

THE BEGGAR KING

A PLAY BY URI PASTER

**INSPIRED BY "THE BEGGAR'S BOOK"
BY MENDELEY TE BOOKSELLER**

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“The Beggar King” is an original legend\play that documents the largely unknown Jewish world in Russia at the beginning of the 19th century.

Inspired by Mendeley the Bookseller’s “Beggar’s Book”, a rich and wide fabric is woven that exposes the deeds of a company of Jewish beggar thieves.

At the time of the rule of the Russian Tsar Nikolei, a bathhouse attendant rises from the gutter, the crippled orphan- Fishke eventually becoming the head of a Jewish army that joins the Russian army as an ally in it’s war efforts.

This is a stormy drama that describes the story of a small man, the misfortunes that he and his environment endure following his becoming a leader contrary to his own will.

The play won the Israeli Payis Council’s award for art and culture in 2001.

The multitude of places appearing in the plot are represented on stage by the minimum use of stage props displayed on a screened multi-media backdrop. At the front of the stage, an electronic beam displays each scenes’ title, setting and time.

The stage directions for the battle scenes are taken from the world of martial arts and form the basis of the choreography that will be developed in rehearsals.

All the characters, places and events are the fruit of the author’s imagination.

The Characters

Fishke: Bathhouse attendant, age 19

Zisserel: Beggar thief, age 27

Feivush: Head of beggar company, age 40\ Nikolei: Russian Tsar, 51

Bayleh: Beggar girl, age 17

Batya: Beggar woman, age 35

Lempel: Beggar journalist, age 65

Leah: Beggar woman, age 22

Tsiril Ciril: Bathhouse owner, age 60\ Cholbezigo: Jewish tramp, 55

Alexei: Tsar's advisor, age 30\ Stevanio: Wagon driver, age 30

Moses David: Estate agent, 50\ Mutillo: Beggar, age 60

Alkili: Beggar, age 40\ Householder\ Russian soldier

Lazer: Beggar, age 20\ Shoymer: Jewish army soldier, age 20

Moses Dura: Beggar, age 50\ householder\ Russian soldier

The Acting Cast and Role Players:

Beggars, householders, housewives, Russian countryfolk, woman innkeeper, Lord and Lady, Lord's servants, Russian farm women, Tora students, Russian farmer, Rabbi, Jewish army recruits, Tsar's guards, wagon drivers, Russian and Prussian soldiers.

Role players: Fishke, Feivush and Zisserel are actors possessing a wide knowledge of the martial arts. The entire cast is required to be of outstanding physical capabilities.

An on-stage musical group accompanies the events with live rock music in a Gypsy\Russian \Jewish style.

Act I

Scene 1

Square in the Jewish village of Kisalon – Afternoon

Nightfall, the central well in Kisalon, wooden benches for the comfort of the water drawers. Fishke feeds grain to pigeons with one hand and concentrates on studying a tractate of the Talmud held in the other. Moses David, the village estate agent, converses in the background with some householders, village womenfolk offer delicacies to a group of Russian army soldiers resting on the benches.

Taybe Shmerel: (whispering): **Tfu! May the plague take them all!**

Old Rachel: (sighing): **We must, we really must do something!**

(Tsiril Ciril appears and stands menacingly over the startled Fishke)

Fishke: **I came to bring more water.**

Tsiril Ciril: **An hour ago,** (catches hold of Fishke's shirt and hauls him up violently) **an hour ago Fishke! Four customers are lying in their baths just waiting for his royal majesty Fishke the first! Bath attendants Fishke, do not feed pigeons and hide away studying the Talmud, bath attendants scrub backs, hands, feet and tushes! That's what bath attendants do!** (He throws Fishke to the ground violently, the soldiers, women, householders and Moses David turn to the source of the commotion, the Talmud tractate flies from Fishke's hand, he crawls towards it and raising it, kisses it fervently)

Old Rachel: (to Taybe Shmerel): **He is our savior.**

Taybe Shmerel: **Him?**

Old Rachel: **Only he can save us from this curse.**

Taybe Shmerel: **Fishke?**

(Tsiril Ciril raises Fishke to his feet, his crippled leg embraced in a leg iron making a horrendous sound, Tsiril gives him the bucket of water.)

Tsiril Ciril: Don't spill a single drop you cripple, not a single drop!

(The terrified Fishke, holding the bucket, drags himself along. Village women circle around Old Rachel).

Tsipa Layke: Fishke?

Old Rachel: Two orphaned invalids, we must marry them, an old superstition says it wards away the evil eye, it will remove the plague from Kisalon!

Taybe Shmerel: So who's the bride?

Old Rachel: A new orphan at Sarah Gittels', she helps the old women to weave, arrived two days ago. She's blind!

(Tsiril Ciril tosses his handkerchief in the well and cools his face, Moses David stands at his side).

Tsiril Ciril: What's this all about Moses David?

Moses David: It's about the plague, tfu! (spitting)

Tsiril Ciril: And what am I supposed to be? The savior?

Moses David: Not you. (points to Fishke in the distance) Him!

Tsiril Ciril: What's my Fishke got to do with the plague?

Moses David: (Points to Old Rachel who is nodding at them from a distance) Old Rachel says he must be wed.

Tsiril Ciril: A wedding? More expenses, that's all I need!

Moses David: We'll pay for everything. Old Rachel said.

Tsiril Ciril: (sarcastically) Ah! If the old woman said so.

(The soldiers begin to leave the well area, Tsiril Ciril and Moses David acknowledge them submissively with modest bows, Sarah Gittel drags the blind Batya to the circle of women).

Batya: Is it time for work already?

Old Rachel: No Batyaleh, it's time for a wedding!

Sarah Gittel: It's a commandment Batyaleh, a mitzve.

Old Rachel: Redemption Batyaleh.

Batya: But I don't want to!

Tsipa Layke: (forcefully) Who does? We all had arranged marriages, and so will you Batyaleh. Congratulations my dear!

All the women: (loudly) Amen!

Tsiril Ciril: (from a distance) Women! Tfu!

Moses David: A help meet for him Tsiril Ciril, so it is written, a help meet.

(Fishke crosses the stage, painfully dragging his leg, a bucket in one hand and the Talmud in the other, the scenery changes behind him).

Scene 2

Tsiril Ciril's bathhouse in Kisalon - Evening

(A number of householders lie naked in wooden baths that are too small for them. Some lie on raised wooden pallets, smoke and steam surround them)

Fenkel Avraham: (loudly) **Fishke, salt!** (Fishke enters the bathroom and hurries to Fenkel Avraham, sprinkles salt in the bath water).

Aaron Leviskaytz: **Fishke, twigs!** (Fishke collects the twigs and commences to beat Aaron's back) **Yes, hard, harder, ah that's good, just like that Fishke, ah that's good.**

Mendel Shmerel: (to Aaron L.) **That's good is it? What do you think Aaron Leviskaytz, that Fishke is your own personal attendant?**

(he signals to Fishke, who rushes to him and begins to beat his back with the twigs).

Aaron Leviskaytz: (to Mendel S.) **This boy is a king!**

Mendel Shmerel: (sighing) **Ah, king of the attendants.**

Fenkel Avraham: A king soon to be a groom!

Fishke: (stopping his work) A groom?

Mendel Shmerel: (hurrying him) That's right, a groom! You think that affords you an excuse to stop working? (the confused Fishke continues to beat him with the twigs, Tsiril Ciril enters with Moses Dura following carrying the wedding clothes)

Tsiril Ciril: To lose income just because of some old superstition?

Moses David: We have agreed the conditions Tsiril Ciril.

Tsiril Ciril: And that's a reason to lose money?

Moses David: (signals to the surprised bathers who rise and begin to dress) Tsiril Ciril, this evening you stand to gain a bride!

Tsiril Ciril: How many times do I have to tell you Moses David? An in-law I refuse to be!

Moses David: (calls to Fishke) Fishke! (Fishke approaches hesitantly) He's like a son to you, mazel tov!

Tsiril Ciril: (observes Fishke at his side) Mazel tov Fishke!

Fishke: Tsiril Ciril, I am to be wed?

Moses David: (begins to undress Fishke and to put on him the wedding clothes) Yes you are a groom Fishke, a groom!

Fishke: But why, and why here?

Tsiril Ciril: Tonight the wedding, and tomorrow - no more plague!

Fishke: But who is the bride?

Moses David: (laughing) You're lucky. She's blind! (Sarah Gittel and Old Rachel push Batya dressed in wedding clothes into the bathhouse).

Fishke: (looks at Batya with alarm) Blind, Tsiril Ciril? But why blind?

Tsiril Ciril: Sssh, really Fishke, she's blind, not deaf. Do you have to make a fuss about every little detail?

Moses David: (helping Fishke into his jacket) It fits, it actually fits.

Old Rachel: (from a distance) **The Rabbi's on his way, the whole village is on its' way.** (she watches the householders hurriedly dressing)
Quickly you fools, we have a long night ahead of us. Batyaleh's wedding bed sheet must be torn in the graveyard along with many prayers and supplications!

Tsiril Ciril: (to Fishke) **It's just an old superstition.**

Old Rachel: (from a distance) **Redemption, tonight, redemption!**

Fishke: **But Tsiril Ciril...**

Tsiril Ciril: (stopping him, laughs) **Just look at you, you cripple. You're a groom, a householder!**

Fishke: **But Tsiril Ciril...**

Tsiril Ciril: (stopping him) **Yes what is it Fishke?**

Fishke: **But Tsiril Ciril, why here?**

Tsiril Ciril: (cynically to Moses David) **He thinks he is the Lord of Yabtzeck! (to Fishke) Did you think to be married in the synagogue? Fishke, you are not a Tora student, you are a bath attendant, albeit the king of the bath attendants, and where do bath attendants wed Moses David?**

Moses David: **Without a shadow of a doubt, and according to every rule in the book – in the bathhouse!**

(Leah, a young beggar, hurries carrying wood for the campfire, crosses the stage in alarmed fashion, Bayleh drags along a heavy lump of wood, behind them the scenery is changing)

Scene 3

Cedar forest at the edge of Kisalon – Beggar's camp – Night

(Feivush's band of Jewish beggars gets ready to camp. A large campfire in the center, Lempel roasts a chicken in it, Feivush at his side).

Feivush: (to Lempel) **Lempel, by the time that chicken is roasted, we will all have died of hunger.** (observes Leah entering with the wood in her hands) **Greetings princess Leah, how was your royal tour of the forest?** (Bayleh enters) **Zisserel!**

Zisserel: (from a distance) **Yes Feivush!**

Feivush: (laughing) **Just look Zisserel, Bayleh resembles a boy, a little boy, just as you like them!** (Bayleh quietly throws the wood onto the fire, Feivush to Bayleh) **When I took you on you were well rounded, in those days I could dig into you like into a pile of cherries, now look at you, skin and bones, like a little boy,** (approaches Bayleh, holds her) **a woman Bayleh needs to be upholstered like an aristocrat's carriage, eat Bayleh, a woman needs to eat!** (observes the approaching Zisserel) **Look Zisserel, like a little boy, just as you like them!**

Zisserel: (stopping him) **It is time, there is a wedding in the village, all the houses are empty.**

Feivush: **And where is the ceremony being held?**

Zisserel: **In the bathhouse.**

Feivush: **A wedding in a bathhouse? I've never heard of such a thing!** (whistles loudly) **Forward you dogs, and quickly!** (all the beggars rise and begin to get organized, Lempel sadly begins to extinguish the fire, Batya enters the camp dragging Fishke by his bleeding hand, in his free hand, Fishke holds on to his bunch of twigs from the bathhouse, Feivush leaps towards them) **Batya?** (Batya breathes heavily and pushes Fishke who collapses next to the fire, his twigs fall to one side, the beggars gather around) **And this? Batya, who is this?**

Batya: **He's a bath attendant, a cripple, an orphan and... my husband!**

Leah: (from a distance) **Congratulations Batya!** (the beggars laugh, Feivush waves his hand. Silence).

Batya: It's all because of this blind girl charade Feivush, I sketched out all the houses' entrances, just as Zisserel requested, but in Kisalon they wanted to rid themselves of the plague, so they married me off, because of this blind orphan game, because of some stupid superstition, they married me off to him!

Feivush: With this skinny thing?

Batya: They needed my virgin blood on a sheet Feivush, so they could tear it over the gravestones and frighten away the plague.

Feivush: (stopping her) But you are far from being a virgin.

Batya: I know that! (laughter rises from amongst the beggars, Batya points to Fishke's bloody hand) I bit his hand (raises his hand) look! This is my virgin blood, and this...this is my husband!

Feivush: (draws the toubled Batya close to him) You are back here with us now.

Batya: (sobbing) And him?

Feivush: (kicking Fishke, Fishke moans) Lempel!

Lempel: Yes Feivush.

Feivush: The looting of Kisalon is cancelled, but we have another skinny chicken for supper! (signals to Zisserel to raise Fishke and to stand him violently opposite him) Let's see now, what's your name skinny chicken? (Fishke remains silent) are you dumb, or just lacking good manners! (Fishke remains silent, Feivush withdraws a burning branch from the fire and burns Fishke's bloody hand, Fishke reacts like a trapped animal and releasing himself from Zisserel's grip, lashes out at Feivush with his iron covered leg and then falls once more to the ground. The amazed beggars await Feivush's reaction, Feivush observes Fishke) Very good!

Batya: Kill him!

Feivush: Not so quickly Batya.

Batya: (enraged) **He'll inform on us, he'll tell, he's from there Feivush, he's not one of ours!**

Feivush: (to Zisserel) **Zisserel!**

Zisserel: **Yes Feivush.**

Feivush: **You dreamed of a boy like this, isn't that so Zisserel?**

(silence) **Tie this skinny chicken to a tree Zisserel, and tie him tight!**

Batya: (forcefully) **Take him, I have no need of him.**

Feivush: (to the beggars) **Why are you standing around like fools?**

The looting of Kisalon has been cancelled. (the beggars disperse, Zisserel leads Fishke to a tree and begins to tie him. Feivush sits, Bayleh approaches Zisserel who is tying Fishke in the depths of the forest, she carries a canteen of water, Feivush loudly to Zisserel) **Tight, I said tight!** (to Batya) **Young virgin of Kisalon the master awaits!** (Batya sits at his side and fusses over him, Bayleh offers Fishke water from the canteen and assists him to drink, Fishke gulps down the water, Bayleh wets a cloth and applies it to Fishke's injured hand, she regards Zisserel, Feivush shouts to Lempel) **Lempel, the master is hungry!**

(at the front of the stage while the scenery is being changed in the background, Moses David follows Tsiril Ciril who stands with his travel bag in his hand, ready to set out on a journey, behind them stand like vultures, Old Rachel and Tsippi Layke)

Moses David: (to Tsiril Ciril) **They say he was kidnapped by robbers.**

Tsipa Layke: **Cossacks from the mountains, tfu!** (spits)

Moses David: **While we were tearing the sheet over the graves.**

Old Rachel: **They say that they were kidnapped because of their wedding gifts.**

Tsiril Ciril: **You pathetic old woman, the wedding gifts are still here in the bathhouse. The newly weds were in the their wedding hut while we busied ourselves with the sheet tearing.**

Tsipa Layke: May the Tsar be cursed, may he be cursed, tfu! (spits)

Tsiril Ciril: (stops, looks at her condescendingly) And what is that for Tsipa Layke?

Tsipa Layke: First a plague, now a pogrom, it's a curse!

Tsiril Ciril: Fishke's gone Tsipa Layke, and while he was without doubt a most outstanding attendant, to organize a pogrom just in order to kidnap him? Even our pogrom-loving Tsar would find it hard to dream up such a scheme!

