

**THE RABBI
&
THE SHIKSA**

by Art Shulman

TIME The present

SETTING The office of Rabbi Persky at Temple Judea. It is a large room, tastefully furnished with his desk, a table, comfortable chairs, and bookcases, at least one containing religious books, and another secular books. A small plaque hangs on a wall, as does a photograph of his deceased wife, Miriam. A wooden charity box is on a table or the desk. Also in the office are flyers for classes.

ACT 1
SCENE 1

AT RISE: AL watches as RABBI looks through a book. RABBI wears an elaborate yarmulke. A plain one is in sight.

(HANNAH enters.)

RABBI

See, it was Hillel who said it, not Rabbi Akiva. Now pay up.

HANNAH

Goldbaum, you should know better than to bet on the Talmud with a man who teaches Hebrew school.

(AL takes a bill from his wallet and places it in the charity box.)

AL

To the fund.

RABBI

You'll have to leave soon, Al. David Feldman is coming in for his bar mitzvah lesson.

HANNAH

No, he's not. His mother just called. David's sick.

RABBI

Then Al, since Feldman cancelled, let's resume our card game from yesterday. I was about to clean you out.

HANNAH

Here, you need to sign this letter.

(HANNAH hands the letter to RABBI, who reads it. AL deals cards.)

AL

You look nice today, Hannah. Doesn't she, Rabbi?

RABBI

(Still proofing the letter, not looking up.) She looks nice every day.

HANNAH

Thanks.

AL

The Rabbi couldn't get along without you.

HANNAH

Thanks, Goldbaum.

AL

He can't type.

HANNAH

Rabbi, would you like me to take away these Jewish culture flyers? Your classes have started already.

(RABBI signs the letter and hands it to HANNAH. AL and RABBI start to play.)

RABBI

Nah, leave the flyers. I use them for scratch paper to keep score. *(To HANNAH)* Perfect, as usual.

HANNAH

Anything more I can do for you, Rabbi? Goldbaum?

RABBI

No thank you. Neither of you have said anything about my new yarmulke.

HANNAH

It's nice. More colorful than your usual ones.

(HANNAH or RABBI places the plain yarmulke in a drawer.)

AL

It's bigger than your other yarmulkes. Covers more of your bald spot.

RABBI

What bald spot?

AL

Why did you buy a new yarmulke?

RABBI

A rabbi doesn't need a reason to buy a new yarmulke.

AL

It's so fancy it belongs more in a Catholic church than a synagogue.

RABBI

Why shouldn't a rabbi wear something nice, if he can afford it? When this yarmulke gets dirty, do you think it should be drycleaned or go in the washing machine?

AL

You put yarmulkes in the washing machine?

RABBI

Why not? When we do the wash there are three types of loads -- whites, coloreds, and kosher.

AL

Kosher?

HANNAH

For dirty yarmulkes and tallises.

AL

Somehow I don't believe you.

RABBI

Things in the kosher load never get lost. God watches over.

(HANNAH exits)

AL

God has better things to do than watch over dirty yarmulkes. Although He doesn't seem to be watching too closely around here, lately.

RABBI

Al, I'm sorry the Executive Board didn't re-elect you Man of the Year.

AL

Maury Plotkin, Man of the Year! Hah! Just because he donated a stained glass window. That he didn't even stain himself!

RABBI

He also donated an ark for the Torah.

AL

A person shouldn't be Man of the Year just because he donates.

RABBI

Why did you win the award the past two years? Because you were on committees. Speaking of which, when's the next meeting of the Building Committee?

AL

I'm thinking about next Wednesday.

RABBI

Wednesday? That's the night of my class.

AL

No matter what night I called it you'd be busy with temple business. The Executive Board meeting one night, the Finance Committee another night, your class. You should get out more into the real world, outside the temple. Go to the fights.

RABBI

I'm not interested in fights.

AL

The night they have a heavyweight Jew fighting an Arab, I'm sure you'll be at the fights.

RABBI

Don't be anti-Semitic.

AL

Anti-Semitic?

RABBI

Arabs are Semites, like Jews. Knock them, you're anti-Semitic. The ACLU will be after you.

AL

I mean, you're not just a rabbi. You're a man too.

RABBI

Last time I looked being a rabbi and being a man weren't mutually exclusive. Of course, last time I looked being a rabbi and being a woman weren't mutually exclusive either. Gin!

AL

Rabbi, you should have more of a social life.

RABBI

Playing cards with you isn't enough of a social life?

AL

Fourteen points.

(RABBI writes the score on the scoring pad.)

RABBI

That's a schneid. You owe me five bucks.

AL

It should be illegal for a rabbi to win at gambling.

RABBI

It should be illegal for him to lose. Pay up or the Almighty will put you down in his book as a chazir.

AL

Here's your five bucks. It seems like half the money in the charity box comes from me losing to you.

(AL puts the money in the box. HANNAH enters)

HANNAH

Excuse me, Rabbi. Mr. Plotkin is here to see you.

