? Why's that?
[Takes a spoonful of soup to his lips.]

Yenta: Cooking this stew for the last 800 years I have been!

[Judah spits soup out in a big spray. Throws down bowl. Stands up, angrily.]

Judah: We're wasting time. I'm ready to fight!
I need to find Yenta, and you're standing around cooking soup and talking like some green Grover from Sesame Street!

Yenta: *[Sighs. Speaks in normal voice, with resignation. Looks over shoulder.]*
I cannot teach him. The boy has no patience. Luzzem gain.

Kenobiah's Voice: He will learn patience. Was I any different when you taught me?

Judah: *[Looking all around]* Dad! Is that you? This is too freaky. I'm outta here.

Kenobiah's Voice: Teach him, Yenta. He is our only hope.

Judah: Yenta? You're Yenta?
I don't know what's going on here, but I'm ready to learn.
I'm ready for adventure and excitement ... and to fight!

Yenta: Always with the fighting, Mr. Big Shot.
Adventure -- Feh! Excitement -- Feh!
[Sighs] Oy vey. Teach you I must!

[As Narrator speaks, Yenta teaches Judah.]

Narrator: And so, Judah Skywalkerabee became a pupil of old Yenta.
[Yenta shows Judah how to wield a light saber; Judah imitates.]

He learned Torah and the ways of the Force of Hashem.
[Yenta shows Judah how to read Torah.]
And he learned balance and decorum.
[Yenta shows him how to balance a book on his head and walk.]

[MUSIC: "YMCA"³⁷]

[Judah is joined by kids dressed as the Village People - Indian Chief, Policeman, Construction Worker etc; Judah sings and leads in hand motions for letters "YENTA"]

Judah:

He said, Young Man, I saw you looking around.
He said, Young Man, you are too tightly wound.
Her said, Young Man, put your saber away.
Meeting him was my luck-ee day.

It's fun to stay here with
Y-E-N-T-A.
It's fun to stay here with
Y-E-N-T-A.
He can teach you a lot.
(Just don't eat from his pot.
It tastes like something that's starting to rot!)

It's fun to stay here with
Y-E-N-T-A.
It's fun to stay here with
Y-E-N-T-A.
He's a rebbe to me
With long ears and some fleas.
He could pass for a green E.T.

He said, Young Man, are you listenin' to me?
He said, Young Man, wars not make one great, you see.
He said, Young Man, now's the time you should be
Learning Torah with a rabbi like me.

EVERBODY!

It's fun to stay here with

³⁷ After Y.O.D.A." by Steven Cavanaugh (<http://www.theforce.net/songbook/songs/33.asp>)

Y-E-N-T-A.
It's fun to stay here with
Y-E-N-T-A.

[slower] Now my training is done
So the battle's begun.
And Darthiokus will be on the run!

Judah: I must go now, Reb Yenta. My people need me.

[Judah starts to EXIT]

Yenta: Cold it is. A scarf you must take. *[Yenta hands Judah a scarf.]*
Sandwiches I packed you. *[Yenta hands Judah a picnic basket.]*

[Judah EXITS]

Yenta: *[Calls after him]* And remember. If to big battle you are going,
wear clean underwear!
[Sighs] Just like his father, he is. He'll never write. He'll never call.

Kenobiahu's Voice: I call.

Yenta: Oy vey. *[Shakes head]*

SCENE 7: Darth's Headquarters

[Darth Music plays]
[Darth speaking on cell phone]

Darth: Simba, let me tell you something my father told me. Look at the stars.
The great kings of the past are up there, watching over us.

Guard 1: Excuse me, Your Darthness.

Darth: Simba, gotta go. *[Puts away phone]*

Guard 1: Our spies have learned that Judah Skywalker has returned to lead the
Jews. Our soldiers run from him.

Darth: Impressive. Most impressive. *[Breathes deeply, wheezing]*

Guard 1: You know, have you tried Primateme mist for that wheezing.
My brother-in-law had the same thing during pomegranate season and...

[Darth holds out arm and telepathically chokes Guard 1]

Guard 1: *[Grabs throat, Choking]*

Darth: Silence fool!

*[Darth puts down arm, releasing Guard 1.
Guard 1 falls, rubs neck, slowly gets up]*

[Guard 2 ENTERS]

Guard 2: O Caped Commander! We just received reports that Judah Skywalkabee has won great victories over us, though he was greatly outnumbered.

Darth: The Force of Hashem is strong with this one. *[Breathes deeply, wheezing]*

Guard 2: Say, that's a nasty wheeze. I've got an herbal remedy that really works. You brew up some chamomile tea...

*[Guard 1 frantically gives Guard 2 a "neck being cut sign" from behind Darth]
[Guard 2 stops talking]*

Darth: There is only one solution.
I will lead our army in battle against this rebel Skywalkabee.
Why, with me in the lead, the morale of our forces is sure to improve.

[Guard 1 and Guard 2 Cough, heads tilted down, then looking at each other, rolling their eyes]

Darth: *[Looks at Guards, with palms upturned]*... What? ... What?

[Guards just look around aimlessly and kick at foot at invisible stones on ground]

Darth: Come! We go to the Death Fort in Jerusalem. They will join us...or die!

[Darth EXITS]

[Guards 1 and 2 mutter the following as they EXIT]

Guard 1: *[Mocking Darth]* Join us or die. Join us or die.

Guard 2: See the world they told me. Money for college they told me.

Guard 1: And what about the vocational training?
I was supposed to work with chariots.

SCENE 8: Jerusalem

[Skywalker Music plays]

[Judah is in room. Chana ENTERS.]

Chana: Judah, our scouts report that Darthiokus is approaching with a great army.
I got a bad feeling about this.

Judah: It'll be OK. The Force of Hashem is with us.

[Han Shlomo ENTERS]

Judah: Han Shlomo! You've come to join us!

Han: Wouldn't miss it for the world, kid. And I brought us a secret weapon.
Over seven feet tall, covered in fur... and best of all, she's Jewish.

[Jew-Bacca ENTERS]

Jew-bacca: ROAR!

Judah: What is it?

Han: She. She's a Nookie.

Judah: How do you know she's Jewish?

Han: Easy. Her name's Jew-bacca!

Chana: Here they come!

Judah: May the Force of Hashem be with you!

Han: Right behind you, kid.

Jew-Bacca: ROAR!

[Darth and Guards 1 and 2 Enter]

[Battle ensues. Guard 1 fights with Han; Guard 2 fights with Jew-bacca;

[Another Guard fights with Chana]

[Darth fights with Judah center stage]

Darth: Join me on the Darth side! *[Crash Swords]*

Judah: Never!

[Papers and mess are strewn about. Stiffed pigs. Seven-branched menorah lies on side.]

Han: P-U! Stinks like a Nookie in here.

Jew-Bacca: ROAR!

Han: No offence, Jewie.

Judah: Come, we've gotta clean up this mess.
Here's the menorah. *[Judah sets the menorah upright]*
Look around for some sacred oil to light it.

[They all search, finding different opened bottles.]

Han: This is spoiled.

Judah: Yeah. So's this.

Chana: Here! I found this one bottle of oil. *[Holds bottle carefully]*

Judah: It's only enough for one day. Well, let's light this menorah anyway.
Han, go get Yenta and have him bring some more sacred oil.

Han: But that's a week's journey, kid. We'll never be back in time.

Judah: You've got to try.

Han: C'mon Jewie.

[Han and Jew-Bacca begin to EXIT]

Han: I hope you fixed the chariots' hyper-drive.

Jew-bacca: ROAR!

[Han and Jew-Bacca quickly EXIT.]
[Judah and Chana light the menorah.]

SCENE 10: Eight Days Later; The Temple

[Chana and Judah look at menorah in amazement]

Chana: I can't believe it, Judah. The oil has lasted eight days.

