

# MIKVEH

BY

## HADAR GALRON

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For further information please contact:  
The Hanoach Levin Institute of Israeli Drama  
c/o The Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv, 30 Leonardo da Vinci St.,  
P.O.B 14033, Tel Aviv 6114001, Israel  
Tel: (+972)-3-6951188, Fax: (+972)-3-6061956  
Shimrit Ron, Director [shimrit@cameri.co.il](mailto:shimrit@cameri.co.il)  
Israeli Dramatists Website <http://dramaisrael.org/en/>

**First Production**

**“Beit Lessin” Theatre – Tel-Aviv  
(run by Tsippy Pine)**

**8.08.2004 ( on stage until 2009, over 600 performances)**

**Directed By : Michah Lewensohn**

**Dramaturgy : Goren Agmon-Nirve**

**Scenery : Kineret Kisch**

**Music : Eldad Lidor**

**Costumes : Netta Hacker**

**Original Cast (in order of appearance)**

**Shoshana – Miriam Gavrieli**

**Esti – Dana Shrayer**

**Hindi – Tracy Abromovitch**

**Shira – Naama Shapira**

**Chedva – Natali Neeman**

**Elisheva – Joey Reager \Gal Chapski**

**Tehila – Hadas Kalderon**

**Michal (Miki) – Anat Magen-Shevo**

**Translated by : Jeannette Posner & Hadar Galron**

\*Nominated for six Israeli Theatre Accadamy Awards – including:  
\*Best play \*Playwright \*Director \*Scenery

Won 2 theatre awards including : “Play Of the Year 2004“  
At the Israeli Theatre Accadamy Awards

“Mikveh” \ Hadar Galron

A womans' place

**Background :**

The play takes place in a local mikveh in an ultra-orthodox neighborhood in Israel .

A mikveh is the ritual bath in which religious Jewish women (from wedding until menopause) immerse once a month (7 clean days after the monthly period) in order to purify themselves from the 'impure blood' and be once again permitted (physically) to their husbands .

The mikveh itself is more like a small pool (rather than a *bath*) of water (with at least some percentage of rain water) at least 1.2 meters deep (so that one can fully immerse) . The place itself i.e; waiting room + pool + small shower-rooms with toilets (where each woman prepares herself for the sanctifying immersion) is also called a Mikve.

The mikve is the sole scenery for the whole play - divided into two locations ; the waiting room = W.R.( takes up most of the stage ) and the *pool* itself = P.

There are stairs leading down into the water and there is just enough room for the bath attendant \ supervisor = (balanit) to stand and supervise.

During the play there are two kinds of rings: the door bell from outside, and the intercom buzz of the ladies from inside the rooms – (they buzz when they are ready to immerse and wait for the attendant to take them to the pool). So: **Buzz**= inside intercom. **Ring** = door bell from outside.

A screen is also used between scenes as a screen for projecting biblical and halachic quotations of relevance

- Yiddish words or phrases will be numbered and written in bold letters with translation at the end of the play.

## Characters

**Shira:** 35 ,is the new bath attendant at the local Mikve . She is not only younger than the average bath attendant but also an outsider ;( she was not born in the religious community). She cannot take lies or hypocrisy and will always be the first to point out “the king is bare” – until it comes to her own home

**Shoshana-Dvora:** 60-70.Senior bath attendant . She’s been working in the local Mikve for over ten years and knows every religious family in the neighbourhood.. She has a daughter who left the religious community and was formally ‘cut off’(excommunicated) Despite her status and preaching – Shoshana secretly keeps in touch with her

**Chedva** , 35- 40 a battered woman , married to one of the popular public activists of the religious community. Chedva knows she must not disclose her personal problems in public in order not to ruin her husbands name – and deep inside feels shame and guilt ( after all – maybe she’s just not good enough for him?!). Even when Shira tries to intervene and help – Chedva feels it her ‘duty’ to look after her family and makes it clear her help is undesired – until she can’t survive without it..

**Hindi-Rochel** , 60+ , . Typical rich Belgium snob. Is a wig-designer and wears an expensive and fashionable wig to hide her age (looks not over 45). Although women after menopause are not obliged to immerse – Hindi comes to the mikve each month – for she fears if her husband realizes there will be no more children besides their one son – he may not love or touch her any more. When Shira becomes a threat to her privacy – Hindi does all she can to convince Shoshana to get rid of her.

**Tehila** , 19,beautiful redhead full of spunk on the one hand and fear on the other .The first time she arrives at the mikve is the night before wedlock. Tehila , who has always felt as if she never manages to do things right, realizes that a good marriage is the best way to become one of the community . However, she is petrified of intimacy –especially with a man she hardly knows, and the more she tries to force herself to love him – the more she detests him – and herself.

**Michal(orMiki)** ,30+ , a singer .Provocative and outspoken outwardly – but a very warm and loving person from within. She is secular but comes to the Mikve because her husband decided *lachzor bitshuva* = to become religious , and will not touch her if she won’t purify herself in the Mikve . She loves her husband and is doing all she can to save her marriage and give her children a ‘normal’ home – but everything about her is slowly becoming a threat to her husband and she reaches a point where she has to ask herself whether she is willing to give up almost everything she loves, and become something she is not.

**Estie** , 35+ , mother of six . Simple, hardworking, happy woman. Tactless; gullible and funny. Believes all she's told and everything written and somehow manages to always get the wrong end of the stick !

**Elisheva** , 10-12 , youngest daughter of Chedva cannot speak ( suffers from elective mutism )  
Elisheva, also being 'different' in a community that doesn't have much patience or understanding for the 'other' , shares a rare and special kinship with Tehila- as if they feel each others heartbeat. Her mutism is a physical form of her mothers helplessness.

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ACT 1 .

1.1

On the screen:

**“And the Lord divided between the waters above the heaven and the water below the heaven – and he named the waters above the heaven “sham –mayim” – “waters up there”**

-GENESIS 1:8

The Hebrew date is projected:

*1st of Shevat, 5764*

*(Lights up on the Mikveh bath. We see Shoshana, the senior bath attendant, in her 60s. standing above the mikveh overseeing Esti who is immersing in water.*

Shoshana

“Kasher!”

Esti

“Blessed are you O Lord our God king of the universe who has sanctified us with his laws and commanded us to immerse.”

Shoshana

Amen!

*(Esti dunks again)*

Shoshana

“Kasher!”

*(Esti dunks)*

Shoshana

“Kasher!”

*(Esti. 35 and a mother of 6, begins to step out of the pool)*

Shoshana

Ah! Only 3 times?! *Nu shoin...*

*(Shoshana stands with a towel outstretched so that Esti can take it, but Shoshana doesn't give.)*

Shoshana

You know what – immerse one more time – do a mitzvah! Tomorrow's the trial of the Jews in Iran – May God save them from those cursed anti-Semites!

*(Esti concedes and dunks again)*

Shoshana

“Kasher!”

Kosher and pure by the Jewish Law of Moses and Israel. Good month. It should be filled with *mazel*.

*(Esti emerges from pool and wraps herself in a towel)*

Esti

*A mechaya.* Thank goodness for the mikveh! – At home, I don't have time for a bath – I'm lucky if my kids give me time to wipe my tuchus

Shoshana

I noticed you had a Cesarean this time?

Esti

What? *(touches her stomach)* Ah! Yes...you don't miss a thing, Shoshana...

Shoshana

That's what I'm here for. Now , excuse me... I'm alone.

Esti

Alone? But I heard the new attendant arrived... *(Trying to recall the name)* Uhhhhh...

Shoshana

Yes, Shira. But today she's a bit late.

Esti

She's not from here, is she?

Shoshana

No

Esti

I knew it! No woman from around here would take the job... not after what happened! Even my mother—who isn't superstitious—she said it's like a curse, such a thing! ! In fact, some thought that you'd also resign after what happened, but I told them – At your age? Where'd you find another job? ... Even in the mikve they've begun taking on young attendents – She young isn't she? This Shira-whatever? What's she like?

Shoshana

Esti, you know I don't gossip – for better or for worse...

Esti

Yes, but Hindi said, that her son Yanki said, that they fired this Shira from the old age home because she interfered too much – she's too 'opinionated'.

Shoshana

She said; he said! And I say that she's been here two weeks and I bless every day she's here. Anyway – what's wrong with being opinionated? We don't have to be a flock of sheep!

Esti

Tell me, is it true her husband's a cripple and she's his nurse?

Shoshana

Esti, this is a pure and holy *mikveh*, and I won't defile it with this 'loshen horuh' (evil tongue). No gossip!...

Esti

It's not Loshun Horuh– God forbid! But there are things it's better to know than to find out ... no ?! *(The doorbell rings. Lights up on the waiting room. Shoshana comes and opens the door. Hindi enters- an attractive and aristocratic middle aged woman from Belgium who looks much younger than she really is. She's wearing a fashionable and attractive wig.)*

¶:במחוק

Shoshana

Hindi! I see you and remember it's *Rosh Choydesh*.

Hindi

Yes, by me, every month 'pukht' each, like clockwork, thank God...*(searching for something/someone)* Nu?

Shoshana

Nu what?

Hindi

Nu, where's our new Mikve attendant?

Shoshana

Today she's a bit late. *(she laughs)* She must have known you were coming to check her out this evening!

Hindi

*Shoshana'leh*, this is no joke! My Yanki, he volunteers at the old-age home, they almost fired her 2 months ago– she's causing a lot of trouble with her big mouth! Five people left that place because of her! Why do you need such a *loch'n'kop*?!

Shoshana

Hindi-Rochel, try to be nice! Give her a chance! It's a *mechaya* I don't have to do all the work alone; with my back...and I don't have to tell you how long I've been looking for someone...she broke the curse.

Hindi

Or she's continuing it...

Shoshana

Hindi-Rochel! *G'vault!* You don't know when to stop!

Hindi

8pm and she's still not here? Where did you find this *metziya*?

Shoshana

I didn't find her! Pinchas did...

Hindi

Ahhhh, 'Reb Pinchas Wasserstrumph!' Now he's also choosing our mikveh attendants?

Shoshana

He has some connection with her husband, *ich vayse*...you know what...it's better to have some new faces around here.

*(Pause)*

Hindi

Be careful that he doesn't replace your face! What? ...Maybe he thinks that a younger person can handle this place alone...?

Shoshana

Nonsense! He brought her here because I asked him!...and you tell your Yanki to stop wasting his time-- he's not going to find a bride in an old age home. You could have been a grandmother by now.

Hindi

He isn't ready yet

Shoshana

What do you mean "Not ready"?! Now that's a curse! "18 years to the chupa"-that's what written and they know what they're talking about. And your boy's already 21, *kin a'hura*.

Hindi

20. Shoshana-D'vora, he's 20...I only have 1 son...my Yankle deserves the best!

Shoshana

You remember that once we thought of your Yanki for my Racheli...?

Hindi

God laughs at us when we make too many plans...

Shoshana

Right. (*sighs*)

Well, a bride is coming tonight. I must--

Hindi

Who?

Shoshana

Fruchter, I'm going to prepare the room.

*Exits*

Hindi

Ah... Tehila Fruchter. Spoiled brat

*Esti enters*

Esti

What, she still hasn't arrived?

Hindi

Esti! Good month... Long time no see--you haven't been here in a while...

Esti

A year and a half! The pregnancy...the birth...the bleeding after the birth – which gets which gets longer with each pregnancy, you know? Well, how would you know? You only have one. My Froyke, *nebach*, he just can't wait anymore: "when are you going to the mikveh? When are you going to the mikveh?" As if I'm delaying it on purpose! All of the kids are by my mother tonight, otherwise *gernisht—nothing!!* Just get into bed--the baby starts crying, bty the time I calm her- Davidula wants to come into our bed, Malka-Dassa wants a cup of water and Sarah-Leah's had a bad dream! But at my mother's house they sleep like babies, and Froyke and I can--

Hindi

(*doesn't want to hear it*) Nu-nu

Esti

Nu, so what's with this Shira?

Hindi

She's late.

Esti

Shame...I really wanted to meet her. Shoshana says she's wonderful. (*Hindi doesn't respond*). What's wrong with being opinionated? No everyone has to be a flock of sheep.

Hindi

Believe me -- 'Opinionated' is not her problem.

Esti

No? So what's her problem?

Hindi

(loud whisper) She's not one of us!

Esti

What, she's not from a religious family...? Tell me: She's a choyzer Bitshuvah?  
*Doorbell.*

Shoshana (*from offstage*)

Hindi, Are you getting the door?

*Hindi opens the door. Shira enters*

Shira

Hello! Good evening...good month.

*Shira hangs up her coat, settles in, etc.*

Hindi

I'd say good *night*. So you're Shira?

