

Judith Weinshall Liberman

LIBRETTO
for
GOOD OLD ABRAHAM: THE MUSICAL
A Musical in Two Acts

BASED ON THE PLAY
GOOD OLD ABRAHAM
BY
JUDITH WEINSHALL LIBERMAN

Copyright © 2011 by Judith Weinshall Liberman

GOOD OLD ABRAHAM: THE MUSICAL

A Note from the Playwright-Librettist

My main guideline in writing the lyrics for **GOOD OLD ABRAHAM: THE MUSICAL** was to stay true to the characters in the original play, **GOOD OLD ABRAHAM**, on which the musical is based: Joshua's persistence, Aaron's coolness, Abraham's passion, etc. The only substantive change I made in developing my original play into a musical was to add a "romantic interest" for Joshua. She is a teenager called "Rachel," who, however, is neither seen nor heard by the audience, but is the intended recipient of Joshua's telephone communications.

GOOD OLD ABRAHAM was inspired by the story of the patriarch Abraham, as told in the Old Testament book of Genesis. Since I grew up in Haifa, Israel (then Palestine), and attended the Reali School, where the Old Testament was an important part of our curriculum, I became acquainted with the story of Abraham when I was still in elementary school. The emphasis in our Bible classes at the Reali School was on the historical and literary aspects of the stories we read, rather than on their religious implications. What I took away from the biblical story about Abraham was that he was a man whose faith in God was so profound that he was willing to give up his two beloved sons if that was what God demanded of him.

Although at the time I did not question Abraham's obedience to God, I felt compassion, even as a young girl, for Abraham's two sons: Ishmael, whom, following God's word, Abraham banished to the desert; and Isaac, whom Abraham was willing to sacrifice, seemingly without hesitation, as a burnt offering to God.

I was in my twenties when, with the advent of motherhood, I first began to seriously reflect upon both the moral soundness of Abraham's behavior and the patriarch's veneration in history. From the suicides of ancient Masada through the martyrdoms of the Middle Ages and all the way to more recent sacrifices made in war by fathers and mothers of their sons and daughters, Abraham's binding of Isaac has served as an ideal worthy of emulation. Over the years, this admiration of Abraham increasingly appeared to me to be unjustifiable, so that when I sat down to write **GOOD OLD ABRAHAM** after reaching my eighties, my doubts about the patriarch and his adulation were the result of decades of reflection.

GOOD OLD ABRAHAM questions the rationality and morality of Abraham's behavior and his suitability for the positive symbolic role accorded to him by history. This questioning is done within the framework of father-son Bible-study sessions, where the son, Joshua, an American teenager who is the play's main character, increasingly gains interest in the Abraham saga and, with mounting self-confidence and insight, dares to question old "truths." Needless to say, the implications of the play go far beyond the bounds of the story of Abraham. They extend to "truths" born in other times and places, "truths" which are still held, and even fought and died for, and which, having remained hitherto unquestioned, may need a Joshua to probe their worth.

While **GOOD OLD ABRAHAM** was inspired by the biblical story, I have taken the liberty of bestowing my own interpretation upon the original tale.

Judith Weinshall Liberman

ACT ONE
PART I

LIST OF SONGS

1. **ABRAHAM (SOLO)**
WHERE ARE YOU?
pp. 8– 9
2. **JOSHUA (SOLO)**
WEEKEND
pp. 10– 11
3. **AARON (SOLO)**
HERITAGE
pp. 12 – 14
4. **ABRAHAM (SOLO)**
I LOVE MY WIFE
pp. 17 - 18

ACT ONE
PART II

LIST OF SONGS

5. **JOSHUA - AARON (DUET)**
ALTAR
pp. 28 - 29
6. **SARAH (SOLO)**
ONE-MAN WOMAN
pp. 35 -36
7. **HAGAR (SOLO)**
JEALOUSY
pp. 41 - 42
8. **JOSHUA (SOLO)**
MOM, I MISS YOU!
pp. 44 - 45
9. **ABRAHAM (SOLO)**
SODOM
pp. 50 - 51

ACT TWO

LIST OF SONGS

- 10.** ABRAHAM - ISHMAEL (DUET)
SACRIFICE
pp. 53 - 54
- 11.** SARAH (SOLO)
FAITH
pp. 56 - 57
- 12.** SARAH (SOLO)
BANISHMENT
pp. 60 - 61
- 13.** ABRAHAM - ISHMAEL (DUET)
PARTING
pp. 63 - 64
- 14.** HAGAR – (SOLO)
SAVE THE CHILD
pp. 65 - 66
- 15.** JOSHUA (SOLO)
JUST PLAIN OLD GOOD
pp. 71 - 72
- 16.** SARAH (SOLO)
LOSS OF FAITH
pp. 77 - 78
- 17.** AARON (SOLO)
ON NINE - ELEVEN
pp. 82 - 84
- 18.** ISAAC - ISHMAEL (DUET)
GETTING TOGETHER
pp. 86 - 87

CHARACTERS

JOSHUA	An American teenager, AARON'S son
AARON	A middle aged man, a widower, a rabbi
ABRAHAM	An elderly but youthful looking man
SARAH	ABRAHAM'S elderly but youthful and attractive looking wife
ISAAC	ABRAHAM'S and SARAH'S son, a teenager who grows up
HAGAR	A beautiful woman of uncertain age
ISHMAEL	ABRAHAM and HAGAR'S son, a teenager who grows up
VOICE O.S.	A man's voice off stage, representing God

TIME AND PLACE

The play takes place simultaneously in contemporary America and in ancient Canaan. Time indications at the beginning of Acts and their Parts pertain to the contemporary scene. To accommodate the division between the contemporary and the ancient scenes, the stage is sectioned into two parts throughout the play: first, a very small area at stage right downstage, where the contemporary events take place; and, second, the main stage, where the ancient saga unfolds. The contemporary scene, which is well lit, is a very small space, a portion of a room, and contains a table, two chairs and a bookcase. There is no wall or other opaque barrier between this space and the main stage. The ancient scene is in a desert-like space, with scattered rocks and branches on the ground and a suggestion of distant barren hills. There is a small shrub near downstage center, and, nearby, a large flat-topped rock, which can double as the top of a well. A small, rectangular tent stands upstage at stage left, running lengthwise parallel to the stage front. The tent has the flap closest to the audience raised so that its interior is visible. The tent's doorway is toward center stage. Pillows are amassed in a tall heap inside the tent. The characters on the main stage cannot see or hear what is taking place in the contemporary scene between AARON and JOSHUA. Nor can AARON see or hear what is transpiring on the main stage. However, by contrast, JOSHUA can see and hear the events unfolding there.

Throughout the play, when AARON and JOSHUA are having their study session, JOSHUA repeatedly and furtively glances over his left shoulder at the happenings on the main stage.

**ALL SINGING
IS INDICATED BY A BOLD FONT**

OPENING OF SHOW MUSIC

ACT ONE PART I

The stage is dimly lit except for a brightly lit small space downstage at stage right, part of a room, where there is a table with two chairs. One of the chairs has its back to the main stage, the other is perpendicular to that chair and faces the audience. Near the table, at stage right downstage, is a bookcase full of books. As the curtain rises, AARON is standing in front of the bookcase, looking through the books. He picks out two identical-looking large volumes, places them on the table, one in front of each of the two chairs, then sits down on the chair that has its back to the main stage. He leafs through the book in front of him, then stops. Adjusting his skullcap, he begins reading silently to himself.

The illumination of the main stage suggests a dream-like atmosphere. ABRAHAM, dressed in a flowing robe, walks rapidly from stage left through the tent and emerges through the tent's doorway. At center stage, he paces this way and that, looking at the sky, as if searching for something.

SARAH, dressed in an ancient style long gown and heavily bejeweled, enters the tent from stage left. She walks through the tent and stops before reaching the tent's doorway. She is closely followed by HAGAR, who is similarly but not as richly attired. The two women stand near the tent doorway, watching ABRAHAM'S every move. SARAH intermittently shakes her head from side to side while HAGAR observes her. SARAH and HAGAR speak to each other from time to time, but their

conversation is inaudible to the audience. After a while, SARAH silently walks back and exits at stage left, dutifully followed by HAGAR. Some time later, SARAH and HAGAR return and resume their previous positions. This back-and-forth activity of SARAH and HAGAR is repeated several times throughout this ACT.

ABRAHAM

Where are You?

ABRAHAM continues pacing back and forth around the stage, searching the sky.

ABRAHAM

**Have I sinned
Against You,
Dear God?
Please tell me, God,
If I have sinned,
How have I sinned?**

**I call Your name,
Dear God, but
You do not hear me.
Or, Heaven forbid,
Do You hear me, God,
Yet not care to respond?**

**Where are You,
My God,
When I need You?**

**You told me to go
To a land You would show me.
The Land of Canaan'**

**You promised the land
To my seed forever.
Yet I have no seed.**

**Where are You,
My God,
When I need You?**

**My wife, Sarai, and I
Are old, O God.
Without your help, dear God,**

**How can we, old people,
Have seed, O God,
If we do not have a child?**

**Where are You,
My God,
When I need You?**

ABRAHAM falls to his knees at center stage. While on his knees, he alternately looks at the sky and bows.

AARON stops reading and looks at his watch.

AARON

Where are you, Josh?

AARON listens for an answer.

AARON
louder

Joshua!

JOSHUA, somewhat disheveled, comes in from stage right, tucking his cell phone into his pants pocket. He quickly seats himself next to his father at the table, facing the audience.

JOSHUA

Sorry, Dad!

AARON

It's past three o'clock.

JOSHUA

I was just talking to Rachel.

AARON

You know what we do on the Sabbath beginning at three.

JOSHUA

Oh jeez, Dad. Do we have to?

AARON

Tell me: What more important things do you have to do on Sabbath afternoon?

JOSHUA

Rachel wanted to hang out.

AARON

You two can hang out some other time.

JOSHUA

None of my friends have to spend their Saturday afternoons studying.

AARON

Do you want to grow up as ignorant about your heritage as your friends will be about theirs?

JOSHUA

Some call it “the Sabbath.”

I call it “the weekend.”

“The Sabbath” is such an

Old fashioned blend:

Part Jewish, part other.

Believe me, my friend,

Just call it “the weekend,”

A time to be free

Of school

And of studies

For a teenager

Like me.

Time to hang out with pals

And talk on the phone

And text

What you’re up to

Before the weekend

Is gone.

What’s the point of being a teen -

And an American at that -

If I have

To waste

My weekends

Learning scat?