[Han, Jew-bacca and Yenta Enter]

Han: Kid, we're back. That darn hyper-drive is still broken.

Jewie: ROAR!

[Yenta looks at menorah. Looks at Judah]

Yenta: Only oil for one day, you tell me.
Hurry, Yenta, you tell me. No time for pack sandwiches, you tell me.
Give a look, hot-shot, burning oil still is.

Judah: Reb Yenta, it was only enough oil for one day.
Somehow it lasted all eight days.

Yenta: Nes Gadol Haya Po.
Happened here a great miracle, yeess, hmm-hmm.
Make, we shall, a new holiday.
What call it we shall?
Any ideas you have?

[Yenta looks at Han and Jewie]

Yenta: Han? Nookie?

Judah: That's it. Han-nuka!

Chana, Han and Judah *[To Audience]*: May the Force of Hashem be with you!
Happy Hannuka!

Jew-Bacca: ROAR!

[Han, Chana, Judah and Jew-bacca EXIT; Yenta remains]

Yenta: *[To Audience]* Adventure...Feh! Excitement... Feh! I need a latke!

[Yenta EXITS]

[Music Swells] [Cast ENTERS for bows]

-THE END-

In Part III, we consider a possible historical precedent for the use of theatrical devices to teach Torah texts.

Part III: Possible Historical Antecedent: Was The Book of Ruth a Play?

A woman and her daughter-in-law, left widowed by the deaths of their husbands, struggle against abject poverty. Alone in the world, they undertake the arduous journey back to the mother-in-law's homeland. "Turn back" says the mother-in-law, "Why should you come with me? Return to your people." But the daughter-in-law refuses to abandon her. "Where you go, I will go," she tells her, "Where you stay, I will stay; your people are my people...where you die, I will die and there I will be buried." Thus, they return -- bereft and bitter.

Arriving at the time of the spring harvest, the young woman sets off to the fields, seeking the meager gleanings that spell the difference between life and death. But there in the fields, she finds more than mere sustenance. Against all odds, she finds redemption and rebirth.

Is this the story line of some old Bertolt Brecht play? A Tennessee Williams drama? The latest Cameron Mackintosh epic? No. It is The Book of Ruth.

Each year on the festival of Shavuot, Jews read The Book of Ruth. With its pastoral setting, scenes of the spring harvest and description of "the thin line between

scarcity and abundance,"³⁸ the Book of Ruth seems a natural for this Jewish harvest festival.

The Book of Ruth has been the subject of much analysis by Biblical scholars seeking to determine the elements that make the poignant story work so well, to understand how the story moves so seamlessly from Moab to Bethlehem, from city to field, from poverty to plenty.³⁹ However, there is one structural element that thus far has not been considered: Perhaps The Book of Ruth was actually The *Play* of Ruth.

Could The Book of Ruth have been a play? In order to answer this question, we need to understand theater and its historical origins.

Origins.

Theater's roots are murky, but it appears to have been born in religious ritual. The Minoans of northern Crete (circa 2200-1450 BCE) built what is considered to be the world's first theater in the palace at Knossos.⁴⁰ Seating 500 people, it is believed that the theater was used for religious rituals of song and dance.⁴¹ In Egypt, a drama celebrating the death of Osiris has been tentatively reconstructed from a record of Ikhnofret, who revised an earlier work in the era 1887-1849 BCE.⁴²

Greek Theater 6th-5th Century BCE.

While the theater of the Minoans and the Egyptians is shrouded in mystery, much more is known about ancient Greek theater.

³⁸ Norman Gottwald, The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction, Fortress Press (Philadelphia: 1985), p. 555.

³⁹ Gottwald, p. 555.

⁴⁰ Don Nardo, Greek and Roman Theater, San Diego: Lucent, 1994, p. 25.

⁴¹ Nardo, p. 25.

After Greece defended itself against the Persians in 490 and 480 BCE, Athens established a powerful and wealthy empire, extending to Italy, the Mediterranean and Asia Minor.⁴³ Art and architecture flourished (this was when the Parthenon was built) and Greek theater reached its summit. Theater was so popular amongst the state's 200,000 citizens, that Athens was forced to invent the theater ticket to allocate seats in its 17,000 seat theater.⁴⁴ Playwrights competed each year in the Athenian version of the Oscars -- The City Dionysia Festival held each March. Here, the Athenian government showcased its wealth and culture, arranging sponsors for each playwright and awarding prizes according to the decisions of a panel of ten judges.⁴⁵ According to The Columbia History of the World, Greek drama was "a new form of entertainments, a form more popular, more thought-provoking, lyrically beautiful, and profoundly moving than any the world had heretofore seen."⁴⁶

What was the form of this immensely popular entertainment? The earliest Greek plays took the form of a *dithyramb*, a choral song chanted to honor the Greek god Dionysus. The entire play was sung by a Chorus, led by a Choral Leader called the *Exarchos*. In the 6th century BCE, Thespis is believed to have separated the first real actor from the Chorus. Plays now involved a chorus and a single actor, who might employ a variety of masks so as to play several characters.⁴⁷ Indeed, it is in honor of Thespis that actors are called "thespians".

⁴² Allardyce Nicoll, World Drama, Harcourt Brace and Co., New York, p. 25.

⁴³ Nardo, p. 35.

⁴⁴ Nardo, p. 34.

⁴⁵ Nardo, p. 21-23.

⁴⁶ The Columbia History of the World, John Garraty and Peter Gay (editors), Harper & Row (New York: 1972), p. 174.

⁴⁷ Nicoll, p. 26.

Slowly, the role of the Chorus diminished and the role of the actor increased. In approximately 490 BCE, the Greek dramatist Aeschylus (ca. 525 BCE - 456 BCE) took the major step of adding a second actor. At first, the role of the second actor was limited. In Aeschylus's drama The Suppliants (ca. 463 BCE), the second actor was required for only two scenes.⁴⁸

Three Actors and Chorus.

Two speaking actors sufficed until Sophocles (495 - 406 BCE) added a third actor.⁴⁹ This was the limit of actors in Greek theater. Even Euripides (discussed below), who emphasized actors more and the Chorus less, did not expand beyond three speaking actors. The three actors could play multiple roles through the use of masks. The actors carried the dramatic interaction while the Chorus would comment. As Greek theater scholar Rex Warner notes, "The real drama is confined to the men and women taking part in it. The Chorus performs the role of sympathetic listeners and commentator."⁵⁰ At the end of each scene, the other characters would generally exit the stage and the Chorus would sing a choral ode (called a *stasimon*) reflecting on the events of the scene.⁵¹

Euripides

The next great playwright in ancient Greek theater was Euripides (ca. 480-406 BCE). Like playwrights before him, Euripides presented stories within a fairly narrow

⁴⁸ Nicoll, p. 35.

⁴⁹ Nicoll, pp. 36-7.

⁵⁰ Rex Warner (transl.), Three Great Plays of Euripides, New York: New American Library, 1958 cited in Nardo, pp. 43-44.

⁵¹ Roger Dunkle, The Classical Origins of Western Culture: The Core Studies 1 Study Guide (Brooklyn College, The City University of New York:1986)

band of legends. However, Euripides introduced several major innovations which would come to define Greek theater.

Real Characters. Euripides sought to make his characters real, ordinary people.⁵² Euripides' characters dealt with personal matters, not just important national issues. As Alfred Bates wrote of Euripides' *Medea*: "The suffering and sensitiveness of injured love are strongly drawn, and with the utmost nicety of observation, passing from one stage to another, until they culminate in the awful deed of vengeance. The mighty enchantress who is yet a weak woman is powerfully delineated."⁵³

Private Arena. Euripides' focus on personal matters reflected the growing dichotomy in 5th century Athens between the public world of the male-dominated *polis*, and the private world of the female-dominated *oikos*.⁵⁴

Women. With his interest in personal matters, Euripides was the first dramatist to portray women not as heroines, but as real people.

