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The Murder of Isaac

A play in two acts

By Motti Lerner

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Translated from the Hebrew by Anthony Berris

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Motti Lerner
5 Massada Street, Ramat Hasharon 47290, Israel
Tel: (972) 3-5405295 Mobile: (972) 54-4583356
E-mail: lerner@hotmail.com

Location

The action takes place in an Israeli Ministry of Defense rehabilitation center for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) cases, some of whom have been there since the 1948 War of Independence. The center is run as a closed hospital but there is no military atmosphere. A number of patients are allowed to come and go as they please, but the majority are not allowed out as they are incapable of functioning on the outside. Some are not allowed out as they might constitute a danger to those around them when suffering an anxiety attack. Although the center is a state institution, there is an obvious desire to do as much as possible for the patients. The atmosphere is supportive and pleasant. The patients are treated by psychiatrists and psychologists, and cared for by male and female nurses. The treatment is quite effective and many of the patients live in the hope of being discharged one day and going back to living a normal life, but among them are cases who have been treated at the center for many years. The majority of the patients are visited by their families, especially those whose parents are still alive, but the older patients whose parents have died and whose friends have returned to the routine of their lives, have been forgotten and are only visited under exceptional circumstances. The center's administration is constantly trying to improve treatment and ease the patients' suffering. The majority undergoes medicinal treatment and conventional psychological therapy, but every now and again they also undergo non-conventional treatment – group therapy, psychodrama, and various other relaxation techniques. This is how the play performed by the patients is born – a play that the administration views as a means of helping them to cope with the reality outside the center's walls.

The characters

- Binder** A 67 year-old amputee who plays the murdered Prime Minister. He was wounded in the battle for Jerusalem in 1948. He is haunted by guilt and suffers from the constant fear that someone is about to assassinate him. He has maintained his intellectual capacity. However, he suffers from severe anxiety as he feels that somebody is going to assassinate him at any time. The other patients respect him despite his limitations and accept his leadership. He led them through the play's writing process and it is he who ensures it to ensure that it reaches its conclusion.
- Lola** A 67 year-old widow and bereaved mother who plays the Prime Minister's Wife. Both her sons were killed in the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Her husband died soon after and since then she has been a volunteer matron at the center. She is a strong, motherly woman who is devoted to the patients and has even established a choir of which she is the conductor.
- Natan** He is 53, blind, wears dark glasses and uses a cane. He plays the Head of the Security Services and a Bereaved Father. In 1973 he served as a private in a home front unit, but was caught in a bombardment and wounded. He has been at the center for 25 years. Deep down he feels that despite his blindness he can see the truth more clearly than the sighted. In recent years he has lived in total isolation. Nobody visits him.
- Avner** He is 35 and wheelchair-bound. He plays the Attorney General, a Mourner, and a Poet. He was a medic in an infantry unit. He suffered PTSD during an air raid on our forces in 1982 and has been at the center ever since. Despite the fact that his legs were not injured, he is incapable of standing; his only way of coping with the severe anxiety in which he lives is by constantly dozing.
- Talia** 28 years old. She wears a short skirt. She is a former opera singer. She has been at the center since 1996 after suffering severe body burns and losing her hair when the bus she was on was blown up. She wears a wig. Most of the patients are unaware of this. In the course of the play she occasionally exposes her body to tease the audience. She plays an Announcer and the Girlfriend of a young man murdered in a terrorist outrage. Her family visits her rarely.

- Yuda** 51 years old, plays the Leader of the Opposition. He was wounded in the battle for Jerusalem in 1967 and also suffered PTSD. He was single when he was wounded but is still a ladies' man. His anxiety level is high. Weeping and shouting arouse terror in him. He is considered a dangerous patient who cannot be allowed outside the center for fear that he will harm those around him. Despite this he is convinced that he has been hospitalized by mistake. For years he has tried vainly to be discharged from the center and return to the army. He is charismatic, impulsive and belligerent.
- Shulamit** A 38 year-old religious woman who plays a Settler. Up to 1994 she lived in a settlement. Her husband fought in Lebanon in 1986 and returned home suffering from PTSD, but was never hospitalized. In 1994 a terrorist broke into their home and murdered her husband and two of their children. Since then she has been hospitalized at the center. Her two young children who survived the attack were given over to custody in another settlement. Over the years her children have broken off contact with their mother. Due to her severe anxiety she is not allowed out of the center. She is embittered and resentful, yet is still a compulsive giggler.
- Avi** He is 36 and a "born again" Jew. He plays a Rabbi, an Assistant Rabbi, an Activist in the National Party, a Settler, and a Settler Leader. Throughout the play he carries a suitcase containing cans of peanuts. With the outbreak of the Lebanon War in 1982 he deserted from the front, but was handed over to the army by his father. He then served as a guard in a POW camp. During a riot there he lost control and shot 28 prisoners. On his first leave he went home and killed his father. He has lived at the center ever since. He suffers from asthma and frequently uses an inhaler.
- Mendel** A 55 year-old ex-colonel in the armored corps. He plays an Activist in the National Party and a Settler. He was taken prisoner in 1973 and repatriated in serious physical and mental condition after nine months of torture. He has been at the center since 1974. Over the years he has lost contact with his family. He clutches onto his rank as the last proof of his status.
- Eliahu** A 50 year-old ultra-Orthodox Jew who was born in Jerusalem's Me'ah She'arim quarter. He is married and has ten children. He plays a Settler Rabbi. He was a gravedigger who served in a special unit for locating the body parts of war and terrorist action casualties. He has been at the center

since 1996 after suffering severe trauma in the wake of a terrorist attack. Since suffering the trauma he is constantly immersed in finding ways of reforming and saving the world. His contact with his family has been severed.

Yigal

About 30, wears a yarmulke, and plays the Prime Minister's Murderer. Carries a "theater" pistol. Has been at the center since 1988 after being wounded by a roadside bomb in Lebanon. Since then he has become more religious, but at the same time he is filled with anxiety that God has abandoned him. He is hostile towards Binder because Binder is a complete atheist and because he feels that Binder derides him.

Boris

About 55, a guard at the center. He immigrated to Israel in 1975 from Russia. He is fat and strong. He is armed with a baton and a pistol. He uses excessive force when called to restore order. He follows the play from his seat, and as he is an excellent singer, every now and again he joins in the songs.

Musicians

According to the possibilities and needs. They, too, have suffered PTSD in the various wars. Their music is rich, theatrical, and for the most part its gaiety contrasts starkly with the pain that is the play's subject.

The time

The action takes place one evening in 1998, when the patients perform the play they have written before an audience of family members, the center's medical staff and the other patients.

The set

The play takes place in the center's hall. The stage is empty except for the patients' beds. This emptiness imbues the place with a nightmarish atmosphere. Most of the actors are onstage during the greater part of the play, follow what is happening and react to it.

The Style

The realistic description of the characters and the detailed stage directions shouldn't imply a realistic show. These guidelines are given to the director and actors to help them understand the reality in which the play takes place. The show needs a stylized theatrical language which will enable the actors to expose the inner worlds of the characters in their full dimensions.

Note:

As noted above, the play is constructed as a play within a play. The dialogues written and rehearsed by the patients are printed in this font, while those created as the play is staged due to the various snags and interruptions appear in this one.

Act One

Scene One

As the lighting comes up the stage is almost empty. Boris the guard is sitting on his chair. Enter Eliahu.

Eliahu: We'll be starting right away, Boris. **(He looks for somebody in the audience)** Yes. With God's help. **(Thinks he has recognized somebody)** Excuse me, sir... **(Realizes his mistake)** I'm sorry. I thought you were... **(Again he thinks he has recognized him)** Sir, are you sure you're not the...? **(Reconsiders)** Sorry, it's just that you look like him.

Enter Shulamit and sweeps the stage vigorously.

Eliahu: You've already swept it a dozen times.

Shulamit: I've swept it and you've dirtied it.

Eliahu: That's how you sweep? **(Takes the broom and demonstrates)**

Shulamit: **(Takes the broom and turns to the audience)** I also do my own laundry. And I don't touch their food either. They served meat one day and said it was lamb, but I could see it was pork right off. **(Laughs)**

Yigal enters and sits down on a bed at the far end of the stage. Mendel, who is frightened by the audience, peeps from behind the scenes. Enter Talia wheeling the dozing Avner in his wheelchair. She blows a kiss to Boris and addresses her mother who is in the audience.

Talia: Mother! It's me. Your daughter. **(Lifts her skirt showing her behind)** Remember now? **(To an enthusiastic member of the audience)** You can come and see me after the play. **(To her mother)** And don't leave in the intermission, Mother. I want to show you who I fuck here. One of the doctors. And the administrator. And the cook. And two guards. And there are the four soldiers who came a couple of months ago. Nineteen years old. If I didn't give them a blow-job once a week they'd have killed themselves a long time ago. **(To the enthusiastic member of the audience)** I receive guests in Room 4, Entrance 2, darling. **(Exits)**

Shulamit: There are drugs for that, but they don't give them to her. **(Laughs)**

Eliahu, who put his hands over his ears during the “show”, addresses someone in the audience.

- Eliahu: You, sir, are the minister of defense. Aren't you? You don't want to draw attention to yourself. But you can't fool me. I saw you once, when you were a general.
- Shulamit: **(To the audience)** All his life he's been waiting for the minister of defense.
- Eliahu: Isn't he the minister of defense?
- Shulamit: No. **(Laughs)**
- Eliahu: **(To the “minister”)** I beg your pardon, sir.
- Shulamit: They're getting ready. We'll be starting right away.
- Mendel: **(Peeps out)** Nobody's getting ready. They're all sitting in the lounge, watching news of the war. **(Hides for a moment and then peeps out again)** They're waiting for the names of the dead. There's nine already.

Enter Talia leading blind Natan to his place next to Avner's wheelchair. As she does so, she again notices the excited member of the audience and reveals her shoulder to him.

- Talia: Don't forget, darling. Entrance 2, Room 4. **(Shows a leg)** You can bring some friends too. **(Exits)**
- Eliahu: **(To the “minister”)** Mr. Minister. I know you don't have much time, but I'd like to talk to you after the ceremony. I have a few ideas for you.
- Natan: **(Scans the audience with his blind eyes)** There's no minister here, Eliahu.
- Shulamit: **(To the audience)** And he thinks he can see. **(Laughs)**

Enter Avi, carrying his suitcase. He approaches Eliahu and whispers something to him.

- Eliahu: **(Angrily)** Out of the question. No way. No way. I don't care what they say.
- Natan: What's going on over there?
- Avi: We shall not make a mockery of the dead. **(To the audience)** Perhaps they're our relatives? First we should know their names.
- Mendel: **(Peeping out)** First we must rend our clothes. First we must mourn.
- Eliahu: **(Angrily)** Many died yesterday. Many will die tomorrow. Only after the Day of Judgment will there be no more dead. **(Hurries to the “minister” in the audience)** Mr. Minister, you must issue a clear order. We will not keep silent.

(Starts trembling) Mr. Minister, the Day of Judgment is nigh. Yesterday the sun stopped in its orbit for a full hour.

Enter Lola, sits him on one of the beds and sits down next to him.