**Just call it “the weekend,”
A time to be free
Of school
And of studies
For a teenager
Like me.**

**None of my friends
Read the Bible
With its stories
So old
They sound
Awfully tribal.**

**Well, I say, “Give me death
Or give me liberty!”
Spending weekends
Learning Bible
Is like dying
In my puberty.**

**Just call it “the weekend,”
A time to be free
Of school
And of studies
For a teenager
Like ---**

**Why study history?
History is past.
It’s done!
It’s over with!
It’s irrelevant!
It didn’t last!**

JOSHUA

For seven long years I went to Hebrew School. Isn’t that enough?

ABRAHAM

searching the sky

Can You hear me?

AARON

With all due respect, Hebrew School is no longer what it used to be.

JOSHUA
What do you mean?

AARON
I figured it out after your Bar Mitzvah.

JOSHUA
I thought you said I did well on my Bar Mitzvah.

AARON
You did.

JOSHUA
All those blessings I had to chant!

AARON
You did well, but...

JOSHUA
And you said Mom would have been proud.

AARON
patting JOSHUA'S head lovingly
She certainly would have been. Very proud. You chanted everything perfectly. But afterwards I realized that Hebrew School didn't give you the proper foundation.

JOSHUA
And I had to do it all in Hebrew!

AARON
It was all done by rote. That's when I decided to take matters into my own hands. I can't let my only child grow up without a proper foundation. Mom would not have wanted me to.

JOSHUA
Oh jeez, Dad. I thought once I was done with my Bar Mitzvah, that was it.

AARON
Learning about your heritage is never done.

JOSHUA
But why?!

AARON
Look, Joshua,
You have to understand:
Without a past

**There is no future,
Either small or grand.**

**No future for nations:
“Ignore the past,”
As Santayana said,
“You’re doomed to repeat it.”
You’ll go down fast.**

**What’s true of nations
Holds for people, too.
You have to learn
From the past
So you’ll know what to do.**

**And people’s experience
Includes that of kin:
Our forefathers
Whose story
Is told as they begin**

**On a wondrous journey
Guided by God,
From the Garden of Eden
To Canaan
And beyond.**

**What’s true of nations
Holds for people, too.
You have to learn
From the past
So you’ll know what to do.**

**The story is told
In a book we hold dear:
We call it “The Bible.”
From its pages we learn
How to live without fear,**

**How to be good Jews
And good citizens too,
Good people,
Good humans,
Good through and through.**

What’s true of nations

**Holds for people, too.
You have to learn
From the past
So you'll know what to do.**

**How to be a good Jew,
A good citizen too,
A good person,
A good human,
Good through and through.**

JOSHUA

Oh jeez!

ABRAHAM

Why will You not answer me?

AARON

Now, do you remember what story we read last Sabbath?

JOSHUA

I think it was about Noah and the flood.

AARON

No. Noah was the previous Sabbath. Last Sabbath we studied another story.

JOSHUA

Which one?

AARON

That's what I'm asking you!

JOSHUA

I can't remember.

AARON

Think!

JOSHUA

I can't think of it.

AARON

The Tower of Babel.

JOSHUA

Oh, yeah, now I remember. God didn't approve of skyscrapers. I wonder what God

would say if He ever came to America.

AARON

It isn't that God didn't approve of skyscrapers. What He didn't approve of was people's motive for building the Tower of Babel. People thought that by building a tall tower they could elevate themselves above God. So what was the lesson God taught mankind by destroying the Tower of Babel?

JOSHUA

I forget.

AARON

Think, Joshua, think! That's what God gave us a brain for. To think.

JOSHUA

I'm thinking, but I still can't figure it out. All I can think of is that the Tower of Babel story was a lot like Nine-Eleven. That tower crashing down on all those people!

AARON

Humility. By destroying the Tower of Babel, God was teaching mankind to be humble.

JOSHUA

And then I think of Mom getting killed on Nine-Eleven, right there when the Twin Towers came crashing down.

AARON

patting JOSHUA gently on the head

Yes, Josh. I think of Nine-Eleven myself. Mom was a wonderful woman, and she loved you very much. You and I both miss her. But we have to go on. That's what she would have wanted us to do. Don't you agree?

JOSHUA

I guess so.

AARON

Listen, Josh. There's something fundamental you have to understand. Maybe I haven't made it clear enough: We read the Bible stories so we can learn from them. They're not there just to entertain us. They teach us important lessons. They teach us how we should behave. With Mom gone, I feel my responsibility to teach you more keenly than ever. Do you understand?

JOSHUA

I guess.

AARON

Well, let's get started. Pay attention now, Josh. Let's read. Take it from Genesis, chapter 11, verse 24.

JOSHUA searches in his book, leafing back and forth. AARON helps him find the right page and points to the spot.

“And Nahor... begot Terah. And Nahor lived after he begot Terah one hundred and nineteen years... And Terah lived seventy years and begot Abraham...”

AARON

Pay attention, Josh. It says “Abram,” not “Abraham.” Only much later was Abram’s name changed by God to “Abraham.”

ABRAHAM

Did I not let You lead me to the Land of Canaan?

JOSHUA

What’s the difference between the two names?

AARON

“Abram” means “great father,” while “Abraham” means “father of many.”

JOSHUA

I see. *“Abram, Nahor and Haran.”*

AARON

Okay. Stop. Why is Abraham important to us?.

ABRAHAM

Did I not keep my faith in You even though the Land of Canaan was bare, with no water or food for my household?

JOSHUA

Beats me.

AARON

First of all, he was one of the patriarchs.

JOSHUA

What does that mean?

AARON

A patriarch is a father-ruler, like the chief of a tribe. Only unlike in a tribe such as an Indian tribe, we are all supposedly descendants of this chief. Abraham is one of our ancestors. He lived about four thousand years ago.

JOSHUA

So learning about Abraham is like learning family history?! But Dad, do we have to start that far back? Four thousand years! We'll never be done.

AARON

We'll take it step by step. We have time.

JOSHUA

Oh jeez!

ABRAHAM

Stands up and looks at the sky

**I love that woman,
My wife.
Since childhood
I have loved
My Sarai.**

**Now in old age
I love her
Even more
For all that
We have shared.**

**Thank you, God,
For the miracle
That is Sarai.**

**She is still beautiful,
My Sarai.
More wondrous
Than any other
Woman on earth.**

**Though we are old
We still take pleasure
In each other,
Yet we have
No child!**

**Thank you, God,
For the miracle
That is Sarai.**

**Yet we have no child,
Dear God.**

**Yet we have no child,
My God.
No child!**

**Can You not perform
Another miracle, O God,
A very giant little miracle?**

AARON

Okay. Let's read. Please read Genesis, chapter 11, verse 27.

JOSHUA searches in his book, leafing back and forth. AARON helps him find the right page and points to the spot.

JOSHUA

"Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah begot Abram, Nahor and Haran, ..."

ABRAHAM

God, have You forsaken me?

During the following, ABRAHAM begins gathering rocks and assembling them into an altar at upstage right. He places a layer of rocks on the ground, one rock next to another in a rectangular formation, then places a layer of rocks on top of the previous one and another on top of that one. Intermittently he stops and wipes his brow.

JOSHUA

"...and Haran begot Lot. And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur..."

AARON

Stop. Let's discuss it. Where did Abraham's family come from?

JOSHUA

It says from Ur.

AARON

Do you know where Ur is located?

JOSHUA

Beats me.

AARON

In Iraq.

JOSHUA

In Iraq? You mean the Iraq where the American troops were fighting?

AARON

Exactly. Now, does the text tell us whom Abraham married?

JOSHUA

looks in his book

It says *“The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai...”*

AARON

And do you know what Sarai’s name was changed to later?

JOSHUA

“Sarah”?

AARON

Excellent! God changed her name to “Sarah” at the same time He changed “Abram” into “Abraham.” We can call her “Sarah” except when we are reading and it says “Sarai.” And what one thing does the text tell us here about Sarah?

JOSHUA

searches in the text

“And Sarai was barren. She had no child.”

AARON

Right. Abraham’s wife, Sarah, had no child. That is an important thing to remember. It’s a major factor in the Abraham saga, as you will find out. But let’s go on. What does the text tell us next?

ABRAHAM, having gathered some rocks arranges them in a rectangular formation, then sits down on the ground, seemingly exhausted. He sighs, wipes his brow, then gets up and stands on his knees near the arranged rocks and looks at the sky.

ABRAHAM

Please, God, give me the strength to finish building this altar for You.

ABRAHAM gets up and continues gathering and arranging rocks.

JOSHUA

after reading to himself

Abraham's dad and Abraham and Sarah and their nephew Lot left Ur and when they got to a place called Haran they stayed there.

AARON

Do you know why Abraham and his family left Ur?

JOSHUA

Why?

AARON

Because the people of Ur were idol-worshippers. They believed that their idols demanded child sacrifice. Abraham, on the other hand, believed in God, not in idols. Now, do you know where Haran is?

JOSHUA

Not really.

AARON

In Turkey.

ABRAHAM

gathering rocks and building

Thank You, God, for giving me the strength to continue building an altar for You.

JOSHUA

So did they stay in Haran?

AARON

Terah died in Haran, but Abraham and Sarah and Lot went to the Land of Canaan. It happened years after they got to Haran. God appeared to Abraham one day and commanded him to leave Haran. Can you find the verse where God commanded Abraham to leave Haran? I think you'll find it further down, in chapter 12, the first verse. Please read it to me.

JOSHUA

“Now the Lord said unto Abram: ‘Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto the land that I will show thee.’ ”

AARON

Stop and read that sentence again, this time to yourself. It's very important. What did God command Abraham to do?

JOSHUA

God told him to leave Haran and go to a land that God will show him.

AARON

And what did that land turn out to be?

JOSHUA

The Land of Canaan?

AARON

Excellent! And did God make any promises to Abraham? Read to yourself and tell me.

JOSHUA

studying his book

God said He will make Abraham into a great nation.

AARON

And what does the story tell us Abraham did after God gave him the command and made him this promise?

JOSHUA

Abraham took his wife and nephew and everyone and everything in his household and left Haran, like God commanded him to.

AARON

And how old was Abraham when he set out on his journey from Haran?

JOSHUA

looking in his book

It says seventy-five. Pretty old.

AARON

And does it say whether Abraham eventually reached the Land of Canaan?

JOSHUA

looking in his book

Yes. He did.

AARON

And where did he settle first?

JOSHUA

looking in his book

A place called Shechem.

ABRAHAM sits down on the ground, seemingly exhausted. He sighs, then gets up on his knees near the arranged rocks and looks at the sky. He wipes his brow, gets up

and continues gathering rocks and building his altar.

ABRAHAM

I am almost done, God, just a few more rocks. Thank You for helping me do the job.

AARON

And what did God promise Abraham then? Please read chapter 12, verse 7.

JOSHUA

“And God appeared unto Abram, and said: ‘Unto thy seed will I give this land.’ ”

AARON

Stop. What does “unto thy seed” mean?