Old Rachel: Yet there are also those who say that the blind Batya was about as blind as a cucumber is red! (Tsiril Ciril straightens up)

Moses David: They say she belongs to a criminal band of Jewish beggars.

Tsiril Ciril: Are there indeed such Jewish criminals?

Old Rachel: So they say.

Tsiril Ciril: So they say old woman! Since when have our people been highway robbers going round kidnapping wretched bath attendants? Since when?

Tsipa Layke: The work of infidels, may they all be cursed, them and the Tsar who rules them, may he rot on his golden throne, tfu! (spits, Tsiril Ciril turns to leave)

Moses David: (follows him) It is an impetuous move to close the bathhouse so suddenly.

Tsiril Ciril: (cutting him off) A day, two days, maybe a week at the most and I'll have Fishke back here, he's probably lying freezing in some gutter just waiting for his Tsiril Ciril to come. (almost leaves) He is like a son to me, remember your words Moses David? (Moses David lowers his head, Tsiril Ciril leaves)

Moses David: (to the startled women) And he never even said the wayfarers prayer!

Old Rachel: **May the Lord save him from sin.**

Tsipa Layke: **From sinners also... from everything, tfu!** (spits, the three of them leave in the opposite direction)

Scene 4

The Main road to Odessa – The same day

(Feivush and his gang hide behind rocks, Bayleh and Leah dressed as girls stand on the road, a wagon carrying Jewish traders is driven by Stevanio who stops)

Wagon owner: (from his seat) **Girls! Move, move girls!** (signals to them with his hand) **Move over girls, move!** (Leah and Bayleh remain motionless, the wagon owner to Stevanio) **Get down and make them move out of the way.**

Stevanio: **What if they're Russian?**

Wagon owner: **We all speak the same language.**

Stevanio: **And what if they're deaf?**

Wagon owner: **And that's what's stopping you from moving them? Move them with your hands not with your mouth.** (mimics chattering)

Stevanio: (sighs) **Alright** (to Leah and Bayleh) **Girls, move over!** (no answer, tries to move them but they resist, turns to wagon owner) **The girls, they don't seem to want to!**

Wagon owner: (irritated) **Are you out of your mind? Since when does the road to Odessa belong to Russian girls? Move them away! Move them!**

Stevanio: (pushes them violently aside, the girls resist and scream)

Maybe they're hungry?

Wagon owner: **What's going on here, Purim presents?** (gets down angrily) **Hungry girls should go home to eat, and not make a nuisance**

of themselves like this, maybe you'd (aids Stevanio to push) like us to feed them some roast duck? (the girls shout) **Be quiet hungry girls, move over!** (from amongst the rocks leap out the beggars and fall on the terrified wagon owner and his assistant, Leah and Bayleh run to behind the rocks where Fishke is holding a large quantity of rope, Zisserel and Feivush cover the wagon's occupants' heads with sacks, the rest of the gang empty the wagon's contents and flee to the forest, Feivush's gaze searches for Fishke)

Bayleh: (sternly to Fishke) **Go and give Feivush the ropes** (Fishke confused by what he has seen doesn't answer) **Go!** (she pushes him into the road where he falls over and entangles himself in the rope, Feivush holds on to the other end and violently drags him along the ground, a terrifying sight)

Lempel: (To Feivush from the wagon) **Feivush!** (shouts) **Feivush!** (from within the wagon suddenly appears another driver, stout in appearance, Zisserel rushes towards him, while Feivush holds on to two victims, Zisserel engages the driver with unusual fighting movements, at the same time Feivush ties up the victims, Fishke succeeds in disentangling himself from the rope, Leah and Bayleh leap into the wagon and after extracting luggage, disappear into the forest)

Feivush: (to Fishke) **Guard them, dog!** (turns to help Zisserel fight with the driver, Stevanio releases himself from his bonds and flees, Fishke chases him, the wagon owner also succeeds in escaping, pandemonium, Feivush to Zisserel) **Zisserel, after him!** (Zisserel catches the wagon owner and subdues him, Feivush gets the better of the wagon driver)

Lempel, Lempel! (Lempel gathers himself and watches over the beaten driver, Feivush runs after the confused Stevanio who still has his head covered with a sack, Feivush jumps on him, and stabs him in the heart, Stevanio collapses) **Where is that dog?** (Zisserel who has finished tying

up the wagon owner comes running, Feivush ties the wagon owner and the driver together, then ties them both to the wagon, Zisserel returns with the alarmed Fishke) **Lempel! Have they taken everything?**

Lempel: Everything Feivush.

Feivush (to Zisserel) **Forward, take this dog to the forest!** (Lempel drags Stevanios body over to the wagon, Fishke shivers. Leah returns from the forest with a burning torch, Feivush releases the horse, Lempel sends it on it's way, Feivush takes the torch and sets light to the wagon, fire, the driver frees himself, Feivush chases him with the torch in his hand, Zisserel drags the terrified Fishke into the forest, Fishke mumbles "Shma Yisroel" while running behind, Leah and Lempel disappear into the forest, while the scenery is being changed, Feivush vengefully chases the driver at the front of the stage, and catching him, sets him alight)

Driver: (screaming) **Jews killing fellow Jews! Jews killing Jews!**

Scene 5

Forest on the edge of Odessa – Beggar's camp -Evening

(Feivush's beggars count the stolen property, the hour is late, Lempel stands next to the fire trying to light it, Feivush enters with the torch in his hand and tosses it into the fire).

Feivush: The torch of death! (Lempel laughs) **Where is the treacherous dog?**

Lempel: He's with Zisserel.

Feivush: (shouts) **Batya! Where is your husband and his new wife?**

Batya: (stepping from amongst the pile of stolen goods) **It's about time you killed him!**

Feivush: (laughing) **Yes, yes.** (shouts) **Zisserel!** (Zisserel appears leading the captive Fishke, his hands tied behind his back and his mouth gagged

with a thick rag, he drags his crippled leg heavily) **Zisserel, I see that your prodigy causes you great pleasure!**

Zisserel: (pushes Fishke towards Feivush) **I would gladly forgo this pleasure!** (Fishke falls at Feivush's feet)

Feivush: **You dog!** (lifts him from the ground) **How dare you to allow those two fat pigs to escape? Wretched cur! It's time I taught you a lesson.** (kicks Fishke in the stomach, Fishke folds over and lashes out at Feivush with his leg iron, all the beggars stand silent) **Zisserel!**

Zisserel: **Yes Feivush.**

Feivush: **Take those damned irons off his leg, I can't take them anymore!** (laughs, the beggars join in) **Zisserel, from now on he's your responsibility.**

Batya: **Why don't you kill him?!**

Feivush: (to beggars) **She's can't wait to be a widow!** (to Batya) **Woman! I said he's Zisserel's responsibility, and that's the way it will be!**

Batya: **He'll inform, he'll tell!**

Feivush: (holding Fishke and raising him) **Tell what? That he's the begging son of a beggar, son of thieving beggars? That he with his own begging hands set light to a driver with the torch of death?** (beggars are silent) **Did you all see it or did you not?** (they all nod affirmatively) **Fine, now let's get this loot ready for sale at tomorrow's market in Odessa. Lempel get out the Russian disguises!**

Lempel: **Yes Feivush.**

Feivush: **Poor Russian farmers, that's what I want to see.**

Lempel: **Yes Feivush.**

Feivush: (throws the injured Fishke towards Zisserel) **He's well suited to your academy fighting methods!**

Zisserel: **Him?**

Feivush: You saw it with your own eyes, he's quick and agile as befitting any respectable bath attendant, and so Zisserel, turn this attendant (displays martial arts movement) into a real beggar, a fighting beggar! (to Bayleh) **Bayleh, to bed!** (Bayleh steps out of the circle of stolen goods and reluctantly joins Feivush, Zisserel leads Fishke to a thick tree trunk, Feivush turns to them rubbing his injured leg) **And those irons! Throw them into the forest!** (Zisserel begins to undo the irons, Fishke resists, choking under the gag)

Batya: (to Lempel) **He'll choke if they don't take that gag off him!**

Lempel: Worried about your husband Batya?

Batya: If he's not to be killed, then he's not to be killed! (extracts a hot potato from the fire, Fishke moans as Zisserel removes the iron brace from his leg, Batya to Lempel) **You may note in your journal Lempel that Batya too is amongst the merciful!**

(Zisserel tosses the leg iron into the depths of the forest, Fishke moans, Zisserel looses his gag and sits at his side)

Fishke: I...I...

Zisserel: (stopping him) **The end is nigh! The Messiah speaks!**

Fishke: I want...

Zisserel: (stopping him) **Water?**

Fishke: ...want to go home to Kisalon.

Zisserel: (laughs) **Kisalon? Kisalon exists no more!**

Fishke: I...I...

Zisserel: (stopping him) **What else?**

Fishke: **I'm an attendant, not a beggar.**

Zisserel: **From now on, you're a beggar.**

Fishke: **Why?**

Zisserel: For that is Feivush's wish, and what Feivush wishes, is what happens. (observes Fishke) **Don't dare try to escape,** (secretively) **only the dead flee Feivush!**

Fishke: But why me? (holds on to his pale iron-free leg)

Zisserel: That's the way it is with Feivush, he says that we do not choose our beggars, he says they choose us. (laughs, moves to the fire, takes out baked potatoes)

Fishke: (mutters to himself) **"Sound the shofar to God with a cry of joy. For God is supreme, awesome, a great king over all the earth. He shall lead nations under us and kingdoms beneath our feet. He will choose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob that He loves Selah! God has ascended with the blast, God, with the sound of the shofar. Make music for God, make music, make music for our King, make music. For God is king over all the earth, make music O' enlightened ones! God reigns over the peoples, God sits on His holy throne. The nobles of the nations gathered, (Zisserel stands behind him) the nation of the God of Abraham – for the protectors of the earth are God's – He is exceedingly exalted. Great is God, and much praised, in the city of our God, mount of his holiness".** (notices Zisserel and stops)

Zisserel: Psalms eh? (laughs) **From all the Book of books, you have to choose Psalms, and here of all places?** (sits next to Fishke) **Take! Eat!** (Fishke bites into the hot potato and burns himself, Zisserel laughs. As the scenery changes, the beggars disguised as Russian farmers parade in front of Lempel, he occasionally alters their clothes and makes note of the goods they have in their possession. Behind, Feivush readies himself, buttoning his trousers, smiling at Lempel, proud of his tempestuous nights, they leave hugging one another).

Scene 6

Forest at the entrance to the Jewish village Maglivia – Beggar's camp

– A week later

(Sunset, at the beggar's camp Leah and Bayleh prepare a meal, Zisserel trains Fishke in martial arts. Fishke's crippled leg is swollen from the effort)

Zisserel: (to Fishke) **With your hands like this** (showing him) **now hit with your fist like this, and this.** (exhibits forward and backward punches) **Now you.** (Fishke tries) **Good, now like this and this.** (shows him a hook and uppercut) **Now you.** (Fishke tries) **You blockhead, you don't understand anything, it's like I said, like this, and this.** (exhibits hook and uppercut, Fishke imitates him successfully) **Excellent, now use your legs, like this and this.** (shows him a forward kick and a hook kick, signals to Fishke, Fishke makes an attempt but gets mixed up with his crippled leg and falls)

Fishke: Zisserel, my leg!

Zisserel: That's the only way it will get better.

Fishke: How will it get better? Every night it gets worse, it needs the iron brace!

Zisserel: (stopping him impatiently) **Who put that horrendous apparatus on your leg anyway?**

Fishke: (stopping him) **In the orphanage.**

Zisserel: **It's sheer cruelty to do such a thing,** bends down to Fishke and gently raises his leg) **your leg needs to be free, to move, now it is no longer trapped, let it find it's way in the world, let it discover freedom.** (rises) **Kick like this,** (executes forward and hook kicks, offers his hand to Fishke and raises him, Fishke concentrates and also executes successfully) **Good, this way your leg is free, kicking, breathing, free.**

Free to defend, to warn and...(doing a cartwheel) **now you.** (Fishke tries and falls, Bayleh and Leah laugh) **Get on your feet beggar, fight for your honor.** (Fishke rises and this time succeeds, Zisserel turns to Leah and Bayleh) **Giggling empty-headed women!** (returns to Fishke) **Good, now all together, like this,** (moves like a snake and a panther, wheeling side to side, Fishke joins in and displays surprising natural talent) **now defend yourself, defense!** (Zisserel engages Fishke, using the moves previously learned, Fishke defends successfully, Bayleh and Leah look on in disbelief, Leah is filled with envy and beats the side of the cooking pot with a ladle)

Leah: Food!

Zisserel: (to Leah and Bayleh, hugging Fishke) **And so? Is he a beggar warrior or is he not?** (Fishke takes a bowl of soup and seating himself at a distance, eats hungrily)

Leah: (to Zisserel) **Feivush will be proud of him.**

Zisserel: He should be proud of me!

Leah: (scoffing) **Yes, naturally Zisserel, it's all because of you!** (gives him a bowl of soup, they both eat standing, Bayleh with her bowl in her hand approaches Fishke, they eat together in silence)

Fishke: (on finishing eating) **So where is Feivush?**

Bayleh: With Batya and a group of beggars, smelling out the streets of Maglivia.

Fishke: (almost to himself) **Sacrilege.**

Bayleh: (laughing) **It's nothing, They're just checking out the entrances and exits to the houses.**

Fishke: (gravely) **To do such a thing to fellow Jews is sacrilege.**

Bayleh: It's only the wealthy ones, the householders, Feivush doesn't rob Tora students, would never hurt a Scholar, God forbid. He has the eyes of a hawk.

Fishke: What do you mean?

Bayleh: (secretively) On the first night you arrived, Feivush told me that he'd never harm you. The eyes of a hawk.

Fishke: (curious) Why?

Bayleh: (pointing to a scar above his ear) Feivush noticed this.

Fishke: The scar? (Bayleh nods affirmatively) The scar where my earlocks were?

Bayleh: He saw and immediately understood, you are no bathhouse attendant, nor a cripple or Batya's husband, Feivush saw a Tora Scholar and as such he will always treat you with respect.

Fishke: (scoffing) Such is his respect?

Bayleh: It is most respectable just to belong to Feivush's beggars, most respectable!

Fishke: And you, you are respected?

Bayleh: I...(sighs) I am with Feivush from the age of fourteen, he snatched me from my parent's home in Altivka, I... (sighs) I don't know anything else, just Feivush and his beggar band.

Fishke: You never thought to escape?

Bayleh: From Feivush?

Fishke: (stops her) Only the dead flee Feivush!

Bayleh: You see, you already know all there is to know. (silence)

Fishke: (eyes sparkling) Feivush really knew that I was once a Tora scholar?

Bayleh: Immediately.

Fishke: And Bayleh, what do you know?

Bayleh: Me? Nothing, (silence) though I should dearly like to! Maybe you could tell me.