Prologue. Given his novel take on legendary themes, Euripides was concerned that his audiences would not understand the play from the start. Thus, he often employed an innovation at the beginning of his plays, a Prologue, which gave the audience the information necessary to understand the work.⁵⁵

Epilogue / Deus Ex Machina. Further, Euripides' human-centric tales often needed to be reconciled with the legendary resolution of such stories.

⁵² Nicoll, p. 70

⁵³ *The Drama: Its History, Literature and Influence on Civilization*, Vol. 1. ed. Alfred Bates. London: Historical Publishing Company, 1906. pp. 192-196.

⁵⁴ "A Woman's Place in Euripides' *Medea*", Margaret Williamson in *Euripides, Women and Sexuality*, Anton Powell (editor) Routledge: 1990), p. 16, citing Humphreys and Gould, *The Family, Women and Death: Comparative Studies*: By S. C. Humphreys. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.

⁵⁵ Nicoll, p. 70.

Therefore, Euripides introduced the "*deus ex machina*", a theatrical device whereby "the deity" would be lowered from the roof of the stage at the play's end to resolve all the outstanding conflicts.⁵⁶

The End of Innovation

In 404 BCE, Sparta defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War. This defeat marked the end of the era of innovation in classical Greek theater. From this point, only revivals of earlier works seem to have been presented.⁵⁷

Influence on Ancient Israel

Greek drama would surely have been known in 4th and 3rd centuries BCE when ancient Israel was ruled by the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. Historian Moses Hadas notes, "If the first thing any group of Greek settlers did was to establish a gymnasium, the next thing they did was to provide a theater; ruins of Greek theaters have been found in all parts of the Hellenized world, in Baalbek and Gerasa and Amman, and as far afield as Babylon."⁵⁸ Greek education and literature deeply influenced Palestinian culture - in parallel with the expansion of the Greek language - in the third century BCE.⁵⁹ However, Greek culture made an impact on ancient Israel at a far earlier date. Indeed, Alexander of Macedon's conquest of the Persian Empire in 332 BCE represents only the culmination of a long period of influence.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Nicoll, p. 70.

⁵⁷ Nardo, pp. 45, 53.

⁵⁸ Moses Hadas, Hellenistic Culture (Columbia University Press (New York: 1959), p. 40

⁵⁹ Hengel, p. 75.

⁶⁰ Paul Johnson, A History of the Jews, New York : Harper & Row, c1987, p. 97;
Lawrence Schiffman, From Text to Tradition, Ktav Publishing House (Hoboken. N.J.: 1991), p. 35.

Many traders and travelers passed through ancient Israel from the Greek world. Strong Aegean influence is observed in 6th century BCE sites in southern Palestine, where imported Hellenic pottery is found extensively and there is evidence as well of near total dependence on Athenian coinage standards.⁶¹ Signs of Greek influence on Palestinian culture increased steadily as the Persian Empire declined during the first two-thirds of the fourth century BCE.⁶² "Greek mercenaries, traders, and scholars were visiting the country in ever-larger numbers, making a distinctive mark on its character."⁶³ According to historian Martin Hengel, "[I]t is to be remembered that The Hellenistic period was in the making throughout the fourth century [BCE], and that Greek cultural influence was visible in the East, above all in Phoenicia and Egypt, even before Alexander's expeditions."⁶⁴ The Hellenistic period came as the completion of a cultural process long under way."⁶⁵

"The Proof of the Pudding is in the Eating"

Against this backdrop of ancient Greek theater and regional influence, we may now turn to The Book of Ruth. Does The Book of Ruth exhibit indicia of an ancient Greek drama?

Before analyzing this question in detail, let us look at the text of the Book of Ruth with one change to its typical appearance: In the pages that follow, I present The Book of Ruth in the form of a play. The script that follows was created with almost no change to the Biblical text. All that has been done is to divide The Book of Ruth into scenes and

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Schiffman, p. 42.

⁶³ Ibid..

⁶⁴ Martin Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism, Vol. I, Fortress Press (Philadelphia: 1974), p. 3.

⁶⁵ Schiffman, p. 42-44.

put the dialogue into the characters' own mouths. Indeed, the great ease with which the Biblical text is here rendered as a play may serve as an initial and potent indicator of Ruth's possible theatrical roots.

I have chiefly relied on the translation from Judaic Classic Library (D. Mandel (transl.)) with emendations based on my own translations. I have added possible settings and character motivations in the form of footnotes so as not to interrupt the actual text. Citations to the text of The Book of Ruth are presented parenthetically throughout the play, including where "stage directions" are presented in the original Biblical text.

The Book of Ruth: A Play in Three Acts

ACT I

Scene 1: On the Road to the Land of Judah⁶⁶

(Naomi, Ruth and Orpah ENTER)

Narrator:⁶⁷

And it happened in the days when the Judges judged,
that there was a famine in the land,
and a man went from Bethlehem in Judah to sojourn in the fields of Moab,
he, his wife, and his two sons. [1:1]

The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi,
and his two sons were named Mahlon and Chilion,
Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah.

They came to the field of Moab and there they remained. [1:2]

Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. [1:3].

They married Moabite women, one named Orpah, and the other Ruth,

⁶⁶ *The setting is a bleak, barren, windswept Wilderness. The women cling to one another against the desert breezes, the wind whipping their clothes and impeding their progress. The light is dim, as if through a haze, the horizon is not visible as sky and land mix; the women are in a liminal place with unknown destinations; they are on the outskirts. The play commences with Naomi's hopes for a new life in the Diaspora having been dashed by the deaths of her husband and her sons. Naomi and her daughters-in-law are poverty-stricken and bereft. They drift like mere shadows in a world where a woman without a male benefactor is powerless.*

⁶⁷ *The names here speak volumes: Elimelech is a kingly name ("My God is King") and commentators identify him as a leader in Bethlehem ("City of Bread"). When the "City of Bread" ironically experiences famine, he leaves his city (and his responsibilities?) for an ill-fated attempt at refuge in Moab. His sons' names, Mahlon and Chilion mean "Illness" and "Destruction," a portent of things to come.*

and they lived there about ten years. [1:4]

The two of them, Mahlon and Chilion, also died;

and the woman was bereft of her two children and of her husband. [1:5]

She then arose along with her daughter-in-law to return from the fields of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that Hashem⁶⁸ had remembered His people by giving them food. [1:6]

She left the place where she had been, accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, and they set out on the road to return to the land of Judah. [1:7]

Naomi (*to Orpah and Ruth*):

Go, return, each of you to her mother's house. May Hashem deal kindly with you, as you have dealt kindly with the dead and with me. May Hashem grant that you may find security, each in the home of her husband. [1:8-9]

(*Naomi kisses Orpah and Ruth, and they weep*) [1:9]

Orpah and Ruth: No, we will return with you to your people. [1:10]

Naomi: Turn back, my daughters. Why should you come with me?

Have I more sons in my womb who could become husbands to you?

[1:11]

Turn back, my daughters, go along, for I am too old to have a husband.