JOSHUA

To Abraham’s children?

AARON

Right. To his children and to their children. To Abraham’s descendants.

JOSHUA

But if Abraham left Haran when he was already seventy-five years old, could he still have children?

AARON

We’ll find out later. The main thing to understand now is that God promised the Land of Canaan to Abraham’s descendants.

JOSHUA

This is all pretty bizarre. How old was Abraham’s wife if Abraham was seventy-five?

AARON

Sarah was ten years younger than Abraham, so she was sixty-five.

JOSHUA

If she was sixty-five, could she still have kids?

AARON

We’ll see later. We don’t want to anticipate too far ahead. It will spoil the suspense.

JOSHUA

Like in a mystery story?

AARON

Precisely.

ABRAHAM finishes building his altar. He looks at it and smiles, then gets on his knees and bows down. He gets up and begins gathering branches, which he places carefully inside the altar.

JOSHUA

looking in his book

I have a question. It says, "*God appeared unto Abram.*" What I want to know is, how did God appear? Like a person?

AARON

It doesn't say.

JOSHUA

Maybe Abraham just imagined that God appeared?

AARON

It says "God appeared."

JOSHUA

Maybe Abraham just heard a voice in his head?

AARON

We have to take the biblical account as it is given.

JOSHUA

But if he only heard a voice, how could Abraham be sure it was God's voice?

AARON

He just knew it was.

JOSHUA

Because he heard it before?

AARON

Yes.

JOSHUA

But how could he tell it was God's voice in the first place?

AARON

He just knew.

JOSHUA

Because he had faith?

AARON
Yes.

JOSHUA
pauses
Hey, Dad. Did you ever hear voices?

AARON
No. I haven't.

JOSHUA
I haven't, either.

AARON
Well, let's continue with our story. Abraham did something very important after he heard God promising the Land of Canaan to his descendants. What did Abraham do? Read it to me. It's in chapter 12, a continuation of the same verse 7.

JOSHUA
"And he built there an altar unto the Lord..."

AARON
Yes, he built an altar to sacrifice to God and thereby thank Him. And then Abraham moved to Beth El, south of Shechem. And what did he do there? Look at the next verse.

JOSHUA
looking in his book
He built another altar. But Dad, how many altars did Abraham build?

ABRAHAM finishes gathering branches and placing them inside his altar. He stands on his knees and looks at the sky.

ABRAHAM
Dear God, thank You for allowing Your humble servant to build an altar for You. I will get a choice lamb for a burnt offering and sacrifice it. Maybe then You will appear to me again.

SARAH, having observed ABRAHAM, walks back through the tent and exits at stage left, followed by HAGAR.

CURTAIN

OPENING OF ACT ONE PART II MUSIC

**ACT ONE
PART II**

A few weeks later. As the curtain rises, AARON and JOSHUA are seated at the table, as before, with their books open in front of them.

On the main stage, ABRAHAM is on his knees near the altar, with his head bowed. There is a black skeleton-like object on top of the altar, suggesting a burnt offering.

SARAH walks into the tent from stage left. She is followed by HAGAR. The two women walk past the pile of pillows to the tent doorway and survey the scene outside. Their eyes fall on ABRAHAM.

SARAH

He is still out there.

During the following exchange between SARAH and HAGAR, JOSHUA and AARON continue with their study session, whether through readings or discussion, but their words are inaudible to the audience.

HAGAR

True, my lady.

SARAH

Praying to his God.

HAGAR

Yes, my lady.

SARAH

What a persistent man!

A man of faith, my lady. HAGAR

When will it end? SARAH

I do not know, my lady. HAGAR

He still believes in his God's promise. SARAH

What promise, my lady? HAGAR

That the Land of Canaan will belong to his descendants. SARAH

A strange promise considering you are both advanced in age, my lady, and have no child. HAGAR

Yes, Hagar. SARAH
sighs

And you, my lady, beyond the child-bearing years. HAGAR

Yes, Hagar. SARAH
sighs

Your husband does not give up easily, my lady. HAGAR

His God keeps repeating the promise, despite the passage of years. SARAH

Do you believe in your husband's God, my lady? HAGAR

I have my doubts. And you? SARAH

HAGAR

I wonder if it is your husband's God or his own imagination that speaks to him, my lady.

SARAH

What do you mean?

HAGAR

Perhaps he wants a child so badly, my lady, that he imagines he is hearing his God promising one to him.

SARAH turns around and walks over to the pile of pillows. With HAGAR'S help, she arranges several pillows in a small pile on the floor of the tent and sits down, facing ABRAHAM. HAGAR pulls out a hand mirror and a brush from her pocket, hands the mirror to SARAH, and proceeds to brush SARAH'S hair.

AARON

Okay, Josh. What did we study last Sabbath?

JOSHUA

About how Abraham and his household went down to Egypt because of the famine in the Land of Canaan, and how when they came back Abraham and his nephew Lot parted company and Lot went to live in Sodom, but Abraham went back to Beth El.

AARON

Do you remember where Sodom was?

JOSHUA

Near the Dead Sea.

AARON

Excellent! But did Abraham stay in Beth El?

JOSHUA

looking in his book

No, Abraham moved to Hebron.

AARON

Do you know where Hebron is?

JOSHUA

Not exactly.

AARON

Further south. In other words, after arriving in the Land of Canaan, first Abraham lived in Shechem and then he moved south to Beth El and then he moved further south to Hebron.

JOSHUA

And in each place he built an altar to God. Even when he moved to Hebron it says *“and built there an altar unto the Lord.”*

AARON

Right.

JOSHUA

**Why did Abraham
Need so many altars?**

AARON

**Because in each place
He wanted to thank God.**

JOSHUA

**Why did he need
An altar to thank God?**

AARON

**Because he wanted
To sacrifice on the altar:
Just little animals
Like small young sheep.**

JOSHUA

**Why would
A God
Who’s supposed
To be kind
Allow for
Such killing?
He’s out of
His mind!**

**Doesn’t God know
That all life is sacred,
That killing the innocent
Just shows a hatred**

**Of what He Himself
Is supposed to have formed
When a pretty big miracle
In Eden He performed?**

**Why would
A God
Who's supposed
To be kind
Allow for
Such killing?
He's out of
His mind!**

**Didn't someone say
About World War Two:
"If you first burn books,
Then you'll burn people, too"?**

**So if you sacrifice
Small animals to God
Wouldn't you then
Believe He'd applaud**

**If you later go on
To sacrifice people, too,
Even your children
Although you're a Jew?**

**Why would
A God
Who's supposed
To be kind
Allow for
Such slaughter?
He's out of
His mind!**

AARON

Joshua!

JOSHUA

I'm glad they didn't have portable altars in those days.

AARON

What important lesson do we learn from this story?

JOSHUA

If they had portable altars, Abraham might have sacrificed even more innocent animals.

AARON

The lesson is that it's important to be grateful. Always remember that, Josh. To be grateful and to express one's gratitude. And what did we learn in chapter 15?

VOICE O.S.

Do not be afraid, Abram. Your reward will be great.

ABRAHAM

But God, what will You give me, considering that I am childless and my only heir is my servant Eliezer?

VOICE O.S.

No, that man will not be your heir.

ABRAHAM

But, God, You have given me no seed!

VOICE O.S.

Someone who comes out of your body will be your heir.

ABRAHAM

Oh, God! Can that be so?

VOICE O.S.

Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. That is how plentiful I will make your seed.

JOSHUA

turns some pages while studying his book

God again promised Abraham that he will have descendants.

AARON

Right.

JOSHUA

But this time it says that "*the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision.*" Does that mean God didn't actually appear to Abraham physically but only in Abraham's imagination, or even that only God's voice was heard by Abraham and Abraham didn't even see anything?

AARON

The text doesn't make it clear. The main thing is that God spoke to Abraham.

JOSHUA

Or maybe Abraham thought God spoke to him?

AARON

You have to take these things on faith. Let's go on to chapter 16. Just read the first verse to me.

JOSHUA

"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children; and she had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar." What's a handmaid?

AARON

A female slave.

JOSHUA

But how did Hagar become Sarah's slave?

AARON

The Bible doesn't tell us, but according to our oral tradition, Hagar was the Pharaoh's daughter and the Pharaoh gave Hagar to Sarah as a handmaid when Abraham and Sarah were in Egypt.

During the following exchange between SARAH and HAGAR, AARON and JOSHUA continue with their study session, but their words are inaudible to the audience.

SARAH

Perhaps Abram is not too old to have a child.

HAGAR

How so, my lady?

SARAH

He has not aged as I have.

HAGAR

That is the way of the world, my lady. We women age much faster than the men.

SARAH

My husband is still strong and vigorous.

HAGAR

I noticed, my lady.

He still tries to have a child. SARAH

I know, my lady. HAGAR

I think I am the problem. SARAH

What do you mean, my lady? HAGAR

I am the barren one. SARAH

Abram loves you, my lady, barren or not. HAGAR

And I love him, too. SARAH

I know, my lady. HAGAR

And my fondest wish is to make my husband happy. SARAH

I noticed that, my lady. HAGAR

But what is a couple without a child? SARAH

A family without a future, my lady. HAGAR

My husband will never be happy without a child. SARAH

That seems to be true, my lady. HAGAR

And I want to make my husband happy. SARAH

HAGAR stops brushing SARAH'S hair. SARAH looks at herself in the mirror.

I have an idea, my lady. HAGAR

What is it, Hagar? SARAH

I know a way for you and Abram to have a child, my lady. HAGAR

After all these years!?! How? SARAH

It is very simple, my lady. HAGAR

Really? SARAH

So simple I do not know why I never thought of it before, my lady. HAGAR

Tell me! SARAH

In all the years I have been serving you, it never crossed my mind before, my lady. HAGAR

What do you have in mind? Tell me already! SARAH

It involves me, my lady. HAGAR

You? SARAH

Am I not your handmaid, my lady? HAGAR

You certainly are, Hagar. SARAH

HAGAR

As your handmaid, do I not have to obey your every command, my lady?

SARAH

You certainly do.

HAGAR

What if you commanded me to go into your husband's tent at night, my lady?

SARAH

What are you saying?

HAGAR

To conceive his child, my lady.

SARAH

Am I hearing you correctly?

HAGAR

If I conceived and bore your husband's child, my lady...

SARAH

Yes?

HAGAR

The child would be yours, my lady.

SARAH

Go on.

HAGAR

As is the custom when a handmaid bears a child, my lady.

SARAH

Go on.

HAGAR

It is the mistress who is deemed to be the mother.

SARAH

Go on.

HAGAR

Not the handmaid, my lady.

SARAH

I understand.

HAGAR

I would simply be the vessel in which your husband's seed grows, my lady.