Shira

Yes. And you?

Hindi

Hindi

Esti

(*eager*) And I'm Esti

Hindi

We've heard a lot about you.

Shira

Only good things, I hope.

Esti

We've never had such a young mikveh-lady...

Shira

that'll pass with time...Ahhh...Shoshana!

Hindi

Wait for her here. She'll be out in a moment. Where've you come from?

Shira

Efrat

Esti

We've never had a mikveh attendant from outside Jerusalem.

Shira

That'll pass too, God willing, in another 6 months we'll be moving here.

Esti

And what do you think of our mikveh then?

Shira

Very... nice. Really... well kept. Lovely Mikveh.!

Hindi

Yes, Shoshana and Yochi always made sure it was lovely here.

Shira

When did Yochi leave?

Hindi

Oh, it's been at least a year.

Esti

May her memory be blessed

Shira

*(shocked)* Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know she.

Hindi

No reason to be sorry, we all come to an end. But it's definitely disturbing. She drowned.

Shira

Drowned?

Hindi  
Yes. Shoshana didn't tell you?

Shira  
No.

Hindi  
In the mikveh...

Shira  
In the mikveh?!

Hindi  
You didn't hear?

Shira  
How can one possibly drown in the mikveh? I mean, the water barely reaches [puts her hand on her shoulder]—!

Esti  
That's exactly what I said! Shoshana said it was 'a work accident', but everyone knows she did it on purpose...

Shira  
Who? Shoshana??

Esti  
No! Yochi! She committed suicide!

Shira  
Why?

Esti  
Post-partum depression...Just imagine being **depressed** after having a baby?! I mean, children are happiness!... And she left behind 7 orphans, *nebuch!*... there is no forgiveness for that – even from God! (*like a ghost-story*) Pinchas Wasserstrumph himself closed the mikveh for 3 months --- there was a big debate over whether you could purify this place after a thing like that. As for me, this is my first time here since the tragedy – it gives me there shivers in my heart.

*Shoshana enters...*

Shoshana  
Esti! Did you need something else before you go?!

Shira  
Shoshana...

Shoshana

Ah, so you finally arrived?

*Esti takes out her purse to pay*

Shoshana

Leave it Esti, it's okay...

Esti

Why? I want to pay.

Shoshana

I won't take money from you!... good night. It should be with *mazel*.

*Esti closes her purse*

Esti

Thank you Shoshana, good night. (*reluctant to leave and miss something*) I have to run...Froyke is waiting for me on pins!

*Esti reopens her purse takes out some change and puts it in charity box. She exits.*

Shoshana

*Nebuch*, they don't have a penny. And they just had their sixth child, *kineayn a'hura*.

Shira

They should live and be healthy... but if they haven't got the means, why **six**? And *noch* "Froyke's waiting on pins"...!

*Shoshana laughs. Even Hindi chuckles*

Shoshana

Tell me, what happened to you today?

Shira

Sorry. I tried calling but...

Shoshana

Nu, And you expect me to do *my* work and *your* work and answer the telephone?

Shira

You're right. And actually it was my fault. There was a suspicious bag on the bus and only after they cleared everyone off and were about to blow it up, I realized it was mine!

Shoshana

(*reluctantly amused*)Again with the bus?... You just have to leave earlier.

SHIRA

Right . That's what I said to myself ! Much earlier

Shoshana

Well, now you're here, so come on, let's start working.

Shira

Of course

Shoshana

Hindi, the room with the window is waiting for you...

Hindi

Thank you, Shoshana dear.

Shoshana

Shira... please 'do' the first room. (hands her the mop)

Hindi

Shoshana-D'vora. *You* will be supervising my immersion, right?

Shoshana

Me, of course me! Shira doesn't supervise yet.

Shira

I know how to do *t'vila*! I passed the course!

Shoshana

Of course you know how to do *t'vila*! Otherwise you wouldn't be here. But give the ladies a little more time, until they feel comfortable with you...

Shira

How much more time?

Shoshana

At least a month. What's the rush? You're just beginning, *maidele*!

Hindi

(*to Shira*) She's a smart woman...you could learn a lot from her. (*exits*)

Shoshana

(*calling to Hindi off stage*) Hindi! You'll see a new sign: no conditioner.

Hindi

No conditioner? Vus?

Shoshana

They informed us that conditioner blocks.

Hindi

(*pops her head back in*) Nu-Nu! Since when does our bald Rabbi use conditioner?

Shira

*(once they are alone)* Shoshana, can I ask you something?

Shoshana

Not now, there's no time to...

Shira

I have to! Please! What exactly happened to Yochi?

Shoshana

Oh! Don't mix yourself up with *loshen haruh!* (gossip)

Shira

But Shoshana – I've been here for two weeks and you didn't even tell me that the previous Mikve attendant drowned!

Shoshana

She didn't drown

Shira

So what happened to her then?

*Bell rings – the door and the intercom*

Shoshana

We have work to do. Open the door. *(she points to some of the rooms, she begins to walk towards 'Hindi's room' and then turns)* mop the floors so they don't slip, and see to it that everything is as clean as it should be.

Shira

For heaven's sake, I know what to do.

*Shira opens the door. Chedva and Elisheva enter. Elisheva is about 10 yrs old. She doesn't speak. Chedva is wearing dark glasses to hide her black eye .)*

Chedva

Good month!!!

Shira

Chodesh tov. I'm Shira. *(Chedva looks at her to see if she knows her or if she should know her, Shira notices her bruises)*

Chedva

*(with a spontaneous hug or a warm shake of the hand , Shira gets a closer look at the black eye)* You're the new mikveh attendant? Welcome. I'm Chedva. Congratulations! Poor Shoshana, for a year she was here alone...it's not easy...

Shira

You...um...are you okay?

Chedva

Fine. *(remembering her dark shades covering her black eye)* Oh, this? This is nothing. I fell. It looks much worse than it is.

Shira

You fell? Where did you fall? Down the stairs??

*Shoshana enters and hears Shira*

Shoshana

You heard her. She fell. Chedva'leh what will be the end of you with all these falls?

Shira

You mean...this often happens?

Shoshana

Shira...which room is ready for her?

Shira

Give me a chance *(to finish preparing)*...!

Shoshana

What are you waiting for...?

*Shira disappears into one of the rooms. A moment of quiet between Shoshana and Chedva. Chedva comes closer to Shoshana as if wanting to whisper a secret. Shoshana immediately starts 'chatting'*

Shoshana

I suppose Pinchas is under a lot of pressure now with all these elections...? Isn't it just wonderful how he slowly but surely climbed the ladder from our local council to the religious council...and now... general elections. We need an MP like him... *Shkoyech* (25)! Good for him! For you as well!

Chedva

Shoshana...*(she removes her glasses. Shoshana can't look at her battered face)*

Shoshana

Shhh... I don't interfere between husbands and wives... it's him you need to speak to – only him. Remember what *mazel* you had to find such a husband—he's charismatic and a good person basically. Other women would have gladly jumped on the wagon, but he chose you. You! To be his "*Eyzer Knegdo*"(27) his sole mate... and he's a very important man in our community. He brings us a lot of respect... [look how he climbed from the religious council to the local council – and now please God with the elections..](#) *(she puts Chedva's glasses back on her)* Okay. So, sometimes it's hard for him. He's busy, it's

natural...and you're doing good Chedva'leh, very good. You fall and get right back on your feet--until you learn exactly how it is with him, and then you won't fall anymore...you understand? And you tell him from me *we're all praying he should get elected and become a Kneset member.. all of us!*

Chedva

I'll tell him.

Shoshana

And think of the children—your little girl!

*Elisheva has taken all of her clothes and runs toward the Mikveh pool.*

Chedva

Elisheva!

*Chedva follows Elisheva, Shoshana begins picking up the clothing.*

Shoshana

Oy very! Not again...? Don't let her go into the mikveh

*Chedva comes in with Elisheva who is wearing an undershirt and skirt ...fighting because Elisheva wants to go back to the water... Elisheva disconnects herself from her mother and starts banging the floor with her fists - Chedva calms her by hugging her tightly. Shira enters*

Shira

The room...is ready.

Chedva

Thank you. Elisheva, you wait for me out here with Shoshana and Shira, okay? *(to Shira & Shoshana)* if there's a problem...

Shira

*(confidently)* Don't worry – she'll be fine here *(Chedva goes out into one of the rooms)*

Shoshana

Chedva'leh...No conditioner!

Chedva

Why no conditioner?

Shoshana

The rabbi said.

Chedva

Oh well--Good to see the *halocha* is still being updated.

Shira

(to *Elisheva*) what's your name? ... what's you're name?

Shoshana

Her name is *Elisheva*.

Shira

What a beautiful name, *Elisheva*. How old are you?

Shoshana

It's a waste of time.

Shira

Are you shy?

Shoshana

The child, she doesn't speak.

Shira

She's mute?

Shoshana

I didn't say mute. I said she doesn't speak.

Shira

She can hear though...

Shoshana

You never know ..

Shira

You can see that she can hear. What's wrong with her?

Shoshana

Nothing's wrong! A few years ago she simply stopped talking! They say it's some kind of illness.

Shira

What do you mean "They say"? Haven't they tried to treat her?

Shoshana

Tried ?! They went to the best doctors in the country! She is the daughter of *Pinchas Wasserstrumph*. He's well connected, and as far as money's concerned – that's no problem ... believe me... if there was anything they could do—you think they wouldn't have done it?

Shira

It's really strange ...She's got such clever eyes.

Shoshana

Yes, it's a shame (changing her tone to be more assertive) But Shira... it's really none of our business. (glances at the clock) Why hasn't the bride arrived yet?

Shira

(excited) What? We have a bride coming tonight?

Shoshana

I hope so... Tehila Fruchter. Her future mother-in-law has paid in advance! Brides usually arrive especially early. But this one, she always causes trouble.

Shira

Always?!? (*laughs*) How many times has she been married?

Shoshana

This is her first time and please God her last... girls always seem to be the troublemakers.

Shira:

How would you know? You only have boys, don't you? (*beat*).

Shoshana:

(*almost too eagerly*) Oh yes! (*sorrowfully, slightly strangely*) Only boys... only boys ... (*The intercom buzzes she immediately returns to herself*). That'll be Hindi... I'm going in. (Shira & Elisheva remain by themselves on stage)

Shira

Elisheva, you want to help me a little, maybe –

(*Elisheva smiles a big smile and nods enthusiastically. She gets up to take the mop from Shira's hand, however-just then, the bell of the front door rings erratically and in addition someone bangs on the front door as if being chased.... Elisheva immediately backs away. Shira opens the door – Tehila, the bride, rushes in breathing heavily, and slams the door behind her. She stands with her back to the door*)

Tehila

Don't let them! Please! don't open the door!

Shira

What is it? Is someone trying to hurt you?

Tehila

My mother, her mother, 2 aunts, 3 sisters, 5 friends from my class, and a few neighbors who joined in on the way here...I just can't anymore!

*Elisheva moves to hug Tehila*

Not now Elisheva.

*Doorbell rings*

They all want to see me dive into matrimony! I don't want them here.

*Shira moves to console her*

Don't touch me...

*Again the doorbell.*

I'll open it.

*She opens the door*

All of you -- GO HOME!!!

Are you Shoshana?

Shira

No, I'm --

Tehila

Then who's Shoshana?

Shira

Look - I'm also a mikveh attendant here.

Tehila

Where. Is. Shoshana?

*Shoshana enters*

Shoshana

I'm Shoshana. And you must be the beautiful virgin-bride... all alone...?

Tehila

I hope so!

Shoshana

A bride with no escort? Shame... Didn't you want anyone with you?

---

Tehila

I don't want anything.

Shoshana

You're right. Dip and go...when was your *hefsek*?

Tehila

The 14<sup>th</sup>.

Shoshana

You counted 7 clean days?

Tehila

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Yes.

Shoshana

Internal inspection?

Tehila

Yes. (*a double take*) What?!

Shoshana

Did you check with the Gauze pad?

Tehila

No!

Shoshana

Next time. Remind me to give you some pads to take home, free of charge. With or without a bath?

Tehila

With. Without. Nothing. I said, I don't want anything. I...I...I just can't

Shoshana

You can't what?

Tehila

Can't anything.

Shoshana

Can't immerse yourself?

Tehila

No. tomorrow. To...to be with a man. I can't! I've never been with... a man before!

Shoshana

I should hope not! Come on.

Tehila

No ! No, (*takes a paper from her bag*) I need you to sign this for me

Shoshana

What's this?

Tehila

Look, I don't know him at all! I need time. A week, 2 weeks, 2 days– something!

Shoshana

*Robaynu shel oylam!!* What do you want?