Even if I were to say, 'There is hope for me!' and even if I were to have a husband tonight -- and even bear sons, would you wait for them until they were grown up? Would you tie yourselves down for them and not marry

⁶⁸ *The ineffable Name of God, the Tetragrammeton, is translated as "Hashem" (meaning "The Name") throughout.*

anyone else? No, my daughters! I am very embittered on account of you;
for the hand of Hashem has gone forth against me.⁶⁹ [1:13]

*(They cry and weep. Orpah kisses Naomi and Orpah EXITS. But Ruth clings to Naomi)*⁷⁰ [1:14]

Naomi: Look, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and to her god; go
follow your sister-in-law. [1:15]

Ruth: Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For
wherever you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people are
my people, and your God is my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I
will be buried. Thus may Hashem do to me -- and more! -- if anything but
death separates me from you. [1:17]

Narrator: When Naomi saw she was determined to go with her, she stopped arguing
with her. [1:18]

Scene 2: In Bethlehem

Narrator: The two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.
When they arrived in Bethlehem, the entire city was tumultuous over
them. [1:19]

*(Women of Bethlehem and Naomi ENTER)*⁷¹

⁶⁹ Naomi fears the hardships that lie ahead for these women alone. She believes that life would be better for her daughters-in-law back with their original families, under the protection of fathers or brothers.

⁷⁰ Ruth refuses to leave her mother-in-law, whom she loves dearly.

⁷¹ Women form the underlying social bonds in the story. The Women of Bethlehem serve as a chorus, expressing the community's viewpoint. Given that our Narrator tells us that "entire city was tumultuous over them" it would seem that great excitement attended

Women of Bethlehem: Could this be Naomi? [1:19]

Naomi: Do not call me Naomi - "pleasant one".

Call me Mara - or "embittered one"- for the Almighty has dealt very
bitterly with me. [1:20]

I was full when I went away, but Hashem has brought me back empty.

How can you call me Naomi -- Hashem has testified against me, the
Almighty has brought misfortune upon me! [1:21]

Narrator: And so it was that Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-
law, with her -- who returned from the fields of Moab. They came to
Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. [1:22]

ACT II

Scene 1: Naomi and Ruth's Room in Bethlehem⁷²

(Naomi and Ruth ENTER)

Narrator: Naomi had a relative through her husband, a man of substance, from the
family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. [2:1]

Ruth: Let me go out to the field, and glean among the ears of grain behind
someone in whose eyes I shall find favor. [2:2]

Naomi: Go, my daughter. [2:2]

Narrator: So she went. [2:3]

Naomi's return. However, nothing can break Naomi's bitter mood; she tells the Women that she left "full" but has returned "empty". She feels deserving only of a bitter name, like those of her two deceased sons.

⁷² *Naomi and Ruth share a small hovel; there is little furniture, the barren room matching their barren lives.*

(Naomi EXITS)

Scene 2: Boaz' Field

(Ruth, Harvesters and Overseer work in the field.)

Narrator: She came and gleaned in the field behind the harvesters, and her fate made her happen upon a parcel of land belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. [2:3]

*(Boaz ENTERS)*⁷³

Narrator: Behold, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and he said to the harvesters --

Boaz: Hashem be with you! [2:4]

Narrator: And the harvesters answered, "May Hashem bless you!" [2:4]

Boaz *(to Overseer)*: To whom does that young woman belong? [2:5]

Overseer: She is a Moabite girl. The one that returned with Naomi from the fields of Moab. [2:6] And she had said, 'Please let me glean, and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' So she came, and has been on her feet since the morning until now; except for her resting a little in the hut. [2:7]

Boaz *(to Ruth)*: Hear me well, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field, and don't leave here, but stay close to my maidens. [2:8]
Keep your eyes on the field which they are harvesting and follow them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. Should you get thirsty, go to the jugs and drink from what the young men have drawn. [2:9]

(Ruth falls on her face, bowing down to the ground) [2:10]

⁷³ *In contrast to Naomi and Ruth's dark, confined room, we emerge into the brilliant golden sunshine of the harvest season, bright and full of life. Though an old man, Boaz is also full of life and God's Name is on his lips for everyone he meets.*

Ruth: Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should take special note of me though I am a foreigner? [2:10]

Boaz: I have been fully informed of all that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband; how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and went to a people you had never known before. [2:11]

May Hashem reward your actions, and may your payment be full from Hashem , the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge. [2:12]

Ruth: May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord, because you have comforted me, and because you have spoken to the heart of your maidservant -- though I am not even as worthy as one of your maidservants. [2:13]

Scene 3: Later that same day, Boaz' field, at mealtime.⁷⁴

(Boaz sits and eats with the harvesters. Ruth waits off to the side)

Boaz *(to Ruth)*: Come over here and partake of the bread, and dip your morsel in the vinegar. [2:14]

(Ruth sits beside the harvesters. Boaz hands her parched grain. Ruth eats, and has some left over.) [2:14]; Ruth gets up and EXITS to glean.) [2:15]

Boaz: Listen, young men. Let her glean even among the sheaves; do not embarrass her. [2:15]

⁷⁴ Ruth does not understand what is happening as this powerful man takes an interest in her.

And even deliberately pull out some for her from the heaps and leave them
for her to glean; don't rebuke her. [2:16]

Narrator: So she gleaned in the field until evening, and she beat out what she had
gleaned -- it came to about an ephah of barley. [2:17] She carried it and
came to the city. [2:18]

Scene 4: Naomi and Ruth's room in Bethlehem⁷⁵

(Naomi sits. Ruth ENTERS, holding a large bag of grain.)

Narrator: Naomi saw what she had gleaned, and she took out and gave her what she
had left over after eating her fill. [2:18]

Naomi: Where did you glean today? Where did you work? May the one that took
such generous notice of you be blessed. [2:19]

Ruth: The name of the man by whom I worked today is Boaz. [2:19]

Naomi: Blessed be he to Hashem, for not failing in his kindness to the living or to
the dead! The man is closely related to us. He is one of our near
kinsmen.⁷⁶ [2:20]

Ruth: What's more, he even said to me, 'Stay close to my workers, until they
have finished all my harvest.' [2:21]

Naomi: It is fine, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, so that you
will not be annoyed in another field. [2:22]

Narrator: So she stayed close to Boaz' young women to glean, until the end of the
barley harvest and of the wheat harvest. [2:23]

⁷⁵ *Back to the barren, dark room. Naomi is amazed at Ruth's haul.*

ACT III

Scene 1: Naomi and Ruth's room in Bethlehem⁷⁷

Narrator: Then she stayed at home with her mother-in-law. [2:23]

Naomi: My daughter, I must seek security for you, that it may go well with you.
[3:1]

Now Boaz, our relative, with whose maidens you have been, will be
winnowing barley tonight on the threshing floor. [3:2]

Therefore, bathe and anoint yourself, don your finery, and go down to the
threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has
finished eating and drinking. [3:3]

And when he lies down, note the place where he lies, and go over, uncover
his feet, and lie down. He will tell you what you are to do. [3:4]

Ruth: All that you say to me I will do. [3:5]

Scene 2: Boaz' Tent, that Evening⁷⁸

Narrator: So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything as her mother-
in-law instructed her. [3:6]

(Boaz enters with Harvesters, eating, drinking and being merry.) [3:7]

Narrator: Boaz ate and drank and his heart was merry.

Narrator: He went to lie down at the end of the grain pile... [3:7]

⁷⁶ Under the law he has the right to buy back the Naomi's ancestral field.

⁷⁷ Some time has passed and Ruth's gleaning in Boaz's fields has been quite successful. Now the wheels begin turning in Naomi's head. Perhaps there is a way out of Naomi and Ruth's dire predicament. Does Ruth know what she is doing? This is unclear, though seemingly naïve about matters between men and women, it must be remembered that she was once married.