Fishke: But I, I don't recall everything, I do recall however that I had earlocks, (points to the scar) on both sides, (points to the other side) two

earlocks-two friends! (Bayleh laughs) You know Bayleh, when one is alone, even earlocks can be one's friends. (Bayleh smiles sadly, awaits the continuation of the story, Fishke searches his memory) You know, when they brought me to the orphanage, I was still very young, I don't know where from, though I recall the house where I grew up, a large blaze, shouting and Russian soldiers, (spits) tfu! with blazing torches in their hands, the house going up in flames and my sisters screaming, and my grandmother from amongst the fire: "Pogrom, pogrom!" But I saw nothing, I never saw my family again, then they brought me to the orphanage, and my earlocks began to grow, like this, (indicates exaggeratedly, Bayleh laughs) or maybe like this, (moderates his exaggeration) they never cut them, they forgot, they never even knew how old I was, so they allowed them to grow wild, then they brought me to Kisalon. This I remember well, I stood there with some other orphans in the village square while the villagers came to check if we were worth purchasing or not. We were nothing more than merchandise. Tsiril Ciril from the bathhouse arrived and began to check my body, he asked me to bend over this way and that, (exhibits) "You are supple" he said, "Are you also swift?" I didn't answer, the head of the orphanage asked me to run round the square for him, I thought to escape, and so I began to run, faster and faster, and each time I tried to break out from the square, there suddenly would appear before me villagers blocking my escape route, I ran between them at great speed, just like the orphanage dog – "Horsey", he would run like a horse, and I ran like him, but there was no way of escaping the square, none whatsoever, then Tsiril Ciril said: "This one I want, this small one, but what on earth is that noise he keeps making?" Then the head of the orphanage who had covered my leg iron with cloth said, and this I remember well, "He's slightly

disabled”, slightly disabled he said, “Yet better suited to work than all the others”, “And most agile” added Tsiril Ciril while paying a large amount of zuz for me. Such a large amount that the head of the orphanage showered me in kisses, wetting my face to the extent that all those watching thought that he was overcome with emotion at having to leave me. In the bathhouse Tsiril Ciril put me in a bath and began to shine my leg iron, as though he had discovered some lost treasure, silver candlesticks or something. Then he said: “Earlocks are ugly”, and I tried to resist him but he held on to me tightly, dipped his knife into the bath water, and then chopped off my locks, deep into the skin he cut, and my earlocks dropped into the bath and floated on the bloody red water, the blood from the cuts, from here. (points to his scars) My earlocks, from here, from these scars, floating in the bloody bath, it was then that I recalled Bayleh, (observes her crying) I recalled that I studied Tora, prior to the pogrom, the orphanage, Tsiril Ciril and his bathhouse, not to mention Feivush and his beggars, before them all, I was a Tora scholar, (Bayleh wipes her tears with a handkerchief, silence) So what now? A beggar, a student, a thief? And what about Batya? We were legally married, what now?

Bayleh: Now I know Fishke that Feivush is no worse than Tsiril Ciril and being a beggar no worse than your work in the bathhouse.

Fishke: But all your deeds are sacrilege and sin.

Bayleh: Our sins are no worse than chopping off your earlocks, but again, I know nothing...

Fishke: (thinks, almost to himself) No Bayleh, you know, you know a great deal!

(Feivush appears from amongst the trees, his beggars follow, he observes from a distance Fishke and Bayleh in conversation, and Zisserel asleep next to Leah by the soup pot)

Feivush: (to beggars) **Couples, loving couples, look before you beggars, a veritable Noah's ark, the cripple and the whore,** (pointing to Fishke and Bayleh) **and the cheat and the sloth,** (Leah and Zisserel rise, as do Fishke and Bayleh) **on your feet you dogs, we're on the move, Maglivia is no better than Kisalon, the Russian army is everywhere, come, we're moving!** (the group of beggars readies to move, Feivush takes hold of Bayleh tightly) **I have the eyes of a hawk, this you know well, from now on, not a glance, not a word. The cripple remains a cripple, and the mistress a mistress, no more mercy Bayleh, mistress you are and mistress you will remain, one more glance, one more word, and there will be no more cripple and no more mistress, we will add no more Baylik, there is no more to be said!** (kisses her forcefully, to Lempel) **Lempel, soon the Russian soldiers will get wind of Leah's soup, they will come, and what will they find? Feivush! And who else? His beggars! Forward, Zisserel, bind Don Juan to you, tie up the skinny chicken tight, move Zisserel!**

Zisserel: (tying Fishke with a rope) **You must not speak with Bayleh, it's forbidden! Thou shalt not commit adultery Fishke! Thou shall not speak with Bayleh, if you commit this one sin, it is as if you transgress all the ten commandments, and I, I, Fishke won't be able to protect you!** (holds the end of the rope, drags along Fishke and joins the other beggars disappearing into the forest)

Scene 7

On the main route to the Jewish village of Zoltavia – Three weeks later

(While the scenery is changing, the Lord and Lady of Zoltavia step to the front of the stage, wearing heavy and expensive coats, some distance behind them two stout servants carry heavy travel trunks)

The Lord: What is the matter with you? Only criticism and complaints, criticism and complaints.

The Lady: It's so tiring and tedious that's all I have to say, and I won't stop saying it, tiring and tedious.

The Lord: And what will they have to say? (pointing to the servants)

The Lady: They're strong, like all the goys Emmanuel.

The Lord: If so, then they were justly hired.

The Lady: Russia is on the boil, soon the day will come when they'll begin a pogrom, right inside our home.

The Lord: You'll soon be telling me that they broke our wagon's wheels on purpose.

The Lady: Quite right.

The Lord: In order to carry our heavy trunks, all the way to Zoltavia? Woman do you have no common sense? (they arrive at the main road, Feivush and his gang wait in ambush behind a huge rock, sticks in their hands and scarves covering their faces. From the trees opposite, Fishke, stick in hand charges at the Lord, Lady and the two servants)

The Lady: (shouting) **Pogrom! Pogrom!**

(Fishke is surprisingly strong, his crippled leg is light, his body is agile as he toys with the oncoming servants, using all of the movements learned from Zisserel, the servants are unexpectedly strong and experienced in fighting, Zisserel leaps to assist him and calls out battle cries to Fishke

that cause him to become more stylish and accurate. At the same time, the beggars, astonished by Fishke's fighting ability, begin to attack the Lord and Lady, relieving them of their coats and placing sacks over their heads, they tie them tightly to one of the trees, then take the heavy travel trunks and disappear into the forest. Fishke and Zisserel beat the senses out of the two servants, while the servants lie in the middle of the road. Fishke and Zisserel shake hands like warriors following a famous victory. Feivush, who has watched the goings on from the top of the rock joyfully applauds them, whistling loudly, then the three disappear into the depths of the forest, silence falls on the main road)

The Lady: (frightened from inside the sack) **Have they gone?** (silence)

They didn't speak, never said a word. (silence) **Just shouts.**

The Lord: **They were Jews!**

The Lady: (chokes from laughter) **A Jewish pogrom!**

The Lord: **I've heard of them, a group of beggars, Jewish criminals.**

The Lady: **It's unheard of, Jews performing pogroms on other Jews?**

The Lord: (sighs) **It's their profession!**

The Lady: **The end is nigh Emmanuel, when Jews do pogroms on fellow Jews and you console yourself because it's their chosen profession? A new profession has arrived in the Jewish world – the Pogrom!**

(while the scenery is changing, Bayleh and Leah skip girlishly to the front of the stage, wearing the lady's expensive clothes which are far too big for them, they laugh, Batya is bathed and dressed in the Lady's gown that fits her figure, she tells to them to calm down)

Scene 8

Forest clearing – The same evening

(In the corner of a forest clearing, Lempel, wearing the Lady's coat counts the loot stolen from the Lord and Lady, in another corner, Fishke is tied to Zisserel, they speak wearily, in the background Leah, Bayleh and Batya turn the stolen trunks into a festive table. Feivush, donning the Lord's coat walks between the beggars more arrogant as ever)

Lempel: (writing in his journal) **Strings of pearls – four, copper bowls – two, silver spoons –twenty, (the beggars are impressed) six candlesticks, one pair, another pair of copper, also a crystal pair.**
(everybody is impressed, Feivush approaches) **Cotton nightdresses – two.**

Feivush: **For the most righteous lady Batya!**

Lempel: **Three magnificent sets of underwear!**

Feivush: **For Bayleh.**

Leah: (from a distance) **What about me?**

Feivush: **For underwear on top, there needs to be a woman underneath Leah. (laughter)**

Batya: (from a distance) **I am a woman!**

Feivush: (angry) **Underwear for mistresses only!**

Lempel: **Three?**

Feivush: **The lady's coat is not enough for Lempel, you need some women's underwear as well? (laughter from all round)**

(Fishke sits at a distance listening to Zisserel)

Zisserel: **I was your age, a youth just drafted into the army.**

Fishke: **A Jewish soldier?**

Zisserel: (laughing) **Don't pretend Fishke, everybody knows I'm only half Russian.**

Fishke: On your mother's side?

Zisserel: That's right. (Feivush approaches them)

Fishke: If so, then you are Russian, all of you!

Zisserel: So be it. (impatiently) So do you want to hear about fighting moves or don't you?

Feivush: (to Zisserel) What's all the fuss about? You should be celebrating your famous pupil's most excellent victory, a hero amongst heroes, a beggar, son of a beggar, son of beggar thieves we have here Zisserel! A grand reason for celebration!

Zisserel:(cynically) And how do you suggest we celebrate?

Feivush: We shall free our beggar from his bonds, (to Fishke) **you are free to walk amongst us! As a free man, a free beggar, a free merciless criminal!**

Leah: (from a distance) So he's no longer your responsibility Zisserel?

Feivush: To his great regret no doubt! (all laugh)

Batya: (from a distance) **He'll run away!**

Feivush: (moving towards her) **To where Batya, to where will this beggar son of beggars run? Back to the bathhouse in Kisalon? You recall the famous passage from the Gemara that says (loudly) "And if thou walketh alone, find thee a group of beggars that they be as brothers in a time of need".**

Leah: That's not from the Gemara.

Feivush: (from a distance) **Lempel! Is this a passage from the Gemara or is this not a passage from the Gemara?**

Lempel: Not yet, but it will be, I'll make sure of that!

Zisserel: (from a distance, while releasing Fishke from his bonds) **That's better!**

Fishke: Thanks.

Feivush: (to Lempel from a distance) **The money! How many zuz?**

Lempel: Sixteen zuz and two halves!

Feivush: With two halves that's seventeen, Lempel, your knowledge of arithmetic is on a par with your knowledge of Gemara.

Fishke: (stroking his twigs, to Zisserel) You learned these martial arts when you were in the army?

Zisserel: You are impatient Fishke, you control your body better than your curiosity.

Fishke: (as if insulted) Nevertheless...

Zisserel: So, the company to which I was drafted was dispatched to the Ural mountains in order to block the advancing Barbarian tribes that had come all the way from distant Mongolia and were spreading terror over the length and breadth of Russia. We succeeded in executing a surprise attack and managed to swiftly overcome them. The battle seemed to be at it's end when their commander, Gregor the Barbarian positioned himself unarmed against dozens of our troops, he began toying with them with swift, agile and unexpected movements. We watched from our vantage point in the trenches, such a hypnotic defense and war dance as we had never witnessed before. When the Barbarian was finally captured, he was brought before the Tsarina herself who offered him shelter and freedom for his troops in return for teaching our soldiers his knowledge of the eastern martial arts, the art of Gregor the Barbarian. I was lucky to be included in the first group he tutored, and so became his best student and his closest follower.

Fishke: So where is the Barbarian now?

Zisserel: After passing on his art, the army authorities executed him and so there remained but a select few with knowledge of his secrets. You are lucky to have this knowledge too, and not without good reason, not without good reason!

Fishke: What about Feivush?

Feivush: (from a distance) **Feivush knows Fishke! And how! Better than you and your teacher! Now we eat!** (signals to the beggars to come closer, to Lempel) **Tomorrow we set out for Odessa market.**

Zisserel: But that's a journey of at least four days.

Feivush: Maybe you would prefer to sell the Lady of Zoltavia's clothing in Zoltavia? (all laugh, to Bayleh) food Bayleh, (places her on his knee) **it's about time we filled the Lady's dress with a little meat,** (thrusts a piece of chicken into her mouth) **eating is good for you Bayleh, first you must pamper you body, and then, the master!** (all eat in silence)

Leah: (enters at a breathless run) **Feivush! Soldiers Feivush! Over there!** (all rise in alarmed fashion and organize themselves for a quick getaway)

Feivush: Forward, quickly Zisserel, Leah, where are they?

Leah: Over there, soldiers!

Feivush: The sacks Zisserel, all of them, Lempel, quickly! (runs)

Bayleh? (to Batya) **Batya, where is Bayleh?**

Leah:, Soldiers, that way!

Feivush: **Bayleh! Bayleh!** (chaos, people running in all directions, disappearing with the loot into the forest, on the background of the scenery change, Fishke crosses the stage at a confused and agitated run)

Scene 9

Russian forests – Over a duration of two days

(Fishke runs in the opposite direction than the other beggars, dragging his leg because of the great effort and carrying his bathhouse twigs, Bayleh appears behind him carrying her belongings in a sack on her back, she tries to catch him, all the dialog from hereon is on the run)

Bayleh: Fishke, (silence) Fishke, (silence) Fishke where are you going?

Fishke: (breathing heavily) There!

Bayleh: But they're all going that way (silence) Fishke, (silence) why that way?

Fishke: (points in the opposite direction) You go that way!

Bayleh: And you the other? (silence) Why that way?

Fishke: (points again) Go that way, with Feivush!

Bayleh: And you?

Fishke: This way.

Bayleh: No Fishke, there are soldiers there (points the other way) this way!

Fishke: (as if possessed) Bayleh that way! (points) Fishke this!

Bayleh: Why Fishke?

Fishke: This way there is no Feivush. (they continue to run in silence, disappearing into the depths of the forest, from the opposite direction appear the group of beggars with the stolen goods on their backs, Feivush leads them, Batya and Leah at the rear)

Feivush: (shouting, looking forward) Tell Bayleh to run faster, to me, (silence) Bayleh, come here! (without stopping, all look to the rear)

Bayleh, come to me now! (silence) Batya?

Batya: I don't see her.

Feivush: Don't want to more like it!

Batya: She's not here.

Feivush: (continues to run and look forward) Zisserel! (silence)

Zisserel!

Zisserel: She's gone!

Leah: (from a distance) So has Batya's husband!

Feivush: (angrily) Zisserel! (silence) Zisserel!

Zisserel: He's gone!

Lempel: They've fled!

Feivush: (smiles in disbelief, without turning turn his head) **Fled,**
Lempel, fled? From Feivush nobody flees, as you know well, Lempel,
only the dead flee Feivush! The dead only! (silence) **Zisserel!**

(continues to run into the depths of the forest, the beggars follow, from the opposite direction appears Fishke running, his crippled leg now light, he skips forward as if hovering, he carries Bayleh's sack, Bayleh is some way behind him)

Fishke: Run Bayleh, run! (silence) **Run Bayleh,** (silence) **run!**

Bayleh: (breathing heavily from a distance) **Feivush is far from here.**

Fishke: Run!

Bayleh: It will take him a long time to realize we're missing.

Fishke: (aggressively) **Run Bayleh, run!** (he offers his hand backwards, Bayleh accelerates, and grasps it, they run hand in hand as a bird fleeing its' cage into the depths of the forest, from opposite the beggars appear running, Feivush to Zisserel, both looking forward)

Feivush: So that's what the skinny little cockroach ,crippled chicken,
did, ran the leash, like a dog, fled, with his whore, the cockroach and
whore!

Batya: My husband, Don Juan, a real Cazanova!

Feivush: A cockroach!

Batya: (almost to herself) **Whore!**

Feivush: If it's war that he seeks? (silence) **Then war he will get!**

Come Zisserel, we're going back!

Zisserel: It's dangerous Feivush.

Feivush: We're going back.

Zisserel: We'll be trapped like fish in a net Feivush! We're carrying stolen goods, the army is behind us, or as you suggest, soon they'll appear directly in front of us!

Feivush: Back, we're going back.

Zisserel: And the loot? What about the loot?

Feivush: Zisserel, I said we're going back, with the loot. Back I said!

Zisserel: (shouting) Come, we're going back! (turning round, they begin to run in the direction from where they came, Batya and Lempel at the rear

Batya: (to Lempel) I'll show that little cockroach what it is to run away from Batya! From Batya, nobody flees Lempel, nobody!