SARAH

I see what you are saying.

HAGAR

After the child is born, I would nurse it until it was weaned, my lady.

SARAH

Of course. I could not.

HAGAR

But the child would be yours, my lady.

SARAH

Understood.

HAGAR

The child would call you "Mother," my lady, not me.

SARAH

And you, Hagar? What would you be?

HAGAR

Nothing, my lady, only the handmaid who gave the child birth.

SARAH

turns to look at HAGAR

**It would be difficult for me
To do what you suggest**

**And let you bear
My husband's child.**

**In all our years together
I have not strayed. Not even once,
Hagar.**

**And he has been a rock,
Loyal and unwavering,
Hagar.**

**I am a one-man woman
And he is a one-woman man
Despite the pain.**

**Our love has lasted
All these many years,
Hagar.**

**Through all these
Endless wanderings,
Hagar.**

**I am a one-man woman
And he is a one-woman man
Despite the pain.**

**Through times of plenty
And times of famine,**

**Through all the pain
Of childlessness**

**I am a one-man woman
And he is a one-woman man
Despite the pain.**

HAGAR

I feel your pain as if it were my own, my lady.

SARAH

My husband and I have loved each other without reservation.

HAGAR

And all you want is to make your husband happy, as you said, my lady.

SARAH

True. How well you understand me, Hagar!

HAGAR

But, as you said, my lady, the only way to make your husband happy is to give him his own child.

SARAH

So it seems.

HAGAR

And having his own child would fulfill his God's promise to him, my lady.

SARAH

True. The child would be his seed.

HAGAR

And that is reason enough to allow me to help you, my lady.

SARAH

I hesitate. I feel conflicted. I do not know what to do.

HAGAR

pauses

This I promise you, my lady. As soon as I find out that I have conceived, I will no longer go into your husband's tent.

HAGAR resumes brushing SARAH'S hair while looking over at ABRAHAM.
SARAH is lost in thought.

AARON

Please turn to chapter 16, verse 2, and read it to me aloud.

JOSHUA searches in his book, leafing back and forth. AARON helps him find the right page and points to the spot.

JOSHUA

"And Sarai said unto Abram: 'Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing; go in, I pray thee, unto my handmaid; it may be that I shall be built up through her...'"

On stage, SARAH gets up from her seat on the pillows, walks out of the tent and over to ABRAHAM, who is on his knees looking at the sky. When he notices her, ABRAHAM gets up and walks toward SARAH. He greets SARAH with a warm embrace, which she reciprocates. She whispers something in ABRAHAM'S ear, and he whispers something in hers. They go back and forth several times whispering to each other. HAGAR, in the tent, watches ABRAHAM and SARAH and smiles. After a while, still smiling, HAGAR exits at stage left.

AARON

Okay. Stop. Can you tell me in your own words what this section says?

JOSHUA

Sarah told Abraham that he should have a baby with Hagar.

AARON

And did Sarah tell Abraham why?

JOSHUA

Because she herself couldn't have children.

AARON

Excellent! And what does "I shall be built up through her" mean?

JOSHUA

Beats me.

AARON

It probably means that Sarah's reputation would recover, because for a married woman to have no children was considered shameful in the old days.

JOSHUA

But maybe it was Abraham who couldn't have children rather than Sarah. Too bad they didn't have fertility tests. Then Abraham and Sarah could both be tested.

AARON

In those days they assumed it was the wife's fault if a couple had no children.

JOSHUA

How bizarre!

AARON

So Sarah was hoping Hagar would bear Abraham's child.

JOSHUA

But wouldn't it be Hagar, not Sarah, who would be the mother of Abraham's child?

AARON

It was the rule that a slave's child belonged to the master or mistress. Hagar was Sarah's slave. And don't forget that even in America, during slavery, a slave's child didn't belong to the slave but rather to the slave-owner.

JOSHUA

That's not fair! If Hagar had a baby, wouldn't it only be right to let her keep and mother her own child?

AARON

I agree it wasn't fair. And we have come a long way since then in our ideas of fairness. For one thing, we've done away with slavery.

JOSHUA

Can you imagine how Mom would have felt if she couldn't keep me?

AARON

pats JOSHUA'S head lovingly

Mom loved you very much. She wouldn't have given you up for anything. But let's go on. What does it say next? Please read it to me.

JOSHUA

"And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her handmaid... and gave her to Abram her husband to be his wife."

AARON

So Abraham did as Sarah suggested.

JOSHUA

Do you think maybe Abraham agreed because he fancied Hagar and this was his chance to hang out with her?

AARON

I'd like to think it wasn't lust but faith that made Abraham act the way he did. He probably thought that in view of Sarah's age, there was no other way for God's promise that his seed would inherit the Land of Canaan to be fulfilled. Now let's continue. Did Hagar become pregnant?

JOSHUA

It says *"and she conceived."*

AARON

Excellent! That means she got pregnant. And what happened after Hagar became pregnant with Abraham's baby? Please read the rest of verse 4 to me.

JOSHUA

"... and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes."

On stage, SARAH is standing next to ABRAHAM, whispering in his ear. HAGAR, visibly pregnant, walks out of the tent and circles haughtily around the couple. SARAH and ABRAHAM go back and forth several times whispering to each other. Intermittently each stares at HAGAR, who

smiles at ABRAHAM but frowns at SARAH.

AARON

So after Hagar became pregnant, things didn't go as smoothly as Abraham and Sarah expected.

JOSHUA

Serves them right. Using Hagar for their own purposes!

AARON

What did Sarah tell Abraham about the situation? Read chapter 16, verse 5, and tell me in your own words.

JOSHUA

reading in his book

She told Abraham it was all his fault that Hagar became so uppity after she got pregnant.

AARON

And what did Abraham say to Sarah after she blamed him for the situation? Read verse 6 aloud.

JOSHUA

"... But Abram said to Sarai: 'Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her that which is good in thine eyes...'"

AARON

Stop. So what did Abraham say? Did he try to lay blame on Sarah, as Sarah did on him?

JOSHUA

No, he didn't. But he seemed to blame Hagar, because he said to Sarah that she could punish Hagar if she wished. And then it says that Sarah did.

AARON

Don't forget that Hagar was still Sarah's slave, pregnant or not.

JOSHUA

If I was in Hagar's shoes, I would have run away. Like some slaves did in America.

Lighting on the main stage is dimmed. ABRAHAM and SARAH exit through the tent at stage left, and HAGAR, near center stage, is illuminated. She looks in all directions, as if trying to get her bearings. As she walks back and forth on stage, seeking the direction she should follow, it is evident that she is big with child. She walks

with difficulty, over and around the rocks and branches that litter the ground, toward the center of the downstage area. She stumbles as she walks, and eventually falls, seemingly exhausted, to the ground. She sobs.

HAGAR

**My service
To Sarai
Was thankless
And ill repaid.**

**I conceived
So the promise
Of her husband's God
Would come true.**

**And how did she
Repay me,
That barren
Old woman?**

**With jealousy!
It was jealousy
That made her
Abuse me.**

**Jealousy is one
Of those terrible things.
You can't imagine
What suffering it brings,
Especially when it
Results in abuse
Of a mistress by a wife
Who has no excuse
Since the mistress did not
Act alone in this deal:
The husband himself
Loved her better for real.**

**If only Abram saw
How she mistreated me!
He would have put
An end to the abuse.**

**He is so kind and gentle.
He appreciated
My sacrifice
On behalf of his wife.**

**Jealousy is one
Of those terrible things.
You can't imagine
What suffering it brings,
Especially when it
Results in abuse
Of a mistress by a wife
Who has no excuse
Since the mistress did not
Act alone in this deal:
The husband himself
Loved her better for real.**

**I cannot help
Loving that man.
Oh, Abram,
Love of my dreams!**

**Where are you
When I need you?
And where
Is your God?**

VOICE O.S.

Hagar! Where are you going?

HAGAR

looking around for the source of the voice

Who are you?

VOICE O.S.

I am Abram's God.

HAGAR

Oh?! I am fleeing from my mistress.

VOICE O.S.

Return to your mistress, Hagar, and submit yourself to her.

HAGAR

Why should I? She has mistreated me.

VOICE O.S.

Look, Hagar, you are pregnant with a child.

HAGAR

Do You think I am not aware of it?

VOICE O.S.

You will bear a son.

HAGAR

A son!

VOICE O.S.

And you will name your son “Ishmael” – God will hear – because God has heard your suffering.

HAGAR

sitting up and wiping the tears off her face

Ishmael!

VOICE O.S.

And through Ishmael I will greatly multiply your descendants, so they could not even be counted.

HAGAR

looks up at the sky, her face brightened with a smile

You are the God of Seeing, because you saw me! Maybe Abram’s God exists after all!

HAGAR gets up, brushes herself off, and heads back to where she came from, toward center stage. Although the ground is littered with rocks and branches, she walks with great assurance and speed, a smile on her face. When she reaches her destination, ABRAHAM and SARAH run out of the tent toward her to greet her, each hugging her in turn.

AARON

Hagar did run away, but then she went back. And what happened next? Please read chapter 16, verse 15, to yourself and tell me.

JOSHUA

reading to himself

Hagar had a baby boy and Abraham named him “Ishmael.”

AARON

And how old was Abraham when Ishmael was born? It tells you in the next verse.

JOSHUA

looking in his book

Eighty-six years old! Do you believe this stuff?

AARON

That's what the Bible tells us. But then, the Bible skips the first thirteen years of Ishmael's life. It goes on to tell us what happened when Abraham was ninety-nine years old.

JOSHUA

I can just imagine little Ishmael being cuddled by Abraham and Sarah, and by Hagar, too. Actually Ishmael had three parents, and among them two mothers. How wonderful that must have been! I still remember when Mom was around.

AARON

patting JOSHUA lovingly on the head

Your mother loved you very much.

JOSHUA

I'm sure Hagar didn't stop loving Ishmael just because of some silly rules about children born to slaves.

AARON

Right.

JOSHUA

**I thought that
Moms
Are here**

To stay.

**I figured
God made them
To not go**

Away,

**To care for
Their family
As their youngsters**

Grow,

**To stand
By their side
And let them**

Know

**That attachment,
That bond,
That only moms
Feel**

**And impart
To their kids
That closeness for
Real.**

**Why were you
Taken from me,
Dearest
Mom?**

**Did God
Call your name
And ask you
To come**

**To His Heaven
To be
By His side
On a throne**

**To watch me,
To guide me,
To lead me
On?**

**I love you,
Dear Mom,
As I have since
My birth.**

**I miss you.
I need you
Right here
On earth.**

AARON

patting JOSHUA lovingly on the head

Yes. Your mother loved you very much. You and I both miss her. But we have to go on. Now, where were we? Oh, yes. Look at what happened when Ishmael was thirteen years old.