(Pause)

Tehila

I need you to sign that I'm not yet pure- that I'm still unclean to ....you know...that I can't .. that I'm crippled... that oh, I don't care what ! Just not tomorrow... not on the wedding night ! ...

Shoshana

An unclean bride?! *Oy vey*(29) ..we shouldn't know of such tragedies . Hindi  
There is no greater shame than that.

Tehila

Please! You must! I don't know what to do! It scares me! I don't –

Shoshana

Shshsh....it's nothing. You're just nervous. Believe me—tomorrow night under the *chupa* you'll bless me that I never made you an impure wife!

Hindi

It'll be the talk of the wedding. Don't deny your mother her *nachus*!

Shoshana

And you're not impure!

Tehila

But I just can't!! You – (*she turns to Shira*) you said you're also a mikveh attendant. Sign for me!

Shira

...I...

Shoshana

She can't sign anything for you. I am in charge here. Now just calm down. Calm down, Tehila. You'll see everything will be alright. We've all been through this.

Tehila

I don't want to! I just can't!

Shoshana

Come now, come *maidele*

Shira

Perhaps it's possible to--

Shoshana

Don't you interfere! (to Tehila) If you want, you can sit down here a while and calm down. Look--here are *Halocha* books explaining all a bride needs to know.

Tehila

Are there any books with... pictures?

Shoshana

Pictures? What do you want pictures for?!? You're going to perform a *mitzvah*.

Tehila

I know it's a *mitzvah*. I'm familiar with the *jewish law*..

Shoshana

So? And you're asking me to go *against* the halocha?

Tehila

No! I only...(sees she's at a dead end ...) O.K. - tell me what to do...

Shoshana

Good girl! You're wonderful. So here we go...Soap. Shampoo. Comb. Hairbrush. Toothbrush. Nail polish remover? Q-tips for your ears...for your belly-button...you've everything you need?

Tehila

Oh! I forgot conditioner

Shoshana & Hindi

It's forbidden!

Tehila

What's forbidden?

Shoshana

Conditioner

Tehila

But I can't wash my hair without conditioner. I'll look like cotton candy!!

Hindi

From tomorrow you need a head covering anyway –(gives her her card) Allow me to solve all your problems!

Shoshana

Maydeleh, it blocks.

Tehila

What blocks what?

Shoshana

Conditioner blocks between you and the purifying waters.

Tehila

But I wash out the conditioner!

Shoshana

I only get instructions. Conditioner: *blocks!*

Tehila

But I can't!!!

Shira

Ah.. In my opinion we ought to let the bride use conditioner if she must! (*Freeze for a second – everyone is shocked*).

Shoshana

*(takes a deep breath)* But I didn't ask for your opinion! *(to Tehila strongly but quietly)* You said you forgot your conditioner, right? So why the *Guntze* (35) argument? Go into that room *(points)*, I'll be in soon ... *(spirit-broken, Tehila exits)*

(Shoshana departs from Hindi by the door congratulating her for the way she handled both Tehila and Shira. Simultaneously, Shira takes a small bottle of conditioner, gives it to Elisheva and sends her to Tehila's room... Shoshana doesn't see and makes her way back to the rooms. Elisheva returns, smiling)

Shira

Did you give it to her? OK! Now do the room at the end!

*Chedva enters, seeing Elisheva--Chedva looks at her approvingly*

---

Shira

Chedva, right?

Chedva

Yes.

Shira

Look, I'm a trained nurse and I -*(Chedva draws back)* How much change do I owe you?

Chedva

I fell . That's it !... You don't owe me anything – put the change in *tzdoka*

Shira

Chedva – it doesn't look good – If this happens to you often it's worth taking a blood test. How much goes to charity??

Chedva

Blood test? Oh ... put 20 shekels in.

Shira

To check that there is no medical problem that causes the bruising (*quickly adds*) or even the falls – Do you need gauze pads?

Chedva

No. Wait, you said the bruises could appear by themselves? For no reason? You know what ? Give me a packet of gauze.

Shira

(*handing them to her*) Here. Tell me... when did this start? These...er...these falls?

Chedva

Oh, Years ago , years .....There have been better times when ...(stops) but it's at least...years! (*they continue talking the lights are dimmed and the attention is focused in the mikveh on Shoshana and Tehila*) They continue talking as lights shift to

### **MIKVEH POOL**

Shoshana

How many times do you immerse, *maydeleh*?

Tehila

I don't (know) –

Shoshana

Shshshh... you must'nt speak ...do it seven times!

(*Tehila dunks*)

No, no! Your lovely hair, *kenayn a'hura*. You must get all of it under the water. Again.

(*Tehila dunks again*)

Gooood, no – no! without touching the wall.

Tehila

I didn't touch the–

Shoshana

Shshshh...! Your hand touched the wall. Come on go under again. Feet off the floor.. head down..dooown .. hands not touching the wall.. *otazoy*.(36)! ... Kosher.. now the blessing then another 6 .

### **Waiting Room**

Shira

Here's the phone number...

Chedva

But what should I do?

Shira

Just call...and eh...they'll tell you what to do.

Chedva

Good. Thank you (*Shoshana enters just when Shira hands Chedva the paper with the phone number*)...to mention that you, eh You sent me?

Shoshana

(*suspiciously but with a smile*) Well well ... What's going on here?

Chedva

I'm just going. Where's Elisheva? Pinchas is having a meeting at home this evening....Elisheva!

*Elisheva enters with the mop*

Shoshana

Now look at this ! My new helper's already got herself a helper!!

Chedva

Come Elisheva...

(*she doesn't budge*)

Give her back the mop.

Shoshana

And don't forget to tell him from me...it's a real treat, *mamesh* a treat.

Chedva

I won't forget (*she exits w/ Elisheva*)

Shoshana

Shira. What's the matter with you today?

Shira

Me?! What's the matter with me?

Shoshana

You( really) must remember that the ladies who come here come to be served – and it's our duty to give them that service

Shira

I get that!

Shoshana

We can't give less than that service, but we can't give more either .

Shira

What do you mean 'more'?

Shoshana

We're not social workers, not psychologists, and we're not nurses either.

Shira

But we are human beings...

Shoshana

First and foremost human beings. That's why I can understand why you made a mistake.

Shira

I made a mistake? How d'you mean?

Shoshana

What are all these little notes you're handing out?

Shira

(No notes!) I saw a woman...in a terrible state...and...I tried to help her.

Shoshana

She fell! She told you that she fell!

Shira

*(trying to control herself)* It didn't look like a fall to me. It looked more like .... like..

Shoshana

Careful Shira! You're new here. I've known Chedva for years. If she said she fell...

Shira

Well it didn't look like a fall to me!

Shoshana

It's none of our business.

Shira

She needs help!

Shoshana

IT IS NOT YOUR JOB. Please understand

Shira

But Shoshana –

Shoshana

No buts! No Buts ! In our community such interference is unacceptable! Chedva didn't ask for your help

Shira

And what about the bride – Tehila? She did ask for help!

Shoshana

Tehila ! That's a different matter altogether – she's under pressure... She can't reason properly ! You want to help her? Tell her she'll get through it– she'll be fine, like all of us...

Shira

And if not?

Shoshana

She has no choice! And she'll be alright. Believe me. I've seen enough brides in my time.

*Tehila enters, to the reception desk and takes out purse. Shira and Shoshana quiet.*

Shoshana

(sweetly ) Your mother in laws' paid already, it brings a blessing. *(without saying a word Tehila moves to the direction of the door) Mazel-Tov (Tehila carries on with her exit from the front door and slams it behind her)*

Shira

Look at her!

Shoshana

Shiraleh, it's none of our business. True - in the mikveh one can't hide anything – but that doesn't give us permission interfere ...

Shira

I'm not interfering!

Shoshana

You have to respect the privacy of every woman that comes here. Without that respect you won't be able to keep your position here ... or anywhere else for that matter...

Shira

I understand.

Shoshana

And believe me, for me it'll be a real shame, because I'm beginning to like you.

Shira

...Thank you...I'll do my best.

Shoshana

I know you will and I think you'll learn very quickly. (*calms down*) Oy! **Ich hob nisht kan koyach**(39) (*sighs*) What a day, and we've still got to clean the rooms .

Shira

If you want, I can do it . Leave me the key, and I'll lock up.

Shoshana

No! Nooo... I can't leave you by yourself.

Shira

Why not? To make up for my being late... I've thought of offering a few times.

Shoshana

But you've got a long journey home. What if you miss your last bus?

Shira

Amatzia, my husband, he can come and pick me up.

Shoshana

Amatzia!?He's not...? I mean—is he okay?

Shira

He's over the worst...really – feel free to go.

Shoshana

Is he back at work?

Shira

Not yet – anyway he'll have to find a different job – but Please God...

Shoshana

Are you sure?

Shira

Positive.

Shoshana

Thank God you're here.

*Reaching out her hand, smiling, Shira accepts and laughs.*

Shira

Thanks.

Shoshana

*(Pats her shoulder with her other hand) So ... I'll get going ...home I mean ... (starts going. Takes her bags etc...) don't forget to turn off the boiler.*

Shira

I won't forget...just...The key.

Shoshana

*(halts)* Oy yoy yoy! *(you can see that she is debating whether to leave the key with her)*.  
I haven't duplicated it yet... *(hesitating)* You won't be late tomorrow?

Shira

Me? Late?

*Shoshana laughs and leaves. Shira locks the door.*

## Scene 2

*Shira sits, massages her feet, stretches, touches her neck, and begins to unbutton her blouse. As the lights dim, she gets up and goes toward the Mikveh. Music gets louder. The lights in the Mikveh go on and we see Shira already inside the waters, dunking with pleasure and joy, relaxed.*

*A telephone rings. Shira doesn't answer.*

*Voice over: (begins as a prayer and becomes a song – I have the tune if you wish)*

May it be thy will... that thy Holy presence remain between me and my husband and inspire us with only pure and holy spirits.

And keep far from us

All evil thoughts

All doubts that may occur

And give us a pure and holy soul

Let our eyesight never wander

From each other

To anyone –in the world

Keep my eyes for him alone

And keep his eyes for me

And may it be in my eyes the there is no gooder, fairer or more charming man than he – and so shall I be in his eyes – as if there's no woman in the world more beautiful, goodhearted and honest than myself... Amen.

*Lights fade.*

*On the screen:*

A man with no wife has no good, no help, no blessing, no luck, no forgiveness...and even no life.

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## Scene 3

*It is exactly a month later*

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*The calendar shows /On the screen:*

*1st of Adar, 5764*

*Shoshana and Hindi are talking quietly in the corner of the reception area. Elisheva plays or draws at the other side of the room. We may see Shira supervising an immersion in the mikveh.*

Hindi

But what does she do here in the mornings?

Shoshana

What mornings?

Hindi

Shoshanala --I'm telling you--I've seen her a number of times coming out of here in the mornings, around eightish... maybe even before

Shoshana

Impossible... There's nothing to do here in the morning- sometimes she doesn't even leave before midnight..

Hindi

Then perhaps she doesn't leave at all ....?

Shoshana

What do you mean? She stays *here*?!

Hindi

Perhaps ...!

Shoshana

No 'perhaps'! It's impossible - her husband comes to fetch her.

Hindi

And who's her husband...?

Shoshana

Amatzia ...

Hindi

You've met this Amatzia?

Shoshana:

No...

Hindi

So how do you know?

Shoshana  
 Know what? That he comes to fetch her?  
 Hindi  
 No—that he's...

Shoshana  
 That he's what?  
 Hindi  
 That he IS.

Shoshana  
*(Hindi smiles)*  
 You mean there's no Amatzia?  
 Hindi :  
 Perhaps ...

Shoshana :  
 Hindi Rochel ! *Gevult* (10)! You don't know when to stop!  
 Hindi  
 One can never know- Truth can be stranger than fiction!

Shoshana  
 Och!! He's forever calling!! Wanting to know where she is – by the rate of it one would think she works in the men's mikveh!  
 Hindi  
 Shoshana'leh, you keep an eye on her...

*Hindi opens a cabinet*  
 Have you seen this? *Gib a kick*(42)!  
*Shoshana takes out a sleeping bag*

Shoshana  
*Gevauld!* A sleeping bag? Do you really think she sleeps here?!

Hindi  
 Well why else would this be here?

Shoshana  
 A *chutzpa!!* I'll come here tonight and check... she can't do whatever she wants here!

Hindi

You're quite right. If I were you I'd also be annoyed... It's Tuesday today... perhaps you'll come in on your way back from Racheli?

Shoshana

Shshh...that's exactly what I'll do.

Hindi

By the way--How is Racheli? She settled in a bit more?

Shoshana

She'll be ok please God. She got a scholarship for another year.

Hindi

Well--she was always very talented.