Lempel: When revenge raises it's ugly head Batya, you suddenly forget you are a widow. (the beggars disappear into the forest, on the background of the changing scenery, four rogue beggars cross the front of the stage wearily dragging sacks of stolen cabbage)

Scene 10

Cabbage field – Afternoon

(Cholbezigo, Alkili, Moses Dura and Lazer, four Jewish tramps, disheveled rogue beggars, drag their sacks of stolen cabbage towards the broken down irrigation hut, suddenly they come upon the sleeping Fishke and Bayleh, they stand over them in silence, Bayleh awakes with fear, Fishke immediately follows)

Cholbezigo: You are Bayleh (silence) I know you, this is Bayleh (to friends) it's Bayleh, (to Bayleh) you're Bayleh aren't you?

Fishke: No.

Cholbezigo: What do you mean, no? I know her, this is Bayleh (to friends) Feivush's Bayleh! (to Bayleh) I can't believe it, Feivush's Bayleh! (silence) What Bayleh? Surely you are not afraid of me? You

don't remember me? Maybe you are hungry, or thirsty perhaps? (to Moses Dura) **Moses Dura, water for Bayleh!** (Moses Dura offers the water canteen, Fishke opens it hesitantly and helps Bayleh to drink) **She's very thirsty** (to friends) **extremely thirsty**, (to Bayleh) **maybe hungry too?**

Fishke: **No!**

Cholbezigo: **No? All the time no? Just look at her, she is extremely hungry,** (to Lazer) **Bayleh is hungry, what food do we have left?**

Lazer: **A little bread, and even less sausage.**

Cholbezigo: **A little bread, a little less sausage, most excellent Lazer, come.** (hurries him) **Hospitality! Lazer, the greatest commandment of them all falls into our laps!** (Lazer offers bread and sausage, Fishke hesitates, Bayleh takes a bite, Fishke joins her, they eat ravenously, the beggars watch on admiringly, to Bayleh) **Have you murdered Feivush?** (to friends) **I sense a murder on a romantic background,** (to Bayleh and Fishke) **please God, tell me that you murdered him, do tell me you murdered him,** (points to his friends) **our hearts will be filled with joy...**

Fishke: (stopping him) **No.**

Cholbezigo: **Another no!**

Fishke: **No.**

Cholbezigo: **If you didn't murder him, then...**

Fishke: (stopping him) **We ran away from him.**

Cholbezigo: **You ran away from him? From Feivush?**

Fishke: **It is so.**

Cholbezigo: **And you stole Bayleh away from him?** (silence, to friends) **See how modest he is, not one given to bragging this one. Alkili, Lazer, Moses Dura, did your ears hear what mine did? We are looking upon a hero that has stepped right out of the pages of the**

Bible, we have before us King David! (to Fishke) **You are King David,** (to friends) **not only fled, but also took with him Bayleh,** (to Fishke) **King David, from today on, we shall be a candle to your feet, a light for your eyes, a melody to your ears, the strength behind your deeds, you are King David and we, we are your subjects.** (all four nod in agreement) **We shall be your soldiers, your vanguard, heads of the camp,** (Fishke is confused, rises, Bayleh follows, they march into the cabbage field, the four do likewise) **Bayleh, you remember, you doubtless recall, how could you or should you forget? We were relieved of all of our thieving areas by Feivush, he took also our women, both belonged to us, the areas, our women, he took everything. Alkili was stricken dumb and has not spoken since, is there no honor among thieves? Hell on earth, Feivush brought upon us, tell her Lazer, tell Bayleh how we felt, tell her.**

Lazer: **We thought that being with him was paradise.**

Cholbezigo: **Hell on earth, hell, Alkili has not spoken since, dumb, but he** (points to Fishke) **he is stronger than strong, he is King David, he stole and he fled, the height of revenge, trampled his honor in a way that will be spoke of for years, till the end of days!** (Fishke stops at the edge of the field, looks at Bayleh, Cholbezigo is behind Fishke) **The road you will choose is the road to victory, the road you will walk is the road to security, we are behind you King David,** (to friends) **he really did, he stole and he fled.**

Fishke: (hesitantly to Bayleh) **This way?**

Cholbezigo: **Certainly that way,** (to friends) **I knew it was that way, obviously that way, and if not that way, then which? A magnificent plan King David,** (Fishke begins to march, all follow) **a magnificent plan, we are heading for Metoda where other comrades will join our company, we shall be a company as none before! From the first King**

David to the Last King David, never was there such a King David as this! Not only escaped, but stole also, stole and fled! (Bayleh, Fishke and the rogue beggars turn to a path and disappear from sight while the scenery is changing, the front of the stage is crossed by the group of beggars, headed by the vengeful and stormy Feivush)

Scene 11

The Jewish cemetery at Metoda – Beggar's camp – A week later

(Buloon, on old Jewish beggar, sits at the entrance to the cemetery, waiting for Feivush and his group, his friend Mutillo, old and disheveled, exits the cemetery)

Mutillo: (to Buloon) **Come, come already, (silence) the Sabbath is upon us, Buloon. And the charity rested from all its' work!**

Buloon: **I'm waiting.**

Mutillo: **You and the gravediggers, we shall return after the Sabbath, The Holy One blessed be He, will be merciful unto us and by the end of the Sabbath an additional two or three householders will doubtless come to rest, bringing with them much charity! (raises his eyes to the heavens)**

Buloon: **I'm waiting for Feivush.**

Mutillo: **Feivush, Feivush, Feivush, a year and a half have passed since then.**

Buloon: (stopping him) **They come on the Sabbaths and the holy days, when there is no one about, this time I shall wait.**

Mutillo: **Buloon, I have my reservations about this.**

Buloon: **None, there is no charity like that of Feivush.**

Mutillo: **Abandon!**

Buloon: Abandon me?

Mutillo: No, Metoda.

Buloon: The very place where rich Jews come to rest?

Mutillo: Have you heard of the cripple from Kisalon?

Buloon: You never stop speaking about him.

Mutillo: So, is he a hero or is he not?

Buloon: A great hero!

Mutillo: If it is so, then come with me!

Buloon: Where to?

Mutillo: I heard a rumor, they are here, heading for the Black Sea, to the coast, let's go!

Buloon: This Sabbath I await Feivush.

Mutillo: Feivush, Feivush, Feivush, although his charity maybe second to none, now there is a new Feivush, there is Fishke!

Buloon: It's all rumors.

Mutillo: Rumors and tidings the size of his strength, I shall find shelter with him, he will care for me, there will be peace!

Buloon: You're going to follow them on the Sabbath?

Mutillo: And why not? It is a holy thing I do, not a beggar's deed! On the Sabbath, most surely on the Sabbath!

Buloon: I shall wait for you here.

Mutillo: Forever?

Buloon: You'll soon return.

Mutillo: Just as Feivush will return, I'm on my way!

Buloon: May your old legs be blessed.

Mutillo: Peace be unto you. (collects his things, leaves, Buloon watches his friend's withered body follow the rumors, Feivush leaps over the stone wall, his beggars follow him)

Feivush: (fiercely to Buloon) Who was that?

Buloon: (joyfully) **Feivush, Feivush, I knew it, I hardly finished speaking and you return, on the Sabbath you return!**

Feivush: (short tempered) **Who was it?**

Buloon: **You don't remember Mutillo?**

Feivush: **Where did he go old man? Where did the old man go?**

Buloon: **He followed the rumors, charity Feivush, Sabbath charity?**

Feivush: **What rumors?**

Buloon: **They say that there is a large company of Jews...**

Feivush: (stopping him) **A company?**

Buloon: **Yes, with a general.**

Feivush: **What kind of general?**

Buloon: **A great general.**

Feivush: **Jewish?**

Buloon: **Yes, Feivush, the great Jewish general that kidnapped Bayleh from you, who you yourself kidnapped...**

Feivush: (holding Buloon throat, almost choking him) **Where are they?**

Buloon: **The great company is on its' way to the coast.**

Feivush: (to his beggars) **Forward dogs!** (the beggars begin to run in his wake) **Zisserel! Zisserel!**

Buloon: (shouting at Feivush) **Feivush! What about charity, the Sabbath charity?**

Feivush: (running back) **Zisserel!** (the beggars return)

Buloon: (happy) **I knew it, you wouldn't keep charity from an old beggar like me!**

Feivush: **Zisserel!**

Batya: **Maybe he's sleeping.**

Feivush: **In a Jewish cemetery?**

Batya: (frightened) **Maybe.**

Feivush: The Russian didn't enter the cemetery with us, you seem to forget Batya. Once a Russian, always a Russian!

Buloon: Charity!

Feivush: (kicking Buloon strongly) Here's your charity! (shouting)

Zisserel: (to Lempel) Lempel, Zisserel has disappeared! (to his beggars) Forward, move! (the beggars spread out, Buloon raises his aching body, Leah passes by)

Leah: (to Buloon) Which way did the beggars go?

Buloon: They went that way... to a great war!

Leah: War with who?

Buloon: First there is Feivush, and then there is the Russian and then, then there is the great Jewish general!

Leah: Old fool! (exits)

Buloon: (after her) Yes, war! (coughs) Charity, there is none, but a great war, there is indeed! (while the scenery changes, Zisserel runs at the front of the stage, looking around him, scared, continues to run to the depths of the stage)

Scene 12

The Black Sea coast – Two days later

(Moses Dura, Cholbezigo, Alkili, Lazer and other beggars affiliated to Fishke stand in the water, their trousers rolled up, trying to catch fish with rags and torn nets. Bayleh launders, Mutillo sits next to Fishke, the sun is pleasant)

Mutillo: (to Fishke) So where is the great rumor? Are you really beggar thieves, (points to the "fishermen") to search food in such a way is most shameful, (silence) so is the rumor true or is it not?

Fishke: A rumor is a rumor Mutillo.

Muttillo: Is it even half true? (silence) All your deeds, the deeds of beggar thieves, and in spite of that, food you have none, and you don't even know how to navigate, (silence) if you are indeed King David, then where is the King and where is David? Cholbezigo said...

Fishke: (stopping him) Cholbezigo speaks for himself.

Muttillo: I am old but not stupid, I know that behind the facade of the Tora scholar hides a great beggar thief, I know, (silence) you may have short and boyish whiskers, yet power and hatred, (points to Fishke's body) you possess! You can't fool me Fishke, I shall join you one way or the other, leaving a good income behind, graveyard charity, good income, I shall not return till I learn if the rumor is true or not.

Fishke: (laughing) So you would like me to be thief Muttillo?

Muttillo: A great one.

Fishke: And what in your opinion is a great one?

Muttillo: Greater than Feivush, a looter, a rapist, a murderer, such is a beggar thief!

Fishke: (withdraws) That is not me!

Muttillo: (watches him in silence) Hiding the truth from an old beggar? Not nice! A great thief you are, this I know! (points to his scarred face) A battle scarred face!

Fishke: (laughs) Once these were earlocks, Muttillo, earlocks...(Zisserel appears running, falling exhausted at Fishke's feet, the beggars leave the water to protect Fishke who stops them with a wave of his hand, Bayleh approaches)

Fishke: (surprised) Zisserel!

Zisserel: I am at your command!

(Fishke helps him to rise, Bayleh offers him a drink from a water canteen)

Zisserel: Thank you Bayleh!

(Fishke helps Zisserel to sit on a rock, Mutillo is wary and joins the other beggars standing at a distance)

Zisserel: I am with you!

Fishke: How is that?

Zisserel: It was always so.

Fishke: (aggressively) You have come to slaughter us!

Bayleh: (softly) Fishke.

Fishke: He wants to turn us in to Feivush...

Zisserel: (stopping him) Feivush is far away.

Fishke: So Bayleh says, yet you are here, a sign that Feivush is not so far away.

Zisserel: He is far away.

Fishke: You'll turn us in.

Zisserel: I've come to join you Fishke.

Fishke: (sneers) You will never be, (silence) you are a Russian, one of us, you can never be! (looks towards Bayleh, his eyes wander suspiciously, to the beggars) **Forward brothers, we're moving!** (the beggars organize themselves, Zisserel follows them, while the scenery changes Feivush's group appears at the front of the stage)

Batya: (to Feivush, on the run) So? You'll kill him?

Feivush: Kill? Of course I'll kill. And his blood I'll put in a wine decanter and send it to his beloved in the Tsar's palace!

Batya: And Fishke?

Feivush: Long before the other.

Batya: And his blood you'll send to Kisalon, for bath water in the bathhouse?

Feivush: His blood I shall drink!

Batya: And her blood? (silence) Bayleh is also amongst the slaughtered?

Feivush: **This is her doing, and her doing will be her reward!** (the group of beggars disappear into a Cherrytree forest)

Scene 13

Cherrytree forest next to the christian village of Pultchek – A week

Later

(Afternoon, Zisserel trains Fishke who holds his bunch of bathhouse twigs in his hand)

Zisserel: (In the background can be heard the voices of the Kisalon householders repeating Zisserel's words as an echo in Fishke's head) **Hit me again Fishke, (evades) and again, (evades) hard, Fishke, hit hard!** (Fishke succeeds in tricking him and hits him with the twigs) **Yes, that's good, well done,** (continues to evade, Fishke succeeds in toying with him until Zisserel kicks the scattering twigs)

Fishke: (collects the twigs, almost to himself) **If Tsiril Ciril could only see...**

Zisserel: (aggressively) **If you defend like that, he will most definitely see!**

Fishke: (Rises with the twigs in his hand) **Feivush?**

Zisserel: **Him too.**

Fishke: (fights Zisserel with a passion) **If Tsiril Ciril our bathhouse keeper in Kisalon (strikes) could see (strikes) how his bathhouse techniques (strikes) have turned into fighting techniques...**

Zisserel: (stopping him) **Defense, defense!**

Fishke: (striking) **he would tremble.**

Zisserel: (stopping him) **He would be proud, (evades) proud! Power is admired by all, Fishke, (evades) defense; everybody (evades) dreams**

of power! (Fishke beats him with the twigs) **Good, good!** (catches him and hugs him) **And Gregor the Barbarian?**

Fishke: What?

Zisserel: Would he be proud or not? (silence, laughs) it's not a question, he would be very proud, the martial arts are woven here in his honor, the bathhouse and the distant Mongolian mountains unite in his art (calls out loud to the depths of the forest) **Feivush! Ready yourself for your bitter end!** (laughs, Fishke is wary)

Fishke: But you said that Feivush is far away.

Zisserel: Far or near, we must do all that we can to prepare for what the future may bring.

Fishke: But you said he is far away! (turns to a tree stump, sits, looks at Zisserel) **I'm tired of the running, of the forests, of Feivush.**

Zisserel: (approaches, sits next to him) **From Feivush you can continue to flee Fishke, but not from your destiny, (silence) you are the head of the beggars now, you are destined for greatness Fishke, greatness and glory!**

Fishke: (ties the twigs) **And you? Why does all this glory interest you?**

Zisserel: For my vision to come true, that I should like to see!

Fishke: Where do I fit into your vision Zisserel? What am I?

Zisserel: You will be part of it, you will most certainly be part of it!

Fishke: (laughing) **You are hungry Zisserel, your head is spinning!**

Zisserel: (almost to himself) **The vision will come true!**

Fishke: (laughing) **If we don't die of hunger first!**

(Lazer enters, frightened, Cholbezigo and Alkili follow)

Lazer: **He's here, they're here, Fishke, Feivush is here!** (Fishke leaps from his place, the bundle of twigs remains on the ground, Feivush and his group enter at a run)

Feivush: (to Fishke) **You cockroach!**

(a circle of beggars surrounds Fishke who stands opposite Feivush, Batya looks at Zisserel and spits)

Batya: Traitor!