JOSHUA

What?

AARON

See chapter 17, verses 15-16. Please read them aloud.

JOSHUA

“And God said unto Abraham: ‘As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.’ “ What’s the difference between “Sarai” and “Sarah”?

AARON

“Sarai” means “princess” but “Sarah” means “queen.”

JOSHUA

So the princess became a queen?

AARON

Right. Now read verse 16 to yourself and tell me what it says.

JOSHUA

reading to himself

God told Abraham that Sarah will have her own baby. But, Dad, is that possible? If Ishmael is 13, then Abraham, who was 86 when Ishmael was born, must be 99, and since you told me Sarah was ten years younger than Abraham, she must be 89, so she probably won’t have a baby till she’s 90. Can a 90 year old woman have a baby?

AARON

According to this story she can.

JOSHUA

This is incredible!

AARON

That’s what Abraham thought, too.

At center stage, ABRAHAM is on his knees, bowing. SARAH is standing in the tent watching ABRAHAM.

VOICE O.S.

I will bless Sarah.

ABRAHAM

But God, You have already blessed us more than we deserve.

VOICE O.S.
I will give you a son by her.

ABRAHAM
You will give me a son by Sarah?!

VOICE O.S.
Yes, by your wife, Sarah.

ABRAHAM
Thank You, God, but how is that possible?

VOICE O.S.
For God, all things are possible.

ABRAHAM
Can a ninety-year old woman bear a child?

VOICE O.S.
If God wills it she can.

ABRAHAM
falls on his face and laughs
Ha-Ha-Ha!

SARAH
in the tent, joins in Abraham's laughter
Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha!

VOICE O.S.
And you will call Sarah's son "Isaac."

ABRAHAM
Why should I call Sarah's son "Isaac"?

VOICE O.S.
Because you laughed when you heard that Sarah will bear you a son.

ABRAHAM
Because I laughed? I laughed because what You say is laughable. And I heard Sarah laughing, too. Who would not laugh upon hearing that a ninety year old woman will bear a child?

VOICE O.S.
I will establish my covenant with Isaac and his seed forever.

ABRAHAM

But what will become of my beloved son, Ishmael?

VOICE O.S.

Do not worry. I will bless and multiply Ishmael and he will become a great nation.

SARAH, still laughing, emerges from the tent and walks toward ABRAHAM. He gets up when he hears her footsteps and they embrace, then walk together hand in hand into the tent and exit at stage left.

AARON

And did you read something about God's covenant in chapter 17?

JOSHUA

I read about how God told Abraham to circumcise all the males in his household as a sign of God's covenant with him. And they were all circumcised on the same day.

AARON

Excellent!

JOSHUA

Does that mean that Abraham was circumcised when he was ninety-nine years old?

AARON

So we're told. And how old was Ishmael when he was circumcised?

JOSHUA

Thirteen.

AARON

Excellent!

JOSHUA

Oh jeez! That's gross!

AARON

Please, Joshua! Circumcision is our covenant with God. It's been our covenant for four thousand years. Please try to show it more respect.

JOSHUA

Phew!

AARON

Okay. Let's move on. How about chapter 18? Did you get the essence of the story

about the three strangers whom Abraham invited to his tent?

JOSHUA

looking in his book

Yes, they brought a message from God that Sarah would have a baby.

AARON

And what mission were they going on when they left Abraham?

JOSHUA

To destroy Sodom because of its wickedness.

AARON

That's a very important story. What did Abraham say when he heard that God was planning to destroy Sodom? Read chapter 18, verses 23-24, to me.

JOSHUA

leafing through his book, then stopping and reading

“And Abraham drew near, and said: ‘Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt Thou indeed sweep away and not forgive the place for the fifty righteous that are within?’ “

AARON

Stop. What was Abraham doing?

JOSHUA

He was arguing with God about whether God should destroy Sodom. He was probably worried about his nephew Lot. Didn't Lot live in Sodom?

AARON

He did. But Abraham was doing more than that. What was he challenging?

JOSHUA

He was challenging God's idea of justice.

AARON

Excellent! How did Abraham do that?

JOSHUA

Abraham argued that the city should not be destroyed if there were fifty righteous people in it.

ABRAHAM emerges from the tent and walks toward center stage. He gets on his knees and bows, then looks at the sky.

AARON and JOSHUA continue with their lesson. Their words are inaudible to the audience.

ABRAHAM

**I thought You were
A loving God,
Caring, giving
And unflawed.**

**I trusted You
But now I see
That what I thought
May not so be.**

**A God who is just
Would not allow
The innocent
To die.**

**If there are fifty
Righteous people
Will You still
Destroy Sodom?**

**What if five
Are lacking
From the fifty?
Will you recant?**

**A God who is just
Would not allow
The innocent
To die.**

**What if there are
Forty
Upright ones
In Sodom?**

**What if thirty
Good people
Are found
Within its walls?**

**A God who is just
Would not allow
The innocent
To die.**

**What if there are
Twenty
Moral people
Found in Sodom?**

**And what if only
Ten innocents
Are found
Within its bounds?**

**A God who is just
Cannot allow
The innocent
To die!**

VOICE O.S.

If there are ten innocents found in Sodom, then I will not destroy the city.

ABRAHAM

Thank You, God! You are indeed a God of justice!

ABRAHAM bows and returns to the tent,
then exits at stage left.

AARON

Abraham's idea of justice was quite advanced for his time. He didn't believe that the innocent should be punished with the guilty. Nor do we today.

JOSHUA

But why did he stop challenging God when he reached ten righteous people? Why didn't he challenge God for wanting to destroy the city if there was even one innocent person there?

AARON

Good question. Actually, in the Jewish tradition, even one innocent life is worth saving. Did you ever hear the expression, "Saving a single person is like saving the whole world"?

JOSHUA

Yes, I think it was in Schindler's List. But did God end up destroying Sodom?

AARON

He did.

JOSHUA

You mean God couldn't even find ten innocent people there?

AARON

Apparently not.

JOSHUA

How many innocent people do you think there were in Sodom?

AARON

According to the story, only four. Lot and his wife and their two daughters.

JOSHUA

And what happened to them?

AARON

God let them escape from Sodom. But if you want to know the whole story of Lot's escape, read chapter 19, verses 15-26. Maybe we can discuss it next Sabbath.

END OF ACT ONE MUSIC BEGINS

JOSHUA leafs through his book, then finds the correct spot and begins reading silently to himself, as does AARON.

CURTAIN

OPENING OF ACT TWO MUSIC

ACT TWO

A couple of weeks have passed. As the curtain rises, AARON and JOSHUA enter together from stage right and seat themselves at the table, as before, then open the books in front of them.

AARON

Do you remember what we studied last Sabbath? It was the beginning of chapter 21 of Genesis.

ABRAHAM and ISHMAEL enter the tent from stage left, then walk through it and emerge through the tent doorway. They walk over to the altar upstage.

ABRAHAM

**Have you ever wondered,
Ishmael,
How to thank God
For His blessing?**

**I will try to teach you
Now, my son,
So you will know
And not risk messing,**

**To make your love
For God quite clear
You give up
What you hold most dear.**

**You get a lamb,
A choice one, too,
Like the white one
That I gave you,**

**And kill your lamb
And cut it then
Into small parts
Small as you can**

To make your love
 For God quite clear
 You give up
 What you hold most dear.

You place the parts
 To be then burned
 Upon an altar,
 As you have learned

ISHMAEL

But why, Father,
 Would I have
 To sacrifice a lamb
 I love so much?

ABRAHAM

To make your love
 For God quite clear
 You give up
 What you hold most dear.

If you give up
 What you love most,
 God knows you will not
 Spare any cost

To let Him know
 That you love Him
 And thank Him, too,
 With this great hymn.

To make your love
 For God quite clear
 You give up
 What you hold most dear.

ISHMAEL

But, Father, why
 Would God want me
 To kill a lamb
 I love so much?

Why, Father, why?

ABRAHAM

I just explained. Now let us do it, Ishmael, so you will always remember that God wants and deserves the best we have. Go get your white lamb and bring it to the altar so you can sacrifice it to God to thank Him for all He has done for you. I will show you how to bind your white lamb and how to place it on the altar and burn it.

ISHMAEL

Oh!

ISHMAEL stares at ABRAHAM, tears in his eyes, then hesitantly walks to the tent, enters it and exits it at stage left.

ABRAHAM

calling after ISHMAEL

I will get the strings and the knife and the fire, and meet you back at the altar!

ABRAHAM walks upstage, where he exits.

JOSHUA

looking in his book

We studied that Isaac was born and was weaned, and that Sarah and Abraham made a big feast to celebrate the occasion.

ABRAHAM, SARAH, HAGAR and ISHMAEL enter the tent from stage left and begin celebrating. They dance while playing musical instruments. ABRAHAM intermittently blows the horn, while SARAH and HAGAR play the cymbal and ISHMAEL plays the flute. Suddenly, ABRAHAM stops playing, hands his horn to ISHMAEL and exits the tent. Outside, he goes down on his knees and looks up at the sky.

ABRAHAM

Thank You God, for bringing us to this happy day! Isaac is now weaned. He is a strong boy. We could not have done it without Your help!

In the tent, SARAH stops dancing and playing, hands her cymbal to HAGAR, and walks toward the tent doorway. For a moment she stands there, watching ABRAHAM, then walks out and kneels beside him, looking up at the sky.

SARAH

**I used to think
The world was not
Created with
A plan or plot.**

**I always felt that
We are only here
Through forces that are
Very queer**

**In that they form
A maze of chance
And force us people
There to dance.**

**I never thought
There was a God
Who plans and plots
Until we are awed
When he bestows
On folks so old
A child to love
And have and hold.**

**But now I know
God does exist
For otherwise
I would persist**

**In being old
And barren too
And having nothing
More to do**

**Than doubt my man
And his belief
There is a God
Who grants relief.**

**So now I know
There is a God
Who plans and plots
Until we are awed
When he bestows**

**On folks so old
A child to love
And have and hold.**

SARAH and ABRAHAM get up and embrace.

ABRAHAM

My dear Sarah, I love you all the more for sharing my faith.

SARAH

Your faith is true, Abraham. It took me years, but I finally realized it. Without God's help, how could an old, barren woman conceive and give birth to a son?

ABRAHAM

Yes, Sarah. And, because of your own faith, soon God may appear to you, as He has to me.

SARAH

I will then thank Him again and personally. But how will I know it is God who is appearing to me? What does God look like? Does He always appear the same?

ABRAHAM

No, Sarah. God appears differently at different times. But His voice never changes. You will recognize Him by His voice.

SARAH

What does His voice sound like?

ABRAHAM

You will know it when you hear it.