Lola: Do you want a glass of water? Do you want to go back to your room? **(He calms down)**

Mendel: **(Peeps out)** We must dig graves. We must bury the dead. **(Hides)**

Natan: Ladies and gentlemen, please remain seated. We'll be starting right away.

Mendel: **(Peeps out)** And then get into the tanks and start the engines. **(Hides)**

Natan: All of us are ready.

Avi: Go home! **(He loses his breath)**

Mendel: **(Peeps out)** And then we must load the cannons. **(Hides)**

Lola: **(To Avi)** Sit down. **(She sits him down, takes his inhaler from his pocket, puffs the medication into his mouth, and addresses the audience)** Good evening. My name's Lola and I've been a volunteer here for twenty-five years. Ever since my two sons fell in the war. I know what mourning is and I think that even on a day like today we can and we should...

Enter Binder, limping, leaning on his cane. Mendel enters after him.

Binder: We're starting!

Avi: Who'll listen to us on a day like this, Binder.

Binder: People who don't want any more days like this.

Mendel: We're shaming the dead.

Binder: We're honoring them. **(To the audience)** They died because nobody took the trouble to stop this damn war. Nobody on our side, nobody on theirs. And the wounded, too, and also those you only think have survived. Look at us. You can't tell us: "Wait until the war is over".

Signals the orchestra to start playing. Lola organizes the patients into a choir and she conducts.

We are the living dead
Showing you our faces,
Faces defeated and miserable
Faces that are invisible

We have been the stain on your war diaries
From the war of forty-eight, from the war of fifty-six.

These are faces that hide from the light
Safe in the blackness of unending night
Where the words we hear are coarse and unforgiving
We're all afraid of death, but more terrified of living
We are the wounded, left abandoned and alone
from the war of sixty-seven, from the war of seventy-three.

We are the faces scarred and pungent
With empty eyes, no skin in which to hide
We are the faces lost in darkness
We are the lone reminders, cast aside

In the war of seventy three, of eighty-two,
forty-eight, seventy-three, fifty-six, sixty-seven, eighty-two,

We are the living dead
Look at our faces
Look in our eyes
See who you are

We are the stains on your triumphant tales of glory
From then till now.

Applause. The singers bow. Talia reveals a thigh.

Shulamit: If you do that one more time we're going to our rooms.

Natan: **(To the audience)** I can hear your whispering. I've still got some shrapnel in my head that picks up every sound.

Mendel I'm going to the cup final tomorrow. I've got a seat in the main stand.

Helped by Lola, Binder gets onto one of the beds. In front of them stand Avner, Natan and Talia as three "security men".

Talia: **(Singing)** I now present the Prime Minister
Thousands have gathered, maybe more
He'll address the throngs in the city square
To declare an end to war.

Binder: My dear friends. I have just returned from a journey around the world and I have an agreement in my hands. **(Takes out a paper)** In every country I've presented it, I've met grateful people. They are grateful to us because we have given them hope. Because we have proved to them that even after a hundred years of killing, it is still possible to find wisdom and compassion in Man. That wisdom and compassion can overcome bloodthirsty hatred. That Man can prefer life over martyrdom. Good sense over fanaticism. Survival over land. I offer this hope to you too.

Lola, Natan and Talia applaud. Yuda gets onto another bed.

Mendel: Ladies and gentlemen, the Leader of the Opposition. **(Applause)**

Yuda: Thank you, my dear brothers. Thank you very much. **(To the audience)** My condolences to the bereaved families. We all face death together and will do everything to loosen its grip around our neck. **(Takes the agreement from Binder)** My dear Mr. Prime Minister. We are grateful to you for this agreement. We congratulate you for it. **(To the audience)** Our prime minister is a wise man. He was a general too. If he promises us peace, then who are we to doubt him? Despite the fact that we face death every now and again. On the borders. In the streets. On buses. Despite the fact that we are all asking one another 'What has happened to our enemies? Have they come to love us

overnight?' But he promises peace and we must believe him. After all, he's been a soldier all his life. He would surely not put us at the mercy of our enemies. But perhaps because he has fought all his life, he isn't prepared to go on fighting? Perhaps he has become feeble and no longer able to go on fighting? And if he can't fight he won't bring us peace, because we will only achieve peace through war. **(Tears up the agreement)** Each of our wars has made us stronger and so will this one. Those who ask for peace will never achieve it. Only those who give peace will achieve it. And so we shall continue fighting until our enemies ask for peace.

Applause.

Yuda: **(To the audience)** They won't manage there much longer without me. Tomorrow they'll call me back to my unit, a machine gun in my hands, grenades on my belt. Burst will follow burst. It's an easy run. Fire from the right! Fire from the left! And I forge ahead. A scratch on my forehead. Never mind. Shrapnel in my shoulder. Don't worry. Forward between burned-out tanks. Jump into the trench, pull out a knife and stab, and stab. Up to the hilt in blood. And the Land will rest for a hundred years...

Avner, who has opened his eyes, suddenly sees the audience and calls out.

Avner: Doctor! Call a doctor! Morphine! The syrette's broken! Call a doctor! Where's the tourniquet? Get your head down! Get your head down!

Yuda: Shut up already. **(Moves away)**

Avner: Have some water, don't move. Have a cigarette. My legs, doctor.

Lola hurries to him and soothes him.

Natan: I actually like it here. Nice people. Every week they bring us ladies.

Binder: **(To the orchestra)** Music!

Scene Two

The home of the chairman of the Council of Settlers Rabbis. Enter Rabbis A and B played by Avi and Mendel. Eliahu, who plays Rabbi C, the committee chairman, looks at them.

Rabbi C: He's come back with an agreement? (**Silence**) He's come back without an agreement? (**He understands**) Did he give them everything? (**Silence**) Everything?

Shulamit: Everything.

The rabbis tear their shirts as a sign of mourning.

Rabbi C: Oy, Land of Israel. Oy, Mother. Oy, Hebron and Bethlehem. Your sweet breasts.

Rabbi A: What do we do, Rabbi?

Rabbi C: (**Weeping**) Oy, Jerusalem, Jerusalem. The first word my lips uttered. Oy, Jerusalem. Widowed. You have no consolation. We're all prepared to sacrifice ourselves for you.

Shulamit: I can hear Jerusalem weeping all the time.

Rabbi A: Prayer?

Rabbi C: (**Continues**) Oy, the Temple. The Temple. Where shall we worship you, O Father in Heaven? Father. Oy, Father. Your children trample you.

Rabbi B: Fasting?

Rabbi C: (**Continues**) We are orphans. Our crown is fallen. The Holy One hides his countenance from us. The Divine Spirit is weeping. The Messiah is silent.

Shulamit: He isn't silent. He is weeping too.

Rabbi B: Rend our garments?

Rabbi C: (**Looks in the book**) It is written that we do everything. (**Looks in another book**) It is written here too. (**Looks in another book**) And here.

Rabbi A: "Everything" meaning "everything"?

Rabbi C: (**Heavenward**) God in heaven. Everything, meaning everything?

Shulamit: (**To Rabbi C**) That's what **He** said!

Rabbi C: I heard. (**Shuts the book**) Everything. Everything. Everything.
Everything!

At the height of Rabbi C's ecstatic outburst Yigal pulls out a gun and aims at Binder.

Yigal: Everything! ("**Fires**" **three shots**) Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, who wreaks our vengeance.

Binder: (**In panic**) Ahhhhh... (**He shields his head with his arms**)

Natan: My ears are ringing, Lola.

Lola: (**To Yigal**) Sit quietly until it's your turn. (**To Binder**) Calm down, Binder, he got confused, that's all.

Binder: Did you check everyone at the entrance? Their bags too?

Lola: Yes. (**To Avi**) Bring him some water.

Binder: Are the doors locked? Are the guards outside?

Lola: Yes. (**She wipes his nose**)

Binder: They're trying to kill me. By running me down. By poisoning me. By throwing me out of a window.

Lola: We can't continue without you, Binder.

Binder: (**To Lola**) They'll do anything so I won't remind them what war is all about. (**To the audience**) War is a sting on your shoulder. A burning sting! In the dark. Like a hornet's sting. What is it? What's this sting? I've been shot. Who dares? You shout and no one answers. You're all alone in the world. And there's another sting. On the cheek. God, what a terrible noise. And there's nowhere to run. Now there's a flash of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And you're covered in dust and smoke. And you choke and retch. You want to stand up but can't. You try again and fall down. And more lightning and more thunder. And suddenly you feel a dull pain. And the pain slowly spreads. You look to the side. It's hard to see in the darkness. There's something lying there, right next to you. Something weird. Suddenly you understand. (**Slaps his artificial leg**) It's your leg. Your leg that has been ripped from your body. And it's still wearing your boot...

Natan: (**To Talia**) Sing, Talia. Sing your song.

Talia: (**Looks for her mother in the audience**) Where's my mother?

Natan: She's right there.

The orchestra plays, Talia sings.

If I had said the cannon needs cooling
 You would have said, "Hold off!"
 If I had said the rifle was jamming
 You would have said, "Cease fire!"

If I had said that we're low on ammo
 You would have ordered, "Halt!"
 If I had said the tank blew an engine
 Then you would have said, "Retreat!"

But I say our hearts are wrecked and defeated
 I say our blood's frozen cold in our veins
 I say our breath has grown short and weak
 And you say "Fire! Fire! Fire!"

I say our skin is scarred beyond healing
 I say that our bones have all crumbled to dust
 I say our souls have been torn to shreds
 And you say "Fire! Fire! Fire!"

I say that there's no more purpose in fighting
 I say that this makes no sense anymore
 I pray to you, won't you please let us live
 And you say "Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Binder: (To the audience) I sometimes go out of here. They take me to see this country of ours. I walk through the streets. I look at the passersby and don't see any pain in their faces. I see people hurrying by. I see people working. Walking. Enjoying themselves. Loving. Quarrelling. But I know. That one's brother is dead. This one's father. That one's son was blown up. This one hides a scar running the length of his belly. That one hides his burn-scarred

hand in his pocket. This one hasn't slept since a bomb landed next to him and ripped five people to shreds. (**Indicates Shulamit**) Her husband and two children were murdered. Pain is a danger signal. If we cover it up, we won't see the danger coming...

Lola brings the play back on track. She takes a bulletproof vest and offers it to Binder.

Binder: I won't wear a bulletproof vest.

Lola: Didn't you hear? The rabbis ordered to do everything.

Binder: Those rabbis are all talk.

Lola: But the murderer can hear them.

Binder: A vest won't deter a murderer. It will only cause damage.

Lola: What damage?

Binder: People watch me. They'll think I'm afraid.

Lola: If you weren't afraid, you wouldn't be so concerned about hiding it.

Binder: I wouldn't hide anything from you.

Lola: If you're so afraid of being seen as a coward, say I made you wear it.

Binder: And then they'll say I'm ruled by my wife's fears.

Lola: They've declared war on you. Haven't you heard?

Binder: Who'll wage war against me? The rabbis? They're the flesh of our flesh. Their students are the best of our young men. We sent them to settle. We built for them. We laid roads, planted trees, brought them electricity. We spilled our blood for them. When I bring them a message that ensures their survival, they'll try to harm me?

Lola: You insist on going to your death with blind eyes?

Binder: Blind eyes? With these eyes I can see for another thousand years. A new world. A world without fanaticism. Without nationalism. Without religions. Without borders. Without hatred, without soldiers, without wars. If I can see all that, do I need a bulletproof vest?