(the circle tightens, more of Fishke's beggars arrive excitedly from the forest, tension, Feivush attacks Fishke who attempts to guard himself according to the movements he has learned. This is a stylized martial arts contest, the vengeful Feivush displays surprising knowledge in the martial arts, Fishke parries him with sharp contemplated moves. The beggar groups follow the fight with fear. Feivush succeeds in throwing Fishke to the ground and extracts a dagger from his boot. Zisserel grabs the bunch of twigs and throws it to Fishke. Fishke catches it and begins to toy with Feivush, he strikes him with the bundle until Feivush loses his footing and stumbles, the dagger falls from his hand, Lempel rushes to pick it up, Feivush crashes into a sharp rock, his head is shattered, the beggars are speechless, Fishke with his attendant's bundle in his hand retires to the tree stump, he sits down, shocked, Feivush's beggars look on the body of their dead leader, as if rooted to the spot, silence, Fishke's beggars motionlessly regard their leader)

Batya: (to Zisserel) **Are you coming?** (silence) **Zisserel, are you coming?** (silence) **Lempel?** (silence, Batya disappears into the forest, Feivush's beggars distance themselves slightly, waiting to see what happens next, Zisserel approaches Fishke)

Fishke: (to Zisserel) **I am a murderer, a murderer!**

Zisserel: "Rise early to kill those that would kill you!"

Fishke: **I am a murderer, a murderer!**

Lempel: (Feivush's dagger in his hand, from a distance) **So wished God on high, the life of the most learned taken by a young Tora scholar!**
(the emotional Fishke looks at Zisserel)

Zisserel: **He was indeed a man of learning!**

Lempel: (from a distance) A Tora sage, but he wished to be like the Russians, he afflicted his own people, the way they afflicted him, a most terrible affliction!

Cholbezigo: (stops him loudly) Thus came King David to avenge his awful deeds, a Tora scholar chosen from above, yes, it is God's will!

Fishke: (to Zisserel) Feivush, a Tora sage?

Zisserel: A genius.

Cholbezigo: (loudly) Long live Fishke! King of the beggars! (silence, the groups of beggars watch one another, loudly) Long live the King of the united beggars, the league of beggars, long live Fishke, King of the beggars!

Beggars: King of the beggars! Fishke, King of the beggars!

Fishke: (to Zisserel) A genius?

Zisserel: Many years and many deeds ago, in a different world!

Fishke: (alarmed, to himself) Sacrilege, sacrilege indeed, sacrilege. (he sways his body as if mourning, the distant beggars look on in astonishment) Sacrilege, sacrilege, (Zisserel attempts to hug Fishke who extracts himself from his arms, the bundle of twigs held tight to his body, his appearance awe inspiring) Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He created according to his will. May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire house of Israel, speedily and soon, and say, Amen. (silence, in an ecstatic and tremendously loud voice) And say Amen!!!

The Beggars: (softly) Amen.

Fishke: May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity. Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded, be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He.

The Beggars: (softly) Amen.

Fishke: Beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations, that are ever spoken in the world, and say, Amen. (Bayleh enters from the forest, cherries held in her folded apron, she sees Feivush's body and shattered head, sees Fishke swaying his body violently, the cherries fall from her apron and scatter over the ground) **May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us, and for all Israel, and say, Amen.**

The Beggars: Amen. (the light begins to fade)

Fishke: He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He in His mercy create peace for us and for all Israel, and say, Amen.

The Beggars: (softly) Amen.

Fishke: (as if possessed) And say Amen!

The Beggars: Amen.

Fishke: (screaming) And say Amen!

The Beggars: Amen.

Fishke: And say Amen! Amen! Amen! (weeps out loud) And say Amen! Amen! Amen!

(DARKNESS – END OF ACT I)

ACT II

Scene 14

The Russian Tsar's Headquarters – One Year Later

(The light rises at the front of the stage, Nikolei struts impatiently, Alexei his advisor, follows him, tries to appease him)

Nikolei: So you say they're Jewish!

Alexei: That's right, Jews, with a merciless murderess leader!

Nikolei: Your personal intrigues Alexei, lead you to live in a world of illusions, (aggressively) and unless I am uncharacteristically mistaken, you're wasting my time!

Alexei: But a large Jewish army is executing pogroms.

Nikolei: (laughs) Pogrom is one their words, not ours, some kind of ludicrous Jewish invention to describe our modest efforts at bringing some order to their odd world.

Alexei: But that's just it!

Nikolei: (impatiently) Just what Alexei?

Alexei: A pogrom for a pogrom, "an eye for an eye", they're exacting their revenge on us!

Nikolei: (cynically) Are you telling me that they've lost their minds and finally ceased praying for their savior's coming?

Alexei: Their commander is their savior, and a merciless one at that, they're attacking countless villages while most of your subjects are away fighting your war.

Nikolei: And all this useless information comes to you via some old acquaintance from the military academy?

Alexei: This is reliable inside information.

Nikolei: (stops, turns to Alexei) **Is he one of them?**

Alexei: **Indeed but he is half Russian, that's why he was thrown out of the service.**

Nikolei: **And you trust him?**

Alexei: **Implicitly.**

Nikolei: (laughs) **Alexei, your complex personal affairs will be the end of us all! (almost to himself) not that doomsday is so far away, your meddling with these Jews, criminals or not, heralds trouble, trouble, trouble, nothing but trouble, (silence, looks at Alexei) and which particular intrigue lies hidden behind this information Alexei? (silence, Alexei smiles) And pray tell, why do they admire their commander so?**

Alexei: **Because he is second to none when it comes to taking revenge!**
(Nikolei smiles with curiosity)

Nikolei: **Not even to me?**

Alexei: **Your majesty's schemes are indeed the greatest of all!**

Nikolei: **If so then the scheme that needs to be plotted now will be, as you say, indeed be the greatest of all!**

(Alexei smiles, Nikolei exits, Alexei follows, to the front of the stage ready for a night mission. The bearded Fishke stands erectly at the head, a picture of leadership, his appearance is surprisingly powerful, Lempel brings up the rear)

Scene 15

A wayside inn in the Russian village of Gorbechika – The same evening

(The woman innkeeper and two common looking Russian farm girls sit around one of the tables, speaking quietly when suddenly a group of beggars bursts into the inn. Some of the beggars throw the women onto

the armchairs, while others concentrate on emptying the inn of its goods, Fishke sits at ease on the food counter observing his groups activities when an old Russian farmer suddenly appears from the kitchen with a stick in his hand)

Cholbezigo: (shouting) **Goy! Moses Dura, there's a goy behind you!**

(Moses Dura turns to struggle with the farmer, Alkili, Lazer and others beat the farmer mercilessly, Fishke watches from the counter, his eyes frozen, Moses Dura smashes the farmer's head against one of the tables as blood spurts from his head.)

Moses Dura: (to farmer) **Why are you not at war, pig! Pogrom fodder!**

Cholbezigo: (to Moses Dura) **Moses Dura, surely you don't wish to kill him?**

Fishke: (cynically to Cholbezigo) **Your heart still contains a modicum of mercy Cholbezigo?**

Cholbezigo: (with a forced laugh) **Not at all your majesty!**

Moses Dura (laughing as he smashes the farmer's head against the table)

Mine neither, mine neither! (an additional group of beggars enters and removes even more items from the shelves, Alkili, stands motionless over one of the women, Cholbezigo looks on from the side, looks to Fishke who signals his approval with his finger)

Cholbezigo: (to Alkili) **Be my guest Alkili, be my guest!** (Alkili tears the woman's clothes from her, drops his trousers and violently rapes her while the beggars continue to loot and the farmer's body lies on the floor)

Alkili: (while raping the woman) **"Judgement day is on its' way!"**

"Judgement day is coming"

Cholbezigo: (joyfully to Fishke) **Alkili speaks again! Thanks to you King David! Alkili speaks once more!**

Alkili: (climaxing at the top of his voice) **“Judgement day is coming!”**
 (Fishke whistles, leaps and disappears over the counter, all the beggars follow, Alkili spits towards the woman) **And to hell with the Tsar! Tfu!**
 (runs out with his trousers round his ankles, silence, the raped woman moans, the other two women groan from behind their gags, terror in their eyes. As the scenery changes in the background, Fishke strides restlessly with Bayleh carrying a travel bag, follows him)

Bayleh: (softly to Fishke) **Are you not frightened?**

Fishke: **And you?**

Bayleh: **I fear that we are wakening the dead.**

Fishke: **Another of your superstitions dearest Bayleh, worry not, our deeds are far from sacrilege.**

Bayleh: **Feivush was afraid of their gods.**

Fishke: **If so, then we are truly not alike, he wished to be one of them, Zisserel told me about him, he took vengeance on his own folk to ingratiate himself with the goys, traded in his Jewish soul as part of the Devil’s bargain.**

Bayleh: **So what solace do you find in revenge?**

Fishke: (sneers) **Solace? For me there is no solace in revenge, Bayleh, I find none! I search but in vain Bayleh, I search in vain!** (leaves, Bayleh follows)

Scene 16

The Jewish market in Balta – A day later

(the village square is crowded, Jewish traders, Fishke’s beggars dressed as Russians sell their wares to the Jews, Bayleh stands at one of the corners, a large bag in her hand, Fishke dressed as a Russian soldier walks amongst the traders and supervises his beggar’s negotiations)

Lempel: (to a Jewish trader holding a vase) **It's unique, an original!**

Jewish trader: **It's a replica.**

Lempel: **And maybe I'm a replica of your good neighbor from Stonia?**

Jewish trader: **I never said such a thing God forbid, maybe they tricked you when you bought it.** (Fishke approaches them)

Lempel: **It's unique, an original!**

Jewish trader: (handing the vase back to Lempel) **It's a fake.**

Fishke: (intervening) **What seems to be the problem?**

Jewish trader: (alarmed, almost salutes Fishke) **I've done nothing wrong!**

Fishke: **But sir, you most certainly have, there stands before you a poor Russian peasant asking nothing but a few zuz, and how do you react? Tell me, will you lose your pants if you buy it? I doubt it very much, you will sell it in an instant...**

Lempel: (interjecting) **Unique and original!**

Fishke: (ignoring) **...to one of these many rich householders, isn't that so?** (the trader nods with fear) **Indeed, this way you will not only line your pockets with a most handsome profit, but you will be assisting one of my poor fellow countrymen, strike a bargain Jew and may your God bless you with many additional good deeds, amen!** (turns to leave)

Jewish trader: (replies in astonishment) **Amen!**

Lempel: (to the trader) **So be it, twenty two zuz, final price!** (Fishke turns to Bayleh and offers her his hand)

Fishke: (almost whispering) **Come Bayleh, it's time to run.**

Bayleh: (surprised) **To Kisalon?**

Fishke: (laughs) **Kisalon? No, never again, never again will I place my future in the hands of the goys, we'll head for your childhood home**

in Altavika, they'll never find us there! (sits by her side, whispers persuasively) **We have more than enough to manage, we can set up house together, (sadly) that is, after I find Batya and divorce her according to the letter of the law.**

Bayleh: (looks at the beggars) **And them?**

Fishke: **I will not carry on in their thankless fashion! I act contrary to my nature Bayleh, I behave like them, they wanted me to be their leader, but I am no beggar thief, and being a bath attendant is also just a distant memory. I am,** (points to his earlocks) **Fishke, they grow now as they once did, I shall be Fishke once more!** (he offers his hand once more, Bayleh smiles and takes his hand, they rise and attempt to leave the square. Beggars dressed as Russians appear before them and unknowingly block their escape, Fishke signals to the beggars to carry on trading and suddenly a way opens up for them, Fishke tugs Bayleh with force, suddenly Zisserel appears in front of them)

Fishke: (stops) **Zisserel! Where did you disappear to?**

Zisserel: **I'm right here in front of you. Where are you going?**

Fishke: **We wish to make a small reconnaissance of Balta.**

Zisserel: (looking at Bayleh's large bag) **A small reconnaissance with a large travel bag!**

Fishke: (stopping him) **It is still packed with unsold merchandise.**

Zisserel: **If so, then maybe I could speak with you privately while** (stresses) **Bayleh sells the "unsold" merchandise?** (Points to the bag, Bayleh looks to Fishke, he nods acquiescently, Bayleh returns to the market)

Fishke: **Where did you disappear to Zisserel?**

Zisserel: **I set out on a mission on behalf of the entire Jewish people.**

Fishke: (laughs) **Once more you count yourself amongst the chosen people? Jewish, Zisserel you will never be, at least, not in this world!**

Zisserel: I will! Thanks to you I will! (silence) His Royal majesty the Tsar Nikolei wishes to meet with you!

Fishke: (sneers) Zisserel have you lost your mind? (Zisserel withdraws a document from his pocket)

Zisserel: (offers the document to Fishke) Read! (Fishke opens the document) Read this, and read it out loud, so those on high will also hear! (silence, Fishke is surprised) Read out the tidings Kishke, read!

Fishke: “An invitation to a clandestine meeting between the Tsar Nikolei and the head of the Jewish army – Fishke” (to Zisserel) Jewish army?

Zisserel: That’s right.

Fishke: The head of the Jewish army – Fishke?

Zisserel: So it is written.

Fishke: In Stonia?

Zisserel: That’s correct.

Fishke: In a week’s time. (alarmed) But Zisserel, we have no army.

Zisserel: Do the Jews have any other?

Fishke: It’s a trap!

Zisserel: You searched for your destiny Fishke, that is no sin, and here it is, your destiny!

Fishke: From whom did you receive this invitation?

Zisserel: From the Tsar’s advisor Alexei.

Fishke: And how did you get to the Tsar’s advisor Zisserel?

Zisserel: I didn’t, he got to me. (hugs the slightly shocked Fishke, they turn to the square) Come, cross the village square for the last time as the beggar king, and for the first time as the head of the Jewish army! (Fishke regards him, Zisserel laughs with joy, Bayleh watches them both, clutches her bag and follows in their wake, they disappear, after a short time Fishke appears at the front of the stage wearing

magnificent apparel, Bayleh escorts him on his way, Zisserel is some way behind, the scenery at the rear of the stage is changing)

Bayleh: They will kill you Fishke...for all...for all you have done.

Fishke: If it was my death he wished, Zisserel could have killed me many times.

Bayleh: It's a ruse Fishke, Zisserel is lying.

Fishke: He has been a loyal friend to me since the first night we met.

Bayleh: But you said that...

Fishke: (stops her) At present our future is in the hands of destiny.

Bayleh: So now you have succeeded in deciphering destiny's secrets?

How? From your Bible studies?

Fishke: (stops angrily, signals to Zisserel to stop at a distance) In heaven only, do I place my trust Bayleh, and doing so, march towards my destiny.

Bayleh: (laughing) It is towards Zisserel's illusions that you march, (silence) we never had and never will have neither army nor head, you are so naive, a Tora scholar you were and thus you remained. (turns away from her, passes Zisserel angrily, Fishke leaves, Zisserel follows)

Zisserel: Women, you'll never understand them, they're more complex than all your Talmud tractates put together!

Scene 17

Abandoned wooden hut at the entrance to the Russian village of

Stonia – A week later

(The Tsar Nikolei in his field-chair, Fishke stands opposite, glasses in their hands. Zisserel and Alexei await in the courtyard)

Nikolei: (laughs) And you have a woman at your side?

Fishke: Your majesty, I had one in the past and I have one at present.

Nikolei: Two wives, most respectable, the revenge, the hate, the nerve and on top of it all – two wives **(silence)** extremely respectable! **(silence)** You shall be enlisted immediately!

Fishke: (surprised) Your majesty...

Nikolei: **(stopping him)** I know, I know, swords and much finance, **(silence)** in gold I shall pay you! Your army as a separate regiment will receive ample assistance. In another month and a half, following your training, you will set out for the Dolchika hills on the Prussian border.

Fishke: Your majesty, our army is small.