SARAH

But, Abraham, how would I be able to recognize it? I have never heard it!

ABRAHAM

For one thing, it is a male voice.

SARAH

But there are many male voices. How would I know that it is the right one?

ABRAHAM

You will know, Sarah. Trust me.

SARAH

I cannot see how, Abraham. Please let me hear you imitate it.

ABRAHAM

No, Sarah. God might consider it presumptuous of me.

SARAH

He would not do anything of the sort, Abraham. You told me yourself that God is all-knowing. So God knows how unassuming and God-fearing you are.

ABRAHAM

I am certainly God-fearing.

SARAH

But if you do not let me know what God's voice sounds like, there is a danger that I might not recognize it as God's voice when He speaks to me. And then, if He orders me to do something and I do not, or if He orders me not to do something and I do, I would be disobeying Him.

ABRAHAM

I would not want you to disobey God because of my failure, Sarah. That would be as if I myself disobeyed Him. Therefore, I will try to imitate God's voice for you so you can obey God when you hear His voice. Please listen carefully so you can always remember what God's voice sounds like.

As the VOICE O.S. is heard during the following exchange, ABRAHAM'S lips move as if he himself is speaking.

VOICE O.S.

Sarah! Can you hear Me?

SARAH

Yes, I can!

VOICE O.S.

I am your God!

SARAH

I hear You!

VOICE O.S.

Will you recognize God's voice when you hear it again?

SARAH

I will! I will never forget it! Thank you, Abraham!

SARAH and ABRAHAM embrace and kiss, then walk hand-in-hand back into the tent and rejoin the festivities, dancing and playing their musical instruments in the company of HAGAR and ISHMAEL.

AARON

And what did Ishmael do at the feast? It tells us in chapter 21, verse 9.

JOSHUA

looking in his book

It says that Ishmael was “*making sport*” of Isaac.

Suddenly, ISHMAEL stops and, still carrying his flute, walks over to the pile of pillows and disappears behind it. After a moment or two, SARAH stops and follows ISHMAEL. She looks behind the pile of pillows, then disappears in back of the pile. SARAH is heard screaming.

AARON

What do you suppose “making sport” means?

JOSHUA

Ishmael was kidding Isaac?

AARON

Scholars have not been able to agree on the meaning of “making sport.” At any rate Ishmael did something to Isaac that made Sarah furious. In view of Sarah’s strong reaction, some scholars have even suggested Ishmael may have engaged in sexually abusing his little brother.

JOSHUA

Maybe Sarah just used whatever Ishmael did as an excuse to complain to Abraham.

AARON

That’s possible.

JOSHUA

Because once she had Isaac, she did a one eighty, because she didn’t feel a need for Ishmael any longer. Poor Ishmael! His mother Sarah stopped loving him. That’s so sad, it’s pathetic.

AARON

So what does verse 10 tell us Sarah said to Abraham? Please read it silently to yourself and tell me.

.JOSHUA reads to himself, as does
AARON. At the sound of SARAH'S
scream, ABRAHAM and HAGAR stop
playing and dancing.

SARAH

calling from behind the pile of pillows

Hagar! Come here at once!

HAGAR

Coming, my lady!

HAGAR dutifully hurries and disappears
behind the pile of pillows. After a moment,
HAGAR and ISHMAEL exit at stage left.
SARAH emerges from behind the pile of
pillows, walks over to ABRAHAM, who is
now standing alone in the tent, seemingly
perplexed, and grabs him by the arm.
Startled, he drops his horn. SARAH quickly
leads him out of the tent to center stage.

SARAH

**I want you to cast out
Hagar and Ishmael!**

**Do as I say, oh, man!
Kick them out!**

**No wife can allow
A live-in rival.
It undermines
Her own survival.**

**Just think what it's like
To wake up in the night
And find my bed empty
And be filled with fright**

**That the man whom I love
Has once again strayed
And despite his own word
Has again me betrayed**

**And sought out the bed
Of my rival, my slave,
Though I sanctioned their union**

'Cause she swore to behave.

**No wife can allow
A live-in rival.
It undermines
Her own survival.**

**When you're not getting younger
You have to maintain
What's yours and what's due you
If you have any brain.**

**You have to fight harder
To keep self-respect
And insist that your own rights
No man will neglect.**

**So when you get older
Just continue to fight
For your man, for your sweetheart,
For that is your right!**

**No wife can allow
A live-in rival.
It undermines
Her own survival!**

ABRAHAM

What are you saying, Sarah? For more than thirteen years Ishmael was your only son. You were his mother, and no son was ever more loved by his mother than Ishmael was by you.

SARAH

Ishmael is Hagar's son, not mine.

ABRAHAM

And he is my son, too, and I love him.

SARAH

Does that mean you refuse to cast Hagar and Ishmael out?

ABRAHAM

Much as I love you, Sarah, I cannot do what you ask of me. It would not be right. God would never condone it.

SARAH walks angrily into the tent and exits at stage left.

VOICE O.S.

Do not be upset, Abraham.

ABRAHAM, standing at center stage, looks all around him, then falls to his knees and looks up at the sky.

ABRAHAM

How can I not be upset? Sarah wants me to cast out my son Ishmael!

VOICE O.S.

I know.

ABRAHAM

And she wants me to cast out Hagar!

VOICE O.S.

I know. I heard what Sarah said to you. But do not worry.

ABRAHAM

How can I not worry? I love Sarah but I love Ishmael too, and Hagar...

VOICE O.S.

You have to do what Sarah tells you to do. You have to listen to your wife.

ABRAHAM

Oh, my God! What will happen to my son?

VOICE O.S.

Your son Isaac will carry your seed.

ABRAHAM

But what about Ishmael? He is my son, too!

VOICE O.S.

Do not worry. I will make Ishmael into a nation because he is your seed.

ABRAHAM falls down to the ground and sobs.

JOSHUA

It's hard to believe that God would ask Abraham to kick out his son.

AARON

But God did. Well, let's go on. What does the story tell us Abraham did after God told him to listen to Sarah and cast Ishmael out? Please read verse 14 to me.

JOSHUA

“And Abraham arose up early in the morning, and took bread and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away, and she departed, and strayed in the wilderness of Beer Sheba.”

ABRAHAM rises and walks into and through the tent. He exits at stage left, and, after a while, reenters, carrying two loaves of bread and two containers of water. He walks through the tent toward the tent doorway, followed by HAGAR and ISHMAEL. He stops and puts the provisions in HAGAR'S and ISHMAEL'S shoulder bags, hugs HAGAR, and whispers in her ear. She hugs him back and bursts into tears. ABRAHAM then turns to ISHMAEL and they embrace for a long moment. Both are sobbing.

ISHMAEL

I do not want to leave you, Father.

ABRAHAM

I wish you did not have to, Ishmael.

ISHMAEL

I love you very much, Father.

ABRAHAM

I love you too, my son. I love you very, very much.

ISHMAEL

So why do I have to leave you, Father?

ABRAHAM

It is God's will.

ISHMAEL

How do you know, Father?

ABRAHAM

God spoke to me.

ISHMAEL

You always taught me that God is just, Father!

ABRAHAM

(spoken)

He is.

ISHMAEL

**If God is just,
How can He
Be so unjust
As to tell a loving father
To send his loving son
Away?**

ABRAHAM

We cannot question God's justice.

ISHMAEL

**But, Father, you once did.
You yourself told me
The story of Sodom
And how God wanted
To destroy the city
And you challenged God's justice.**

ABRAHAM

**I have come to realize
That God has His own
Idea of justice,
Which man may not
Comprehend.
A man of faith must simply obey.**

ISHMAEL

Oh, Father!

ISHMAEL bursts into tears. ABRAHAM, sobbing, embraces ISHMAEL and kisses him on the cheek. ISHMAEL kisses ABRAHAM back, then walks away with his head bowed and joins HAGAR. As HAGAR and ISHMAEL go out of the tent and depart toward stage right, ABRAHAM

follows for a few steps, then breaks down, crying. He then turns around and walks slowly through the tent, exiting at stage left.

JOSHUA

So what happened to Hagar and to Ishmael?

AARON

Please read chapter 21, verses 15-20, to yourself and tell me in your own words.

JOSHUA reads to himself, as does AARON.

HAGAR and ISHMAEL pace this way and that on stage, trying to find their bearings. They intermittently wipe off their brows and drink from their water containers until these are empty. ISHMAEL fans himself with his hand, then removes his robe and discards it. HAGAR and ISHMAEL keep pacing back and forth, seemingly lost, and ISHMAEL eventually falls to the ground. He cries in agony, then appears unconscious. HAGAR drags him to a shady spot under the bush downstage. She then sits at some distance from him and looks away.

HAGAR

weeping

**Oh, God of Abraham!
Let me not witness
The death of the child!**

**My child - Ishmael -
Abraham's child,
Is dying!**

**God of Abraham!
Do not let
Our child die!**

HAGAR gets up and begins walking toward ISHMAEL. She notices the well nearby and, stopping, she fills a container with the well water and brings it to ISHMAEL to drink. ISHMAEL drinks and is revived. HAGAR helps him up on his feet and holds

him, and when he seems stable on his feet, she fetches his robe, which ISHMAEL puts on. HAGAR goes down on her knees and looks at the sky.

**Thank You, God,
For letting
Ishmael live!**

**God Almighty!
You did not let
Our child die!**

**From now on,
You are not only
Abraham's God.**

**You are also my God
And the God
Of Ishmael!**

HAGAR and ISHMAEL stop by the well, fill up their containers with water, then walk toward stage right and exit.

JOSHUA

It says Hagar and Ishmael got lost in the desert but God saved them.

AARON

Right. And then we are told that Ishmael dwelled in the desert, and his mother picked an Egyptian wife for him.

JOSHUA

I'll bet Ishmael still missed his father even after getting married.

AARON

I wouldn't be surprised.

JOSHUA

And I'll bet Abraham missed Ishmael, too.

AARON

I'm sure he did.

JOSHUA

And I'll bet Abraham was mad at Sarah for making him send Ishmael away.

AARON

Probably.

JOSHUA

And I'll bet Abraham could never forgive Sarah for what she did.

AARON

Forgiveness is difficult. But it's an important thing to do. Not just for the person who is forgiven but for the one who forgives. I hope you never forget that, Josh. Now let's go on to Genesis, chapter 22. Please read the first two verses to yourself and tell me what they say.

JOSHUA reads to himself, as does AARON.
ABRAHAM walks into the tent from stage left, places some pillows near the tent's doorway, and sits down on the pillows, looking out. He gets up and walks out of the tent, looking around as if searching for someone, then goes back into the tent and resumes his seat by the tent's doorway.

VOICE O.S.

Abraham!