He laughs. Meanwhile, Yuda is trying to flirt with Talia. Her patience snaps.

Talia: If you touch me once more I'll cut your prick off.

Shulamit: (**To Talia**) He didn't touch you. Why are you talking nonsense?

Yuda: You should be thankful that somebody comes anywhere near you.

Talia sits down in a corner of the stage. Binder signals the orchestra to play. Music.

Scene Three

Eliahu, who plays a Settler Rabbi, is standing at a lectern on which there is a thick volume of the Talmud. Yigal addresses the audience.

Yigal: (To the audience) Before I begin, I'd like to tell you that a terrible disaster is about to happen here. Hundreds of thousands will die. All the rivers will flow with blood. The sea will turn red.

Binder: Not now.

Yigal: I won't tell you how I know, but I know. I write to the prime minister every day and that stupid idiot doesn't reply. He doesn't care that so many people will die.

Binder: Okay. They've got it. Begin.

Yigal: And if we know and do nothing, then God gets even more angry. Because he wants us to save ourselves. And not one of you has any idea what God does in his wrath.

Binder: I asked you to begin.

Yigal: God's lost his patience. Anyone who's killed out there today is a warning signal. And when I think what will happen tomorrow, my heart pounds like a helicopter.

Binder: (Angrily) Do you want to go back to the closed ward?

Yigal: Like the helicopter that rescued me from the fire. And I can't breathe, and I'm sweating, and we continue falling into the abyss, and I'm not sure I can rescue you, but I can't hide any longer from God who keeps forcing me to speak...

Binder: (Yelling) Stop it already!

Yigal addresses the rabbi.

Yigal: Honored Rabbi.

- Rabbi: **(Without stopping his study)** Is it you?
- Yigal: Yes, Rabbi.
- Rabbi: Was it you who asked for an urgent meeting?
- Yigal: Yes, Rabbi.
- Rabbi: **(Closes the book)** Welcome. **(Kisses him)** Tell me, if you would be so kind. Don't you have a rabbi?
- Yigal: I do, but lately he hasn't been answering any urgent questions.
- Rabbi: And how do you know that I'll answer them?
- Yigal: They say that you are a master of erudition on the laws of war.
- Rabbi: Is that what they say?
- Yigal: So what is the answer?
- Rabbi: To what question?
- Yigal: In the matter of heretics, Maimonides says that killing them is our religious duty. If we can kill them by the sword in public, they should be killed right away – and if not, they should be pursued with cunning until they can be killed.
- Rabbi: That's the answer.
- Yigal: But how can I know if this man is a heretic?
- Rabbi: He's a heretic because he denies the Torah.
- Yigal: And how can I know that he denies the Torah?
- Rabbi: If he denies the existence of the Almighty, then all the more so he denies the Torah, which was given to us by the Almighty.
- Yigal: Yes, but how can I know that he denies the existence of the Almighty?
- Rabbi: If he abandons the holy land of the Almighty, which was given to us in accordance with Almighty's Torah, then he certainly denies the existence of the Almighty.
- Yigal: Even though he is a Jew?
- Rabbi: He is a Jew, but the spawn of a beast.
- Shulamit: Only we, the believers, were born of the seed of Adam. **(Laughs)**
- Yigal: **(Kisses the rabbi's hand)** Thank you very much, Honored Rabbi.
(Turns to exit)
- Rabbi: Thank you for what? Where are you going? I haven't said a thing. And if they ask you what I said, or didn't say, you say I didn't say what I said. Because if you say that I said what I said, or what I didn't say,

then the sages will pronounce you an informer, and will order to kill you as well.

Yigal laughs and leaves. Eliahu turns to the “minister of defense” in the audience.

Eliahu: Your Excellency the Minister of Defense. Now you’ll finally hear what I’ve been waiting so impatiently to tell you.

Binder: Eliahu, where do you see a minister of defense?

Eliahu: **(Continues)** Now, Your Excellency is probably asking himself what a believer such as myself is doing in a place like this.

Binder: Are you out of your mind? Who told you that the minister of defense is here?

Eliahu: Can’t you see I’m speaking to him? **(To the “minister”)** I’m one of those black crows who carry plastic bags and fly to your shattered corpses in the killing fields. I’m one of those who collect spilled eyes, amputated fingers, ripped-out tongues and crushed testicles. I’m one of those who try to join a head to its neck, a shin to a thigh and a hand to its arm. I create your dead so you can have bones to weep over.

Binder: There’s no minister here, Eliahu!

Eliahu: I’m telling you this, Your Excellency, so that you know I’m not softhearted like the people here, and I ask you not to listen to them, sir, when they try to deter you from the war. I can show you in all the writings of the prophets that we must have no fear. The Almighty himself will be at our side in person in any war, and we will win it, as it is written in the Book of Zachariah, chapter 13, verse 8.

Binder: **(Loses his patience)** The minister of defense isn’t here. There’s war going on outside. He’s busy.

Eliahu: **(Points at the member of the audience he thought was the minister)** That isn’t the minister?

Binder: No!

Eliahu: **(To the member of the audience)** My dear sir, I beg you to tell me the truth.

Binder: **(Screams)** He isn’t the minister! **(Sits despairingly on one of the beds)**

Natan: My ears are still ringing, Lola.

Lola: Eliahu, please.

- Eliahu: **(Continues)** Because I'm telling you the truth. We will be victorious in this war. We will strike them with a great and powerful blow. We will annihilate and destroy and devastate them all.
- Lola: You should stop before it's too late **(Gestures to Boris)**.
- Eliahu: **(Hysterical)** And after this war, men and women and old and young will die intact in their own beds. And all I will have to do is wash and purify them, wrap them in a shroud, dig them a grave, bury them, pray for the elevation of their souls. O God in Heaven. After this war the Messiah will come and the dead will be resurrected, without a wound and without a bruise, without a scratch and without a burn, and they will have all their limbs. O God in Heaven...
- Boris: You don't have to shout, friend Eliahu. He up there can hear very well.
(Takes him out)

Scene Four

- Binder: **(To the audience)** We regret the disruption. Some of us have suffered so much that their desire for redemption has driven them mad **(Announces)** The office of the Council of Torah Sages.

Music. He enters the office of the Head of the Council of Torah Sages. Mendel and Avi are playing the Rabbi's Assistants. They put a yarmulke on Binder's head and examine his clothing. Throughout, Avi is holding his suitcase.

- Asst. A: Welcome, Mr. Prime Minister.
- Asst. B: When you see the Rabbi, sir, you must wear a yarmulke.
- Asst. A: And don't forget to give it back when you leave, sir.
- Asst. B: Is your honor sure that his jacket is kosher?
- Binder: Kosher?
- Asst. B: **(Explains)** That it does not contain, Heaven forbid, a mixture of wool and flax. Where did you buy it?
- Binder: My wife bought it.
- Asst. B: Here, in the Holy City?
- Binder: Yes.

Asst. B: Well, so be it. There isn't a single clothing store here today that isn't inspected.

Asst. A: And about your wife. You should wash your hands. Maybe she hasn't cleansed herself in the ritual bath this month.

Binder washes his hands. Shulamit addresses the “director” in the audience.

Shulamit: Why isn't there a ritual bath here, Doctor? Ever since I came I've been begging you. Do you want me to burn myself? God wants me pure.

Lola sits her down on one of the beds.

Asst. B: You're not, God forbid, a communist?

Binder: No.

Asst. B: Lucky for you, because if you were he wouldn't talk to you.

Asst. A: I trust that you're not by any chance, Heaven forbid, a socialist?

Binder: No.

Asst. A: Very good. He doesn't talk to socialists either. And don't forget to return the yarmulke before you leave.

Binder accidentally touches Avi's suitcase. He rebukes him angrily.

Avi: Don't touch it!

Binder: I'm sorry.

Enter the Rabbi, played by Yuda, who has stuck a beard and side-locks onto his face. He is holding a page of text.

Rabbi: Welcome, Isaacle*. (To the audience) I'm replacing our friend Eliahu, whose cup of suffering, as you have seen, has run over with all the electric shocks they give him here.

Binder: Peace unto you, Honored Rabbi.

* The Yiddish diminutive of “Isaac”, pronounced like “icicle”.

- Rabbi: **(Reading from the page)** *Nu*, I see you're wasting no time and putting the "piss"[†] at the top of our agenda. "He who maketh 'piss' in his high places, may he make 'piss' for us and for all Israel".
- Binder: Amen. I'm glad to hear that your honor also seeks peace.
- Rabbi: "Piss"? We live in "piss" all the time.
- Binder: Yes, absolutely. But the country also needs peace.
- Rabbi: *Nu, nu*, not exactly, Isaacle. It's the pork-eaters who need "piss".
- Binder: Your blood is also spilt in this war sometimes, sir. If bloodshed can be prevented, then should we not prevent it?
- Rabbi: *Nu*, of course. But how can we prevent bloodshed? By praying to the Almighty, blessed be He.
- Binder: Of course, Honored Rabbi. But also with deeds. I have brought a good agreement (**Shows him**). If you support it, we shall be saved from destruction.

Eliahu, who has recovered backstage and heard Yuda speaking his lines, hurries onto the stage and addresses Binder as the Rabbi.

- Rabbi: You come to us to save you from destruction? To us, who have been warning you for a hundred years that even the establishment of this cursed state is a great sin? And our warnings have fallen on deaf ears. Six million Jews died just because you couldn't wait for the Messiah. And now you too are going to be punished for it. Not for nothing has the Almighty gathered another six million Jews in this Holy Land. Not to save you, Heaven forbid. Not to redeem you. These wars that he condemns you to, are intended to visit your sins upon you and destroy you. All of you. Men, women, the aged, and the young. You will all die.
- Binder: He sent six million to their deaths and now he wants to kill another six million? Why?
- Rabbi: Because you have interfered with his plans, Isaacle.

[†] This is the Rabbi's Yiddish-accented pronunciation of the word "peace".

Binder: What is so important in his plans that justifies killing another six million people? Did those men, women, old people and children stand in his way from redeeming the world?

Rabbi: Man is a small and insignificant creature, Isaacle. He cannot know God's plans.

Binder: If man cannot know God's plans, Honored Rabbi, how can you know that his intentions are good? Can you, Honored Rabbi, give me a single proof of his good intentions? Perhaps they're evil? Perhaps they're even monstrous?

Rabbi: Monstrous? Out!

Binder: Perhaps this god is nothing but a brutal, bloodthirsty murderer? There is certainly proof of that.

Rabbi: Out, I said!

Binder: And if he's a bloodthirsty murderer. Why worship him? Why obey his wishes? If we want to live, perhaps he should be killed?

Assistant B puts his hand over Binder's mouth.

Rabbi: The Torah. Where's the Torah? Bring me a Torah! **(Asst. A hands him a Bible. He leafs through it)** Deuteronomy 28. **(Finds the place)** "The Lord will cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies... And thy carcasses shall be food unto all fowls of the air... The Lord will smite thee with madness, and with blindness... And all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed." Amen! Amen and amen!

Assistant B pushes Binder out.

Asst. A: **(Calls after Binder)** The yarmulke! The yarmulke!

Binder throws the yarmulke onto the floor. Asst. A picks it up and kisses it.