Nikolei: I shall issue a proclamation for a general mobilization of all Jews! Alexei will appoint you as my representative, from now on your army will be our ally and under our command. After fulfilling your mission in Dolchika, you will receive land stretching from here to the Black Sea where you will be an independent governor over all Jewish subjects. **(rises, turns to the guard at the door)** Call Alexei! **(to Fishke)** Put the fear of god into the Prussians as only you know how, farewell! **(Fishke rises, Nikolei shakes his hand, turns to the door, Alexei arrives, Zisserel follows, Nikolei exits, Alexei follows, Zisserel stands alone at the entrance watching the pensive Fishke)**

Zisserel: All signed and sealed?

Fishke: Signed and sealed. **(rises, emotional yet firmly to Zisserel)** No more woods and forests Zisserel, out in the open, erect and proud. An independent regiment of the great Russian army, that's what we are, the Jewish Army! The owners of all house owners shall we be, we are the power that grew from the ranks, as weeds we were, but now as towering fir trees we have become. Follow them Zisserel, the appointment needs to be signed in order to receive authority, swords and many zuz, gold, more

gold than we could make in a lifetime of looting, **(approaches and hugs Zisserel)** Bon voyage my friend!

Zisserel: Where are you going?

Fishke: We must enlist to our ranks strong and healthy Jews, we will be a large and proud Jewish army. Off you go Zisserel!

Zisserel: **(hugging Fishke)** Your majesty, **(looks on him proudly)** the first Jewish Tsar! **(leaves, Fishke remains alone, sits in the Tsar's seat, pours himself wine, drinks, his eyes shine with pride, at the front of the stage while the scenery is being changed at the rear, Fishke's beggars pass by on their way to enlist recruits, Lazer carries a banner inscribed with the two tables of the ten commandments, Lempel bugles in all directions, all are erect and intensive, bringing up the rear are Cholbezigo and Leah, followed by Bayleh and Fishke walking in silence, from amongst the trees the exhausted Batya suddenly appears in torn rags, she falls at Fishke's feet)**

Batya: Forgive me for my sins your majesty! **(Bayleh shrinks to the rear)**

Fishke: Batya?

Batya: Your majesty, accept me to your ranks, I shall be loyal to my dying day, I heard of the assembly in Yabtzeck and came immediately, accept me to your ranks and I shall do whatever you request!

Fishke: I request a divorce!

Batya: Whatever.

Fishke: Just a divorce.

Cholbezigo: I'll find a rabbi to divorce you in Yabtzeck.

Fishke: Stand on your feet woman! **(to Bayleh)** She needs food and water, **(to Cholbezigo)** it's going to be a long journey. **(they leave, Batya drinks the water thirstily from the canteen, to Bayleh)**

Batya: What of Zisserel?

Bayleh: **(scornfully)** Aha! Zisserel is in Moscow, a most important man. He is the Russian Jewish advisor to the Tsar's Russian advisor. **(leaves)**

Batya: **(laughs)** Zisserel?

Mutillo: **(enters, weary from travelling)** Ah! You too?

Batya: I was here a long, long time before you!

Mutillo: If so, then you know Batya that here we speak little and do much! **(leaves, Batya follows him)**

Scene 18

The village square at Yabtzek – Two days later

(the village square is bathed in sunshine, benches are scattered around in the Jewish fashion, Fishke sits statesmanlike with the gloomy Bayleh at his side. At a distance, Lempel registers the recruits, Lazer hands over coins on account of their salaries, the rest of the beggars wander around the young Jews, persuading them to enlist, the Jewish banner is hoisted in the middle of the square, Cholbezigo sits on one side with a sour face)

Lempel: **(to Moses Sabena)** Name?

Moses Sabena: Moses Sabena.

Lempel: Jewish?

Moses Sabena: Praise be.

Lempel: Profession?

Moses Sabena: Carpenter.

Mutillo: A good sword hand!

Moses Sabena: And what will I receive?

Lempel: A regular income.

Moses Sabena: **(happy)** Regular income, thank God!

(Lempel takes his thumb and dips it in ink for a print\signature,
Moses Sabena “signs”, Mutillo gives him some coins)

Bayleh: (to Fishke) He won't be back.

Fishke: Zisserel is loyal Bayleh, he'll return!

Bayleh: He ran away from Feivush.

Fishke: In order to realize his dream.

Bayleh: (**bitterly**) A Jewish army setting out to battle? That's his dream?

Or is it yours? (**Leah arrives running, stopping her**)

Leah: Your majesty, this Batya of yours has no place in our army.

Fishke: (laughing) **And why is that?**

Leah: Your majesty, she's not prepared to cook with the rest of us,
“we're in an army”, she claims “not in a Sabbath kitchen”.

Bayleh: (rising) **Come Leah, I'll help you.**

Fishke: (to Cholbezigo) **You promised to find a rabbi to divorce me
from Batya.**

Cholbezigo: **And you promised wealth not war!**

Fishke: **War is the way to wealth, Cholbezigo.**

Cholbezigo: (rises) **You may well be King David, but I am not Uriah
the Hittite!** (turns to his friends, Fishke is surprised, Lazer appears at a
run)

Lazer: (to Fishke) **Your majesty, they say that your majesty is a
criminal!**

Fishke: **And what do you reply?**

Lazer: **Poppcock! I say to them!**

Fishke: **Tell them that only we can protect our homes, tell them that
it is time for a truce with the Russian people, tell them that it is
heaven's wish, Lazer go and tell them so!** (Lazer leaves)

Lempel: (after him) **And the gelt! Don't forget to tell them about the
gelt!**

(Moses Dura approaches Fishke)

Moses Dura: Your majesty, a miracle, a couple of excellent youths, kosher Jews, and from where? From where your majesty?

Fishke: Riddles at noon time Moses Dura?

Moses Dura: From Kisalon!

Fishke: (excited) Kisalon?

Moses Dura: The rumor of the Tsar's proclamation has drifted as far as Kisalon, your name has sprouted wings!

(from a distance an old rabbi and two of his students watch the goings on)

Rabbi: Tfu! (spits) Jewish goys, Jewish goys. (Fishke notices them and approaches)

Student: It's an army Rabbi, our army.

Rabbi: Our army is the heavenly host, and the heavenly host only!

Fishke: (to the Rabbi) Rebbe, (lowers his head in respect) could you divorce me from my wife? We were married according to the law but have never lived together as man and wife, could I call her?

Rabbi: Jews only do I marry, and Jews only shall I divorce.

Fishke: I am Jewish.

Rabbi: We know only too well who you are, only too well! (the Rabbi turns to leave, his students follow, Fishke's face turns pale)

Lempel: Name?

Yoel: Yoel ben Isaachar.

Lempel: Jewish?

Yoel: I don't keep the commandments but on the command of God do I present myself here. (silence) The Tsar's proclamation to join the Jewish army is a command from God himself!

Lempel: (emotional) Mutillo, Mutillo! Where is my journal? I must write down this wonderful adage in my journal, (Mutillo hands him the journal) say it again, out loud Jew!

(Fishke is again in his seat, Alkili sits next to him)

Alkili: Your majesty, I have brought excellent recruits, strong Jewish traders!

Fishke: YabtzeK's rabbi is not prepared to divorce me from Batya.

Alkili: Our world is a thousand miles distant from theirs.

Fishke: Yet one belief binds us all.

Alkili: We'll wait till after the training, till after the battle.

Fishke: Will Bayleh also wait Alkili?

Leah: (enters running, raising a commotion with her shouts) **Cholbezigo** has run away, I saw him, he took the Lady's silver samovar and disappeared into the forest!

Fishke: (stops Alkili) No!

Alkili: But he's run away, afraid of the war, he's gone.

Fishke: Leave him be.

Alkili: But he ran away from your majesty.

Fishke: I'm not Feivush, I seek not those that run away from me. The Jewish army has risen from the dead Alkili, with or without Cholbezigo, it is alive and kicking.

Alkili: (rises stormily, shouts) **The Jewish army has risen! The Jewish army has risen!**

(at the front of the stage, while the scenery changes, a group of recruits practices swordsmanship combined with attacking and defensive martial arts movements. Their suppressed energies explode into the searing air)

Scene 19

The Jewish army's camp near Odessa – Two weeks later

(Erect army tents, the Jewish Army's banner is flown proudly in the center of the training ground. Fishke and Zisserel in impeccable uniforms, opposite them, beggars and recruits, Lempel and Mutillo next to the

sword collection, polishing the weapons that Zisserel brought from Moscow. On the side, Bayleh, Leah and Batya prepare lunch, for the first time in shining new copper cooking utensils. Discipline and order, all watch Fishke and Zisserel's exhibition of martial arts incorporating swordplay)

Fishke: Thrust, (demonstrates sword thrust) **slash**, (slashes with the sword) **chop**, (spins round and executes a chop) **and now, feint, thrust, turn, slash** (demonstrates) **Zisserel! Thrust**, (both demonstrate) **slash**, (demonstration) **chop**, (demonstration) **feint, thrust, turn slash**, (demonstrating, Fishke's voice is authoritative, his body erect with no hint of his crippled leg) **and now defense**, (Fishke defends himself against Zisserel) **defense**, (parries again) **defense, attack attack**, (demonstrates opposite Zisserel) **feint** (evades) **feint**, (evades once more) **and thrust!** (attacks Zisserel and demonstrates a model thrust, all the soldiers applaud, Fishke raises his voice) **Lempel, Mutillo, swords!** (the beggars and recruits from two orderly lines opposite Mutillo and Lempel, take their swords and return to their places) **And now after me, thrust**, (they execute the movement) **slash**, (execute) **chop**, (execute) **feint, thrust, turn slash** (execute) **thrust, slash, chop, feint, thrust, turn slash** (execute) **thrust, slash, chop, feint, thrust, turn slash** (Fishke and Zisserel move between the beggars and recruits) **thrust, slash, chop, feint, thrust, turn slash** (execute) **now in pairs**. (the beggars and recruits stand in pairs) **Defense**, (execute) **defense** (execute) **defense, attack attack** (execute) **feint**, (execute) **defense, attack evasion**, (execute) **defense, attack, feint, thrust, slash, chop, feint, thrust, turn, slash, defense, evasion, attack, thrust!** (the beggars and recruits execute Fishke's instructions) **and now a sword against an unarmed man**. (the unarmed Fishke demonstrates against the sword wielding Zisserel, the

beggars and recruits applaud) **Change** (Zisserel tosses his sword to Fishke and demonstrates impressive evasion tactics, the onlookers are silent, Fishke reproaches them) **Respect for Zisserel!** (applause) **Sword to body!** (all begin to fight each other, a combination of martial arts defense and sword dexterity in attack attracts excited attention, Lempel and Mutillo's eyes sparkle, Bayleh, Leah and Batya regard the fighting Fishke and Zisserel, not believing their eyes)

Lempel: (to Mutillo) **The Jewish army Mutillo, look, the Jewish army!** (the melee of swords and martial arts in the background)

Mutillo: (to Lempel) **And against whom shall we display such power?**

Lempel: **Against the Prussians, may the Devil take them! Tfu!** (spits)

Mutillo: (almost to himself) **The Prussians, the Prussians,** (to Lempel) **tell me Lempel, what have the Prussians done to deserve the heat of our wrath?**

Lempel: (clearing his throat) **The Prussians? Nothing I can think of.**

Mutillo: **And so?**

Lempel: (unsettled) **And so? And so my Mutillo it is to the assistance of the Russian people we are called.**

Mutillo: (insistently) **Then what did the Prussians perpetrate against the Russians that warrants us skewering them with our swords?**

Lempel: (impatiently) **Mutillo, you are the flag bearer, the flag bearer of the Jewish army, such is your mission in the battlefield, spare me your questions.**

Mutillo: (scornfully) **I suppose the answers are all in your journal?**

Lempel: **When swords clash – the muses are silent!** (total darkness, battle cries in the background, while the scenery changes the Jewish army is entrenched at the front of the stage awaiting a hand to hand battle, Fishke with Zisserel at his side, look towards the Prussian wall of defence)

Fishke: (shouting) **Moses Dura!** (Moses Dura along with a group of sword wielding Jewish soldiers storms the depths of the stage) **Alkili!** (Alkili with a group of sword wielding Jewish soldiers storms the depths of the stage)

Zisserel: **Lazer!** (Lazer with a group of sword wielding Jewish soldiers ecstatically storm the depths of the stage)

Mutillo: (Shouts to Fishke) **The banner Fishke, what about the banner?**

Fishke: (shouting) **Mutillo!** (the banner bearing Mutillo strides to the heart of the battle, battle cries and the clashing of swords can be heard all around, Fishke calls out) **Follow me brothers, follow me!** (Fishke storms forward, his flashing sword visible from a distance, Zisserel with a group of Jewish soldiers following, the stage front is silent, suddenly it is filled with well trained Jewish troops fighting brave Prussians, Fishke cruelly stabs with his sword in all directions, chaos, Fishke battles both mercilessly and recklessly, suddenly he falls to the ground clutching his crippled leg, Shoymer, one of the Jewish soldiers, notices Fishke and pulls him to safety)

Shoymer: Your majesty, you are injured.

Fishke: It's just my crippled leg refusing to straighten itself. (**Shoymer and Fishke arrive at a sheltered spot, in the background the Jewish army fights the valiant Prussians**)

Fishke: (**to Shoymer**) It's nothing, it's just my crippled leg, if only I had my leg iron. (**holds his leg**) It was of great assistance. (**tries to rise with the assistance of Shoymer, points to his leg**)

Shoymer: The iron is in his majesty's heart. (**Fishke smiles, and straightening his leg, returns to the heart of the battle with his sword aloft, Shoymer gazes in admiration, Shoymer to himself, as if**

praying) Our savior, our father, thou art our savior Fishke! (leaps with a battle cry to heart of the fighting)

Scene 20

The Jewish army camp close to Odessa – Three months later

(the disorderly tents stand on the verge of collapse, wind, dust, all is in a state of neglect, Batya zealously bandages one of the injured, Lempel reads from his journal, four casualties lie on a canvas next to the fire listening to him. Leah and Bayleh peel onions in the food preparation area with tears in their eyes)

Lempel: (out loud) “King David you are!” cried out Cholbezigo, Fishke modestly lowered his head while Mutillo muttered “Amen”, an amen, as if taken from the Kol Nidre prayer on Yom Kippur. God on high smiled at Fishke and whispered: “You are their savior Fishke, their staff and their saviour!” “You are King David”, so continued Cholbezigo, whilst He on high raised his voice to the archangel Gabriel and said: “From David to David, there has been no such David, as this Fishke!” (Lempel continues his reading, the injured are comforted by his words, his voice is heard in the background)

Leah: (contemptuously to Bayleh) Cholbezigo, spineless traitor, he’s terrified of the fighting! Bayleh, we have become no better than the goys, their onion soup is our only nourishment.

Bayleh: We must suffice with the little there is.

Leah: But what about the injured? Is it not enough that we have no dressings or medicine?

Bayleh: Batya is doing all that is humanly possible.

Leah: Only because she loathes preparing food, peeling onions is below her, that's why she tends the injured, while at the same time hoping to find a husband amongst them.

Bayleh: (sadly) She is still married to Fishke.

Leah: Only until things settle down, once he returns victorious from the battlefields, he will divorce her. All those rabbis will stand in a line and beg for the honor of performing the mitzve. (Lempel's voice rises to prominence)

Lempel: "Pay no heed to our opponents!" cried Fishke, addressing the camp as his sword shone brightly from a distance, "Pay no heed!" "What fault did these rabbis and scholars find in such a man?"