ABRAHAM

rushing out of the tent and looking at the sky

Here I am.

VOICE O.S.

Take your son, your only son...

ABRAHAM

But I have two sons, Ishmael and Isaac.

VOICE O.S.

Take the son you love...

ABRAHAM

But I love both of my sons!

VOICE O.S.

Take Isaac.

ABRAHAM

Isaac?

VOICE O.S.

Yes, and go to the Land of Moriah.

ABRAHAM

It is quite a distance from here.

VOICE O.S.

I know.

ABRAHAM

And what should I do when I get to the Land of Moriah?

VOICE O.S.

Offer Isaac there for a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will show you.

ABRAHAM falls to his knees and bows, then gets up and walks into the tent, exiting at stage left. He reenters the tent a while later, carrying a container with a flame in it. ISAAC follows him, carrying a stack of branches. ABRAHAM and ISAAC walk through the tent and emerge, then proceed to walk from center stage to downstage. They walk side by side.

JOSHUA

God told Abraham to take Isaac to the Land of Moriah and offer Isaac there as a burnt offering to God.

AARON

Excellent!

JOSHUA

Seriously, Dad. These Bible stories are getting weirder by the minute!

AARON

Why do you say that?

JOSHUA

First God told Abraham to send Ishmael away, and now God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Well, Abraham had only two kids, and the thing he wanted most in the whole wide world was to have kids. So why wouldn't God just leave him alone and let him keep Isaac?

AARON

Maybe God did. But we don't want to anticipate and spoil the suspense. What does it

tell us in chapter 22, verse 3, about what Abraham did?

JOSHUA

reading silently

It says Abraham rose early in the morning to start on his journey to the Land of Moriah.

AARON

Why do you suppose Abraham rose early?

JOSHUA

He probably wanted to sneak away before Sarah woke up, so she wouldn't find out what he was up to.

AARON

Or maybe he was just eager to obey God's command without delay.

JOSHUA

So what happened when they finally got to the Land of Moriah?

AARON

God showed Mount Moriah to Abraham, and Abraham and Isaac climbed it.

JOSHUA

But did Abraham tell Isaac that he was planning to kill him?

AARON

Read chapter 22, verse 7, to yourself and tell me what it says.

JOSHUA reads to himself, as does AARON.
ABRAHAM and ISAAC walk side by side
silently.

ISAAC

My father!

ABRAHAM

Here I am, Isaac.

ISAAC

Father, I can see the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

ABRAHAM

God will Himself provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.

ABRAHAM and ISAAC continue walking
side by side silently, until they reach
downstage. They proceed to build an altar,

using the large rock downstage as a base and placing some smaller rocks, which they find scattered about, on top of it. They place the branches that ISAAC has been carrying in the altar.

JOSHUA

Abraham didn't tell Isaac that he was planning to kill him.

AARON

Why do you suppose he didn't?

JOSHUA

Abraham probably didn't want to scare Isaac and have him run away.

AARON

Of course! Because if Isaac ran away, Abraham couldn't obey God's command.

JOSHUA

So what happened?

AARON

Please read verse 9 aloud.

JOSHUA

"And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built the altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood." Oh man! What kind of a father would bind his son and place him on an altar so he could sacrifice him? Do you want to know what I think?

AARON

What?

JOSHUA

I think Abraham was a sadist.

AARON

Joshua! Watch what comes out of your mouth!

JOSHUA

But isn't killing supposed to be against the Ten Commandments?

AARON

The Ten Commandments were not given to Moses until hundreds of years later.

JOSHUA

Oh jeez, Dad, this stuff makes me sick. Can I go get a cold drink?

AARON

Sure, but hurry back. We have a lot of work to do.

JOSHUA gets up and runs out at stage right.
AARON goes to the bookcase and consults
some of the books.

JOSHUA

his voice heard from off stage

Rachel? Rachel? Oh, God, she's gone!

After a while AARON looks at his watch
and sits down in his previous seat.

AARON

Joshua!

JOSHUA comes in from stage right.

Downstage, ABRAHAM pulls strings out of
his pocket and binds ISAAC'S hands and
legs. ISAAC does not resist. After binding
him, ABRAHAM lays ISAAC on the altar,
face up.

JOSHUA

Sorry, Dad! This stuff really makes me sick!

JOSHUA

**I'm a Jew with a history
As long as can be,
And I'm just beginning
To dig it, you see.**

**Now let me tell you
What it's about
To learn of folks
Who never had doubt
That a God exists
Who is nothing but just
Though He tells them in Him
Blindly to trust.**

**Obviously
 Reason
 And conscience
 Rebel
 When His way
 Would lead
 Directly
 To Hell!**

**How is it possible
 That people are blind
 And believe in a God
 Who is clearly unkind?
 A God who compels
 His flock to obey
 And mistreat their kids
 Just on his say.**

**Clearly
 Reason
 And conscience
 Rebel
 Since His way
 Would lead
 Directly
 To Hell.**

**I have learned from the Bible
 How never to act
 By following God
 When as a matter of fact
 He tells me to ignore
 My own conscience and mind
 And obey His orders
 As if I were blind.**

**I'm a Jew and determined
 To lead a good life,
 To be a good man
 And live without strife
 And love and be kind
 Like a good person should.
 A good man, a good human,
 Just plain old good.**

JOSHUA sits down.

AARON

Now where were we? Oh, yes. Genesis, chapter 22.

JOSHUA

If I were Isaac, I would have punched and kicked Abraham and run away.

ABRAHAM reaches in his pocket for his knife, then holds the knife above Isaac as if to strike him.

VOICE O.S.

Abraham! Abraham!

ABRAHAM

Here I am.

VOICE O.S.

Do not lay a hand on the lad!

ABRAHAM

What did You say?

VOICE O.S.

Do not do anything to your son!

ABRAHAM freezes, then takes a deep breath. He uses his knife to untie ISAAC and puts the knife back in his pocket. ISAAC gets up from the altar and, seemingly dazed, walks away and exits upstage. ABRAHAM spots a small ram caught in the nearby bush, catches it, then binds it and places it on the altar.

ABRAHAM

O God! Thank You for sparing my son's life! But there is something I cannot understand: After first telling me to make a burnt offering of Isaac, why did You then relent?

VOICE O.S.

Now I know that you are truly a God-fearing man. You did not withhold your son, your only son, from me.

ABRAHAM sighs, then looks all around.

ABRAHAM

Isaac! Where are you?

ABRAHAM continues looking around, then walks alone slowly in the direction from which he came, upstage. He reaches the tent, enters it and exits at stage left.

AARON

So did Abraham end up sacrificing Isaac? Read verse 12 to yourself. What does it say?

JOSHUA

reading to himself

It says that at the last moment God told Abraham not to do it.

AARON

Right. And do you know what this whole story about the sacrifice of Isaac is called?

JOSHUA

What?

AARON

It's called "The Binding of Isaac." In Hebrew it's known as "The Akedah." Can you say that?

JOSHUA

The Akedah.

AARON

Right. So why do you suppose God asked Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice in the first place?

JOSHUA

Beats me.

AARON

Think, Joshua! Think!

JOSHUA

I'm thinking but I still can't figure it out.

AARON

God wanted to test Abraham.

JOSHUA

What for?

AARON

He wanted to see how strong Abraham's faith in God was. If Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only remaining son, who was probably the most precious person in the whole wide world to him at this point, then God could be sure that Abraham had real faith.

JOSHUA

But Dad, it would make more sense to say that it was the other way around, that it was actually Abraham who was testing God to see how moral God really was, sort of like Abraham was playing a game of chicken with God, waiting for God to stop him. Because why would God have to test Abraham to find out how much faith Abraham had in Him? Isn't God supposed to be all-knowing, so He would certainly know if Abraham had faith in Him or not?

AARON

Good question. Actually, some scholars think that God just wanted to make an example of Abraham for others, because God knew Abraham would obey Him.

JOSHUA

What kind of an example would that be? A father willing to sacrifice his own son?!

AARON

An example of absolute faith and of absolute obedience to God. As a matter of fact, since Abraham, whole generations have taken their inspiration from the Akedah.

JOSHUA

How so?

AARON

Think about all the wars mankind has engaged in during the past four thousand years, where fathers – and mothers - have sacrificed their kids. Many have related their experience to Abraham's.

JOSHUA

Although Abraham ended up not sacrificing Isaac, while fathers and mothers do sacrifice their kids in war, right?

AARON

That's true. Keen observation.

J

OSHUA

But didn't you tell me that idol worshipping was frowned upon in the Bible because the idols demanded child sacrifice?

AARON

Yes, child sacrifice was quite prevalent in Abraham's time. Actually, according to some

scholars, the fact that God in the end told Abraham not to sacrifice Isaac shows that God didn't approve of child sacrifice.

JOSHUA

But if God didn't approve of child sacrifice, how come He told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in the first place? Do you think maybe He was testing Abraham to see how moral Abraham was?

AARON

The main thing is that in the end, God told Abraham not to do it.

JOSHUA

I know that's what the Bible says, but I have a different theory about what really happened.

AARON

Why, what do you think happened?

JOSHUA

I think God truly wanted Abraham to sacrifice Isaac to Him. That's why He told Abraham to take Isaac up the mountain and offer him there as a burnt offering. And I think actually God never changed His mind.

AARON

What do you mean?

JOSHUA

Look, Dad. If God could bring towers crashing down on people, and if He could destroy whole cities, and if He could tell a father to send one of his two sons away, then God's justice is not above requiring that a father sacrifice his only remaining son.

AARON

If that's the case, how did it happen that Abraham didn't sacrifice Isaac in the end?

JOSHUA

Maybe there's another explanation for why Abraham ended up not doing it.

AARON

What explanation might there be other than what the Bible tells us, namely, that in the end God told Abraham not to sacrifice Isaac?

SARAH enters the tent from stage left, walks quickly through the tent, then emerges and paces frantically around the stage, looking this way and that.

SARAH

Isaac! Isaac! Where are you, my son?

SARAH cups her ear, listening for a response, looking all around her. Suddenly, she seems to spot something downstage in the distance, and begins running downstage. She is out of breath and has to sit down on the ground and rest. This occurs several times. Each time she gets up and, with great effort, continues running downstage. When she reaches her destination, she hides behind the bush downstage, and observes an imaginary scene of ABRAHAM preparing

to sacrifice ISAAC, a scene which is now past and invisible to the audience.

As the VOICE O.S. is heard next, SARAH'S lips move as if she is the one speaking.

VOICE O.S.

Abraham! Abraham!

(Pause)

Do not lay a hand on the lad!

(Pause)

Do not do anything to your son!

(Pause)

Now I know that you are truly a God-fearing man. You did not withhold your son, your only son, from me.