Rabbi: **(To his assistants)** The day will come when this state will be destroyed, and instead of the Jewish state, a Gentile state will arise. Arabs, Turks, English. And they will enact laws for themselves, and make an army for themselves, and fight their wars, and make their “piss”. And they will profane the Sabbath, and sell pork, and commit adultery. What do we care for them? And we, we will build our holy communities here, with *yeshivas* and synagogues and ritual baths. And we will have our own courts. And we will worship the Lord, blessed be he, “each under his own vine and fig tree” forever and ever, until the end of time.

Assistants: Amen!

Talia, who has been sitting immersed in herself at the corner of the stage for a long time, gets up and addresses the audience.

Talia: Now I know how I want to die. I don't ask for an easy death. Here people usually die with a loud noise. Screaming in agony. But this agony is the easy part. The hard part is fear. Even when death surprises you with fire or a thunderbolt, you always manage to see it coming and then you're attacked by this terrible fear, and your soul evaporates. I want to die without fear. I want to go to the train station and lie down on the track, breathe deeply and hear the announcement through the loudspeakers that the train is about to depart in one minute.

Natan: **(Shouting)** Somebody shut her up!

Lola embraces Talia. Avi turns to exit.

Yuda: Where do you think you're going?

Avi: I'll be right back.

Yuda: You're not going anywhere.

Lola: Yuda!

Mendel: Quiet! I want quiet.

Yuda grabs Avi's shirt. Boris gets up holding his baton.

- Avi: I wanted to hear the names of the dead. Perhaps my brother hasn't come because someone from our family has...
- Yuda: (**Interrupts him**) You know why your brother hasn't come to see you.
- Mendel: I'm a colonel! When I say "quiet", there's quiet!
- Boris: Friend Yuda, do you want me to switch off the electricity?

Yuda lets go of Avi. Binder signals the orchestra to play.

Scene Five

The orchestra plays. Shulamit sweeps the stage. A soldier's funeral. Yigal is lying on a stretcher as the dead soldier.

- Talia: (**Sings**) The Prime Minister has come to the funeral
To ease the family's grief
But the pain they feel overwhelms them
And he has no words of relief
- Eliahu: "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."
- Binder: It wasn't the Lord who took him away. It was a man. A soldier who shot him.
- Eliahu: Shhhh. "He who maketh peace in his high places, may he make peace for us and for all Israel; and say ye, Amen."
- All: Amen.
- Binder: Only **we** can make it.
- Eliahu: Shhh. (**Continues**) "May God comfort you among all the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."
- Binder: He won't comfort anybody. We will all mourn until the end of our days, unless we stop these bloody wars.
- Yuda: (**To Binder**) Pardon me, Mr. Prime Minister, but are you suggesting that we'll make peace? Why?
- Mendel: What exactly would we gain from it?

- Shulamit: How exactly would we benefit from it?
- Avi: Why should we give anything up for it?
- Eliahu: **(Angrily)** Shhh...
- Yuda: If you were to propose making peace with the Americans or the British – even with the Germans – we would understand. But with the Arabs?
- Avi: With poor, primitive villagers?
- Mendel: Have you ever been in their villages? Have you seen the filth? The sewage in the streets? Their illiterate children running wild in the alleys?
- Eliahu: **(As he prays)** Shhh...
- Shulamit: Arabs have no culture. They don't wash. They stink. **(Laughs)**
- Mendel: They fuck camels. Sheep. Murder is nothing to them. They simply slaughter people with knives, axes, whatever they can lay their hands on.
- Eliahu: Shhh. May he rest in peace." **(Announces)** Thank you. The next funeral will be held in one hour.
- Mendel: Tell us. Without any hypocrisy. Do you really like Arabs?
- Avi: If you like *hummus*, do you have to like the cook?
- Mendel: If you like goat's cheese, do you have to like the goat?
- Yuda: Hand on heart, do you see a single Jew here who can say that he loves Arabs?
- Shulamit: Do you see a single Arab who loves Jews?
- Binder: You're looking for love? **(Laughs)** We've got lots here. Like oil. Like gas. Like water in the Mediterranean. The cook loves anyone who loves *hummus*, just as the goat does with people who love goat's cheese. But meanwhile that love is hidden in the ground. It doesn't bleat, it doesn't moo, and it doesn't chirp. Because for love you've got to love too. There is no God in heaven who gives out love for free. Love, and you'll be loved in return.

Enraged, Yigal sits up on the stretcher.

- Yigal: There is a God in heaven! Don't you say there isn't! **(“Shoots” Binder three times)**

- Binder: Ahhh!
- Natan: Take the gun off him!
- Lola: It's nothing, Binder. You know how he is. When he hears 'Hello' he pulls out a gun.
- Binder: Did you check everybody at the entrance? And their bags too?
- Yuda: He won't do it again. I'll look after him.
- Lola: **(To Yigal)** Give me the gun before I tell Boris to restrain you.
- Yigal: I'm afraid of Boris? Have you ever seen me afraid of anyone? **(To the audience)** When a car bomb exploded right next to me and my friends were ripped to shreds, the Holy One himself plucked me from the flames.
- Lola: In a minute you'll go to your bed and start crying.
- Yigal: You're pitying me? You, who walks around here all day seeking pity. **(Mimics her)** "My sons, my glorious sons, they both fell in the war."

Yuda clamps a hand over his mouth. Lola is deeply wounded. She turns to the audience.

- Lola: Yes. I talk about my sons all the time. About both of them. You only talk about the dead on Remembrance Day. **(Insistently)** If you care about the living, talk about the dead before you go to war. **(Silence)** I'm a simple woman. But I understand pain. And ever since that cursed war I constantly ask myself: How long do we have to suffer such pain in order to live here? **(Silence)** After the funerals hundreds came to console us. The prime minister too. She shook our hands and sat in an armchair. We sat in silence. We didn't have the strength to cry. The neighbors served her tea. She lit a cigarette and said that the boys had saved us from destruction. Sinai is the guarantee for our existence. We believed her. How could we argue?
- Binder: **(To the orchestra)** Music...

Scene Six

Talia brings on blind Natan, who plays the Head of the Security Services, and addresses Binder, singing.

Talia: Dear Mr. Prime Minister
 There's a situation most sinister
 The Head of the Security Services is here
 Your life is undoubtedly in great danger.

She begins her striptease. Yuda follows it with visible enjoyment.

HSS: A gang of settlers have decided to assassinate you, sir.
 Binder: I'm sure the security services know how to protect me. Thank you very much.
 HSS: These settlers have accumulated vast knowledge in killing Arabs, sir. They won't hesitate to use it.
 Binder: Thank you. You are head of the security services. It is your job to protect me, not frighten me. **(Signals to Talia to escort him out)**
 HSS: Just a moment, sir. You have eyes to see. Look!

He feels his way and turns over a bed, revealing Avi who plays Settler A. He "cocks" his broom and aims at Binder.

Settler A: **(To Binder)** I'm a shepherd from Judea. My sheep graze in the mountains. My wife's a cheesemaker. Swiss cheese. There are two small swimming pools beside my house. One for girls and the other for boys. Every night the Arabs come to steal the water. If they're thirsty they should dig wells. Their wells are dry? They should buy from some water company. Tel Aviv children can swim and ours can't? We're second-class citizens? Tonight my wife and I will be returning home from a wedding. On a bend in the road the water thieves will open fire on us. She'll be hit. Another burst will shatter the windscreen. I'll lose my grip on the wheel.

Avner: Enough, enough.

Yuda: And who gave them weapons? Who? **(Points at Binder)**

The Head of the Security Services turns over another bed revealing Mendel who plays Settler B who also “cocks” a broom and aims it at Binder.

Settler B: I’m a settler from Samaria. Not a messianist. Not an extremist. A law-abiding accountant. A small house with a tiled roof and a solar heater. Drives to Jerusalem every day to Cohen and Levi Accountants. Kids throw stones at me here and there. I understand it. It’s the education they’re given at home. But why do I have to drive through their villages? Don’t I deserve a safe two-lane road? With tunnels through the mountains? Let them drive on their roads. With their donkeys and carts. With their buses. Why do I have to get stuck behind them on inclines? I’m a second-class citizen? On my way home from Jerusalem today I’ll be overtaken by a car. Three masked men will pull out guns. I’ll see the muzzle flash.

Avner: Enough, enough.

Yuda: And who gave them weapons? Who? **(Points at Binder)**

The Head of the Security Services turns over another bed revealing Shulamit who plays a settler and is also carrying a broom, which she aims at Binder.

Settler: It’s nighttime. I’m waiting for my husband to come home from the yeshiva near Nablus. We moved here in order to live in our faith, in purity and sanctity. Because we’re Jews. And a Jew is a part of God on high. A Jew is not just the entire world. He’s all the worlds. His soul is holy. Who freed the world from idolatry? Who taught the world justice and morality? We did. Not the *goyim*. That’s why there’s a difference between their souls and ours. And that’s why there’s no difference between their souls and the souls of animals. That’s what the Torah says. That’s what my husband teaches. He’ll be home soon, we’ll pray together by the bed and go to sleep. At midnight they’ll break in. Shoot my husband and the sleeping children. The children won’t even know they’re dying.

Yuda: And who gave them weapons? Who? **(Points at Binder)**

Avner turns weeping to Yuda.

Avner: Do me a favor, get me out of here. Please. I can't listen to any more of this.

Yuda: You've heard it all before.

Avner: (**Continues**) Take me to my room. I need my medicine. Please. I'll clean your room. I'll give you cigarettes.

Yuda: Shut up already! (**Drapes the Attorney General's robe over him**)

Binder: (**To Talia, who's almost naked**) And you! Get dressed! The only thing you haven't shown them is the fillings in your teeth. (**Talia is hurt and turns to exit. Binder relents**) Don't go. Show them everything.

She halts, turns to the audience and reveals the deep scar running across her belly. Silence. She takes blind Natan's hand and runs it along the scar.

Talia: (**To her mother in the audience**) It's just a scar, Mother. It doesn't hurt. The skin's a bit rough, a bit hard. You can touch it. You can stroke it. You won't have to tell me you can't bear my pain. (**Laughs**)

Binder: (**To Talia**) Now you have to sing.

Talia: (**She leads Avner to center stage and turns to the audience, singing**)
The Attorney General is here
He has some information
How to save the Prime Minister
We ask for your cooperation.

Binder: (**To Avner**) Mr. Attorney General, what are you going to do about these people? How can we stop them? (**Avner doesn't reply**) I'm waiting for an answer.

Attorney: (**Recites with difficulty**) The judicial system is a tool in the hands of the regime, but not in the hands of the prime minister.

Binder: These people are not only endangering me, they're also endangering the regime.

Attorney: The judicial system must have evidence.

Binder: Isn't what you've seen enough?

Attorney: Evidence is... (**Bursts into tears**)

Talia: (**Prompts him**) "Evidence is a proven fact."

Binder: Can't they be stopped according to the Emergency Laws?

Attorney: The use of the Emergency Laws is...

Talia: **(Prompts him)** Is not constitutional.

Binder: Does the constitution protect the murderer more than me?

Avner goes on weeping. Talia again addresses the audience in song.

Talia: The Attorney General was here
We listened to what he had to say
How to save the Prime Minister
He didn't help us find a way. **(She leads Avner off)**

Binder: **(To the HSS)** What do you suggest we do?