Mutillo whispered in my ear, "To trust and to follow him and his mighty deeds is the will of God" he added. "They consider us no better than goy mercenaries" whispered Moses Dura as Zisserel lifted his voice: "The day will come, as the days of the Messiah will come, when we shall unite as one people!" So he said this Zisserel, whose soul remained untouched during his search for his identity. (his voice in the background)

Leah: (to Bayleh) Street poet!

Bayleh: His words are dear to me, like distant melodies.

Leah: Only three months, and already our melodies are distant?

Bayleh: (sternly) Lempel's words are dear to me, (looks to the injured) to them also, it soothes their pain. (Alkili, his blood dry on his ragged uniform, carrying a large staff, drags himself into the middle of the camp, two injured beggars follow, Leah, Bayleh, Batya and Lempel all rush towards him, he seats himself painfully on the ground, Leah pours him some hot water, Alkili sips the water, a deafening silence engulfs the entire camp, all await his report)

Alkili: (softly) **They are no longer with us. Both were killed.** (Bayleh covers a scream with her hand and runs in amok to the depths of the forest, Leah follows)

Batya: (to Alkili) **My husband? My husband is dead?**

Lempel: (sorrowfully) **Fishke never was your husband, never,** (enraged, a sob in his voice) **Fishke was never your husband! He was a heroic Jewish soldier, he was our savior!** (cries openly) **“Thy glory, O Israel is slain upon thy high places, how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph”** (the injured, Alkili and Batya regard the sobbing and shouting Lempel) **“From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Zisserel turned not back, and the sword of Fishke returned not empty”** (Bayleh watches from a distance, approaches the sobbing Lempel and hugs him tightly)

Bayleh: (crying, to Lempel) **It’s time to go home, Lempel, the time has come.**

(while the scenery is changing in the background, the front of the stage is lit, the Tsar Nikolei, extremely pleased with himself, struts on the palace guest-room balcony with Alexei in his wake)

Nikolei: (surprised) **But he told me that he had two wives, two I tell you.**

Alexei: **Fishke never had a woman in his life.**

Nikolei: **But he said...**

Alexei: (stopping him) **Your majesty, Zisserel revealed to me all.**

Nikolei: **Do elaborate.**

Alexei: **He was married in order to charm away the evil eye, to ward off the plague, such is the way of Jews.**

Nikolei: (laughing) **Odd ways indeed.**

Alexei: Indeed, and he never even got to sleep with his charming bride, it transpired that she was the beggar leader's mistress.

Nikolei: But there was another wife.

Alexei: She was another of the leader's mistresses.

Nikolei: But when she was with Fishke, why didn't he sleep with her then?

Alexei: It is forbidden to take a woman whilst still being married to another.

Nikolei: Now I'm really confused!

Alexei: Such is the way of the Jews.

Nikolei: Just as I said, odd ways indeed.

Alexei: Maybe, but Fishke was a heroic soldier your majesty, his way was not theirs.

Nikolei: So in his own odd way then, (laughs) his own very odd way!

Scene 21

The guestroom in the Tsar's Moscow palace – The same night
(two of the Tsar's bodyguards stand by the entrance to the guestroom, Zisserel enters, turns to the Tsar Nikolei and his advisor Alexei who are standing at the front of the stage on the room's balcony)

Zisserel: (proudly) Your majesty, the head of the Jewish army – Fishke.

Nikolei: Bring in the hero! (the guards leave, to Alexei) What is his surname?

Zisserel: We don't know.

Nikolei: Does he?

Zisserel: Apparently nobody knows, (Nikolei sneers, the guards return to the room with silk cushions bearing decorations for military valor, Zisserel out loud) **The head of the Jewish army - Fishke!**

(Fishke enters the room, clicks his heels in salute and bows, Nikloei marches to one of the guards and removes from one of the cushions a miniature sword, he turns to Fishke and taps on his uniformed shoulders in exaggerated ceremony)

Nikolei: You have become a valiant hero! Prior to this day, only four valiant soldiers have been decorated with this sword, (reads the inscription on the sword) **“Valiant hero – Fishke”, you are the fifth, the fifth of our nation and the first of your own people!** (strokes the sword) **It may be small, yet it is of great value, and it’s blade** (points it towards Fishke) **is razor sharp!** (places the sword in Fishke’s hand and turns to Zisserel) **For your loyalty and exceptional valor, you are awarded the Golden Cross.** (signals to the guard, the Tsar marches towards Zisserel and affixes the medal to his chest) **From today forth you are promoted to the rank of Major General!** (the astonished Zisserel clicks his heels and dutifully bows) **May this decoration be appeasement for the sins of your Academy tutors!**

Zisserel: (his eyes sparkling) **Your majesty, now we are as one people, we are as one!**

Nikolei: (signals for the guards to leave) **Alexei**, (calls him to the center of the room, invites Fishke and Zisserel with his hand, all hold glasses of wine) **As stated by our superior officer, we are now as one people, one people!** (proffers his glass for a toast, all drink, Nikolei sits, the others do likewise) **To the victory in the arduous campaign in the Doltchika hills!** (drinks, others follow) **To the Jewish army who led the campaign!** (drinks, others follow) **To the coming night when our valiant hero will know a woman for the first time!** (laughs, drinks,

Fishke is confused, Zisserel and Alexei drink, Nikolei to Fishke) **Drink, be not ashamed, there are no secrets between brothers in arms, and women here are most plentiful!** (laughs, Fishke drinks, Nikolei puts his glass down, all do the same) **In a place where all were routed, the Jewish army was victorious!**

Fishke: **Your majesty, our troops remain in the trenches, without food or water.**

Nikolei: **When you return to your troops, you will observe that they lack for nothing.**

Fishke: (suspiciously) **Your majesty, am I to return alone?**

Nikolei: (points to Zisserel) **I'm afraid so, our Major General must leave early tomorrow for our troops on the Black Sea coast, a long period of training awaits all.**

Fishke: **But your majesty, Zisserel is a soldier in the Jewish army!**

Nikolei: **We are one people now, and he is second to none in fighting tactics, pray be generous, our army is in need of his talents. Be generous, we are one people now.**

Alexei: (to Fishke) **You can always train some of your own soldiers to be senior officers in his stead, the major assault is still at least six months away.**

Fishke: **Your majesty, the campaign is as good as over, victory is at hand.**

Nikolei: **I would like to believe that is so, yet the Prussians are bringing reinforcements to the hills, are they not yet weary of your courage? Or just seeking self- destruction?**

Fishke: (to Alexei) **Have we not done sufficient?**

Alexei: **At this very hour your troops engage the Prussians in a fight to the bitter end.**

Fishke: (bolts upright, to Zisserel) You said the battle was over, that they awaited us in the palace, a great victory you said.

Alexei: A great victory in the battle, but the campaign continues.

Fishke: (to Nikolei) Your majesty, was it not agreed that following the battle I was to receive authority and lands?

Nikolei: It was agreed, but only after the war,.

Fishke: The war, your majesty, could go on for years.

Nikolei: Not with you at our side, not when we are united!

Fishke: My troops will be slaughtered one by one!

Nikolei: (rises angrily) You were worthy of slaughter for your evil deeds in my townships, only owing to my merciful heart do you have the honor of being slaughtered in defense of our country!

Fishke: O Jews! (confused) We are Jews, the obligation to enlist does not apply to us!

Nikolei: You were chosen because of your exceptional courage and your evil deeds, it was your own hand that signed the enlistment papers!

Fishke: (rises, Zisserel, Alexei and the Tsar are surprised) I shall return to my troops, I cannot neglect them, I shall collect the entire Jewish army and we shall return to our previous lives.

Nikolei: (laughs) The night is still long enough for weighty decisions.

Fishke: (raging at Zisserel) Do Lazer, Alkili and Moses Dura know of this? You swore, you swore before me! Are they aware that we left for Moscow? Do they know of our desertion?

Nikolei: (stopping him) Alexei, the valiant hero and our superior officer show more interest in their own mundane matters than in our presence, (Alexei rises, Nikolei to Fishke) I beg of you dear hero, make avail this evening of the comforts the palace has to offer, take a woman, or two, maybe four, let your body find true peace. (stresses)

We shall rise in the morning with new battle plans, we are as one people now, (laughs) our nocturnal disagreements will disappear as the blink of an eye with the rising of the sun. Good night.

Zisserel: (rises) Your majesty. (clicks his heels and bows)

Fishke: (his voice weak) Your majesty. (turns to the balcony, Alexei and Zisserel are amazed by his nerve, Nikolei smiles)

Nikolei: (to Zisserel and Alexei) Such is the way of valiant heroes, I know where all four are buried, (laughs) and this fifth one is no different. (leaves, Alexei follows, Fishke at the front of the stage, the golden sword in his hand, Zisserel moves towards him, the scenery is changing in the background)

Fishke: (his teeth grinding in suppressed anger) Sacrilege Zisserel, sacrilege, our soldiers abandoned on the hills of Doltchika are being led like sheep to slaughter, Bayleh awaits us in the camp and we are here. Follow your destiny you said, but this destiny belongs not to me, it belongs to you and you alone! To return to the goys' army was your wish, to be an officer. From the day you met with Feivush, may he rest in peace, (turns to Zisserel) when you enchanted him with your arts, your secret battle movements, until my arrival, when you found in me what you had been searching for all along. I escaped your web, but you followed, you enticed Feivush to his death, my hands guided by yours committed this sin. It was your destiny that I followed, I was the head of the beggars, the head of the army, yet it all came from your head, I was your soul's redeemer. You are distant from us, a goy as much as any other, you desecrated my soul and all it contained. You plotted against me. "We shall rise in the morning" said his majesty, I know now that I shall not wake but die in this palace, such is your plan! I have completed my role, to you I am no different from Gregor the Barbarian, you have no more need of me, I

am as good as dead! Only your own good do you seek, only this lights your way, since the same fateful day you were expelled from the Russian academy and sent back in ignominy to your own people, the people that occupy only half of your heart.

Zisserel: (scornfully) You as the Jewish Tsar is what I wished to see.

Fishke: Your interest is in yourself only.

Zisserel: And my belief in you was in vain.

Fishke: (with hatred) **Belief determines our paths from above! Cain, Esau, Ishmael and the goys came together in your heart, a heart that is not mine, a belief that we don't believe in** (opens his arms to Zisserel, hugs him and whispers madly in his ear) **Traitor!** (stabs the surprised Zisserel in the heart with the decoration) **Your whole life was sacrilege!** (extracts the sword from his heart, Zisserel collapses on the balcony floor, Fishke spits on him) **Tfu! Be cursed for all eternity! May the Tsar be cursed for ever and the day!** (escapes via the balcony, Zisserel chokes in his pool of blood, his dead eyes raised to the skies)

Scene 22

Bayleh's childhood home in Altavika – Two months later

(darkness, a candlelight crosses the back of the stage. Bayleh slowly lights the oil lamps in her childhood home, the living room is revealed, Lempel robed in a grand dressing gown dozes on a wooden rocking chair, Bayleh has her hair tied up and is dressed modestly, she appears older than her years, sits opposite Lempel with embroidery in her hand, Lempel opens his eyes)

Bayleh: (laughing) **Idler!**

Lempel: **Why not? What is there left to do with our wealth that we have not done already?**

Bayleh: Leah wishes us to keep a tidy home.

Lempel: Wishes and wanders, all day long she's wandering around the village square!

Bayleh: She seeks to wed a young scholar.

Lempel: And you, if you do not believe in the legend of Fishke's resurrection, then why do you not accompany her?

Bayleh: I have no wish to marry any scholar, (laughs painfully) I've had enough of them Lempel, more than enough.

Lempel: (laughs) Scholars, criminals...

Bayleh: There is little difference. (their nostalgic laughter rolls around the frugal room, Leah storms in)

Leah: A strange Jew is spying on me, followed me all the way from the square.

Lempel: Maybe he is looking for a match!

Leah: His gaze and his flaming eyes burned in my back, I say to myself, what a strange and imposing individual, (looks around her) at least the lamps are lit. (sits on a wooden stool and removes her boots)

Bayleh, we really must keep an orderly house, disorder saddens my soul, (rises) I know, I shall cook some potato soup, Lempel, just like in the army camp. (turns to the kitchen)

Lempel: (to Bayleh) As far as I recall from those distant days, our diet was one of onion soup, (Bayleh laughs, silence, Fishke, a thick beard concealing his young features, eyes red from travel, a black coat covers his dusty clothes, stands at the entrance, watches Bayleh placidly embroidering, Bayleh raises her head in his direction)

Bayleh: Ah...

Fishke: Bayleh!

Lempel: (turning round) Identify yourself Jew!

Leah: (exits the kitchen) **This is the strange Jew that followed me all the way from the square.**

Fishke: **Leah!**

Bayleh: (rises) **You are alive!**

Lempel: (rises) **The legend of the resurrection is true!** (turns to open the net door)

Leah: (suspiciously) **Fishke?** (Fishke enters, stands opposite Bayleh, silence, they embrace, Bayleh sobs)

Fishke: (softly) **Bayleh, my Bayleh.**

Lempel: (ecstatic) **He's alive and well, King David is alive and well!**

Leah: (suspiciously) **What resemblance to Fishke do you see in this Fishke? He neither looks nor sounds like Fishke, he's just a strange Jew, that's all I see, a strange Jew, I see no Fishke whatsoever!**

Bayleh: (stops her) **Bring us some vintage wine!**

Fishke: (laughs) **Vintage?** (sits)

Lempel: (sits) **And lots of it! We relieved the camp of much of its' wealth, pray tell Ezekiel, oh vision of the dry bones, pray explain to us...** (Leah pours out the wine, sits at a distance on the stool, Fishke drinks, Bayleh observes him in awe)

Fishke: (extremely wearily) **The battles were most bloody, to the very edge of hell were we thrust. The Prussians were brave, their eyes full of hatred, they thought us Russians, then when they discovered we were Jews, their hatred grew even more, with spear and sword they attacked us, but the army (his eyes glow) the Jewish army Lempel, charging with belief in their hearts, charging straight from the pages of the Book of books, from the battle of Gilboa to the hills of Dolchika they charged, with God's pride in their heroism shining upon them.**

Bayleh: **So how were your wounds healed?**

Fishke: I suffered not a single scratch Bayleh, my sword unsheathed, I was oblivious to everything, except for my crippled leg which refused to straighten, how I longed for my old leg iron, a great assistance it would have been had Feivush not tossed it into the forest.

Lempel: It was Zisserel that discarded it.

Fishke: Indeed, and Zisserel it was who said: “the battle is over” said he, “victory is at hand and our decorations await us in the Tsar’s Moscow palace”. “Do our officers know of this?” I asked, “They know” swore Zisserel, “they know and sent heart felt blessings for our journey”.

Leah: (from a distance) Traitor!

Fishke: It is so, Achitophel, just and true were your words Bayleh, yet I was slow to grasp, a goy as all the goys was he, a traitor in our midst from the very first day he joined up with Feivush.

Leah: Where is the traitor now?

Fishke: He has returned his tortured soul to his creator.

Lempel: (scornfully) Then not all his creations are good.

Fishke: (softly) Not so, they are all good Lempel, it is we that distort his world, with our own hands.

Bayleh: How did you find your way?

Fishke: I recalled the lake in the story of your childhood, the death of your parents and the call of the ducks from the lake by the village square, in search of the lake I wandered, for many days, my crippled leg sending tremors throughout my body, hiding from the Tsar’s soldiers seeking my head, hiding from my own troops seeking revenge! Then suddenly I saw Leah in a square at the side of a lake.

Leah: Saw and spied.

Fishke: It is so, I spied and followed from the square to the house, from the house to the square.

Leah: With your eyes burning in my back, like a torch!

Fishke: (laughing) Time affects you not Leah, nor your exaggerations!

Lempel: (apologizing) Alkili announced your death, so we left and came here to carry on our lives.