(Boaz goes to lie down next to a pile of grain) [3:7]

Narrator: And she came stealthily, uncovered his feet, and lay down. [3:7]

(Ruth sneaks in and lies down at Boaz' feet) [3:7]

Narrator: In the middle of the night the man was startled, and turned about -- there was a woman lying at his feet.⁷⁹ [3:8]

(Boaz awakens, startled.) {3:8}

Boaz: Who are you? [3:9]

Ruth: I am your handmaid, Ruth. Spread your robe over your handmaid; for you are a redeemer. [3:9]

Boaz: Be blessed of Hashem, my daughter; you have made your latest act of kindness greater than the first, in that you have not gone after the younger men, be they poor or rich. [3:10]

And now, my daughter, do not fear; whatever you say, I will do for you; for all the men in the gate of my people know that you are a worthy woman. [3:11]

Now while it is true that I am a redeemer; there is also another redeemer closer than I. [3:12]

Stay the night, then in the morning, if he will redeem you, fine! Let him redeem. But if he does not want to redeem you, then as Hashem lives I will redeem you! Lie down until the morning. [3:13]

⁷⁸ *It is a dark and cool night in the fields of Boaz. Campfires glow in the distance, bringing flickering, golden warmth to the dark blue of the sky.*

⁷⁹ *"Lying at his feet" may be a euphemism.*

Narrator: So she lay at his feet until the morning and she arose before one man
could recognize another, for he said ... [3:14]

Boaz: "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor."⁸⁰ [3:14]
Hold out the shawl you are wearing and grasp it. [3:15]

Narrator: She held it, and he measured out six measures of barley, and set it on her;
(*Ruth EXITS*)

Narrator: Then he went into the city. [3:15]
(*Boaz EXITS for the city*) [3:15]

Scene 3: Naomi and Ruth's room in Bethlehem

(*Naomi lies in bed, Ruth ENTERS*)

Narrator: She came to her mother-in-law. [3:16]

Naomi: Who are you? My daughter? [3:16]

Narrator: So she told her all that the man had done for her. [3:16]

Ruth: He gave me these six measures of barley for he said to me, 'Do not go
empty-handed to your mother-in-law.' [3:17]

Naomi: Sit patiently, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out,
for the man will not rest unless he settles the matter today. [3:18]

⁸⁰ Boaz is concerned about appearances and reputations -- both hers and his. And he yet has a bit of business to conclude with her closer redeemer which could be thwarted if word were to get out about this night.

Scene 4: The Gate of Bethlehem⁸¹

Narrator: Boaz, meanwhile, had gone up to the gate, and sat down there.

Just then, the redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken passed by. [4:1]

Boaz: Come over, sit down here, Ploni Almoni. [4:1]

(Ploni Almoni SITS DOWN) [4:1]

Narrator: He then took ten elders of the city and said.... [4:2]

Boaz: Sit here. [4:2]

(Ten elders SIT DOWN) [4:2]

Boaz: *(to Ploni Almoni)* The parcel of land which belonged to our brother,
Elimelech, is being offered for sale by Naomi who has returned from the
fields of Moab. [4:3]

I resolved that I should inform you to this effect: Buy it in the presence of
those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you are
willing to redeem, redeem! But if it will not be redeemed, tell me, that I
may know; for there is no one else to redeem it but you, and I after you.
[4:4]

Ploni Almoni: I am willing to redeem. [4:4]

Boaz: The day you buy the field from Naomi, you must also buy it from Ruth the
Moabite, wife of the deceased, to perpetuate the name of the deceased on
his inheritance. [4:5]

⁸¹ Now the men of the story form a counterpoint to the earlier chorus of Women. Whereas the women were all emotion and caring ("The city was tumultuous over them"), the men act with legal formality. The men sit on a series of stone blocks, with the high archway to the city behind them. Evidence of a split chorus of men and women may be found in Aristophanes' Lysistrata.

Ploni Almoni: Then I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I imperil my own inheritance.

Take over my redemption responsibility on yourself for I am unable to redeem. [4:6]

Narrator: And this was the custom in earlier times in Israel that, in redemption and exchange transactions, a man drew off his shoe and gave it to his neighbor to signify the transaction. [4:7]

Ploni Almoni: *[draws off shoe and gives it to Boaz]* Buy it for yourself. [4:8]

Boaz: You are witness this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's from Naomi. [4:9]

And, what is more, I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Machlon, as my wife, to perpetuate the name of the deceased on his inheritance, that the name of the deceased not be cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place. You are witnesses today. [4:10]

Elders: We are witnesses!

May Hashem make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and like Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel.

May you prosper in Ephrath and be famous in Bethlehem [4:11]

and may your house be like the house of Perez

whom Tamar bore to Judah,

through the offspring which Hashem will give you

by this young woman. [4:12]

Narrator: And so, Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. [4:13]

Scene 5: Bethlehem, some time later

Narrator: And he came to her. Hashem let her conceive, and she bore a son. [4:13]

Women of Bethlehem (*to Naomi*):⁸²

Blessed be Hashem

who has not left you without a redeemer today!

May his name be famous in Israel. [4:14]

He will become your life-restorer, and sustain your old age;

for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, has borne him,

and she is better to you than seven sons. [4:15]

Narrator: Naomi took the child, and held it in her bosom, and she became his nurse.

[4:16]

The neighborhood women gave him a name.⁸³ [4:17]

Women of Bethlehem: A son is born to Naomi. [4:17]

Narrator:⁸⁴ They called him “Obed”.

And he was the father of Jesse, the father of David. [4:17]

Now these are the generations of Perez:

Perez begot Hezron. [4:18]

and Hezron begot Ram,

and Ram begot Amminadab [4:19]

and Amminadab begot Nachshon,

⁸² *The chorus of Women return to express the community's emotional reaction to the story.*

⁸³ *The entire community of Women seems to be involved in raising the child and gives him his name.*

and Nachshon begot Salmah [4:20]

and Salman begot Boaz,

and Boaz begot Obed [4:21]

and Obed begot Jesse,

and Jesse begot David. [4:22]

- THE END -

⁸⁴ *The Narrator offers an Epilogue which carries the story down to King David, thereby showing us the great ramifications of this apparently small story.*

Play-Like Characteristics of the Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth contains a number of readily-apparent theatrical elements including (i) a great quantity of Dialogue, (ii) distinct Scenes, (iii) an obvious Cast and (iv) the presence of Stage Directions.

Dialogue.

One quickly notices the plethora of spoken dialogue in The Book of Ruth. Of a total of 85 verses, 58 are in the form of dialogue. Indeed, if one eliminates the Prologue and Epilogue, we are left with 73 “middle” verses in which the 58 verses involving dialogue are found.

Distinct Scenes.

The Book of Ruth proceeds through ten different scenes, preceded by a Prologue and followed by an Epilogue:

Prologue (1:1 - 1:7)

- (i) On the Road from Moab (1:8 - 1:18)
- (ii) With the Women of Bethlehem (1:19- 1:22)
- (iii) Naomi and Ruth's Room in Bethlehem (2:1 - 2:3)
- (iv) Boaz' Field (2:3-2:17)
- (v) Naomi and Ruth's Room in Bethlehem (2:18 - 2:23)
- (vi) Naomi and Ruth's Room in Bethlehem (3:1 - 3:6)
- (vii) Boaz' Tent in the Field (3:6-3:15)
- (viii) Naomi and Ruth's Room in Bethlehem (3:16 - 3:18)
- (ix) The Court at the City Gate at Bethlehem (4:1 - 4:13)
- (x) With the Women of Bethlehem (4:14 - 4:17)

Epilogue (4:18- 4:22)

Cast.

There are five individual characters in the Book of Ruth: Naomi, Orpah, Ruth, Boaz, Boaz's Overseer and Ploni Almoni. In addition, there are two choruses: one of Women (1:19; 4:14-15 and 4:17) and one of Elders / Men (4:11-12). Finally, there is a Narrator whose role is (i) to set the time and place during the Prologue (1:1-7), (ii) to move the action along from scene to scene and provide background information where necessary (e.g., 2:1, 4:7) and (iii) to bring the story down to a later time and place in the Epilogue (4:18-22).

Stage Directions.