HSS: Bug the settlements, plant agents in the *yeshivas*, install cameras in the synagogues.

Binder: The synagogues?

HSS: Sir, democracy cannot show mercy to those who seek to destroy it.

Binder: Democracy is put to the test precisely when someone expresses a deviant opinion. The truth is sometimes hidden in this very opinion that is considered deviant.

HSS: **(To the audience)** Don't blame me. I sounded the warning. And I planted agents in the settlements. Not in the *yeshivas*, but in the kindergartens. Not in the synagogues, but in the cemeteries. And also a few attendants at ritual baths. All authorized by the attorney general. You wanted democracy? You've got it! **(Makes an obscene gesture)**

Yuda loses his patience and addresses somebody in the audience.

Yuda: What are you so happy about? That it sounds good? That it's nice to hear? That it's clever? **(Grabs a pillow from one of the beds, and lights a cigarette lighter next to it)** If I set fire to this, the whole place will go up in flames.

Natan: What's happened?

Yuda: The moment you see the fire you'll run for the doors. You'll trample and hit out. Without any democracy. Nobody will let anyone else live. Not his friends. Not his wife and children.

Natan: **(Worried)** What's happening there?

A moment of tension. Boris picks up a fire extinguisher and moves towards Yuda. Binder gestures to him to stop.

Binder: You can burn us, Yuda. Burn us and prove to us we've ceased to be human.
That we kill anyone who stands in our way.

Yuda: The need to kill is the need to live, Binder. You don't have to apologize for it.
(**To the audience**) He'll soon apologize for the people he's killed. In fifty years he hasn't missed a single opportunity to weep over them.

Binder: What's so terrible about being human, Yuda? (**Yuda remains silent**) Why do you despise it?

Yuda: I do not despise it. I'm trying to show you what it means. Look at me. This is what it is to be human. (**He falls silent**)

Binder takes the lighter from him and gives it to Boris. Boris hits Yuda hard with his baton

Natan: See what a nice place it is? (**Laughs**) Once a week they bring us ladies.
(**Laughs**)

Binder: Ladies and gentlemen, Shulamit's song.

Music. Shulamit, Avi and Mendel are wearing orthodox-Jewish women's head covering. The men accompany Shulamit.

I'm a nice Jewish girl at a college
For nice Jewish girls who think right
And like all my friends at the college
I'll stay a virgin till my wedding night.

Ay, ay, ay... Ay, ay, ay...

On the walls of my room there hang pictures
Of rabbis and good holy men
But it's a photo of the great Killer Doctor
That I come back to again and again

Ay, ay, ay... Ay, ay, ay...

Night after night after prayers
 I take his picture from under my bed
 Then I'm kissing the face of that great man who knows
 That an Arab is better off dead

Ay, ay, ay... Ay, ay, ay...

He's pressing himself up against me
 Whispering orders I long to obey
 Curling his beard in my fingers
 I play with myself as I pray

Ay, ay, ay... Ay, ay, ay...

As it gets closer and closer to midnight
 I'm ready to burst with desire
 I see my love with his machine gun
 I lose control as he opens fire

Ay, ay, ay... Ay, ay, ay...

I count all the bodies of Arabs
 One by one they're mowed down in a line
 I keep counting and counting and counting
 And I climax at corpse twenty-nine!

Ay, ay, ay... Ay, ay, ay...

The three take a bow. Avi and Mendel take off the head covering.

Binder: **(Applauds)** Thank you. Thank you very much.

Avi addresses the audience.

Avi: I also killed twenty-nine people. In a POW camp in Lebanon. They were rioting and I opened fire. They fell. Twenty-eight didn't get up. Next day the sergeant major gave me a day's leave. I went home and killed the twenty-ninth. My father. When the war broke out I had hidden at home. A few days later the military police came looking for me, and he sent them down to the basement. **(He falls silent. Lola takes his arm)**

Scene Seven

Music. Binder gets onto the bed that is his stage. Lola is at his side.

Talia: **(Sings)** The Prime Minister has come to the city square
Fear deep in his bones
He saw the crowd awaiting, and he's well aware
That their lives depend on him alone.

Binder: **(To the audience)** My dear friends. You all know why we have gathered here this evening. To choose between life and death.

Yuda: **(Interrupts him)** Just a minute.

Binder: What do you want?

Yuda: I concede. The people are behind you. We are a small and defeated minority.

Binder: What do you want?

Yuda: To speak on behalf of the minority. You yourself have said that very often the truth is concealed in the voice of a small minority. You want us to feel that you're gagging us?

Binder: You can speak. After me.

Yuda: After you? It's your audience, sir. I'll just warm them up. **(To the audience)** When you're being shot at in the trenches and you have nowhere to hide, you discover the truth pretty quickly. They had this bastard there with a flamethrower. Spewed flames ten meters.

Binder: **(To Yuda)** Go ahead, speak. Briefly.

- Yuda: **(To the audience)** I'd like to thank the prime minister who has most generously given me the floor. Indeed he is a generous man, our prime minister. But where does his generosity stem from? It stems from his ability to give. From his power to give.
- Avi: Long live the generous.
- Yuda: So let us become more powerful so that we can become more generous. And if anybody thinks that power only means generosity, he's wrong. Power also means order. The planets revolve around the sun in perfect order only because of its power.
- Shulamit: Long live order.
- Binder: I said briefly.
- Yuda: And order endows power with another wonderful attribute. We all know that chaos is ugly and order is beautiful. So power is beauty! He was lying in position with his flamethrower. All the soldiers in the trench were burned. We didn't have any water to throw on them.
- Avi: Long live beauty.
- Yuda: Yes. So why be ashamed of power? Why apologize for it? Power assures us of life. The weak are trampled. The weak are destroyed. Crushed. Annihilated. Who wants to be weak?
- Mendel: Nobody.
- Binder: Briefly, I said!
- Yuda: We shall no longer live by charity. We shall live by right. The right of power. Power that will defeat. Power that will deter. A power so generous. A power so proud. A power so cruel.
- Avi: Long live Power!
- Natan: He said briefly. Didn't you hear? Briefly is briefly!
- Yuda: Anyone who thinks that the war has ended is an idiot. All their talk about peace is nothing but a trick. Listen to them. Lying for the Jihad is a good deed.
- Mendel: **(To the audience)** We must kill them. Burn them. Drive them out.
- Yuda: Enough, Mendel.
- Mendel: They'll pay for what they did to me when I was a POW. For the beatings. The electric shocks. The fingernails they pulled out. The teeth they broke. The toes they cut off. **(Removes a shoe and shows his foot)**

Yuda: One more word and I'll cut out your tongue. **(To the orchestra)** Music!

From under the mattresses his supporters take out long poles to which bleeding doves are nailed. They raise the poles and sing.

Choir: This is the dove sent from the ark
 To see if the waters had receded,
 It brought an olive branch in its beak,
 So we slit its throat in the dark.
 And then the war broke out,
 Oh, what a perfect war!
 A beloved war.
 And then the war broke out,
 Oh what a good war!

Binder: This man is deceiving you. Power is an illusion. It is built on quicksand.
 If there is another war, we will win it. But to keep the fruits of victory we
 will have to continue living by the sword. And in the coming wars we
 will not win. We will not win because we'll discover that winning is not
 worthwhile. That fighting is not worthwhile. We'll discover that life loses
 its meaning in wars.

Choir: This is another dove sent from the ark
 To see if the waters had receded,
 It brought an olive branch in its beak,
 So we broke its neck right away

Binder: Whoever thinks that by amassing power we'll prevent war is mistaken.
(To Yuda) Shut them up! **(Yuda does nothing. Binder turns to the audience)** If we amass power, our enemies will too. If you want to
 prevent war you should abolish the reasons for war.

Choir: This is another dove, and this is another dove
 This is another dove, and this is another dove
 Until a vulture comes
 With rotting flesh dangling from its beak
 Then the trumpets shall sound
 And the world will be redeemed.

Binder: In the war stands a youth, still wet behind the ears, and he is clutching a rifle and shooting at the enemy, that hides in the village houses. He shoots a man who peeks over the roof. And another in a window. And another in a second window. And there's an old man appearing in the doorway. And he shoots him too. And the woman behind him, and the child behind her, and the child behind him. And he can't stop...

Yigal suddenly appears and “fires” three shots at Binder. Binder bursts into tears. Lola hurries to him. Before the curtain closes Avner screams. He raises his arms and slashes his wrists. Lola leaves Binder and rushes to him.

Yuda: Lights! Turn off the lights! Close the curtain! Close the curtain!

End of Act One

Act Two

Scene Eight

The curtain is open. The house lights are still on. The stage is empty. Blind Natan bursts onto the stage, cane in hand. He stumbles, falls, gets up, loses his sense of direction and addresses the audience with his back to them.

Natan: ...I'll tell everything. What they don't want you to hear is most important of all. **(He carries on talking in the wrong direction)** Ladies and gentlemen, Binder was so frightened by telling you about his murders in the war, that he cut out my lines. I came here this evening to talk.

Talia: **(Enters after him)** If you want to talk, then talk!

She turns him towards the audience and remains at his side, starting her striptease.

Natan: **(Angrily)** Binder didn't have to tell me he's a murderer. Only a murderer is so frightened that somebody will murder him any minute.

Talia: **(Revealing a thigh)** See, Mother? I've had two operations here.

Natan: I saw it on the day I arrived. I see everything.

Binder: **(Enters after Natan)** We're not canceling your speech, Natan. We're just postponing it.

Natan: I'm not postponing anything. If I'd said it before the war, I wouldn't be here. **(To the audience)** Man isn't a lump of meat on the state's butcher block. The state can't knead him with its bloodstained hands. The state was created for Man. It can't wipe its filthy ass with him and then bury him in the ground.

Binder: You'll have a chance to say that.

Talia: **(Reveals her back)** I had two here as well.

Natan: Man is the heart of the matter. Not the state. The state can't rob Man of his life, his conscience, his dignity.

Binder: What you have to say is very important, Natan. We shouldn't waste it on interjection.

Natan: Man has the right to live according to his will. According to his conscience. And we here have waived that right. Because we were cowards. We were fools. We were blind.

Binder: **(Angrily)** If you go on talking they won't come onstage.

Talia: **(Points at her face)** I had three here, Mother.

Natan: And if the country can't assure Man that he won't kill and be killed, if it can't assure him of his life, his sanity, his sight, then it does not deserve to exist.

Yuda: **(Enters and turns To Natan)** We asked you not to say that. **(To the audience)** They've just announced that another seven soldiers have been killed.

Natan: No one has the right to demand that another person die for him. Neither a father from his child nor a child from his father. And certainly not this bloody country.

Yuda: Shut your mouth! **(Clamps a hand over his mouth)**

Natan: We can live without a state. We don't have to be so afraid to live without it.

Enter Boris, who separates them and sits Natan on one of the beds. Binder addresses the audience.

Binder: I'm sorry that those things were said. The helicopters bringing the wounded to the hospital flooded some of us with painful memories.

He turns to exit. Talia, who is almost naked, addresses the audience.