Shoshana

Frankly – I preferred her drawings before she started at that fancy-shmancy art school.

*Telephone rings*

Hello Mikveh...we're open for another 2 hours, at least. Of course no one answered all day-- we're only open after nightfall...because that's the *halocha!*—*the law*...clean? You must be joking...I personally change the water each day here! Believe me, It's cleaner than your swimming pools ... men don't use this mikveh– it's only a ladies mikveh...right, there are many ladies, but they only immerse after a bath... Madam... What's your name?...Michal! Oh, it's you again?! You've been calling for 2 months but you never come, so maybe you'll be kind enough to tell me exactly what you want instead of wasting my precious time?...(buzzer) okay, I have to...what? No, it isn't possible to drown in the mikveh – unless you want to drown – and if you do—do me a favor—don't come here, there are other mikvehs ... If you want to immerse – you're welcome! Good night!

*She hangs up. To Hindi:*

A shiktzer! I bet she didn't even go to the mikveh before her wedding night! Ha! No wonder the Jews have such *tzures*.

*Shira enters. On edge.*

Hindi

Good month! Good evening Shira..

Shira

Good month, Hindi.

Shoshana

Have you done all the rooms?

Shira

Not all ... I've been supervising immersions of women who were ready. (*Shoshana & Hindi exchange glances*) You said a month!

Shoshana

We said that we'd give them time to feel comfortable with you...

Shira

And they did feel comfortable with me. I asked them.

Shoshana

And what exactly did you expect them to say? 'No'?!

Shira

You can see that they feel comfortable with me –

Shoshana

Which ladies did you immerse?

Shira

Esti.

*Pause*

And Chedva.

Shoshana

Chedva...? You should have asked permission.

Shira

Why? I'm an attendant here – just like you!

Hindi

But Shoshana manages the mikveh...she's the head-attendant here.

Shoshana

It's okay, Hindi, there's no need to...

Shira

Madame Hindi, nobody said anything to me about 'head' attendants or 'secondary' attendants. (*to Shoshana:*) But I can understand why you tried so hard to avoid me seeing Chedva naked...

*Doorbell. Tehila enters, all her hair under a tichel or hat. Elisheva releases the mop and stares.*

Shoshana

Well, well—here comes the bride!

Hindi

Tehila ?! Oh ! I hardly recognized you with ... without your...hair! (*a hand motion to indicate the large crown of hair*) Didn't you want a *Sheitle*(46)

*Esti enters*

Tehila

I didn't want anything.

Hindi

Shame! I could have made you a *sheitle*(46) exactly like your own hair.

Shira

So why wear a *sheitle*(46)?

*(Hindi exits)*

Esti

I took off my wig only because of those indians that sold all the *sheitle*(46) makers hair that was used for idol worship !! But (*checks under Tehilas' hat*) But you haven't even cut your hair yet...!? You've got fabulous hair! You could cut it and sell it to a *sheitle*(46) maker ...Hindi! ...She can make you a wig like your own hair ! I'm sure it's Kosher! ...No? (*Looks for someone to back her words*)

Shoshana

Esti, isn't Froyker waiting for you? (*Esti takes out her purse*) I don't take money from you.

Esti

Thanks Shoshana. It's like a free monthly pass. (*Exits*)

Shoshana

*(to Tehila- trying to be soft)* I heard it was a wonderful wedding, *Kenain ahora*(20)...(*Tehila doesn't move--she remains quiet, looking down*) Were there really a thousand people there? (*no answer*) For two days it was the talk of the mikveh!...(still no reaction from Tehila )

Shira

I bet you were a beautiful bride...

Shoshana

*(losing patience)* Well, we haven't got all night – There's a free room at the end on the left...

*Tehila looks at Shoshana then at Shira*

Shira

What?

Tehila

Why didn't anyone tell me how much it hurts?

Shoshana

What??!

Tehila

It was...horrible.

Shira

I'm so sorry...

Shoshana

It's not our job. We're mikveh attendants, *not* bridal instructors. We're only here to supervise the immersions.

Tehila

But I asked. I begged you to help me. To sign I was impure. This was the only place I dared to ask for help. The only place I was by myself.

Shoshana

What difference does it make? Sooner or later you would have had to go through with it anyway...So why spoil the wedding for everyone..?

Tehila

I don't care about everyone!

Shoshana

Oh! Then that's your problem! You're a spoiled little girl! Now grow up a bit!

Shira

Shoshana!

Shoshana

...You should thank us that you were a pure and kosher *kala*.

Tehila

I didn't feel either pure or Kosher. I've never in my life felt so...so impure! So unclean.

Shoshana

Shhh! This is no place to speak about it!

Shira

Where do you want her to speak about it ?.. in the synagogue?

Shoshana

Shira.. She has a mother! Her mother was once a bridal-instructor, wasn't she? (*to Tehila...Quietly*) Didn't she speak to you? Didn't she explain everything to you?

Tehila

My mother?! (*Bitter laugh*) I was too terrified to even ask her ... That's why I thought that here..

Shoshana

Well you were wrong ,*Maidalah* ! This is a Mikveh and I'm an attendant – Not your Mother ! So please understand me - I have a job to do here ...I can't lie for you!

Tehila

I wanted to die!

Shoshana

Nobody's ever died from it yet, I promise.

Tehila

I hate him!

Shoshana

You don't hate him. Love takes time, *maydelah*. And he really is a wonderful boy.

Tehila

Yes...And I hate him!!

Shoshana

(*losing patience*) Look, if you have any special problem then there are rabbis, psychologists, people whose job it is to solve such things... It's not my job.. (*towards Shira*) or Shira's .. do you understand?(*intercom rings*) Do you understand?!(*again intercom*) I'm coming!! Shira, Remember there are other ladies waiting! *Intercom rings*

*Shoshana exits. Elisheva comes to Tehila*

Tehila

So it's me, isn't it? Everyone's okay—but me... I'm....

Shira

Tehila, there's nothing wrong with you. You're perfectly alright! How old are you?

Tehila

19 and a half.

Shira

*Shiduch?*

Tehila

Yes...

Shira

Did you want to get married?

Tehila

I wanted to leave home!

*Pause*

Shira

And get married?

Tehila

Eh... Yes...

*beat*

But not to him

*Silence*

Shira

You know ... I didn't get the guy I wanted either...

Tehila

Really? Why?

Shira

*Yichus*(48) ! My family isn't good enough (laughs, slightly embarrassed) All the *yeshiva-bochers* (49) I wanted, backed off as soon as they found out that I don't come from a religious family and my parents are divorced! ... In the end I simply took the one guy that really wanted me. I said to myself, that maybe it was fate from heaven and that I have to give it a real chance ... and every day we got a bit closer - until I realized I loved him

Tehila

But how? I--I'm so scared...

Shira

Of what? Of him? Is he (*makes a scary face*) scary?

Tehila

(*laughing*) No! but... tonight... I'm ...

Shira

Talk to him Tehila. Have you tried?

Tehila

(*surprised*) No!

Shira

Look, if he's not (*scary face again*), there's no reason you shouldn't just talk to him! Simple!

Tehila

How? What should I say?

Shira

Anything! Everything! *Bell rings, Shira goes to open the door*

You do have a mouth thank God! And what a mouth!

*(Miki enters. She's a singer –and by her clothing and attitude it is obvious she's not religious and rather out of place)*

Miki

Hi...

Shira

I'll... be with you in a minute.

*(to Tehila)* tell him what you're afraid of, you've got nothing to lose! You may even find out that he's scared too.

Tehila

Maybe.

*Pause*

Did you...did it hurt you?

*Miki tries walking into the rooms*

Shira

Please !! Just a moment ...

Miki

Okay...

Tehila

Did it? Did it hurt you as well?

Shira

We didn't do it on our wedding night. I asked him to wait a bit.

Tehila

Really? I tried to separate my head from my body...but it just hurt me so much.

*On hearing Tehila, Miki tries to escape*

Shira

I'll be with you in half a minute.

Miki

Okaaay. *(takes a pamphlet)* I'll read something...

Shira

Listen, Tehila.. give yourself time... you'll see - lots of things will change - for the better I mean...

Tehila

Please God.

*From off stage:*

Shoshana

SHIRA!!

Shira

...Wait, I'll be back in a minute.

Tehila

He...my husband...he's waiting outside...

Shira

So? Let him wait a bit – don't worry.

*Elisheva comes up to Tehila, hold her hand. Moved, Tehila sings to her. Miki comes closer. Elisheva, sacred of Miki's strangeness, runs away*

Miki:

Hi...

Tehila:

*(not understanding why the stranger started talking to her)* Hello. Welcome...

Miki

So the guy in the white car outside... He's yer hubbie is he?

Tehila

Yes, why? Is he blocking the--

Miki

Oooh--You caught yourself a kosher cutie, didn't you?!

Tehila

Me...?

*Elisheva runs out of the room*

Miki

Sorry! Who did I scare off?

Tehila

Elisheva...

Miki

Oh well... win some – ya lose some! (*long pause...Miki is trying to find the courage to ask what she really wants to know . Finally*) ...Tell me! - What's it they do to you here? What hurts so much?

Tehila

What? No!

Miki

Yeah! You said! Please tell me...

Tehila

No! You didn't understand! They, they don't do anything!

Miki

C'mon !! You gotta tell me ! I heard they do awful things here – especially to know-nothings like me! My friend told me they nearly drowned her – five full minutes under the blue! Since she went to the mikveh she can't go to a swimming pool, take a bath, do the dishes – nothing!... Just sees a glass of water -and she instinctively stops breathing!! (*Tehila laughs*) Look, I'll pay you!

Tehila

God forbid. For what?

Miki

I gotta know exactly what they do here! You said it hurt! I heard you! What the (*she wants to say fuck*) heck do they do here!?

*Shoshana enters, immediately recognizes Miki from the phone calls*

Shoshana

So it was you I spoke to on the phone ...! Michal

Miki

Uhhh, Yeah. Miki. I, uh,,,

Shoshana

Come in...

Miki

(*Miki backing up towards the door*) Oh No. Thanks sweetie, I... just came to have a look...(Going to the door. She turns back to Tehila) I'll wait for you by the car, alright? (*she leaves and comes back*) My car, yeh? (*leaves*)

Shoshana

Okay, Tehila, you can go in.

*Tehila doesn't move. Elisheva sits by her*

Come on, what are you waiting for? We've wasted enough time this evening

Tehila

I...I want Shira to immerse me.

Shoshana

Whatever you want! Shira? (*she enters*) You heard? YOU immerse Tehila.

Shira

That's fine - Go in – I'll be right there.

*Tehila exits. Intercom buzzes, Shoshana exits. Chedva enters to pay*

Chedva

The telephone number you gave me – it's not for a medical checkup.

Shira

No... it's the 'helping hand' association.

Chedva

I don't understand...you deliberately lied to me.

Shira

Chedva (*crossing to her*) you need help! Someone who'll listen to you, who'll know what to do. Someone who can help you – *there* they can help you.

Chedva

No. I can't go to a place like that...my husband is...I can't just! I have to go....Shevelah!

Shira

Chedva, I want to help you.

Chedva

I don't remember asking for your help.

Shira

So why did you call the number I gave you? Why did you let me supervise your immersion today? You wanted me to see!

Chedva

No!

Shira

Yes! The bruises you have – they're not from falling...someone--...

Chedva

No, No! You mustn't talk like that. I never asked you to help me.

Shira

Why are you suddenly so afraid? Is it your husband?

Chedva

What?!

Shira

Is it? Did Pinchas do this to you? Does he hit you? Does he...

*Elishevah enters, stands behind Chedva and nods her head, while Chedva shakes no. Chedva sees her daughter*

Chedva

You mustn't speak like that! I do not need your help. Elisheva... (*gently, Chedva puts her hands on both her cheeks and Elisheva stops nodding*) Come, we've got to go (*Chedva goes in the direction of the door- Elishevas' eyes remain fixed on Shira*).

Shira

Your change.

*Elisheva continues to hold Shira's gaze. Chedva goes to the door. Elisheva stays behind and runs to Shira's side.*

Chedva

Put it in the charity box... "Charity shall save you from death."

*Elisheva remains next to Shira, maybe hiding in her skirt.*

ELISHEVA!!

*They exit*

*Shoshana and Hindi enter*

Shira

Shoshana, if you—ahh--want to leave early, I can lock up.

Shoshana

Why would I want to leave early?

Shira

No, I just thought , it's Tuesday today and usually on Tuesdays you leave earlier--

Shoshana

I *what?* What's Tuesdays?! Did I ever say that I had a problem on Tuesdays?

Shira

No! I just thought--so you're...staying?

Shoshana

Maybe I'll stay, maybe I'll go, I don't know yet.