The Book of Ruth provides an array of seeming stage directions, telling us when people weep (1:9, 1:14), cling to one another (1:14), bow (2:10), sit (2:14, 3:18, 4:1, 4:2), lie down (3:7, 3:14), come stealthily (3:8), and even hold out a shawl (3:15). Rather than simply telling us what happened (e.g., "He sat down"), in many cases one character instructs a person to take an action and the text then tells us the action was taken (e.g., "Come over here"... "So she sat beside the harvesters (2:14); "Stay the night"... "So she lay at his feet until the morning (3:13-14); "Come over, sit down here, Ploni Almoni and he came over and sat down (4:1); "He then took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit here" and they sat down (4:2)). These additional statements of actions being taken could have been stage directions for the actors.

One might argue that these elements -- Dialogue, Scenes, Characters and Stage Directions -- may just as easily apply to a folk tale. However, now let us consider several elements that would seem to apply only to theatrical presentations after the innovations of Sophocles and Euripides.

Three Actors, Narrator and Chorus

The Book of Ruth has five different characters: Naomi, Ruth, Orpah, Boaz, Overseer and Ploni Almoni. In addition, there is a Narrator as well as two different Choruses -- one of women (The Women of Bethlehem) and one of men (The Elders).

The Book of Ruth never employs more than three speaking actors (in addition to the Narrator and Chorus) at any one time:

Act I, Scene 1:	Naomi, Ruth and Orpah
Scene 2:	Naomi, Ruth
Act II, Scene 1:	Ruth, Naomi
Scene 2:	Boaz, Overseer, Ruth
Scene 3:	Boaz, Ruth
Scene 4:	Naomi, Ruth
Act III, Scene 1:	Naomi, Ruth
Scene 2:	Boaz, Ruth
Scene 3:	Naomi, Ruth
Scene 4:	Boaz, Ploni Almoni, Elders (Chorus)
Scene 5:	Women of Bethlehem (Chorus)

Indeed, only two scenes arguably employ a third speaking actor (Orpah in 1:10 and the Overseer in 2:6 – 2:7); in each of these cases, the third actor speaks but a single line. Thus, The Book of Ruth adheres to the limitation on the number of actors (three) of ancient Greek theater after the time of Sophocles. These three actors, with the use of masks and costume changes could easily play all the non-Choral speaking parts of The Book of Ruth.

As in Greek drama, the Chorus's role is limited to commenting on the action and providing narration. Moreover, the two major speeches of the Women of Bethlehem (4:14- 4:15) and the Elders (4:11 – 4:12) are flowery speeches that seem at odds with the general dialogue of the work, but would fit well with the choral odes (*stasima*) sung by the Chorus in Greek drama:

Elders/Men: *"May Hashem make the woman
who is coming into your house
like Rachel and like Leah,
both of whom built up the House of Israel.
May you prosper in Ephrath
and be famous in Bethlehem [4:11]
and may your house be like the house of Perez
whom Tamar bore to Judah,
through the offspring which Hashem will give you
by this young woman."* [4:12]

...

Women: *"Blessed be Hashem
who has not left you without a redeemer today!
May his name be famous in Israel. [4:14]
He will become your life-restorer,
and sustain your old age;
for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, has borne him,
and she is better to you than seven sons."* [4:15]

The Narrator's role could have been played by the leader of the Chorus (the *Exarchos*).

This "Three Actor plus limited Chorus" structure did not exist in Greek theater until Sophocles (495- 406 BCE).

Prologue.

The Book of Ruth commences with a Prologue to explain the background events that had led to the setting (1:1 – 1:7).

The Prologue describing the back story was a theatrical innovation of Euripides (ca. 480-406 BCE).

Ordinary Women Protagonists.

The main part of The Book of Ruth is concerned with very ordinary female characters -- two poor women trying to survive in a difficult world. Further, these are very private matters. Ruth "deals with the stuff of everyday life, with the round of birth and death, with love and marriage, and with work as the necessity of life."⁸⁵

Such a focus on non-heroic characters, especially women, was not presented on the stage until Euripides (ca. 480-406 BCE).

Subject Matter: Public/Private, Male/Female Dichotomy.

Ruth exemplifies a split between the private, women-centered world and the public, male-centered world. The quiet scenes of personal loss, of people clinging to one another for support and of hoping for a better day, are scenes dominated by women - Naomi, Orpah, Ruth and the Women of Bethlehem. When the Chorus of Women speak, they speak of personal concerns. When Ruth bears a son, while they wish that the

⁸⁵ Gottwald, p. 555.

newborn "be famous in Israel" (4:14), they are more concerned with his personal impact of Naomi's life -- "He will become your life-restorer and sustain your old age" (4.15).

Meanwhile, the two main public settings are dominated by men -- Boaz and the Overseer at the harvest (2:4 – 2:16) and Boaz, Ploni Almoni and the Elders (4:1 - 4:12). The Chorus of Elders/Men express concern over the public ramifications of the union of Boaz and Ruth -- the building of a family line or house. They express the desire that this woman be "like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel" and that Boaz's house be "like the house of Perez" (4.12).

This dichotomy between the women-dominated private sphere (the *oikos*) and the male-dominated public sphere (*polis*) was not represented in Greek drama until Euripides.⁸⁶

Epilogue

At the conclusion of The Book of Ruth, the Narrator informs us of the Divinely-chosen offspring that would come from the union of Ruth and Boaz -- none other than King David himself (4:22)! This strikes the observer as a most unusual outcome of the simple story.

Summary of Analysis

The Book of Ruth contains a number of salient theatrical elements including a preponderance of Dialogue, clear Scenes, a Cast and Stage Directions. More importantly, several other factors strongly indicate a theatrical foundation that would fit well with the structure of ancient Greek dramatic plays. These factors are:

⁸⁶ "A Woman's Place in Euripides' Medea", Margaret Williamson, Euripides, Women and Sexuality, Anton Powell (editor) Routledge: 1990), p. 16, citing Humphreys and Gould, The Family, Women and Death: Comparative Studies: By S. C. Humphreys. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.

- Three Actors (Sophocles 495 - 406 BCE)
- Chorus and Narrator/Exarchos (Thespis ca. 6th c. BCE)
- Prologue (Euripides ca. 480-406 BCE)
- Ordinary Women Protagonists (Euripides ca. 480-406 BCE)
- Public/Private Male/Female Dichotomy (Euripides ca. 480-406 BCE)
- Unexpected Epilogue (Euripides ca. 480-406 BCE)

These theatrical elements all argue strongly for the proposition that The Book of Ruth, in its final form, had a basis in Greek drama.

Moreover, given that these theatrical innovations were not present in Greek theater until the mid-5th century BCE we may reach another conclusion:

The Book of Ruth - in its final form - was composed no earlier than the time of Euripides (ca. 480 - 406 BCE).⁸⁷

It must be emphasized that this analysis refers to the final form of The Book of Ruth. It is not to imply that this was the original or only version of the story; it is simply to maintain that the final form of the Book of Ruth would fit the dramatic schema of ancient Greece after the middle period of the 5th century BCE.

Dating The Book of Ruth

Could The Book of Ruth only have taken its final form after the mid-5th century BCE? To answer this question, we must consider the process of Biblical canonization.

As Robert Gordis has observed, the canonization of the books of the Bible is "a complicated question, concerning which little is certain."⁸⁸ Before 400 BCE, there was

⁸⁷ Unless these theatrical innovations were actually created in ancient Israel (and we have no evidence to indicate that they were).

no canon, but by 200 BCE the canon was beginning to take its final form.⁸⁹ Even after 200 BCE, however, questions as to canonization remained, especially with respect to the third section of the Bible -- The Writings (*Ketuvim*). It is this third section, The Writings, which includes The Book of Ruth.