Talia: This isn't so nice to look at, is it? You'd rather see something more appealing, more tempting? **(Laughs)** But this is ugly, isn't it? It's very troubling, it raises questions. Why did it happen? Why me? Who's to blame? It is very easy to blame the bastard who blew himself up right next to me. But why did he blow himself up? None of you were part of it? **(Laughs)**

Binder: **(Angrily)** Get dressed right now! We have a problem here that's more important than your ass.

Talia: There's nothing more important than my ass!

Binder: Do you want us to talk about it right now?

Talia: My nose and cheeks were made out of this ass. And my lips too, Binder. So nothing is more important to me than my ass. **(To the audience)** Think about that when the next sonofabitch blows up right next to you. When everything shatters. When everything is on fire. Not about friends or family. Or the prime minister. Not even about God. Just think of your ass.

She laughs, and then removes her wig revealing a bald scalp. Binder hurries over to her and sits her down on one of the beds. Music. The whole cast comes onstage. Lola conducts the choir.

Blood flows red, deep from the hills
Washing down the slopes
Children weep, Mothers mourn
Trudging through the thunderous silence of their cries

And the earth was without form and void
And darkness on the face of the deep

Open graves lie in the cities
Burned faces wear their masks
Amputees limp through the streets
The blind feel their way in the dark

And the earth was without form and void
And darkness on the face of the deep
But on that day they'll all be there
Orphans, widows, parents mourning their sons
Their lives destroyed beyond repair
Brothers, sisters, all will stand in line at the polls

And blinded by amnesia, forgetting all they've lived through
They all will cast their votes one by one
And elect a new government
A government that will declare another war.

And the earth was without form and void
And darkness on the face of the deep,
And God saw that it was good.

Scene Nine

The funeral of a youth who was murdered in a terrorist attack. Yigal is lying on a stretcher as the dead youth. Eliahu says the prayer for the dead. Binder and Lola are among the mourners.

Eliahu: He is the Rock, his work is perfect: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He. **(Murmurs)**

Enter Talia wheeling Avner. His wrists are bandaged.

Eliahu: The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. **(Murmurs)**

Talia: **(Sings)** The Prime Minister has come to the funeral of another lost too soon.

Eliahu: **(Aloud)** "He who maketh peace in his high places may he make peace for us and for all Israel; and say ye, Amen."

All: Amen.

Talia: Stand up, Avner. You did it yesterday. **(To the audience)** He's afraid that if he gets out of the chair they'll send him back to the army. **(To Avner)** If you stand up, so will he. **(Indicating his groin)**

Eliahu: Shhh... **(Continues)** "May God comfort you among all the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."

Talia: **(Sings)** Soldier boy, soldier boy, guard your cock well, if you come home without it, you can go straight to hell.

Eliahu: Shhh! O God, who art full of compassion, who dwellest on high, **(Aloud)** The Lord is his portion. May he rest in peace.

Talia supports Avner who manages to stand up. Now he plays the bereaved brother.

Shulamit: **(To the audience)** I got a nurse to stitch him up during the intermission. The doctors were all drinking tea in the kitchen. **(Laughs)**

Binder: Dear friends. Death has struck us once more and once more the pain is unbearable.

Avner: Mr. Prime Minister, get out of here.

Binder: I have come to lament your brother, my friend.

Avner: He was murdered because of you. Go. Let us mourn him.

Binder: I mourn him as if he were my son.

Avner: I curse the day I believed you. **(He is suddenly standing without Talia's support)** I curse the day I followed you. **(Collapses into his wheelchair, weeping)**

Mendel: **(To Binder)** Go!

Avi: Go!

Talia: **(As the murdered youth's girlfriend)** Mr. Prime Minister. I loved him and he loved me. Now he's dead. And our love is dead too. Hatred has grown in its place. I hate everything that lives because he is no longer living. I hate everyone who loves, because I no longer love. I hate everyone who hopes because I have no hope. But more than anything I hate you, sir, because you blinded me with the hope that hatred can be abated.

Shulamit: **(To Binder)** Go!

Yigal sits up on the stretcher, the cocked pistol in his hand. He suddenly hesitates and addresses Binder.

Yigal: Now? Should I fire now?

Binder: No!

Yigal: I was only asking. **(Lies back down)**

Natan as the Head of the Security Services moves towards Binder.

HSS: You've got to get out of here, Sir. The damned murderer is hiding among these people. I heard his footsteps.

Binder: I will not run away from him.

HSS: He's already cocked his gun. His breath is carried on the wind. Listen to his heartbeat.

Binder: Our fate will be sealed by a murderer?

Yigal sits up on the stretcher and interrupts him.

Yigal: He's not a damned murderer. He's a martyr. He's a divine messenger.

Eliahu: In your eyes anyone who kills is a murderer. Maimonides says that killing a Jew who threatens to kill another Jew is a good deed! Killing a Jew who informs on another Jew is a good deed. And if you can kill a Jew to save another Jew, then you can kill thousands of Arabs to save him!

Binder: Eliahu, enough.

Eliahu: And if a Jew needs a heart transplant, he can tear the heart of an Arab from his chest!

Binder: Enough, I said!

Yuda grabs Eliahu and claps a hand over his mouth.

Binder: **(To the audience)** None of us agree with that.

Shulamit: I do.

Avi: So do I.

Mendel: Me too.

Yuda: If you go on, Binder, I'll let him talk too.

Binder: **(Furiously)** I wasn't born a murderer. I wasn't born to become a murderer.

Binder quells his anger and signals the orchestra to play.

Scene Ten

Music. Enter Avi who plays a Settler Leader.

Mendel: **(Announces)** The settler leader has come to meet the prime minister.

Settler: In spite of all your promises, Mr. Prime Minister, we're still afraid that you'll uproot us from our land.

Binder: My dear friend, we settled you there. We increased your number and protected you. We shall also ensure your existence.

Settler: Thank you very much, sir. **(Shakes his hand and turns to leave)**

Binder: I hope this handshake means that you'll support peace.

Settler: Peace? It's a European peace. It's not a Jewish peace.

- Binder: What's a Jewish peace? Isn't "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more", a Jewish peace?
- Settler: The Prophet Isaiah is very specific about what must happen so that "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more".
- Binder: What must happen?
- Settler: Listen. **(Takes a Bible from his briefcase)** "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains." In other words, first we must build the Temple. "And all nations shall flow unto it". That is, all the nations will recognize the house of the Lord. "And He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths". This means that all these nations will obey the commandments of the holy Torah of Israel. "And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people", means that the kingdom of Israel will be a power. "And they shall beat their swords into plowshares". Who will beat their swords into plowshares? The many nations! Not us! All the nations must lay down their arms, and only then, says Isaiah, only then will "Nation not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more".
- Binder: That's a Jewish peace?
- Shulamit: Yes. **(Laughs)**
- Settler: Yes. **(Turns to exit)**
- Binder: **(After him)** One more question, my friend. What will happen if the nations around us don't accept your interpretation of Isaiah?
- Settler: Then the Almighty will force it on them.
- Binder: My dear friend, if he doesn't force it on them quickly, our little country will not survive.
- Settler: So it won't survive. What makes it worthy of survival? A few million assimilated Jews? Jews who eat pork, who profane the Sabbath, who are ignorant, hedonistic adulterers? This pitiful state is nothing more than a first step. The Almighty chose you to establish it for us, and now it's our turn to lead it, and because of us the true Messiah will appear in a storm, and fight for us and destroy all our enemies. And then there will be peace. **(Exits)**

Binder: **(After him)** Yes, my friend. On behalf of the pork-eaters, the profaners of the Sabbath, the hedonistic adulterers, I thank you and your Almighty for giving us the role of your first step. Stand on my back, climb onto my shoulders and enter the gate of your holy kingdom. I hope you'll allow us to go on serving you. To build for you and shed our blood for you. **(But the Settler has gone)** Regarding your messiah, I've got a somewhat better suggestion for him. Instead of destroying all our enemies, let him try conciliation with them. **(To the audience, angrily)** If this is what we're like, is it any wonder we're hated so much? When we were dispersed among the nations we kept our mouth shut. Now we're here, we've opened it and shown what madmen we are. If there's a God, will He send us a messiah? He'll slaughter us!

He suddenly realizes something. He looks around and turns to leave.

Lola: Where are you going?
 Binder: Somebody's got to say it there.
 Lola: You want us to go on without you?
 Natan: **(Worriedly)** I've got ringing in my ears, Lola
 Mendel: **(Mockingly)** Bye-bye Binder.
 Binder: If the truth has no emissary, I must be that emissary.
 Lola: Please, Binder. You've been doing so well until now.

But Binder carries on toward the exit. Boris stands up and blocks his path. Binder tries to evade him and falls. Yuda and his friends laugh. Lola helps Binder up. She takes out a handkerchief and wipes his nose.

Binder: Did you check everybody at the entrance? And their bags?
 Lola: Yes. **(To Talia)** Get him some water!
 Binder: Are the doors locked? Are the guards outside?
 Lola: Yes. **(To the orchestra)** Play!

Music. Yigal mimes trying to kiss Shulamit. She mimes pushing him away.

Shulamit: First kill him.
 Yigal: I've already bought a gun. I've got a plan.

- Shulamit: **(Indicating her breasts)** Judea and Samaria are holy sites. Entrance is forbidden to a Jew who has not killed.
- Yigal: But I've fired rubber bullets at hundreds of Arabs.
- Shulamit: That's not enough.
- Yigal: I'm sure I shot out the eye of one of the children.
- Shulamit: What's shooting out the eye of a child?
- Yigal: All right. Let's go down to the Nablus road tonight and you'll see me shoot at cars.
- Shulamit: That's just kid's stuff, too.
- Yigal: I'm willing to plant a roadside bomb for a bus in Ramallah.
- Shulamit: Any Hezbollah maniac can do that.
- Yigal: So what do you want me to do?
- Shulamit: To kill him. **(Points at Binder)**
- Yigal: I'll kill him. I'll kill him, I swear. I've already got a silencer.
- Shulamit: Just the opposite. With a big bang. Just as Phineas the priest killed a fellow Jew for fucking a non-Jewish woman. And just as Mattathias the priest did to a Jew who sacrificed a pig. They both killed Jews. Without rabbis. Without courts. Without wasting words. And they were rewarded with sanctity. If you kill him, you will conquer both Judea and Samaria, and you'll re-conquer Gaza as well. **(Indicating her groin)**

Yigal kneels and kisses her feet. She turns to the audience.

- Shulamit: He had to be killed. My husband said so every day. He came home after the war in Lebanon. But only his body returned. His soul remained in the mountains near Beirut. For ten years he'd wake up screaming at night, cowering in a corner and crying with fear, thinking I was a Shi'ite with a bazooka. Ever since the "peace", he didn't leave the house. That night, when that murderer came into the kitchen, he went towards him empty-handed, he wanted to die so much. **(Regains her composure and continues)** The two children died too. But their death was not in vain. The Almighty, blessed be He, took them to Him to put me to a test. And I'm meeting that test. I won't stop believing in Him and I won't stop obeying Him. And if one day He asks

me for my two older children, I'll give them to Him. I'll give them to Him in faith.

Her voice breaks. Binder goes to her and takes her hand. Yuda pushes him away.