SARAH rises and heads rapidly back, stumbling as she runs. Out of breath, she reaches the tent. Before entering the tent, she stops and looks up at the sky.

SARAH

Oh, God of Abraham!

How could You

Allow

Such an abomination?

I was an old, barren, woman,

With no hope of bearing a child.

Without Your help, my son, Isaac,

Would not have been born.

**But then,
After giving me a son,
Suddenly, You want to
Take my son away!**

**Oh, God of Abraham!
How cruel can You be?
Do You not know that it is better
For a woman not to have born a son**

**Than to bear a son and lose him?
You may be Abraham's God,
But from now on
You are my God no more!**

SARAH runs into the tent and exits at stage left.

JOSHUA

I think Sarah woke up and when she couldn't find Isaac, she looked around and spotted Abraham and Isaac walking away toward Mount Moriah. She followed them quietly just so she could see what they were up to, and when she reached the mountaintop and saw Isaac bound on the altar and Abraham's knife raised to strike him, she pretended she was God and stopped Abraham.

AARON

So according to your theory, the reason Abraham ended up not sacrificing Isaac is not because God stopped him but because Abraham mistakenly thought God stopped him?

JOSHUA

Right. Since Sarah imitated God's voice, Abraham thought it was actually God ordering him to stop.

AARON

That's an interesting theory. Actually, some scholars have commented on the strangeness of Sarah's silence. In the whole Akedah story, the Bible doesn't mention Sarah even once. But according to your theory, Sarah wasn't silent at all. On the contrary, according to you, from the moment she discovered that Abraham was planning to sacrifice Isaac, she took the strongest measure she could to prevent Abraham from doing it. She knew how obedient Abraham was to God, so she used God's voice to stop Abraham. How clever!

JOSHUA

But I have another theory, too. Maybe Abraham decided to sacrifice Isaac because he

was mad at Sarah for asking him to send Ishmael away. Maybe it was tit for tat. So maybe it wasn't God that told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Maybe it was all Abraham's idea in the first place because he just wanted to get back at Sarah for what she did to Ishmael. And then Sarah followed Abraham up the mountain and pretended she was God and stopped him.

AARON

You have some interesting theories, Josh. Looks like you're really into the story of Abraham. I'm glad to see it, considering how reluctant you were to study the Bible when we first started. Actually, there may be some merit to your theory. Because in the very next chapter of Genesis, chapter 23, it tells us that Sarah died. The juxtaposition of the story of Isaac's binding and Sarah's death may not be coincidental.

JOSHUA

I think Sarah died not only because she was disappointed in Abraham for being willing to kill their son but because the incident made her lose her faith in God. I think in the beginning she didn't believe in God at all, but she went along with Abraham and let him believe what he wanted to because she loved her husband. And then, when she got pregnant and had Isaac, she became a believer. But now, when she realized that Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac to God, she lost all faith, because she knew Abraham wouldn't be willing to sacrifice Isaac without God's approval. It was a big shock to her to realize that a God she believed in betrayed her.

AARON

And Abraham? Do you think that after the binding of Isaac and after Sarah's death, he stopped believing in God, too?

JOSHUA

I wouldn't blame him if he did. God really mistreated him.

AARON

Joshua!

JOSHUA

Okay. God tested him. First Abraham was told to give up Ishmael. Then he was told to give up Isaac.

AARON

You're right. God tested Abraham time and time again. But Abraham stood the tests. That's why Abraham has been revered for thousands of years.

JOSHUA

But what about the way Abraham treated his own kids? Did Isaac ever forgive Abraham for being willing to kill him?

AARON

It probably took quite a while before Isaac felt close to his father again.

JOSHUA

Poor Isaac. What he must have felt, lying there bound on the altar and seeing his father wielding a knife, ready to kill him!

AARON

It must have been very frightening, I agree.

JOSHUA

It would have been bad enough if it was a stranger Isaac saw threatening to kill him. But it was his own father!

AARON

You're right, Josh. That experience must have been quite traumatic for Isaac. Isaac didn't have it easy. The Bible tells us that in later life he became blind.

JOSHUA

Maybe it was a delayed reaction to seeing his own father threatening to kill him, seeing it with his own eyes! I'll bet if Abraham was living today and if he did what he did to his kids, kicking one kid out and threatening to kill the other kid, that Social Services would be there in a second.

AARON

Probably.

JOSHUA

And how about God? Does the Bible tell us God was sorry for what he told Abraham to do?

AARON

No, the Bible doesn't tell us that God regretted what he told Abraham to do.

JOSHUA

Maybe God doesn't admit His mistakes after all.

AARON

Except that, come to think of it, the prohibition of murder in the Ten Commandments may have been God's way of admitting he made a mistake at the Akedah.

JOSHUA

Does that mean God learned from His mistake?

AARON

Probably.

JOSHUA

Because didn't you tell me that it's important to first admit one's mistakes and then learn from them?

AARON

You're right, Josh. You have to at least admit your mistakes to yourself.

JOSHUA

pauses

Dad, I want to know something. What if God told you to kill me, like God told Abraham to kill Isaac. Would you do it?

AARON

God has never spoken to me.

JOSHUA

But what if He did?

AARON

I wouldn't do it.

JOSHUA

Don't you think if you took steps to kill me you'd be arrested?

AARON

Probably.

JOSHUA

And then, when you were brought to trial, don't you think if your defense was that you heard the voice of God telling you to kill your son, that your lawyer would argue that you were just out of your mind, that you were insane?

AARON

Probably.

JOSHUA

Because normal people don't hear voices.

AARON

You're probably right.

JOSHUA

So maybe Abraham was simply insane?

AARON

Joshua! Watch your words!

JOSHUA

But, Dad, what was so great about Abraham, if he heard voices that made him abuse his own kids? Why is he so highly regarded?

AARON

I told you. He did what he did in obedience to God.

JOSHUA

Or so he thought. Maybe those voices were just in his head.

AARON

Abraham was a man of absolute faith. That's what he is admired for, not only in the Jewish tradition but also by Christianity and Islam.

JOSHUA

I'm glad I'm not Abraham's son. There's no telling what God might ask him to do to me if I was his son.

AARON

pats JOSHUA lovingly on the head

I, too, am glad you're not Abraham's son, Josh, but rather my son.

AARON

**She was taken
From me
On a bright,
Sunny day,**

**With the skies
So blue
And the sun
So gay**

**At the prospect
Of lighting
The path
For us all**

**To work
And to play
And to answer
Love's call,**

**When suddenly
Flew
Those two planes**

From nowhere

**And crashed
Into towers
That stood
Unaware**

**That on a
Bright day
Skies could darken
And melt**

**With the steel
And the stone
And the shudder
They felt.**

**And the people
Burned
In that blazing
Fire.**

**Men and women
Crushed
In that grotesque
Pyre.**

**Fathers
And mothers,
Sons, daughters
Too,**

**And brothers
And sisters
And grandchildren
New.**

**Firemen, police,
Workers,
Bystanders,
Drowned**

**In the falling
Debris
And the smoke
All around.**

And my loved one
Just gone,
Without a trace
 Disappeared,

As if she had
Never
Been here.
 And I feared

To be left
Alone
Without her
 All the time,

To live
All my life
With no reason
 Or rhyme.

But she gave me
A son
And he now
 Fills my days

And my thoughts
And my heart
And my hopes
 And my prayers.

She gave me
A son,
And through him
 She still gives.

My dear wife
Is here
With us both.
 She still lives!

JOSHUA

gets up and hugs AARON, who hugs him back

Thanks, Dad! I love you.

AARON

wipes away a tear

I love you, too, Josh. I love you very much. Well, let's continue. Now where were we? Oh, yes. Do you know what Abraham did after Sarah died?

JOSHUA

sitting down

What?

AARON

He married again.

JOSHUA

No kidding!

AARON

He married a woman called "Keturah."

JOSHUA

Maybe "Keturah" was really Hagar? I think Abraham always fancied Hagar.

AARON

It's possible.

JOSHUA

But how about Isaac and Ishmael? Did they ever get together? After all, they were brothers. I wish I had a brother.

AARON

I know you do. Yes, they got together. Please read Genesis 25, verses 8-9, to me.

JOSHUA searches in his book, leafing back and forth. AARON helps him find the right page and points to the spot.

JOSHUA

"And Abraham expired, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people. And Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him..."

ISAAC and ISHMAEL enter the tent from stage left and walk slowly and solemnly through the tent, carrying together a body bag on their right shoulders, with ISAAC leading and ISHMAEL following a few feet behind. They have a somber expression on their faces. They emerge from the tent, then turn upstage.

ISAAC

trying to look over his free shoulder at ISHMAEL

**It is good to see you, Ishmael!
I missed you all these years.**

ISHMAEL

**Oh, Isaac, now that they are gone,
You and I can get together.**

ISAAC

**We have a lot of catching up to do.
It will be difficult to fill the gap.**

ISHMAEL

**Our father was a man of faith,
And we both paid the price.**

ISAAC and ISHMAEL stop and carefully place the body bag on the ground. They rush toward each other and embrace warmly. Then they stand side by side, holding hands, facing the audience.

BOTH

**We are two brothers
Torn asunder
By a father's
Awful blunder.**

**Brothers in deed,
From now on together,
Not just in name.
Inseparable forever.**

**Through brotherly love
All wrong will be righted.
For ages to come
We will be united.**

ISAAC

turning to look at ISHMAEL

**Our father, Abraham,
Would wish nothing less
Than for us to be close
And each other to bless**

**And forgive all that's past
And seek a new day
When Abraham's seed
Can honestly say:**

**We are brothers indeed,
Old Abraham's boys!
Call it from rooftops!
Announce it with noise!**

ISHMAEL

looking at ISAAC

**Proclaim it from mountains!
Declare it with glee!
A new dawn is breaking
When we are both free**

**Of all ancient hatreds,
Of feeling outcast,
Of anger and envy,
Of all struggles past.**

**A new day is coming
Behold, it is near!
A new sun is shining
And true peace is here!**

BOTH

Amen!

ISAAC and ISHMAEL embrace again, then carefully pick up the body bag from the ground, each placing one of its ends back on his right shoulder. They proceed on their way, with ISAAC in the lead, as before, and walk slowly and solemnly upstage, where they exit.

JOSHUA

So Dad, do you remember that when we first started studying the Bible together, you said that we don't study Bible stories for entertainment? You said these stories teach us something, that they teach us how we should behave. So what does the story of Abraham teach us about how we should behave? I can't figure it out.

AARON

pauses

That's a good question, Josh. I'll have to think about it. I thought I knew the answer, but after studying the story of Abraham with you, I'm not sure any more. Let's both think about it, and we can discuss it next time. How's that?

END OF SHOW MUSIC

CURTAIN

POST CURTAIN MUSIC