In rendering the Wisdom of Ben Sira into Greek in 132 BCE, the translator states that his grandfather (the author of the work) had read the Law and Prophets and "the other books of our fathers."⁹⁰ While it is believed that this last phrase refers to the Writings, little is known of this third section of the Bible until the beginning of the Common Era, when the books included in the Writings were fixed.⁹¹ In 90 CE, a rabbinic synod at Jamnia affirmed the canonical status of the books of the Bible; nonetheless, questions as to the sacred character of some of the books of the Writings continued for centuries.⁹²

Scholars have long speculated as to the date of composition of The Book of Ruth. The Book of Ruth claims to take place "in the days when the judges judged" (Ruth 1:1), leading it to be placed beside the Book of Judges in Greek manuscripts.⁹³ According to the Mishnah, the Book was written by Samuel (T. Bavli Bava Batra 14b). However, based on certain late Hebrew expressions and Aramaic words, some theorize it was

⁸⁸ Gordis, p. 220.

⁸⁹ Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, Harper Perennial (New York: 1987), p. 95.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ The Cambridge Bible Commentary: The Books of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Lamentations, p. 6.

composed after the Exile.⁹⁴ Robert Gordis maintains that the Book of Ruth is post-Exilic, written in a style reminiscent of the Book of Judges.⁹⁵

It is possible that, as with many Greek dramas of the ancient era, The Book of Ruth was a dramatic reworking of a much older legendary story. The Cambridge Bible Commentary presents a possible three-stage evolution of the Book of Ruth's composition:

- (i) an old poetic tale, perhaps from the days of the Judges,
- (ii) a prose version from the eighth or ninth centuries,
- (iii) a final edition in its present form from after the Exile.⁹⁶

While speculation as to the first and second stages of this theory are beyond the scope of this work, strong evidence exists for a final composition of the work after the Exile -- indeed, after the mid-5th century BCE.

Stylistic Issues

If written, or put in its final form, only after the 5th century BCE, why does The Book of Ruth retain a style generally reminiscent of a much-earlier era?

Jewish authors of the Hellenistic age adopted the Hellenistic convention of writing pseudonymous works conforming to the literary conventions of their ancestors.⁹⁷ Elias Bickerman advances two theories for such archaic writing: (i) as a general reaction of the ancient civilizations of the Near East to their new "barbarian" masters and (ii) despite its innovative spirit in many areas, Hellenistic civilization remained traditional

⁹⁴ The Cambridge Bible Commentary: The Books of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Lamentations, p. 7.

⁹⁵ Robert Gordis, The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job, University of Chicago Press (London: 1965), p. 164.

⁹⁶ The Cambridge Bible Commentary: The Books of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Lamentations, Wesley Fuerst (commentator), Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 1975), p. 7.

⁹⁷ Elias Bickerman, The Jews in the Greek Age, Harvard University Press (Cambridge, MA: 1988), p. 202.

and suspect of innovation; thus, Egyptian priests writing under the Ptolemies tried to imitate their classical language, then out of use for over a millennia.⁹⁸

Why is there no tradition as to the theatrical origins of The Book of Ruth? To answer this question, we must understand the complex historical relationship between ancient Greek and Jewish cultures. Historian Martin Hengel divides the interaction between Judaism and Hellenism into three periods:

(i) During the third century BCE, a positive and open relationship seems to have existed between the Greeks and the Jews of Palestine, even amongst Jews who strictly observed the law.⁹⁹

(ii) This view of Greek civilization starts to change in the era of Ben Sira (ca. 180-175 BCE), who criticizes the complete assimilation of the upper classes into Greek culture and away from the belief of their ancestors.¹⁰⁰

(iii) The rise of the Hasidim and later, the strict Essenes (ca. 150 BCE) at the beginning of the Maccabean revolt marks the third stage in the relationship. Here, the dispute becomes nearly intractable between those opposing the spread of Greek influence (especially the Essenes) and those favoring - and even seeking to accelerate - the integration of Greek culture into Jewish society.

With the success of the Hasmonean revolt against Greek rule, a deeply reactionary spirit within Judaism took hold and Greek gymnasia and Greek education were banned.¹⁰¹ To mark the supremacy of the Temple, Simon Maccabee destroyed the walls of Acra and (according to Josephus) leveled every hill on which the citadel had

⁹⁸ Bickerman, pp. 202-203.

⁹⁹ Hengel, p. 248.

¹⁰⁰ Hengel, p. 249.

¹⁰¹ Johnson, p. 105.

stood, 'so that the Temple might be higher than it'.¹⁰² John Hyrcanus, who succeeded his father Simon and ruled from 134-104 BCE, sought to eliminate all foreign and heretical cults, destroying the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim, demolishing the city of Samaria and pillaging and burning the Greek city of Scythopolis.¹⁰³

It is against this historical backdrop that The Book of Ruth appears on the scene and enters the canon. With this total rejection of all things Greek, The Book of Ruth as a dramatic play presented a conundrum: How to reconcile this Jewish core text with its Greek theatrical form?

Perhaps the solution was to conceal the Greek form.

Point of View: Greek vs. Jewish Thought

Ancient Greece and ancient Israel held quite differing worldviews. As historian Moses Hadas observes: "The Greeks seem almost to have lacked a sense of history; everything, whenever it happened, is conceived of as present"¹⁰⁴. However, in the Biblical tradition, "All of history is the unfolding of a grand scheme, single and unified."¹⁰⁵

This helps explain the uniquely Jewish point of view presented by the Narrator in the Epilogue to The Book of Ruth. Here, the Narrator informs us that this apparently simple story of two struggling women is actually much, much more. The story of Ruth and Naomi is not merely a pleasant, pastoral folk tale with a happy ending. Rather, this story has consequences for all of human history. For these poor, downtrodden women are none other than the forebears of King David.

¹⁰² Johnson, p. 106.

¹⁰³ Johnson, p. 107.

¹⁰⁴ Hadas, p. 55.

In the movie Casablanca, Humphrey Bogart's character Rick states that, "The problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world". However, the Narrator of The Book of Ruth informs us that the problems of the three little people -- Ruth, Naomi and Boaz -- actually do matter. Indeed, as Moses Hadas would say, they amount to nothing less than an essential element in the grand unfolding of all human history.

¹⁰⁵ Hadas, p. 55

Part IV: Conclusions: The Holy and The Not-Yet-Holy

But Is It Jewish?

Gilligan's Island and the story of Jonah? Star Wars and Chanuka? Austin Powers and Passover? The use of pop culture and comedy as a means to teach Biblical stories may strike some observers as not very traditional. But adaptation of popular culture may be as old as Judaism itself.

The development of Jewish texts and traditions did not take place in a cultural vacuum, wholly separate from the local civilization. Indeed, adaptation of elements of neighboring culture may be as old as Judaism itself. Ancient Israel stood at the crossroads between Africa and Asia; thus, it was constantly subject to the influences of both the native Canaanite and foreign travelers and invading armies on their way across its land.¹⁰⁶ Parallels have been identified between ancient Judaism and Babylonian culture during the Middle Bronze period (2200-1500 BCE) and Ugaritic culture in Syria during the Late Bronze period (1500 – 1250 BCE).¹⁰⁷ According to Nahum Sarna, Judaism would often combat alien cultures through usurpation and transformation of the outside mythos: "Often the technique is to use the very terminology and phraseology of pagan myth or liturgy, emptying them of their objectionable content, and transforming them to make them compatible with the religion of Israel."¹⁰⁸

For example, Reuven Hammer notes that the sacrificial system practiced in ancient Israel borrowed the outward forms of pagan worship, but revolutionized the

¹⁰⁶ Nahum Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁷ Mathews and Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels*, Paulist Press (New York: 1991), pp. 2-3.