Leah: (extracts Fishke's bathhouse twigs from the corner and places them on the table opposite him) Treasures and wealth we carried on our backs, and Bayleh, she carried your bathhouse twigs, all her wealth amounted to your bathhouse twigs!

Fishke: (to Bayleh) I am divorced.

Bayleh: From Batya?

Fishke: It was decreed from above, when I came to the camp, the injured bodies were piled one on another, an atrocious sight, and Batya amongst them, unburied with her eyes open wide, glaring at me in anger, divorcing me from her and her world.

Leah: Did you remain with the injured?

Lempel: They probably all died of hunger and thirst.

Fishke: From pain and disappointment did they die Lempel, their world in ruins, devastation I brought upon them.

Bayleh: We have a new life now Fishke, the beggar's world we have left behind, now we are most respectable and charitable.

Leah: (proudly) We give charity to the beggars every Sabbath and holiday eve.

Lempel: No one shall know you are who you are!

Bayleh: It will be locked in our hearts, we will say naught!

Leah: You will be a householder, a most orderly house I shall keep for you.

Lempel: We are quite well off, we'll buy you a new iron for your leg!

(silence, Bayleh, Leah and Lempel watch Fishke hopefully)

Fishke: Forgive me my sins, I beg of you, that is all I request. (takes the twigs in his hand and offers to Bayleh) **The time has come to raise a Jewish family, the time has finally come!**

Lempel: (to Leah) **You see Leah, Bayleh found a groom, now you go and try, off you go!** (laughs with joy)

(darkness in Bayleh's childhood home, at the front of the stage Tsiril Ciril walks heavily, his travel trunk in his hand, he is weary and walks as if drunk from his long journey in search for Fishke, his missing bathhouse attendant)

Scene 23

Bayleh's childhood home in Altavika – Six months later

(light rises on the living room whose facade has been changed completely, pale curtains cover the windows, a vase with red roses on a table covered with a pristine white cloth, Bayleh, with rounded belly, dressed in the fashion of married women with a head covering enters the room, a prayer book in her hand, sits in an well upholstered armchair styled for men of leisure. Leah, immaculate, wearing a white apron, enters from the kitchen with a large plate of biscuits in her hand, she places them on the table next to Fishke's bundle of twigs and sits opposite Bayleh)

Leah: (to Bayleh) **The child, he must be given sweet things to eat!**

Bayleh: **You're fattening me like a duck!**

Leah: (proudly) **Just as I promised, a most orderly house.**

Bayleh: **Rabbi Yitzchak ben Avraham will soon find you a good match, the expectation will bring it's own blessing.** (Leah smiles in satisfaction then rises alarmed)

Leah: I hear the ring of the master's iron leg.

Bayleh: (laughs) Rabbi Yitzchak ben Avraham is at present giving a lesson, young children are drinking down his wisdom. (Lempel enters the room, dressed elegantly in the style of a householder)

Leah: (disappointed) It's only you.

Lempel: Only?

Leah: I was expecting the master.

Lempel: Is that so?

Leah: He's a true scribe and teacher, not a simple letter scribbler like you.

Lempel: (turns to the coat peg and hangs up his coat) My letters are of great importance for the unity of the Jewish people, this very hour I have forwarded a letter to a Polish Lord's cousin, is this not as important as teaching?

Leah: (alarmed) He's coming!

Bayleh: (laughing, holding her belly) Leah, I've told you once and I'll tell you again, Rabbi Yitzchak ben Avraham will not come home whilst there is still a lesson to be given. (Tsiril Ciril appears behind the net door)

Tsiril Ciril: Jewish brothers, I beg a little rest for my poor feet and a taste of Jewish broth for my lips, nothing more!

Lempel: Bring him into this Jewish home, (reprimanding Leah) receiving guests is nothing less than a commandment! (Bayleh rises, Leah and Lempel stand opposite Tsiril Ciril and his travel trunk)

Bayleh: Sit with us while Leah warms for you some soup. (Leah turns to the kitchen, Bayleh, Tsiril Ciril and Lempel all sit)

Lempel: (apologizing) We await the master of the house, we eat when he returns from his studies, he is a respected teacher and thus our meals are usually at a late hour.

Tsiril Ciril: (observing the bathhouse twigs on the table) **What are these bathhouse twigs for?**

Bayleh: (alarmed) **Twigs collected from the cedar forests on the Black Sea coast, a souvenir from my childhood.**

Tsiril Ciril: **The bathhouse attendants use these most excellent twigs in their craft. Do you know anything of their craft?**

Lempel: (innocently) **Never once have I visited a bathhouse!**

Tsiril Ciril: **A Jew is not a Jew unless he has experienced the bathhouse attendant's craft.**

Lempel: **We have little money.**

Tsiril Ciril: (looking around) **I see nothing lacking here, a magnificent home.**

Bayleh: (quickly) **We have little income but our home is our first priority.**

Lempel: **Why are the twigs bound so?** (silence, aggressively) **Only bath attendants tie their twigs in such a way.**

Bayleh: (aggressively) **A childhood souvenir to decorate our table, we have never thought of it otherwise.** (Leah pours hot soup for Lempel, sits at a distance on the wooden stool)

Tsiril Ciril: (apologetically) **I'm sorry for asking so about these twigs, after lost hopes and longings do I search,** (silence) **I apologize.**

Lempel: (stops him) **Eat, bon appetit.** (Tsiril Ciril tasted the soup)

Tsiril Ciril: **Hot, with a fine Jewish taste.**

Lempel: (scolding Leah) **Are you being thrifty with the bread Leah?** (Leah leaps to the kitchen)

Tsiril Ciril: (to Lempel) **Servants, boneheads!** (they both laugh)

Bayleh: **Leah is no servant, she is one of the family.**

(Leah places sliced bread next to Tsiril Ciril, returns to her place, silence, Tsiril Ciril eats)

Tsiril Ciril: (to Bayleh) A servants broth is usually bland yet this has the taste of paradise, (eats) I know well the difference in tastes from my many treks around Russia.

Lempel: You are a travelling salesman?

Tsiril Ciril: God forbid, I own a bathhouse in Kisalon. (silence, Bayleh, Leah and Lempel sit bolt upright) Although at present it is under lock and key, once I find my trusty attendant, once more joyous bathing will return to our town and the cries of joy will empty themselves and their profits into my open pockets.

Bayleh: And this choice attendant, where is he now?

Tsiril Ciril: He was like a son to me, modest and hard working, from the orphanage I took him, my elderly father taught him the attendant's craft, (Bayleh rises, walks towards the clothes pegs) a plague fell upon the township, and he being both orphaned and crippled, was wed in order to ward off the disease, since then rumors of him have been wild and many, some say (Bayleh buttons her coat) he is a merciless criminal, others describe him as a brave soldier, some say he fell on his sword, yet others report him to be alive and well. And I say a criminal he cannot be, when scores of pigeons in our village square profited so from his charitable nature. A brave soldier also cannot be true, him being so crippled and sickly. And how could he fall in battle? If so many of his followers still search for him? Then again, how can he be alive when the ground has seemingly swallowed him? (to Leah) your soup is deserved of world renown.

Bayleh: (by the door) What was his name?

Tsiril Ciril: At home his name was Fishke.

Bayleh: You must excuse me, but I must greet my husband on his return from the house of study.

Tsiril Ciril: Even when you carry such a burden?

Lempel: (forced laugh) **The loyalty of the women of Altivka is also of world renown!** (Bayleh leaves)

Tsiril Ciril: **A most trying question have I dealt with during my long treasure hunt, an answer I have yet to find. Could it be that an innocent youth will turn overnight into a ruthless criminal? Fellow Jew, can this possibly be?**

Lempel: **Unlike you my friend, I have seen little of the world, answers I have none.**

Tsiril Ciril: **Took revenge on the Russians they said, head of the army they said, (laughs) even said that for a time he was even the Jewish Tsar, have you ever heard such tales? Since when did we desire a Jewish Tsar? Is not the Tsar Nikolei enough? (spits) Tfu! May he be cursed! (to Leah) A cup of steaming tea I would beg, (Leah rises and enters the kitchen suspiciously, to Lempel) along with the opportunity of shelter for the night.**

(the light rises at the front of the stage, the scenery is changed in the background, Bayleh awaits Fishke on the path leading to the house, Fishke arrives, looking pure and studious, he smiles)

Bayleh: (panic stricken to Fishke) **Tsiril Ciril is in our home! The bathhouse owner from Kisalon!**

Fishke: **Kisalon?**

Bayleh: **In our home!**

Fishke: **But Kisalon is far from here.**

Bayleh: (stops him) **In our home!**

Fishke: **What does he know?**

Bayleh: **Your bathhouse twigs scream in his face, yet he knows nothing.**

Fishke: (troubled) **I shall not return to Kisalon, I shall not be Fishke once more.**

Bayleh: I know, yet I fear that he wishes to spend the night in our home.

Fishke: I shall not meet his eyes, I'll hide my face.

Bayleh: He'll hear your voice.

Fishke: I'll remain silent.

Bayleh: He's expecting traditional Jewish hospitality.

Fishke: You are right, I have not learned from my previous sins, a valiant woman you are, a help meet, I'll listen to your advice, I'll go to the forest, I'll find shelter from the elements, in the morning I shall return.

Bayleh: If he leaves, I'll place the twigs on the window ledge, they will greet you, if they are not there, then return to your hiding place.

Fishke: Bid him farewell in the morning, now my students await lessons, (hugs Bayleh tightly) tell me the baby's name, so that till morning light I shall hear your voice whispering his name.

Bayleh: (laughs) Fishke we'll call him, your name commemorated for eternity, his name will be Fishke, if he be a boy. (Fishke holds Bayleh close and kisses her warmly, her eyes fill with tears, he leaves, Bayleh watches him and whispers) **"May it be thy will Lord our God, and God of our fathers, to lead us in safety and to direct our steps in safety, may thou bring us to our destination in life, happiness and peace. Deliver us from every lurking enemy and danger on the road. May we obtain favor, kindness and love from thee and from all whom we meet. Hear our supplication, for thou art God who hearest prayer and supplication. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who hearest prayer."**

Scene 24

Forest at the edge of the Jewish village of Altabika – Same evening

(Fishke sits on his large coat spread as a sheet on the dry autumn leaves. His leg is crippled and his leg iron is discarded to one side. He reads psalms from a book in his hand. His voice covers Bayleh's wayfarer's prayer)

Fishke: "By David, to you my God, I call my rock, be not deaf to me, for should You be silent to me I would be comparable to those who descend to the grave. Hear the sound of my pleading when I cry to you for help, when I lift my hands towards Your Holy Sanctuary. Do not cause me to be drawn with the wicked and with doers of iniquity who speak peace with their companions though evil is in their hearts". (from amongst a heap of leaves appears the head of Shoymer, Fishke's comrade of old, the leaves act as a blanket against the cold, he regards Fishke with surprise) **"Give them according to their deeds and according to the evil of their endeavors, according to their handiwork give them, render their recompense to them. For they study not the deeds of God or His handiwork, may He tear them down and not rebuild them. Blessed be the Lord for he has heard the sound of my pleading"**.

Shoymer: (to Fishke) **Psalms in the midst of the forest?**

Fishke: (startled) **Leave me alone.**

Shoymer: (rises, the leaves falling from him) **You leave me alone, you and your psalms, a little peace and quiet I search and here you are chirping in my ear like a cricket.** (silence, Shoymer approaches Fishke)
And what is the Rabbi doing here in the middle of the forest?

Running away from his students?

Fishke: **I look to rest from my travels.**

Shoymer: Then why the need to hide away? Perhaps you have sinned against our Lord?

Fishke: (closing the book, tries to rise) I shall be on my way.

Shoymer: (placing his heavy hand on Fishke's shoulder, throwing him amongst the rustling leaves) Just a moment Rabbi, you strive and discover, it is good, you strive and discover not, twice as good, you carry money with you?

Fishke: I carry none, I am on my way home.

Shoymer: And where does our Rabbi live?

Fishke: My home is in Altabika.

Shoymer: (sneering) Altabika is there, (points with his hand) yet you were headed in this direction, (points in the opposite direction) tell me the truth Rabbi, are you on your way to the whore house in Sololinta?

Fishke: (shudders) I have a wife who carries my child.

Shoymer: How fine, a Tora student with a wife at his side, carrying no doubt a male child that will continue to glorify his Jewish seed.

Fishke: (shyly) We know not yet the child's gender.

Shoymer: It's a boy I tell you, tell me I beg of you, what will be his name?

Fishke: (hesitates) We have yet to decide.

Shoymer: Fishke, you will call him, Rabbi have you heard of Fishke? (Fishke rigorously shakes his head) Of course you don't know (Shoymer rises to his knees in hatred) you know nothing, "pay no heed to our opponents" he cried, and proved to be correct, you know full well, but from his world you distanced yourselves, and his memory you erased, (silence) I shall not rest until I find him.

Fishke: (rises in respect) I shall be on my way.

Shoymer: (smiles, signals to Fishke's coat spread on the floor) **Be on your way rabbi yet leave behind your coat so I shall be afforded a warm covering for the night.**

Fishke: I would request the coat remain with me.

Shoymer: I would request that you tell me what you know of our savior Fishke, (silence) you are from amongst our opponents, I shall pay no heed to you! (silence) Rabbi, once I was like you, I left my study bench in order to follow his deeds (stands, his feet on Fishke's coat) I became a soldier in my ancestor's footsteps, (demonstrates martial art movements) my father's traditions I neglected and followed him instead, I saved his life in battle, he was a true hero, they say he fell in battle, though others say he is alive and well, thus I wish to return our former glory to it's rightful place, one village more, one village less, in the end I shall find him and save him from his amnesia just as I saved him back then on the field of battle. (shouts in Fishke's ear) Do you or do you not know of his whereabouts? (silence) Tell me where is our savior is and I shall return your coat, tell me learned rabbi, where is the savior to be found?

Fishke: I have nothing to tell you (turns to leave)

Shoymer: (grabbing his collar) Would you say that I am not Jewish? I hear your voice, you say to yourself "I am a kosher Jew, but Fishke and his army are goys, just like all the other goys," I hear your voice, along with the voice of my savior, "pay no heed" the voice says, "our opponents" I hear you both. (with his free hand he withdraws a sword from his boot and slashes Fishke's throat, Fishke collapses on the heap of leaves, blood spurting from his neck, his startled eyes still open) **There is none such as Fishke, the Jewish army will be rebuilt, I shall rebuild it!** (moves Fishke's body from the coat with his foot, searches through the deep pockets, puts a few zuz in his pocket and throws the psalm book to

the depths of the forest, he finds in an inner pocket Fishke's miniature sword, he regards it with astonishment, reads the inscription) **"Valiant hero- Fishke"**. (in amok he turns over Fishke's body, touches his face, searches for identifying marks, feels one leg, and then the other, discovers the leg iron and cries out) **The saviors iron leg brace! My father, my savior, Fishke!** (looks once again at the inscription on the sword and cries out) **"Valiant hero – Fishke" "Valiant hero – Fishke"** (covers his face with his hands and cries openly) **Our savior, our savior, the first Jewish Tsar, Fishke!** (the wind begins to blow and lifts the leaves around, creating a whirlwind around the dead body, Shoymer to himself) **Sacrilege, sacrilege,** (the wind strengthens) **"Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He created according to his will. May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days,** (sobs, insanity rising in his voice) **and within the life of the entire house of Israel, speedily and soon, and say, Amen.** (the light begins to dim slowly) **May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity. Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded, be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He. Beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations, that are ever spoken in the world, and say, Amen. May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us, and for all Israel, and say, Amen.** (Shoymer's cries overcome the sound of the leaves and the wind) **And say Amen, and say Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen"**

(DARKNESS – THE END)