Shira

Okay. I just wanted you to know that if you *want* to go—it's fine with me.....

*Intercom*

That's Tehila, I'll go in.

Hindi

Did you see how eager she is to get rid of you?

*Telephone rings*

Shoshana

Hello Mikveh...Racheli!... why are you calling me here? I'll be there soon...No, I'm not annoyed...but if G-d forbid anyone finds out...Racheli is anything wrong? I can tell by your voice...what work? A what's what? an artist's model?! Look I don't understand about these things but it's too much for you...I'll give you some more money – stop working ...we'll talk about it tonight – I've got plenty of time...it's Tuesday—Daddy's got his Talmud class...I'm not afraid of him, Rachel'nekah, I just respect him—I don't want--

*Shira enters realizes that Shoshana is having a private call, exits.*

Racheli...Racheli—don't cry, “Mom enough”. Okay, okay! I won't tell you what to do—what? Of course I cooked them for you, and made the “crunchie cookies” you love...me too, Racheli...get some rest in the meantime.

*She hangs up.*

*To Hindi*

Sometimes *Robaynu shel oylam* gives people talent just to test them.

Hindi

Racheli works as a Model?!

Shoshana

No! An artists' model.

Hindi

You know what an artist's model is !? (*pause*) She sits in the middle Naked and everyone paints her!

Shoshana

*Gevult* (10)! Hindi Rochel –You don't know when to stop!

Hindi

I'm telling you. That's her JOB!

Shoshana

*(starts to get annoyed with Hindi)* Well, she won't be working anymore anyway! I'll pay her living!

Hindi

So all your wages--you give for that "art school"?

Shoshana

I have to leave a door open for her--

Hindi

What?! You still think she's going to come back to the community?

Shoshana

With G-d's help

Hindi

Forget it, Shoshana Dvoyra, you can't buy her faith!

Shoshana

But I can't lose mine either... I just hope nobody finds out! My two little ones still have to get married – and my Meir will never forgive me if he finds out I deceived him.. I just can't understand... what was so bad for her here?!

Hindi

There's nothing to understand. Racheli always had to do things her way.

Shoshana

*(with a sigh)* Only her way! Shira's like that too, you know?

Hindi:

Yes, but you don't owe Shira anything. *Gurnischt* (17)!

*(Tehila enters from washrooms – goes to desk to pay)*

Tehila :

Good night *(leaves)*

*(Hindi pays and tips Shoshana- before leaving Shoshana assures her)*

Shoshana:

Tonight I'll check out what's going on here

#### **Scene 4**

*(Low light in the waiting room –music recall of song in scene 2. Cell.phone rings. Shira enters from backrooms her wet hair uncovered, wearing a bathrobe – takes the phone out of her bag and answers ...)*

#### **WAITING ROOM**

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Shira

Amatzia ? Yes ... I'm here ... No – don't wait for me ... I... I'll be back in the morning  
... Okay...err--Amatzia... Don't forget to take your pills. Good-night

*(Shira goes to sit on one of the chairs with a book. Lights a small reading light and  
begins to read – suddenly keys are heard in the lock and Shoshana enters)*

Shoshana

Shira!

Shira:

I missed the last bus home-

Shoshana:

(noticing her wet hair ) Did you immerse yourself in the Mikveh ? No supervision ?

Shira:

Yes.

Shoshana

It's not kosher.

Shira

I'll worry about what's kosher for me - thank you.

Shoshana

So... you're waiting here for Amatzya to come and pick you up?

Shira

No. He can't drive at night...

Shoshana

But you told me that he was alright...

Shira

He's alright... more or less

Shoshana

I don't understand, Shareleh (silence) You've got two young children at home...

Shira

They're not so young...!

Shoshana

But on your mikve night ...you sleep here?! (*silence*) ..

His disability ... is he ... can he ....?

Shira

He can still have children– if that’s what you mean.

Shoshana

G-d bless him! So you should be at home with your husband!!

Shira

(sharp & cold) I missed the last bus!

Shoshana

This isn’t the first time ...

Shira

Nooo... it’s happened a couple of times ...

Shoshana

*(looking at the night-light , book and bath-robe)* For ‘a couple of times ‘ you’ve made a huge effort, Shareleh !

Shira

Shira – Shira – Not Shireleh !

Shoshana

People are beginning to gossip about you here--

Shira

“People” have been gossiping about me before I even came here, so it doesn’t really worry me.

Shoshana

Why didn’t you say anything to me..? You should have told me.

Shira

Why? Why should you care if I sleep here now and then? Because I didn’t tell you? ...didn’t get your permission? Is that it ? O.k - So now I’m asking: Shoshana - may I sleep in the Mikveh once in a while?

Shoshana

No!

Shira

Well--now you know why I never asked...

Shoshana

Why do you have to sleep here? *(it dawns on her. concerned)* Are you... **denying** yourself from your husband? A woman who is not prepared to sleep with her husband is by jewish law a “rebellious woman”! *(Shira is silent)* and on mikveh-night it’s referred to as “torture”...

Shira

You want to know why I sleep here? So I don't get pregnant, ok?! Until six months ago, when I had to take care of Amatzia night and day, the Rabbi gave me special permission to take the pill. But since his condition's improved – no permit – and I'm back to my role as 'the walking womb'. I've been through two serious miscarriages, after which I nursed Amatzia for two years ... I just don't have the strength ... and even if you think I'm "rebellious", I don't want any more children right now.

Shoshana

Who do you think you are to make such decisions? You want children... you don't want children.... We must be thankful for everything G-d gives us...

Shira

Well - G-d also gave me free will and the right to choose!

Shoshana:

*(pulls out the sleeping bag from the draw)* Oh! So in the name of your Free Will you keep on lying?!

Shira:

Don't YOU talk to me about lies – 'Chedva fell'? *(silence)* – Huh? You see her naked every month – Chedva falls? The truth!

Shoshana:

She said that she fell!

Shira:

That's not what I asked! *(low but intense)* You know, today I saw Chedvah for the first time, naked, in the Mikveh-... she has an iron-mark on her back! I wanted to scream. I couldn't believe I'd find a woman, like my Mother was, here in the religious community. When my mother became religious, it gave her the strength to make a new start. It was like magic for me... I was nine years old.. I'd never felt so safe before in my life...

Shoshana

I don't interfere with matters between husbands and wives...

Shira

Ohh! You think you don't interfere!! With your silence and your lies you're protecting and defending a criminal! –even if you didn't mean to. It's against all Jewish values.

Shoshana

I have no idea what you are talking about.

Shira

*(completely losing her calm)* I can't believe you're carrying on this facade to my face!

Shoshana

From the minute you arrived here you've caused nothing but trouble

Shira

I never caused any trouble- and it didn't start from the minute I arrived- Yochi committed suicide long before that.

Shoshana:

What has Yochi to do with this now!?

Shira

Another lie, another silence... "a work-accident"?! She suffered from depression for years... You worked with her every evening... What did you do? Did you try to help her, or just to convince her - like Chedva, that everything's ok... What did you do?

Shoshana

(Defensive) I did everything I could!

Shira

What? Her story haunted me -the doctor told them that it was dangerous for her to get pregnant and she got pregnant... What. Did. You. Do.? Did you try to convince her to abort?

Shoshana

God forbid!

Shira

Why not? "The mother's life is more important than the fetus" that's the jewish law! Why didn't you take a stand? Even after she died - you just carried on sweeping everything under the rug! What else are you hiding?

Shoshana:

I made one mistake - I let her remain here alone in the Mikveh - And I made the same mistake with you, from today I will lock up...

Shira

What's that got to do with it? (*pause*) Shoshana. You know what your problem is? You distinguish important issues from trivial issues-- but somehow you choose the trivial ones.

Shoshana

Don't you tell me what's important and what is unimportant...

Shira

I swear to you - next time I see Chedva like that, I won't shut up - I will not shut up!

Shoshana

There are things that are beyond our control.

Shira

This isn't beyond our control. This is a Woman's Mikveh- !

Shoshana

A Womens' mikvah - not a womens' shelter!!... And you can't sleep here anymore!

Shira

o.k – I won't sleep here.

Shoshana

*(begins to leave ) Shoyn (51)*

Shira

Shoshana *(playing her last card)*-Racheli called.

*(Shoshana stands still doesn't turn around)*

Shoshana

Who?

Shira

Your daughter- Racheli..

Shoshana

How do you know?

Shira

She called earlier, just after you left.

Shoshana:

*(turns towards her)* What did she want?

Shira:

You . I think she was crying...

51.ShoyN =well then

**End Act 1**

## Act 2

### 2.1

*on the screen:*

**“A Man demands with his mouth and a woman demands with her heart...and this is a beautiful virtue of women”**

***The reception area.***

*On the screen:*

Rosh Chodesh Nissan – *1st of Nissan, 5764*

*Esti is alone onstage. She looks around, takes out a sexy baby-doll from her bag and slips it on over her clothing. Seeing that the baby-doll is shorter than her skirt, she begins to pull up her skirt – “shortening it.” Shoshana enters.*

Shoshana

*(as if she just saw a ghost) HUUUUH!*

Esti

Shoshana! How’s this?!

Shoshana

*Gevult (10)!* Esti ! What is it?

Esti

It’s not for me, it’s for Froyke.

Shoshana

Froyke wears things like that ??

Esti:

No! I mean

Shoshana:

Take it off ! *Nishtugaducht (52)!*

Esti

My mother can’t look after the kids tonight--because she’s having a really tough pregnancy...so Froyke said to me: “You go- I’ll see to everything! When you get back it will be as if the children are by your mother.” He such a *tzadik!*... Do you know, on mikveh days he really spoils me. He phones me during the day—for nothing! Just to ask how I am –today, for example, he called 3 times...for nothing! They say according to the survey that our Reb Pinchas is going to almost, perhaps, maybe be elected as an MP!... Tonight, I’ll immerse one extra time, for Reb Pinchas, Bonus! I’ll immerse with real feeling.

*Doorbell – Shoshana opens the door. Miki and Tehila enter together.*

Shoshana

Good evening to you both *(to Miki)* What is it this time - again just to look, or would you like to take the guided tour?

Miki

You're not kidding! This is the second time I'm here and the second time I got lost in the bushes! Lucky I met Tehila in the jungle – How about putting up a sign “mikveh” with a little arrow?

Shoshana

Not everyone has to know you're going to the mikveh.

Miki

You mean it's [tucked away] on purpose? So not to be ashamed?! God- that's hysterical!

Shoshana

Ashamed? God forbid. Family Purity is more important than fasting on *Yom Kippur!* ... *Tznius(55)!!* ... perhaps where you live, there is no room for modesty!

Miki

“Modesty?!”. Where I live, women don't have to report to the Rabbi every time they wanna have sex with their husbands! *(Tehila laughs)* it's not like that? [implying: that's what it's like here]...?? *Shoshana tries to quiet Tehila with a look.*

Oh, forget it! Tell me what I've gotta do, and let's be finished with it.

Shoshana

When did you have your *hefsek*?

Miki

What?? I've never had a thing like that in my life!

Shoshana

When were you last unclean?

Miki:

I have a shower every day if you don't mind

Shoshana

*(Realizing she has no choice. Quietly.)* When did you finish your last period?

Miki

Period!! Well then say 'period' ...Eh...a week or two ago...

Shoshana

The date, the date! You don't remember?

Miki

No!! What for??

Shoshana

What am I going to do with you? *(as if really thinking)* More than a week ago...?

Miki

Yyyehhhh... Just a minute...*(to Tehila, asking)* Yes?! *(Tehila laughs, nodding yes)* Yes!

Shoshana

7 clean days at least. I won't have you contaminating my mikveh.

Miki

What the heck do you want from me? I came to immerse in the mikveh. Can I or can't I?

Shoshana

*(a sarcastic small laugh)* Ohoho! That depends on you Madame!

Shira

*(suggesting)* Shoshana, why not let her go in ? There are full instructions in each room... and if there's any problem she can always call one of us ...

Miki

Wonder woman!

Shoshana

I think –

Miki

Don't bother *(to Shira)* Which way?

Shira

Come – I'll show you *(Shira leads Miki out)*

*Shira and Miki exit*

Shoshana

Tehila, she is no friend for you.

*Shira comes back in, addressing Tehila*

Shira

*(re-enters. To Tehila)* You can go into the last room *(Tehila hesitates, Shira nudges her sweetly)* I'll come to immerse you...*(Tehila goes out to the room)*

*Tehila exits*

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Shoshana

Shira--immerse *yourself* however you like, but women who come here will immerse according to the *halocha*.

Shira

What's the problem?

Shoshana

I've seen a thing or two – believe me--her type are the worst ...the likes of her come to the mikvah with no will, no faith- her husband is most probably one of those “*choyzer betushvachs*”(18) or something...