RABBI

Thank you, Hannah. Tell him to come in.

HANNAH

Good luck!

(HANNAH exits. Shortly, PLOTKIN enters.)

AL

I'll change the date of the building committee meeting. How about next Thursday?

RABBI

Next Thursday is fine.

PLOTKIN

I'd like to attend that meeting. In fact, I'd like to be on your committee. The new Treasurer should be on a committee that's in charge of so much money.

RABBI

I agree. Maury Plotkin, I hereby anoint you a member of the Building Committee.

AL

Anoint?

PLOTKIN

Thank you.

RABBI

So what do we owe the honor of this visit?

PLOTKIN

Rabbi, I wonder if we can speak privately.

AL

I was just leaving. I'll put the charity box back in the hall.

RABBI

Let me take out the money, before you go.

AL

The money goes in his desk each day so it's safe.

(RABBI removes cash from the charity box, puts it in an envelope, and in his desk)

PLOTKIN

So that's where you hold it.

AL

Goodbye.

RABBI

Goodbye, Al.

PLOTKIN

Goodbye, Goldbaum.

(AL exits, taking the charity box with him.)

RABBI

So, sit and tell me what's on your mind. Would you like to play gin rummy while we talk?

PLOTKIN

I don't play gin rummy.

RABBI

I forgot. You have no discernable vices.

PLOTKIN

I'm afraid you might not want to hear what I'm going to say.

RABBI

People often tell me things I don't want to hear.

PLOTKIN

Rabbi, I take my job as Treasurer very seriously.

RABBI

You take lots of things very seriously. Which is good. A Treasurer doesn't take his job seriously, the organization can get into trouble.

PLOTKIN

Rabbi, the reason I came to speak to you today is because I wanted to tell you first, so it doesn't come as a surprise.

RABBI

So, tell me.

PLOTKIN

I know you're aware that Temple Judea has big financial problems.

RABBI

It's had financial problems since I've been here. They're no bigger now than they've always been.

PLOTKIN

Yes.... Well... Maybe they are.

RABBI

Go on.

PLOTKIN

The roof leaks, the parking lot needs repaving, we need new carpeting...

RABBI

I know. A man from a carpet company is measuring now.

PLOTKIN

...the congregation has been losing members, and contributions have declined every year for the past five. We're down to four hundred families.

RABBI

This is not news. The nature of a neighborhood changes. There are fewer Jewish families around. I've taken steps to reach out for new members. I've made telephone calls, I've added a whole evening of classes....

PLOTKIN

Yes, your cultural education program.

RABBI

What's wrong with my cultural education program?

PLOTKIN

Nothing. I wish you'd do more to foster the observance of Judaism here.

RABBI

What do you mean?

PLOTKIN

Instead of basing your sermons on the Bible, you address political issues. And there's talk that you want more of the services conducted in English instead of Hebrew.

RABBI

It's something for the congregation to consider. The world is changing.

PLOTKIN

I didn't come here to argue with you about that now. Rabbi, at the rate we're going, we'll run a deficit of almost fifty thousand dollars this year.

RABBI

We have a money market fund and the building fund to fall back on.

PLOTKIN

The building fund is for building, making capital improvements. And maybe we should hold off on getting new carpeting now.

RABBI

The old carpeting is torn. It's dangerous. Someone will trip. Besides it doesn't look nice.

PLOTKIN

We have to save money somewhere.

RABBI

So, you're the Treasurer. Do something about it.

PLOTKIN

I am. It's about time for your salary review, and, in my opinion, I'm afraid the temple can't afford you.

RABBI

So, don't give me a raise this year.

PLOTKIN

I'm not just talking about a raise.

RABBI

What are you talking about?

PLOTKIN

What I said. The temple can't afford you.

RABBI

What do you mean it can't afford me?

PLOTKIN

You've been here how many years? Twenty?

RABBI

Twenty-three.

PLOTKIN

And every year you got a raise.

RABBI

A merit raise.

PLOTKIN

This is a problem that often arises in business. People are at a place for a long time, given annual raises. After a while they're paid more than they're worth, more than they contribute.

RABBI

And in your opinion, I'm not worth what I'm paid.

PLOTKIN

I've taken the liberty of finding out what other congregations pay their rabbis, and far and away...

RABBI

Which other congregations?

PLOTKIN

Temple Beth El, for one.

RABBI

Rabbi Schwartz has been there a year. He makes bupkis. In twenty two years he'll make what I make.

PLOTKIN

Is Rabbi Schwartz a good rabbi?

RABBI

He's a fine rabbi.

PLOTKIN

Exactly my point. We can get a fine rabbi for a third of what we're paying you.

RABBI

Temple Beth El is not in the same type of community.

PLOTKIN

What has that got to do with it?

RABBI

A rabbi should make the average what his congregation makes.

PLOTKIN

Where did you learn this rule, in Rabbinical school?