Yuda: Don't touch her! **(To Shulamit)** We'll get out of here. Both of us. Whoever shut me up in here is afraid that I'll ruin his dream that the world is a Paradise and that people are angels, and that one day tanks will plow the fields and fighter planes will carry flowers. Only crazy people have dreams like that. I speak the truth. That's why I'm here. **(To the audience)** I'm not crazy. In all our wars I was always the first. In the battle for Jerusalem I caught a burst in the stomach. My intestines were hanging out. That's why I didn't charge. Look! **(Shows his stomach)** After the war I begged them: Take me back. Let me be a driver. A mechanic. A clerk. Nobody listened. For thirty years they've shut me up in here for nothing! Nothing!

Shulamit: **(Crying)** I've wet myself.

Yuda takes Shulamit's hand, sits her down on a bed and sits next to her.

Scene Eleven

Music. Natan plays the Head of the Security Services and Avner the Attorney General.

Binder: Mr. Head of the Security Services. The murderer is approaching. Maybe he's one of my aides. Maybe he's one of my advisors, maybe he's the barber, maybe the cook. Maybe he's even one of my guards.

Lola: Maybe he's a settler with a gun in his pocket.

HSS: We've detained a number of settlers, sir, but they cover up for one another. The court released them.

Binder: Bring me the Attorney General.

Talia: **(Sings)** The Attorney General is here
He has some new information
How to save the Prime Minister.
We wait with rapt anticipation.

Binder: **(To Avner)** Sir? **(Avner opens his eyes)** Mr. Attorney General, The murderer is already breathing down my neck. Is there no way to save my life?

- Lola: First you should arrest the rabbis who sent him.
- Avner: That's not possible.
- Binder: Doesn't this country have a law against murdering a prime minister?
- Avner: We can only arrest the rabbis when...
- Binder: Only when I'm murdered?
- Avner: Only when we can prove...
- Binder: Prove what? **(Avner is silent)** Prove what?
- Avner: That they actually sent somebody to murder you.
- Binder: But I want to prevent them from sending a murderer.
- Avner: The judicial system cannot prevent .It can only... **(He is unable to continue)**
- Talia: It can only judge a suspect when there is evidence against him.
- Binder: The rabbis incite against me in every synagogue.
- Avner: So far... **(He is unable to continue)**
- Talia: So far the law hasn't found any connection between incitement and murder.
- Binder: The inciter can't convince someone to murder?
- Avner: We must prove that the inciter had a clear intention... **(Bursts into tears)**
- Talia: **(Sings)** The Attorney General was here
We listened to what he had to say
But how to save the Prime Minister
We still don't have a way.
- Binder: **(To HSS)** So what shall I do? Run away? Hide?

Yuda, who has been sitting angrily on the bed with Shulamit, turns towards Binder.

- Yuda: You don't have to run away because no one is threatening you. You're afraid because you're a coward, because you die every time a car passes, a window opens, a match is struck, a door is slammed or a plate smashes. When you hear a leaf fall, you hide under your bed.
- Binder: Please, let us continue.

- Yuda: Nobody's trying to kill you. Nobody's even interested in you. You'll die of old age, of feebleness, of stupidity. And you'll be buried in some hole, without a name, without a headstone. As if you'd never lived.
- Lola: I don't have to explain to you what fear is, Yuda.
- Yuda: **(Derisively)** Since when do you know what fear is? Have you ever known fear in your life? **(To the audience)** They brought her here at the head of a flock of chickens crowing around us, so we'd be happy and shut up.
- Lola: **(To the audience)** I don't know what fear is. **(Pause)** It was two days after Gadi was killed in Sinai. He was twenty years old. Burned in his tank. There was nothing left to bury. We were sitting at home. Towards evening. The window was open. On the table there was a letter from Ze'evik who'd already crossed the Suez Canal. We could see the gate from the window. The sun hadn't yet gone down. Suddenly, a car approached, and then another one. And I didn't understand. A woman officer got out of the first car, and then a civilian, maybe a doctor. And from the second car came a social worker and a psychologist. And even then I didn't understand. They hesitated for a moment by the gate, as if they were frightened to open it. I told myself that this couldn't possibly be. They'd already told us that Gadi had been killed. What else was there to say? And Ze'evik's letter was lying on the table. Perhaps it was our neighbor's son. I prayed that it was the neighbor's son. Then the girl rang the bell. And then I knew fear... **(Falls silent)**

Binder goes to her. She avoids him, signals the orchestra to play and sings.

Death walks through the street
 Like a Siren tempting with song
 And our boys, flush with desire
 Charge on in and march right along

We watch from our windows in wonder
 As they go off, so eager to die
 But it's useless to ask any questions
 For no one can really say why

When the time comes, Death shows up for the funeral
 And choking, he'll voice a cliché
 He'll stay for a photo, then get in his car
 And in minutes, he's off on his way

Can't you stay and tell us something
 We'll beg and we will plead
 How long did he lie there?
 Did he suffer, did he bleed?

Any tiny detail
 It's the least that you can do
 For I blame myself
 'Cause I listened and I voted for you

Death walks through the street
 With his irresistible song
 So our boys will go, one by one
 Lost forever as they march along

Shulamit: (To Lola) You're so afraid of death because you only know the pitiful, momentary life in this world. When it's over, everything is over for you. (To the audience) We who believe know that death is only the beginning.

Scene Twelve

A house of mourning. The occupants are sitting *shiva* for a victim of a terror attack. Eliahu and Avi are wearing prayer shawls.

Mendel: A young man has been murdered by a terrorist. The Leader of the Opposition has come to console the bereaved family. (Puts on a prayer shawl)

Yuda: I have come to you in your darkest hour not just to console you in your bereavement. There is no consolation when young people's lives have been cut off prematurely. I have come to assure you that your pain is

ours too, and we'll obey this pain until all his murderers are murdered. In every house, in every cellar, in every cave. We'll pursue them and annihilate them. Them and their families. Them and those who send them out. Them and those who assist them. All of them.

Avi: Thank you, Sir. (**Shakes his hand**).

Yuda: I thank you. I came to fortify you and I leave fortified myself. Thank you for the tea. (**To Avner in his wheelchair**) I have one small request from you. You are an influential poet.

Avner: Yes, sir.

Yuda: You must surely understand that in order to kill these murderers, we must train the best of our young men for it. We are better than our enemies in everything, and we can also be better murderers. We can murder more cleverly, more cunningly, more cruelly than them.

Avner: (**With difficulty**) How can I help?

Yuda: It's no simple matter to establish this army of murderers. There are writers and poets who are likely to oppose the whole idea. I have to admit that there's no one in my camp to respond to them. I've never had much to do with writers and poets. I'd appreciate it if you would write something about the situation. About the lack of choice, about the necessity. What is more moral? To bare your neck to the murderer, or kill him?

Avner: Yes, sir. No...

Binder sees that Avner doesn't remember his lines, and he answers in his place.

Binder: At least, sir, we must make sure that whoever we have decided to kill is indeed a murderer. Perhaps we should put them on trial before we kill them.

Yuda: You are certainly right, sir. You're a great poet. You can well describe how difficult it is to kill somebody.

Avner: Of course.

Yuda: By the way, I read your latest book. Very touching. It's a pity it didn't sell all that well. But I believe in you and I'll write the introduction to your new book. It will surely sell much better.

Avner: Excellent, Sir. Morphine. Morphine. Where is it?
 Yuda: And you should stress that we're fighting for our lives.
 Avner: You're right, sir. Morphine. Give me a little morphine.
 Binder: You're right, sir. When we are fighting for our lives, killing is permissible. But perhaps we are saying that we are fighting for our lives only to justify the killing?
 Avner: Where's the morphine? Don't move... My legs!... My legs!
 Yuda: We all have our doubts, my friend. I'll put that into the introduction to the book. I'm not promising, and don't quote me, but you're going to win the National Literary Prize.

Yuda shakes Avner's hand. Avner cannot control his flow of fragmented sentences and weeping.

Avner: Morphine... Morphine... No. There's no morphine for the men... Get water. Get bandages. Bite down. There's no morphine. No morphine.
 Yuda: **(Blocks his ears and shouts)** Stop whining!

Talia kisses him on the lips. He shuts up. She turns to the audience:

Talia: He'll doze now. He doesn't want to see, or hear, or even think. He doesn't believe in anyone anymore. Not in a man. Not in a woman. Not in a child just born. **(To her mother)** Don't worry, Mother, I don't believe anymore either. Nobody here comes near me. Even I'm afraid to come near myself.

Eliahu, Mendel and Avi light black candles and conduct the "Black Lightning" ceremony in front of Binder.

Rabbis: We, the rabbis of Israel, shepherds of His holy flock,
 cast the Curse of the Black Lightning upon Isaac, son of Rosa,
 who has given parts of the land of our fathers to the Gentiles.
 We hereby enjoin you, angels of heaven, in the name of the Almighty
 and the name of this congregation, in the name of the Lord God of
 Hosts, God of Israel. Cursed is he by the twelve angels charged with
 the months of the year. Cursed is he by the seven angels charged
 with the days of the week. Cursed is he by the four angels charged

with the four seasons of the year. Cursed is he by the great, mighty and revered God. Destroy and annihilate him. Angels of destruction wound him. Cursed be he in all his actions. May his soul flee affrighted. And let us say Amen.

The music reaches a climax. Silence. Avi takes his suitcase and turns to leave, but the case opens and dozens of cans of peanuts fall out.

Mendel: What's this? Why so many peanuts?

Avi: They're for my father.

Mendel: Your father? But your father's...

Avi: **(Stubbornly)** My father likes peanuts.

Mendel: But he's...

Avi: And what will I do if the resurrection of the dead starts without warning? Go shopping?

Avi turns to collect his cans. Eliahu bursts in and addresses the audience.

Eliahu: Thus spake the Lord of hosts. The day is not far off when a great war will engulf you. And in this war tens of thousands will fall and many tens of thousands will be wounded.

Lola: Enough, Eliahu. **(She moves towards him)**

Eliahu: **(He evades her)** And after that terrible war all the faint-hearted pork-eaters will flee from the Land and be dispersed to the four corners of the earth. The day is not far off when all the Jews of the Land will wear yarmulkes and prayer shawls, and whoever does not wear a little prayer shawl beneath his shirt will be jailed. And whoever profanes the Sabbath will be stoned. And whoever sells non-kosher meat will be burnt.

Lola: **(To Eliahu)** I said enough!

Lola tries to chase him, but Eliahu manages to evade her.

Eliahu: The day is coming, and after the next war rabbis will sit in judgment in the courts. And all your schools will become religious. The universities will be

turned into *yeshivas* and the swimming pools into ritual baths. The theaters will become synagogues and the sports stadiums cemeteries.

Binder: (To Yuda) Catch him.

But Yuda remains on the bed, sulking. Lola cannot go on chasing after Eliahu.

Lola: (To Boris) Catch him, Boris.

Boris catches Eliahu, but allows him to continue.

Eliahu: (Panting) And so I command you to embark on a Holy War. And after it your Land will be the Holy Land once more. And you will live in it according to the Holy Torah, and your lives in it will be holy

Eliahu kneels. Boris takes him by the arm and sits him on one of the beds.

Scene Thirteen

Binder addresses the audience. He is fuming over Eliahu's outburst.

Binder: Please, forget what you have just heard. With all his devotion to his God he forgets that there are people here. (To behind the scenes) Yigal! (To Yuda) Where is he? (To Behind the scenes) Yigal! (To the audience) Just when you need him he's gone.