Shira

So what? Welcome her, make her feel comfortable.. so that next month she'll want to come back...

Shoshana

You heard her! She's on the verge of blasphemy!!

*Intercom – a long buzz*

See? She probably hasn't even read two lines! And if she's ready for immersion then I'm a kugelhof!

Shira

I'll see to her--

Shoshana

No. No! Leave it to me!

*Doorbell rings. Shoshana exits. Hindi enters.*

Hindi

*Chodesh Tov.*

Shira

Good month, Hindi.

Hindi

Is my room free?

Shira

YOUR room? Oh... The one with the window you mean?

Hindi

Yes. I must have a room with a window...

Shira

The room is free.

*Hindi begins to leave*

Call me when you're ready.

Hindi

Where's Shoshana?

Shira

*(smug)* Shoshana's busy.

***Focus on the MIKVEH POOL***

*Miki is wrapped in a towel. Shoshana stands by her side*

Shoshana

What's this nail polish?

Miki

Salon, Shosh. 120 shekels! Like it?

Shoshana

You can't immerse with nail polish on.

Miki

*Come on!* You're kidding, right?

Shoshana

You haven't removed your makeup properly either.

Miki

Ya-What? What the heck do you want from me?

Shoshana

I'll give you some nail polish remover and cleanser if you don't have any. Turn around.

Miki

*(turning)* I'm not taking off my nail polish!

Shoshana

Then you're not going into the mikveh

Miki

Why? Whazzat got to do with it?

Shoshana

It blocks.

Miki

Your grandmother blocks! Ow! What're you doing?

Shoshana

You've got a mark on your back.

Miki

It's a birthmark! It won't come off.

Shoshana

*(Getting more annoyed)* Look – either you immerse according to the *halocha*(30)- or you don't immerse at all!!

Miki

You don't say!! Who do you think you are? G-d's bouncer?

Shoshana

I'M THE MIKVEH ATTENDENT and I am IN CHARGE of--

Miki

Oh you charge all right—like a primitive [archaic] bull, God!

Shoshana

Okay. That's it! Enough! You're not immersing in my mikveh.

Miki

Oh yeah? You wanna bet ? *(goes in the direction of the pool- takes one step down and stops )* What d'you do ? Dive ?!

Shoshana

Get out of my Mikveh! *(beat)* Out of my Mikveh!! *(Shira enters)*

*Shira enters*

Shira

Ummm, Shoshana, Hindi only wants you--let me--

Shoshana

*(not budging)* She didn't have a bath, didn't count clean days, refuses to take off her nail polish. We cannot allow her to immerse!

Shira

Let me.

Shoshana

If you let her to immerse with nail polish – I'll see to it that this is your last day here!

*Shoshana exits*

Miki

What's wrong with her?

Shira

Don't take it personally– she's annoyed with me...(to Miki) Now look, Miki-(looks at the birth mark on her back)

Miki

Do me a favour! I didn't come here to be lectured, I jus' wanna get this thing done with!

Shira

Well, you're not immersing for me! For all I care you can go straight in as is – nail-polish and all!

Miki

Wow! Great. How... ?

Shira

Does your husband know you're here?

Miki

You mus' be kiddin'?! He is the reason I'm here!

Shira

Well then... maybe he won't accept the fact that you didn't take off your nail polish...

Miki

What?! You mean maybe 'coz of the nail polish, even though I 'Mikved' he won't sleep with me coz I'm blocked...?!

Shira

Look, I don't know him...

Miki

I know him!! wowowow ! ... give us the remover... quick !

Shira

(gives her acetone and cotton wool laughing ) Take these and buzz me when you're finished... you'll see- it can be fun..

*Shira exits*

Miki

Fun... yeh... fun...

**Reception room**

Hindi

Shoshana, I don't want Shira supervising my immersion.

Shoshana

Of course not!

Hindi

And I don't owe her any explanations!

Shoshana

(sighs) Why? Did she say anything to you?

Hindi

"Shoshana's busy...". What, now she's become your boss?

Shoshana

Right now she's immersing that secular girl – with nail polish on! I just don't know what to do with her.

Hindi

You have to speak to Pinchas.

*Doorbell rings, Elisheva enters, nervous, near hysterics.*

Shoshana

Elisheva! Where's mommy? (*Elisheva tries to go to the mikveh*) No! You can't go in there. (*Hindi stops her*) Mommy's not there. Are you lost? Here, I'll call home (*Elisheva point to the outside with one hand, and beckons with the other and for Shoshana to follow her. Shoshana instead dials. Shira enters. Elisheva rushes to her, hugs her and pulls her sleeve.*)

Shira

Elisheva! What happened?

Shoshana

Nothing happened! I'm seeing to her.

Shira

Elisheva, did anything happen to mommy?

Shoshana

No-thing. Happened! The child just got lost...

Shira

What do you mean: "nothing happened"! Look at her!

Shoshana

Shira I—

Shira

What! Are you waiting for him to beat her to death?

Shoshana

Shira, I'm taking care of her. *(to Hindi)* There's no reply at home.

Shira

No-no -- NO!! I'm taking care of her! Come on Elisheva... take me to Mummy *(they go towards the front door)*

Shoshana

*(to Hindi)* They're not answering at home.

Shira

No, No, No! I'm taking care – Come on Elisheva... take me to Mummy *(they go towards the front door)*

Shoshana

You're not going anywhere. You're at work now!

Shira

Shoshana! I'm going! Write me down as sick today. I'm sick of these lies ... *(goes towards the door, turns around to Shoshana)* By the way *(note to Miki)* – she's removing her nailpolish ! *(She slams the door. There's a long silence...)*

*Long Silence.*

*Tehila peeps out from behind a door in her towel.*

*Esti comes out to see. She approaches Hindi*

Hindi

I have never seen anything like it.

Esti

What happened?

Hindi

I. Have. Never. Seen. Anything. Like. It.

Esti

**What happened?**

Hindi

You've got to get rid of her. She does whatever she wants here –comes whenever she wants, goes whenever she wants, sleeps here whenever she wants...she thinks she's the *ba'labusta* here--

Shoshana

Well, I warned her not to go. Now she'll meet Pinchas, and that'll be the end of her here.

Hindi

If she meets Pinchas– it will be the end of YOU here! As far as he's concerned, you're responsible for everything that happens in the mikveh.

*Intercom*

Shoshana

*(screaming to off-stage)* Just a moment !!. (to Hindi) I have to go in..

Hindi

No--you have to speak to Pinchas....explain that you didn't send her!

*Intercom*

*Pause.*

*(in a quieter tone)* you need your wages for Racheli, right?

Esti

What, you're still in contact with the daughter you're not in contact with?

*Intercom*

Shoshana

*(to offstage)* Just a moment!! *(to Hindi)* What, do you think he'd....?

Hindi

He's a politician! Call him before he calls you!

*Miki enters in her towel*

Miki

What the heck's going on here?!! ... I haven't got all night you know!

Shoshana

I'm not immersing you.

Miki

I don't want you to immerse me.. Where's the nice lady?

*Tehila emerges from her room*

Tehila

*(comes out from behind the door)* She's gone to save Chedva from her husband...

Shoshana

*(warns her)* Tehila...

Tehila

That's the truth, isn't it ? He's been beating her for years, but

nobody says anything because he's Pinchas Wasserstrumph

Miki

With a name like that- no wonder he beats her.

Shoshana

You have no idea what you're talking about.

Tehila

I'm not a child anymore! They happen to be our neighbors, and the walls aren't exactly thick-

Shoshana

Stop with this loshan hora. It's out of place here.

Tehila

What's not out of place here?

Shoshana

Immersing in the mikveh—only immersing!

Miki

Yeah? So what about me then?

Shoshana

And only according to the *halocha*.

Miki

Whatsa matter with you?! What are you making such a big deal of it for?! S'only a puddle.. (to Tehila) You done ?

Tehila

Not yet.

Hindi

Come on then!

Hindi

(to Shoshana) Don't waste your time now

Tehila

(to Miki) Where to?

Miki

Come on!!! It's no big deal!

*Miki and Tehila exit toward the mikveh. Shoshana wants to stop them, but Hindi stops her.*

Hindi

Call him!

Shoshana

*(calling to the girls)* I'm coming in a minute!

*Shoshana dials.*

Miki

*(off-stage)* Don't worry! We won't drown!

Shoshana

*(Shoshana dials the phone. She's very nervous.)* Hello Pinchas...I – oh yes, this is Shoshana, from the mikveh, yes... First of all I wanted to wish you luck in the elections next month, please God ...yes... I-I understand you're very busy ... It's just important that you know that I didn't send Shira ... to your house ... A new attendant? ... Well, I don't want to fall into evil gossip – but Shira is really not suitable for the position... Because she does whatever she wants here and *(realizes that he is threatening her and not Shira)* ...Me? To replace me?! Why? What do you mean I can't manage! With her it's impossible! *(coldly)* O.k. - I understand. Thank you! Goodbye ...*(puts the phone down)* Why did I call him? I'm such a fool!! He'd already left - he didn't know anything...!

### **Focus Mikveh Pool**

*Miki is in the water. Tehila stands by the side of the water wrapped in a towel*

Miki

come on – we can dip together ! The men always dip in together – come on ... you dip me- then I'll dip you ... Ooooh ... the water's great! Come on!

Tehila

Uhhmmm....

*Tehila, shyly, takes off her towel and begins to enter the pool*

Miki

*(Tehila takes off her towel , and begins to enter the pool )* Wow! What a hell of a body! So... unorthodox! What a waste...!!

Tehila

Don't say that.

Miki

Why not ? And what amazing hair! Why hide it under that hat all the time.

Tehila

That's exactly the point...

Miki

What point?! Everyone's playing "The Rabbi Said"! To you he said "cover your hair"! – To my husband he said "Change your name", and to me he said "Change your profession" – women can't sing because in Jewish law a woman's voice is temptation! ...then don't listen, I said to him!

Tehila

But you won't stop singing, will you? I love your songs.

Miki

Really? *You got a tv ? I thought that was prohibited*

Tehila

*I watch on the computer*

Miki

*Naughty !!* I didn't think I had orthodox fans! Thanks... 'course I won't stop singing – God gave me my voice and it would be a sin not to use it! The rest is just men's bullshit!!

Tehila

Why do you come to the mikveh?

Miki

My husband – *Just when I got into "The Voice"* - he got into this orthodox thing ...! I told him "*forget it!* I'm not going to the Mikveh- *If ye don't want me* - don't sleep with me- we'll see how long you last"! Three months he did not touch me! ...Nothing! (*beat*) In the end I gave in- came to the Mikveh... What can I do? He's a sick, crazy, maniac son of a bitch.. but I LOVE HIM (*pause*) Do you love your husband?

Tehila

I ...ummm...I don't know him.

Miki

*How* d'you mean? You married a guy you don't know?

Tehila

Yes... – a *shidduch*.

Miki

A what?

Tehila

You know—an arranged marriage.

Miki

*God!* It's like a one-night-stand, only with a *shidduch* you get stuck with the one-night-stand for the rest of your life.

Tehila

One night stand?

Miki

Yeh, someone you sleep with once and never see again.

Tehila

What for?

Miki

For the sex, that's what for! (*Tehilah reacts*) You do know you're supposed to enjoy it, right?

Tehila

I think it's awful.

Miki

Why? (*Pause*) What, did he do something? (*Tehila shrugs*) Did he hurt you? (*Miki approaches her, Tehila retreats*) Tell me. Did he rape you?

Tehila

No! I don't know... I just pretend I'm asleep so he doesn't ... sometimes he tries to wake me up, but I don't open my eyes... I keep hoping that he'll leave me alone, when he doesn't I just go stiff and I wait till he's finished. Look—he's not a bad man... I once even heard him cry after... I wanted to hold out my hand...to tell him it's not him...it's me. But I couldn't move.

**Focus reception area: Shoshana, Hindi, Esti**

Shoshana

But you heard the conversation – Pinchas would rather fire me than her. I don't understand.

Esti

I do !! ... It's because of Shira's husband, what's his name? Amatzia – he works for Pinchas...for the elections – he buys him votes from the other jewish communities ...They say if Wassershtrumph gets into Parliament it'll be because of him – so now Wassershtrumph owes him! He can't exactly fire his wife, can he?!

Shoshana

What, he actually buys his votes?

Hindi

(lying) Yes, yes... I also heard something like that...

Esti

BUT... Well, this part's *loshen horeh* (evil gossip)... d'you want to hear?

Shoshana

No!

Hindi (overlapping)

Yes!