RABBI

This rule exists not to make rabbis wealthy, but so members of his congregation think of him as an equal economically. So he can serve as their spiritual leader.

PLOTKIN

I mean no disrespect to your spiritual leadership. Listen, I am just one member of the Board, which will have to vote on this. However, I will make my recommendation. If the majority of the Board feels otherwise, they'll vote to renew your contract.

RABBI

Then, let's leave it to the Board. Plotkin, you've been Treasurer less than a month, and been in this community for what, two years, and ever since you got here you've had it in for me.

PLOTKIN

Rabbi, my only concern is for the future of this synagogue. My priorities, at this moment, are fiscal in nature.

RABBI

There's an old saying -- A rabbi whose congregation does not want to drive him out of town isn't much of a rabbi; and a rabbi they do drive out isn't much of a man. There is no way I'll leave my temple! The next Building Committee meeting is Thursday. I'll see you then.

PLOTKIN

I'll see you on Saturday, at services.

RABBI

But I'll be avoiding you then. So, I'll see you at the meeting of the Building Committee.

PLOTKIN

Good afternoon, Rabbi.

(PLOTKIN exits.)

RABBI

Putz! (*Beat*) Replace me with a younger rabbi?

(HANNAH enters.)

HANNAH

Would you like a cup of tea, Rabbi?

RABBI

Why suddenly would I want a cup of tea?

HANNAH

Because when Maury Plotkin visits you, you usually need something soothing afterwards.

RABBI

You don't need to bring me tea. Give the tea to the man who sleeps on the steps. Better yet, get him some soup.

HANNAH

The vagrant? He's not even Jewish.

RABBI

We Jews aren't obliged to feed only each other. Now, why not sit and chat with me a moment.

HANNAH

I don't have the time. I have a lot of work...

RABBI

Sit. Stop thinking of yourself always as an employee, rather than a friend. How is your mother?

HANNAH

She's doing fine.

RABBI

I have something for you.

(RABBI goes to the envelope in his drawer and removes a bill.)

Rent some movies for your mother. I hear there are some good ones available -- Exodus, the Ten Commandments, *(NOTE: ADD A HUMOROUS THIRD MOVIE HERE; E.G., "No Country For Altcockers", OR, "The one about that Jewish superhero, Schneider-man", etc..)*

HANNAH

But Rabbi, you're not supposed to give away money from the charity fund. The committee decides...

RABBI

Consider this a perk of the job. My position here allows me some discretion for repaying you. You could make twice what we pay you in a job on the outside. What does this plaque you gave me say?

HANNAH

"You're more than a boss. You're my friend." Even so, you shouldn't give me...

RABBI

Hannah, I only want to tell you I appreciate you. And you shouldn't spend all your free time taking care of your mother. You should find a man.

(RABBI hands HANNAH the money.)

HANNAH

I'm waiting for the right man to find me.

RABBI

Don't wait too long. You'll end up a lifelong single person, like me.

HANNAH

Lifelong single you are not. You were married.

RABBI

A long time ago. Eight years since Miriam passed away. It seems like a lifetime.

HANNAH

My mother said I should invite you to dinner one night, maybe a Saturday, after services.

RABBI

That's very nice of your mother. But I'm a pretty busy man, and a Saturday, I don't know...

HANNAH

I understand.

RABBI

By the way, Hannah, when this yarmulke gets dirty, does it go to the cleaners, or can it be handwashed? It doesn't have any cleaning instructions.

(RABBI removes the yarmulke and hands it to HANNAH.)

HANNAH

Let me see.

(THERESA enters.)

THERESA

Excuse me, I'm looking for the rabbi.

RABBI

You're in the right place.

THERESA

I know. The sign on the door says this is the rabbi's office. Is he here?

RABBI

Do I have the mature demeanor of a rabbi?

THERESA

Yes.

RABBI

Do I have the authoritative voice of a rabbi?

THERESA

Yes.

RABBI

Well, then...

THERESA

But you don't have the yarmulke of a rabbi.

(RABBI takes the yarmulke from HANNAH and puts it on.)

RABBI

How about now?

THERESA

Now you're talking. Rabbi, I came to talk with you about the carpeting estimate.

RABBI

You're a woman.

THERESA

I've been a woman my whole life. Except for the early years. (*Beats*) When I was a girl. Theresa Genovese is my name. I'm with Atlas Carpet.

(At some point, HANNAH places the money back into the envelope.)

RABBI

I thought it was a man who was measuring to give an estimate.

THERESA

Believe me, Rabbi, I'm not a man. But if I were a man I'd come up with the same estimate.

RABBI

Let's sit and talk business. Hannah, you'll join us. Hannah is my right hand man.

THERESA

You have a big temple here. Altogether, I figure you need nine hundred square yards for the synagogue itself, another hundred for the hallways surrounding...

RABBI

And what's your total price?

THERESA

I've got to work that out. Which I'll do later.