Yigal: (Enters) Here I am.

Binder: You don't shoot now.

Yigal: Okay. I don't shoot. (But he holds the gun.) Hello, sir. I'm Yigal. Your murderer.

Binder: You've made up your mind?

Yigal: Not yet. That's why I've come to see you.

Binder: You want me to persuade you to murder me?

Yigal: I want you to tell me the truth.

Binder: What truth?

Yigal: Are the rabbis' accusations against you true?

Binder: Of course not.

- Yigal: I wish I could believe you. When I'm daydreaming it seems I can hear the voice of the Almighty, and He's telling me to kill you.
- Binder: The Almighty in person? His own voice?
- Yigal: Maybe it was His own voice. Maybe just an echo of it. I sometimes tell myself that I'm imagining His voice because I know He has a vested interest in killing you.
- Binder: The Almighty has a vested interest in killing me?
- Yigal: Haven't you realized yet that He's opposed to peace?
- Binder: But the Talmud says that the world stands on the law, the truth and peace.
- Yigal: He opposes peace because war is the beginning of redemption.
- Binder: So if He has commanded you to kill me, why are you hesitating?
- Yigal: Perhaps He's testing me like He tested Abraham with the sacrifice of his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. And don't forget that you're an Isaac too.
- Binder: I think you're right. He really is testing you. That's why you shouldn't kill me. That's also why you shouldn't listen to the rabbis. They're using you. They're exploiting you. You should wait until you hear His voice loud and clear. Until you actually see Him, and you're sure that the voice you're hearing is really His.
- Yigal: And if I see Him, how will I know it's Him?
- Binder: I'll be glad to show you.
- Yigal: You'll be glad to show me? You should say that He'll appear with fire and smoke.
- Binder: **(Forcefully)** I should say something else completely. Wake up, Yigal. There is no God. You won't see Him and you won't hear Him. He doesn't speak to mortals or reveal himself to them. He doesn't want to kill me and he doesn't want war at all. The God of war is the invention of men who want to kill in wars.
- Yigal: There's no God?
- Binder: No. You are sovereign. You are the one who thinks, feels, decides and kills. You and no one but you. Not an angel and not a seraph and not an emissary.

- Yigal: But he pulled me from the flames himself. Without him you wouldn't be alive either. **(To the audience)** And you too. If he doesn't fight for you, they'll slaughter you, and burn you, and smash your children's skulls. All of you. **(Turns to exit)**
- Binder: People have become such monstrous murderers only because they made themselves bloodthirsty gods, or because they believed in bloodthirsty gods.
- Yigal: I'll kill you. I swear to God I'll kill you. **(Exits)**
- Lola: **(Enters)** What are you doing here? Come back to bed. It'll soon be morning.
- Binder: I can't sleep.
- Lola: Was somebody here? Who? Why are you so pale?
- Binder: Come. **(Turns to leave)**
- Lola: Where to? Without bodyguards?
- Binder: Before disaster strikes.
- Lola: What disaster, Binder?
- Binder: Come!

Scene Fourteen

Night. Binder searches for Yuda among his people. Lola is with him.

- Binder: I've come to talk to you. **(Yuda signals his people to move away)**
You know that the murderer is already aiming a gun at my head.
- Yuda: I don't know anything.
- Binder: After he kills me, he is likely to get to you as well.
- Yuda: I don't know what you're talking about.
- Binder: To incite him against me you flooded the country with fear of destruction, until we lost our power of reason. Even if we survive, we won't be able to live in such fear.
- Yuda: To incite against me you flooded the whole country with fear of war.
- Binder: Isn't war terrifying enough?
- Yuda: We're a healthy people. We understand that our destiny has always been determined by wars.

- Binder: If we were healthy we'd understand that we can determine our destiny with common sense.
- Yuda: Common sense? Human beings are bloodthirsty. Man is a beast of prey. He zealously protects his tribe, his people and his God. He will not flinch from slaughtering millions for their sake.
- Binder: Yes, there are such people. But is there no remedy for them?
- Yuda: They kill for the sake of killing. **(To the audience)** When I was crawling in that trench, my gun jammed. I raised my arms in surrender. Yes. I did. That shit didn't have to shoot. But then I saw this lust in his eyes, a lust that rivers of blood could not cool down.
- Binder: What do you mean "they kill for the sake of killing"? When you kill a man, he becomes a corpse.
- Yuda: Don't lecture me about death. You are afraid of it. I use it. Death is power. **(To the audience)** When he squeezed the trigger, even before I heard the shots, even before the lead ripped into me, even then I could see it. If I have this power I'll live.
- Binder: Look at what has become of us because we have used this power.
- Yuda: What's become of us?
- Binder: I've imprisoned myself for life so that I won't be forced to go on killing.
- Yuda: You have imprisoned yourself because you are afraid that you'll go on killing willingly.

Binder gives up and signals the orchestra to play. Music.

Scene Fifteen

Binder and Lola in the prime minister's residence.

- Lola: He's right. The time is not yet ripe.
- Binder: What else has to happen for it to be ripe?
- Lola: Far too many among us are still beasts of prey. They're willing to spill a lot more blood.
- Binder: Nevertheless I have to fight for their lives too.
- Lola: And your life?
- Binder: I've got people who are responsible for my life. **(Turns to exit)**

- Lola: Just a minute. Aren't you wearing the vest?
- Binder: There's no need.
- Lola: Put it on.
- Binder: It's too bulky.
- Lola: You're going to the rally to die there. You think that if you're murdered, the whole country will be shaken.
- Binder: I don't want to die.
- Lola: Please. Wait.
- Binder: Until when?
- Lola: Until we suffer the most awful blow. Until every family suffers death. Until mourners weep in every home. Only then will people open their eyes. **(To the audience)** Mine also opened only after the death of my sons.
- Binder: I won't wait for that terrible blow. **(Exits)**
- Lola: **(After him)** I won't come to watch you die!

Enter Yigal wrapped in a prayer shawl, his gun in his hand, and turns his eyes heavenward in prayer.

- Yigal: O Lord of the Universe, who sits on high, please give me a sign to kill him, may his name be erased. For even if I stand before him with my gun drawn, I will be unable to end his life unless I know that I am fulfilling your will. I know that you will not be revealed to me in a burning bush as you were revealed to the Father of the Prophets. You haven't even sent me an ordinary dream lately. Please, Lord of the Universe, give me a sign. Maybe a little earthquake. Perhaps a partial eclipse of the moon. A tree falling in the wind. A chirping bird. A sign, Lord of the Universe, give me a sign. Tell me it is your holy will that I die. For your land, and then I will shoot him without fear. Lord of the Universe, give me a sign. Just one sign.

Scene Sixteen

Binder is addressing the rally. His bodyguards, Talia, Avner and Natan, are in front of him. Lola watches from a distance.

Binder: You came here to hear me speak about peace. I want to speak about war. About the rotting corpses of young soldiers on the battlefields. I have seen them. You take your comrade's hand and it falls to pieces in yours. And the busy maggots hurry to find another piece of meat. And the gaping eyes are empty. **(Painfully)** What really justifies such death? What is so much bigger than our life that's worth dying for like that?

Enter Yigal, his gun drawn. He sees a space between Talia and Natan.

Yigal: O Lord of the Universe. This is the sign. His bodyguards are asleep. There is no one standing between me and him, may his name and memory be erased.

Binder: **(Pleading)** Shoot me! Shoot! What are you waiting for?

Yigal: Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, who wreaks our vengeance.

Lola: **(Trying to block him off)** No, don't shoot!

But Yigal shoots him. Binder falls. Yuda and Mendel capture Yigal. Lola kneels beside Binder.

Choir: In the square three shots rang out
A man fell
His blood spilled
Hope failed
A dream killed
A vision forever stilled

Lola: Damn you! May you be damned to your dying day. I will never have peace again, but neither will you. I will walk among you mourning. I will not dress the wounds. I will not heal the scars. You will see the bleeding wounds and the gaping scars and you will know it was you who spilled this blood. Just as you spilt the blood of my children. Their

blood was also drunk by this land. I should never have given birth to them. I should never have raised them on it.

Meanwhile, two *yeshiva* students played by Avi and Mendel, have brought in Binder's "grave" and place it at center stage. Binder "wakes up" and protests.

Binder: Just a minute. We agreed not to do this scene.
 Mendel: We didn't.
 Avi: The truth is more important than this agreement.
 Shulamit: They'll perform what they want to perform.
 Eliahu: And in the way they want to perform it.
 Binder: They'll perform what we agreed upon! **(To the choir) Sing!**

Yuda gags Binder and allows the *yeshiva* students to go on. Boris draws his baton.

Student A: **(To the audience)** Ladies and gentlemen, we are students from a well-known Jerusalem *yeshiva*.
 Student B: It is now midnight. A few hours ago your prime minister was buried here.
 Student A: May his name and memory be erased.
 Student B: And we have broken in to found a new Jewish tradition: the pissing on the grave.
 Student A: And now, in secret, away from prying eyes, we stand on the grave, open our flies, take out the redeemer from its underwear, and observe the commandment.
 Both: Blessed art Thou, O lord our God, King of the Universe, who has kept us in life, and hast preserved us, and enabled us to reach this day.

The students urinate on the grave using big phalluses hanging from their hips. Lola rushes to Yuda and slaps his face. He releases Binder.

Binder: **(To Eliahu)** And this is also a commandment handed down by God on Mount Sinai?
 Eliahu: We've only just realized it. **(Laughs)**
 Yuda: We'll end the play with the national anthem. I ask the audience to please stand!
 Binder: We'll end the play with the finale!

Lola, Natan, Talia and Avner begin the song.

Choir: We are the living dead
 Showing you our faces,
 Faces that cannot hide the scars.

But Natan loses his patience. He rushes towards Mendel and Avi brandishing his cane. Despite his blindness he manages to hit them.

Natan: I want to get out of here. I want to live. I want my eyes back. I want to get rid
 of the shrapnel in my brain.

Avi, Mendel and Shulamit hit Natan. He keeps struggling.

Natan: I don't want to live among the dead any more. I don't want to hear any more
 wounded... no more tears... no more shame... no more fear.

Mendel and Avi knock him down. Lola rushes to rescue him. Avner tries to scream but can't utter a sound.

Lola: Let go of him.

Talia: **(To her mother)** Take me home, Mother. Take me home.

Yuda tries to restore order.

Yuda: Please, stand up. Start singing.

Binder: **(To the orchestra)** Play! Play!

Talia: Take me home, Mother.

Boris tries to rescue Natan from Mendel and Avi. Binder limps to Yuda.

Binder: What more do you want of me? I was prepared to die. You saw how I welcomed this cursed death. For what are you punishing me? For what dream? For what hope? I've already paid the price for the people I killed. I've paid it all my life. I've died here every day of my life.

Suddenly, Yigal goes to Boris, snatches the gun from his belt and rushes to Binder.

Yigal: There is a God in heaven. You won't say there isn't.

He manages to fire three real shots into Binder before Boris overpowers him. Binder falls down.

Yigal: Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who wreaks our vengeance.

Binder tries to get up, but falls again. Lola rushes to him and discovers he is dead. Shock. Darkness.

Curtain