Esti

Well Shira's husband has been crippled since his Palestinian worker became a terrorist and ran him over with the tractor at their settlement they used to live in... And I heard ...at least that's what they said at *shool*(57) –that she wanted to get a divorce – but he wouldn't give her one.....Her mother's also divorced and its genetic...

Shoshana

It's impossible! She took care of him after the attack!

Hindi

She still sleeps in the mikveh, doesn't she?

Esti

What? She SLEEPS in the MIKVEH?

Shoshana

Not any more!

Hindi

No?? Shoshana Devorah , I live across the road , remember ? (convincing her) Can't you see - it's either you or her! You don't know what tales she's capable of spreading about Pinchas ....and she couldn't care less if she hurts you... if she hurts all of us..

Esti

What tales about Pinchas?

Hindi

You heard Tehila...where did she get the idea that Pinchas beats Chedva?

Esti

Ahhh! From Shira?! And Chedva only fell! We all know she falls!

Hindi

We have to put an end to all this.

Shoshana

But HOW? She has no limits...

Hindi

So we'll give her limits! A woman who does not want to sleep with her husband is a rebellious wife!

Esti

Quite Right!

Shoshana

I told her so!

Esti

Her husband can divorce her for such a thing!

Hindi

That's probably what she wants. She doesn't sleep with Amatzia because he's crippled..

Shoshana

But he can still give her children!

Hindi

But CRIPPLED... Shoshana...

Esti

So?

Hindi

So if she doesn't sleep with her husband why does she still immerse herself in the Mikveh? She immersed herself that night that you found her here, right?

Shoshana

*(uneasy)* Yes.

Hindi

Well she didn't immerse herself for her husband, because she had no intention of returning home! Then for whom did she immerse herself...?

Shoshana

Hindi-Rochel, *Gevult!* God forbid...you don't know when to stop!

Esti

She committed adultery?

Shoshana

Shhhh!

Esti

She committed adultery!

Shoshana

Shhh!

Hindi

When I told you that she sleeps here you didn't believe me either, remember?

Shoshana

But do you think?

Hindi

I'm sure. In fact (lying) One morning I saw a man running through the bushes so that no-one would see him... At the time I thought it was a thief, but now it's obvious ...!

***Focus Mikveh Pool***

Miki

And what if you don't dip?

Tehila

What?

Miki

If you don't immerse yourself in the Mikveh, then he's not allowed to touch you, right?

Tehila

Yes, but –

Miki

So don't dip!

Tehila

But what... what would I say to him?

Miki

Tell him the mikveh-lady said you were blocked.

Tehila

For how long?

Miki

Until you're ready, until you want to...

Tehila

What if I never want to?

*Silence*

Miki

Have you ever had another man?

Tehila

No! I mean yes, but not...

Miki

Yes or no?

Tehila

I wanted to marry someone else, but the rabbi wouldn't let us, because we got to know each other on our own...

Miki

On your own... what's that supposed to mean?

Tehila

It means not a *shidduch*. I used to see him every morning, on my way to school. He was on his way to the Yeshiva. For years there was nothing, just – just a look, sometimes almost a smile. Then one day during the last week of school I went up to him and asked him what his name was.

Miki

*(doesn't seem a big deal)* Wow.

Tehila

And we started to talk...and we talked...and talked...and

Miki

Ended up in bed !?

Tehila

No! it's forbidden to touch – even to hold hands—until the wedding night!

Miki

[Wow, for real?] One day you're not allowed to hold hands and the next day you gotta go all the way?! That's perverted. *(Pause)* Look—you've got to meet this guy.

Tehila

No!...What for?

Miki

Because you love him! I bet – if HE were to touch you, you wouldn't pretend to be asleep, am I right? You'd yearn, you'd crave... you'd... do you have a way to get his number?

Tehila

No!

Miki

You haven't tried. You got guts? You could meet him at my place! Sammy doesn't get home until eight or nine-ish...

Tehila

No, it's impossible ...He's getting married next month.

Miki

Well stop it then!! Do something! Look at Romeo & Juliet... never heard of them?...well then, King David and Bat-Sheva!...David and Jonathan...David and Goliath... what difference does it make – fight for your love!!!

Tehila

You're telling me to commit adultery?

Miki

I'm telling you my house is free. Free of charge and all...

Tehila

You'll never understand – you come from a different world. It's hopeless.

Miki

You're not Catholic--get a divorce!

Tehila

No! No! I can't fail again...

Miki

Fail? Who's giving out grades?

Tehila

Everyone! From the day I remember myself I haven't once managed to do things right – I flunked everything!

Miki

Well maybe you should stop trying to do things right and think of what you want to do ...

Tehila

But I want to make things work! This marriage—it's my last chance, if I fail now...nobody's going to want me.

Miki

How can you make a marriage work when you're in love with another man?

Tehila

I must!

Miki

It doesn't work like that! It's impossible.

Tehila

Why are you saying that! It has to work—it has to! Why did you say that?

*(Miki tries to calm her. She hugs her while Tehila sobs on her shoulder. She remembers herself suddenly and pulls away, embarrassed.)*

### RECEPTION

*Hindi, Esti, and Shoshana stop talking as soon as Shira walks in. Shira puts on her 'work' coat. The other 3 stare.*

Shira

*(breaking the silence)* Sorry that I left in the middle of work, but it was very important..

Shoshana

'important' for who, Shira?

Shira

For Chedva! It took a quarter of an hour for her to just open the door, and she was too scared to even let me call *hatzola* or take her to the hospital...

Hindi

Shira, we don't need you here...Neither you, nor your stories!

Shira

*(shocked)* You won't stop will you?! Until you see Chedva's body floating in the water like Yochi's - all of you just wont stop!! And even then - you can always say "it was an accident" – she fell in the water!

Hindi

Meanwhile it's you who's eulogizing her while she's still alive-not us!!

Shira

If Pinchas gets elected to the council it will be in Chedva's blood.

Shoshana

If Pinchas gets elected to the council it will be because of your husband.

Shira

What? That's not true! What's my husband got to do with it?

Esti

He buys him votes from other Jewish communities [Modern Orthodox]—everybody knows that Amatzia's a big *macher*.

Shira

He doesn't buy votes! He's only helping out; calling his friends from his hesder yeshiva -- and people he knows from the *yishuv*. He knows many people and he's using his connections—so what?

Hindi

And you really believe that Pinchas gave you the job here because of your talents? Nobody wants you here... but he owes your husband- because he buys him the votes...

Shira

He does not buy votes!

Shoshana

It's all quite understandable, with the situation between you and your husband, that you don't have a clue what he does at all!

Shira

"The situation" between my husband and myself is fine thank you!

Shoshana

If the situation was "Fine thank you", you wouldn't have to sleep in the Mikveh, you wouldn't have to lie again and again ...you wouldn't – (*stops*)

Shira

What...? Go on – spit it out - I wouldn't what?

Shoshana

You wouldn't be waiting for him to give you a GET.

Shira

(*a bitter laugh*) (A Get?) A divorce?! Shoshana! Where did you get that one from? You of all people, always preaching against gossip (*looks at Hindi*) I do not want, and I'm not waiting for or hoping for a divorce from Amatzia! I explained it to you! I--

Shoshana

Your personal problems make you want to cause problems for everyone else!

Shira

What problems, Shoshana?

Shoshana

You're purposely causing troubles between Chedva and her husband –

Shira

Chedva is a battered wife!

Shoshana & Hindi

She is not a battered wife.

Shira

She is a battered wife!

Esti

She falls... No?

Shira

She is battered and you all know it! And a man that beats his wife is...

Shoshana

Be careful who you're talking about.

Shira

I don't care if he's a street cleaner or the Lubavitcher Rabbi ! He is a violent, low, unworthy, pretentious, sick man who needs treatment..

Esti

The Lubavitcher Rabbi??!

Shira

*Och* (41)!!

Hindi

Does your husband know who you spend your nights with here?

Shira

Who I ... What?

Hindi

Does he know the man with whom you fornicate here at night?

Shira

I...fornicate? (*Silence*) You...you don't mean – I don't believe it.... You (*turns to each of them, but they look away*) It's impossible!! Shoshana ... you were here at night ! You saw there was nobody else...

Shoshana

I didn't see anything!

Hindi

Shira, you're not from here, you don't belong here, and we don't want you here – do you understand?

Shira

Thank God I'm not from here! Thank God I'm second-class, that my mother was not only divorced but also an outsider from an unorthodox family...Thank God I had the privilege of seeing things from the outside and never ever being one of you! Can't you see the lies? The rot? You're sacrificing flesh and blood! Poor Chedva... at least now she's...(stops herself).

Shoshana

At least now she's 'what,' Shira? (*Shira does not reply, Shoshana asks again*) Where's Chedva ? What have you done with her?

Shira

Don't worry. Chedva's in a safe place. A place she won't fall.

## 2.2

*On the screen:*

*As Jephthah wished to sacrifice his daughter unto the Lord she cried before him:  
Father! I ran to meet you with rejoice and you're slaughtering me!  
And he did not listen to her! He went and slaughtered her before God .  
And the Holy Spirit screams: Souls have I requested that you offer me? Souls? ! I have  
not commanded, not spoken and it has never entered my heart*

### **Reception Area**

*(it has been a month since Chedva's "disappearance")*

*On the screen / on the calendar it reads:*

*1st of Iyar, 5764*

*First of the Month of Iyar.*

*Shira enters with a broom and dustpan. Shoshana enters from the outside with rolled up posters. Esti is right behind her.*

Esti  
(to Shoshana) She's still here?! [why!/?]

Shoshana  
Until tomorrow – after the elections.

*(Esti deliberately turns over the pan – Shira pushes her with the broom and walks out. Shoshana hangs up the posters that are notices requesting help in search of Chedva and Elisheva . Esti reads one aloud as Shoshana hangs a few up in the Mikve)*

Esti  
She disappeared off the face of the earth! *(reads from the notice)* “Kidnapped Elisheva!” Wait a minute how can she kidnap her own daughter? It's like stealing your own car... *(carries on reading)* “A mentally disturbed woman who is in need of” Just a minute...mentally disturbed?! What does that mean; crazy? *(gasp)* How come? Since when? She doesn't look – mind you... sometimes she does seem a bit ... I mean, if it's written- there must be a reason! tsk-tsk-tsk ...Poor Pinchas! For a man like that it's real *Tzures*(45). She can destroy his whole career with her madness!... Well what do you know? – Chedva's a *Meshigana* (60)? Come to think of it Elisheva isn't exactly... OY! Shoshana! Do you think it's contagious?

*(Suddenly we hear Miki singing from one of the rooms: “And tonight is the night- I am feeling so right – we'll be making love the-”)*

Shoshana  
*(calling to offstage)* Michal! Michal!! Miki!!! You're in the mikveh! Not on stage!

Miki  
*(shouts back)* You don't say ! That's why I'm celebrating. That's what our marriage has come to - The Mikveh– wash and go! *(starts singing again)*

Shoshana  
*(goes to the door of the room)* Please show this place some respect.

Miki  
Shoshke sweetie– I show much more than respect ... No nail polish, no makeup no conditioner – I wouldn't recognize myself in the street, if I met me!! .

*Shira enters. Shoshana does not react.*

Esti  
Shoshana, I don't want the adulteress immersing me!

*Intercom buzz. Shoshana exits. Shira immediately tears down one of the notices in anger and crumples the paper into a ball*

Esti  
...SHOSHANA!!  
*Shira runs after Esti throwing the 'ball' at her. Esti scampers off. Doorbell. Tehila enters. She's looking relaxed and happy. – a bit strange – like she's in a drug induced haze. She's reading Psalms.*

Shira  
Tehila, how are you?

Tehila  
*(with a big smile)* Wonderful!!

Shira  
Great! I told you it was just a matter of time...

Tehila  
Shame, shame! Adulteress! ...

Shira  
*(thinks Tehila is joking)* Tehila it's not funny, I'm sorry, this past month here I've completely lost my sense of humor *(during the conversation she touches Tehila's forearm but Tehila draws back from her)*

Tehila  
Don't touch me! Adulteress!

Shira  
You're not joking *(Tehila looks away coldly)* I'll prepare your room.

*Shira exits to the rooms. Miki enters with wet hair. Tehila gets confused when she sees Miki and buries herself in her prayers.*

Miki  
Hey Tehila !! Where've you been ? I left you a million messages at home... *(Tehila does not look at her - her eyes downcast - Miki realizes immediately that something is not right)* I even came by yesterday... Where were you?

Tehila  
...At the best wedding in town...

Miki  
What? *(she realizes)* That boyfriend of yours? *(Tehila doesn't respond)* Are you some kind of a masochist or what? Did he invite you, the maniac?