¹⁰⁸ Nahum Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*, p. 72.

inner meaning.¹⁰⁹ Whereas the pagan gods were viewed as needing (and, therefore, consuming) the sacrifices, Exod. 25:30 describes how the showbread for the God of Israel was placed on the table each week -- and nothing was done with it.¹¹⁰ Maimonides maintains that the sacrifices were retained in Judaism, not because God required them, but because the people needed them, as sacrifice was the prevailing custom of worship of the day.¹¹¹ The prophets would later seek to transform the experience of bringing sacrifices: "Samuel said, 'Does God delight in elevation offerings and feast offerings as much as in hearkening to the voice of God? See, to obey is better than a choice offering, to pay heed than the fat of rams'" (1 Sam. 15:22).

Some Psalms appear to have been based upon well-known pagan hymns, albeit reworked by the Hebrew Psalmist to express a new message. For example, many commentators see a close relation between Psalm 104 and a hymn to the sun of Akhenaton (Amenophis IV) found at El-Amarna.¹¹² However, whereas the sun in the Egyptian hymn represents a deity-- "When thou dost set on the western horizon, the earth is in darkness, resembling death" -- in the Hebrew Psalter the sun has been transformed into a creature serving the Creator's Will -- "He appointed the moon for seasons; the sun knows its setting time; You make darkness, and it is night; when all the beasts of the forest creep forth." (Psalm 104:19-20). Parallels have also been identified between "The Stories of Ba'al and Anat" (ca. 1400 BCE) and The Book of Psalms.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Reuven Hammer, Entering Jewish Prayer, p. 44.

¹¹⁰ Hammer, p. 44.

¹¹¹ Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, Part III, Ch. 32, p. 526, Shlomo Pines (transl.) University of Chicago Press (Chicago: 1963).

¹¹² Hans-Joachim Kraus, Psalms: A Commentary, Vol. 2, p. 302.

¹¹³ Mathews and Benjamin, Old Testament Parallels, Paulist Press (New York: 1991), pp. 153-175. Compare the following verses from "Anat Goes to War (I.ii)" and The Book of Psalms: (a) "Her heart fills with joy" cf. Ps. 16:9: "For this reason, my heart rejoices"; (b) "She bathed with rain from The Cloud Rider" cf. Ps. 68:5: "Exalt Him Who rides on the clouds".

Jewish music, too has experienced cross-cultural sharing. The recitation (and, likely, singing) of the Psalms was generally accompanied by music played by the Levites. As Nahum Sarna notes, "By the time the Israelites settled in Canaan, a well-established tradition of vocal and instrumental music as an important mode of religious expression had long existed there and everywhere else in the Near East".¹¹⁴ Indeed, throughout history, Jews have shared musical traditions with local cultures. The Italian Jewish song of praise, "Alabemis", was written in a traditional "Tarantella" rhythm; Moroccans set Psalm 16 to the tune of the Moroccan National anthem; and the French sang Hallel HaGadol - Psalm 136 to the tune of a popular French song.¹¹⁵

Today, the cultural milieu from which we may borrow includes Star Wars and Austin Powers, Indiana Jones and SpongeBob Square Pants. I have involved all of them in Biblical plays.

Lessons of The Book of Ruth

The final form of The Book of Ruth shows the likely hand of cultural borrowing. The Book of Ruth evidences many of the innovations of Greek theater of the mid-5th century BCE, including Three Actors, a Narrator, a limited Chorus, a Prologue, Ordinary Women Protagonists, Real Life Issues, a Public/Private Male/Female Dichotomy and an Unexpected Epilogue resolving all difficulties. As these innovations may be dated no earlier than the mid-5th century BCE, the final form of The Book of Ruth may be dated no earlier than this time period. It must be noted that this does not mean that The Book of Ruth was first written after the mid-5th century BCE; indeed, it may well be a re-

¹¹⁴ Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms*, p.p. 8-9.

¹¹⁵ "Songs of Longing and Belonging", Lecture of Hazzan Ramon Tasat, Annual Retreat of The Academy for Jewish Religion, Kerhonkson, NY, Nov. 18, 2008.

telling of a much older story. However, as with all successful cultural borrowing, Judaism took the Greek theatrical form and adapted it to a Jewish purpose. The Book of Ruth's Point of View is uniquely Jewish, showing how the small story of two struggling women is an essential part of the unfolding of God's great Plan.

Moreover, the content of The Book of Ruth also argues for a Judaism enriched by involvement with the world. The Book of Ruth teaches that Judaism may benefit from interaction with the world. Ruth the Moabite's unwavering devotion to Naomi and her union with Boaz lead to King David. The Book of Ruth thus teaches that Judaism may be enriched by welcoming certain *things* from other cultures (the dramatic theatrical form), as well as certain *people* from other cultures (Ruth the Moabite).

In both form and content, The Book of Ruth stands for a Judaism that recognizes and values the benefits that Judaism may gain from its interaction with the whole of God's world.

"Sing to God a New Song!" (Psalm 96)

In this paper and in the Biblical plays presented, I have attempted to make the case for bringing the full array of human creativity in Judaism. I believe this is one means by which we can make Judaism accessible, relevant and exciting.

One of the great advantages of the somewhat irreverent tone of the creative plays in this paper is that they highlight that there is no distinction between religion and the "real world." It is perfectly acceptable to see a connection between Gilligan's Island and Jonah, between laughter and religion, between Judaism and song parody. Judaism is more than a religion of the synagogue; it is (as Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan once famously observed) a Civilization. All parts of human existence should be considered a part of this

Civilization, not just the apparently sanctified precincts of the synagogue. As one of the followers of the Hasidic master Rabbi Dov Baer said, "I didn't go to [the Rebbe] to learn Torah, but to see him unbuckle his shoes."¹¹⁶

In explaining the tenets of Open Orthodoxy, Rabbi Avi Weiss likewise sees no distinction between Judaism and the "Real World":

*"Chemistry, language, medicine, and all disciplines are potentially aspects of Torah. In the words of Rav Kook, 'There is nothing unholy, there is only the holy and the not yet holy.'...In a word, there is nothing devoid of God's imprint. The way one loves, the way one conducts oneself in business, the way one eats...are all no less holy than praying and fasting."*¹¹⁷

To those who would claim that pop culture is not "Jewish" enough, I answer with the words of Rav Kook: "There is only the holy and the not yet holy." Indeed, in the *Kedusha* in our daily liturgy, we recite the following verse from Isaiah indicating that God's Presence extends throughout the world: "Holy, holy, holy, The Lord of Hosts, the whole world is filled with the One's Holiness." (Isaiah 6:3).

In Deut. 4:27-28, we are warned that, if we anger God by worshipping idols, "The Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and you shall be left few in number among the nations... And there you shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell." Nonetheless, from this situation of apparent great distance from God, there is hope: "But if from there you shall seek the Lord your God, you shall find him, if you seek him with all your heart (*lev*) and with all your soul." (Deut. 4:29). However, the translation of "*lev*" as heart" does not capture the true meaning of the word. "*Lev*" encompasses our full inner self -- our mind, knowledge,

¹¹⁶ http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/hasidim_&_mitnagdim.html

¹¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avi_Weiss.

memory, inclinations and character.¹¹⁸ Indeed, repeatedly, the Torah enjoins us to employ all our heart in the service of God, including in the *Shema* that we recite twice each day: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might"¹¹⁹ In serving God with all our "*lev*", we should employ all the gifts of imagination and humor with which God may have blessed us.

Let us direct all the wonderful flights of imagination and creativity of the human mind towards the service of God.

"Where is God?"

The Kotzker Rebbe answers, "Wherever we let God in."

Even -- "Here on Jonah-gan's Isle!"

¹¹⁸ The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Francis Brown, Hendrickson Publishers (Peabody, MA: 1906), pp. 524-5.

¹¹⁹ Also Deut. 10:12, 11:13, 13:4, 26:16, 30:2, Joshua 22:5, I Sam 12:20, Jer 29:13, Yoel 2:12, Prov. 3:5.

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