Tehila

*(reading from psalms)* – [ki avi v'ami asa vuni, adonai, adonai, ya'ah sami] “for my father and mother abandoned me, and God shall collect me unto Him...”

Miki

Tehila--you alright hon'?

Tehila

I'm fine, thank God...

*Shira enters*

Miki

*(To Shira)* Tell me, D'you think she's o.k. ?!

Shira

Never seen her look better...

Miki

*(to Shira)* You don't look so hot yourself *(looks at the bucket)* What's this with you not doing immersions any more? You become the char/cleaning lady--or what..?

Shira

Oh - the rumors never got to you? *(so that Tehila can hear)* I'm an adulteress!!

Miki

Yer what??

Shira

A story they made up hoping I'd give up my job ...eh, Tehila! Your room's ready...

*Shira exits*

Miki

Shoshana!!

Tehila

*(comes over to Miki)* Miki lets immerse together – like last time!

Miki

I already dipped...

Tehila

*(disappointed)* Then...sing me a song!! *(Tehila takes her hands -Miki is a bit embarrassed)*

Miki

Do you want Shosh'keh to skin me alive?

Tehila

Sing me! Please... I love your voice—please! (*Tehila begins to sing, and dance- get's into a trance- uncovers her hair- spins faster and faster- wants to remove her clothes- Miki grabs her and stops her.* )

Miki

Tehila! What's the matter?

Tehila

A hug—one hug--please, Miki... hug me

*Miki hugs Tehila. Shoshana and Hindi enter, Shira immediately follows. Miki releases the hug. Shira picks up the headcovering and leads Tehila to one of the rooms*

Hindi

(*to Shoshana*) You're not going to let Shira immerse her I hope?

Shoshana

God Forbid! She's hasn't immersed anyone here for a month.  
(*To Miki*)As for you - you will not contaminate my mikveh!

Miki

Bye! See yer in a month. Unless my husband decides to become a Muslim by then...

Shoshana

*Nishtugaducht (42)!!!!*

*Doorbell. Shoshana opens the door. Chedva and Elisheva enter just as Miki turns to leave. Shoshana, Miki, Hindi, and Esti all freeze.*

Chedva

Where's Shira?

Miki

(*Calling offstage*) Shiiiiirrrraaaa!

*Silence. Shira enters, runs to them*

Shira

Chedva! Elisheva! What happened?

Chedva

I'm sorry...(verge of tears) I didn't want to come here but someone must've told Pinchas where I was staying...

Shira

How? That's impossible!

Chedva  
No it's not... Someone threatened your friends...

Shira  
Threatened?

Chedva  
I told you they'd find me ! They sent them an envelope with a bullet in it, signed "the modesty patrol"  
*Shoshana has reached for the phone and dials*

Shoshana  
Hello, can I please speak to Pinchas [Wassurstrumph]--

Shira  
*(Leaps and cuts off the line)* NO!

Shoshana  
What do you think you're doing?

Shira  
I won't let you!

Shoshana  
I must inform them that she's here.

Shira  
No! She'll stay here until we find another place.

Shoshana  
You're out of your mind! *(Shira's hand still on the phone)* Take your hand off, it's over!

Shira  
No! You can't do this to her. You don't really believe that she's mentally disturbed, do you?

*Shoshana is quiet.*  
Hindi: *(with cell phone in hand)* I just wanted to inform Moishe that Chedva and Elishevah arrived at the Mikveh safe and sound.

*(Chedva lets out a cry. Shira impulsively takes the keys from the table runs to the door. There is a key in the door as well. She locks twice, and puts both keys in her pocket)*

Shira  
Don't worry, Chedva. No one can get in.

Miki  
Great thinking Batman!!

Shoshana

You fool! You can't lock us in here. Look at Chedva...you forced her out of her home!  
And what are you offering her now? To come and live with you here in the mikveh?

Shira

Shoshana, if I've done one thing right – it's been to take Chedva out of her home. And  
you're right—at the moment I don't have anything to offer but the truth.

Shoshana

You heard her... She has nothing to offer you! Go home Chedveleh!

Chedva

*(finally finding the courage to stand up to her for the first time)* Don't you Chedvalah me!  
You knew! All along...you knew I didn't fall! You as well Hindi! *(to Esti)* and what  
about you, Esti ? *(Esti turns her face away)* Everyone knew! huh? Only in front of me  
you played this stupid game! *(once again on the verge of tears)* It's my fault ...I made  
the game up! Because I wanted to protect him, to protect our family's good name.

Shoshana

And you did well, Chedva. You did well.

Chedva

*(cynically)* OH! I did very well... never dared make one wrong move...! I used to think it  
was my fault, that I deserved him to hit me- but now I know...it has nothing to do with  
what I do or what I think! The house is top notch, the children, the cooking, even his  
meetings at home until two in the morning! I was always there for him – he never heard  
a word – a whisper of complaint *(looks again at the notice on the wall, tears it off)*

Shoshana

He's worried sick about you!

Chedva

If he was worried sick, he wouldn't be trying to institutionalize me! After all I've done –  
I need to prove my sanity?! *(she waves the notice in Shoshana's face)* I need to prove  
my sanity?!

Shira

You don't need to prove anything.

Shoshana

But Chedva...

Chedva

Shut up! Or I'll shut you up the way he used to shut me up.

Esti

*(to Hindi whispering)* She does seem a bit *Meshigana*(60)!

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Shoshana

Chedva, look at all you had, what's left? Where's your life? Your home? Your family?  
She's taken everything from you!

Hindi

Chedva, she's using you! She's got problems with her husband and she's looking for a  
way to take revenge ...don't you be like her...

Shira

*(sarcastically to Hindi)* No - don't be like me! Don't try and deal with the problem,  
ignore it! That's the formula, isn't it Hindi?

Shoshana

Chedva, go home of your own free will. Don't wait until they come and take you by  
force.

Chedva

By force? For ten years I've been forcing myself to go home ... forcing myself to  
swallow hard and shut up!! Not to say a word – to keep silent... Look at Elisheva? She's  
my silence. She –

*The door bell rings everyone freezes. Elisheva hugs her.*

Miki

Oh my god!

Hindi

Esti, go and see who's there.

Esti

It's Rifka. She wants to come in. And I... I have to go.

*She begins to head back to where Hindi stands*

Hindi

Stay where you are – tell us exactly who arrives. Let's get this over with

*Pause. Phone rings. Miki is sitting by the phone*

Miki

OMG! *(Nobody moves)* Should I—?*(half picks it up without speaking into it)*

Shoshana

No! it might be [Racheli]  
*Miki bangs it back down.*

Esti

It's Sima Orbach & Pnina. And Rifki's still waiting...and I've got to go! I must! I can't stay in the Mikveh on Mikveh night!- It's forbidden ! One must go home...that's the Halocha(30) ! It even says ... well it must say something- somewhere!...Oh this is terrible – Froyke's waiting for me...

Shoshana

(*To Shira*) What are you trying to gain with this craziness? You can't prevent women from purifying themselves!

Shira

I am not opening the door!

Miki

She's right! No one in, no one out! Get it?

Esti

But what can WE do anyway?

Shoshana

Shira! If you don't open the door I'm calling the police.

Shira

The police -- Great idea! I wanted to call the police myself, but Chedva wouldn't let me (*Hands her the phone*) Please - do us all a favor...

Hindi

You're really crazy!

Shira

I'm crazy, Chedva's crazy...Elisheva's crazy...who else?

### 2.3

#### ***Focus on Mikveh pool.***

*Tehila, wrapped in a prayer shawl, is immersing privately in the mikveh.*

Tehila (*voice over*)

Almighty God, with a trembling heart I fulfill this command of immersing for purification. ... As the waters of the mikveh purify my body, I pray to You, O Lord, to purify my soul of any sin and transgression, pain and sadness... Mighty Lord in Whose hands lie all living creatures, bestow upon me your blessing... and send your angels to accompany me.

Amen, amen.

Amen

*She immerses herself in the mikveh waters.*

#### Scene 2.4

*(Megaphone from outside the mikveh:)* **Holy daughters of Israel ... this is a serious warning of the High Rabbinical court of Justice...You have amongst you Chedva Wassershtumph , who is in need of immediate psychological attention --and her daughter Elisheva who was kidnapped by her mother one month ago. To hold them with you is a desecration of the All mighty... The purifying Mikve is not a place for acts of revolt , may God forgive you...In spite of the law, we are allowing you one hour to come out of the Mikve.- At the end of which, we will come to take both Mother and Daughter to the legal and lawful person responsible for them, Reb. Pinchas Wassershtumph . Anyone who does not come out of the Mikve will be excommunicated from our community and will face judgement as a rebellious wife who has rejected the Law. And the women are: Shoshana Weiss , Hindi Beltzberg, Esther Fienstien , Shira Nemaan, Tehila Struman, Chedva & Elisheva Wassershtumph.**

Miki

What the heck was that? Can someone translate?

Esti

“ThePatrol.”

Miki

Police?

Esti

The modesty patrol!

Shoshana

Well “wonder-woman” – what do you want to do now?

Shira

I’ve no idea... after all I’m not from here and I don’t belong here... YOU do something! Speak to Pinchas. Threaten him!

Shoshana

I should threaten Pinchas? You threaten him!... the day you went to Chedva, Pinchas threatened to fire ME! – Not YOU, ME!! ! They’ve already taken my daughter– now it’s my work they’re threatening -and as a ‘rebellious woman’ they’ll take away my husband and family too! I won’t let you ruin my life!

Hindi

There is no bigger shame then this.

Chedva

Shira, open the door, open it!

Shira  
No!! *(suddenly aware that Chedva said it)* Chedva?

Shoshana  
Are you beginning to see what you've done?

Chedva  
Forced support is not support...Open.

Shira  
I KNOW what I'm doing –

Chedva  
Thank you, Shira, but no! Give me the key.

Shoshana  
She asked you for the key!

Shira  
No!! I won't open the door!*(Elisheva stands beside Shira)* Are you so used to being a victim that you can't—for once in your life--demand what you deserve?

Hindi  
It's a curse!

Shoshana  
Chedva asked you to open the door!

Miki  
*(coming to Shira's aid)* Oh Come on!! You're can't turn Chedva Into a *Meshigana* (60), Shira into an adulteress and your mothers into prostitutes just so that your "tuchus"(4) will sit comfy in the Mikveh!!

Shoshana  
Sha – *Shiktzer!*

*Miki holds up a notice she wrote with her red nail polish / lipstick:  
"Mikveh closed--matter of life and death"*

Miki  
*(showing the sign to Shira)* how's this?

Shira

Excellent! Slide it under the door.

Chedva

Shira! This isn't --

Shira

Don't ask me to help you to surrender! God is giving you the choice to live!

Hindi

We have no choice!

Shira

That's ridiculous! Not one of us here is rebellious! – Why are you already condemning yourself?

Hindi

The law is in their mouths! The moment they say “rebellious”, I am “rebellious.”

Shira

Well, we also have mouths and there is no reason to shut them just when we need them most! (*looks at Elisheva – then turns back to Hindi*) You! You'd sacrifice your own son to come out of this clean!

Hindi

Don't you dare—

*Hindi faints, falls*

Shira

Hindi!!

Shoshana

Open the door! Hindi needs air!

*Shira snaps into nurse mode. She picks Hindi up, supporting her shoulders, back, etc.*

Shira

There's enough air! She needs her inhaler. (*she gives Hindi the inhaler that Hindi had in her hand*) Take off her shoes and her stockings...elevate her legs – a little –no, no ...don't bend them – they should be straight. (*Shira opens Hindi's blouse*) breathe deeply...slowly.

*Hindi tries to say something but can't*

Shoshana

...She's never had such a bad attack ...

Esti  
(going to phone) I'm calling for an ambulance.

Shira  
Calm down, Esti.

Esti  
Okay. (puts down the phone)

Shira  
Breathe in deeply. Now hold it in (counts on her fingers) Breath out...again. You could do with taking this off as well (Shira takes off Hindi's long black wig, Hindi's hands go immediately to her head – to her gray/white hair...)

Shoshana  
No! No! Not her *Shaytel!*

Hindi  
It's too late...right? Too late. (a bitter laugh. Shira gently lets go of Hindi - her breathing goes back to normal. Silence)

Shira  
So this is why you didn't want me to immerse you? (hands Hindi the wig)

Hindi  
My women's cycle stopped seven years ago... I was afraid you wouldn't let me immerse...because I'm old!!

Shira  
For seven years you've been coming to the Mikveh although you're not ... I mean... of your own free will?

Hindi  
Free will? (Bitter laugh) What do you mean "free will"- "choice"? Did I choose to stop being fertile? to stop being a mother? Did I choose to stop being a woman?!

Shoshana  
Hindi! You're the bravest woman I know.

Hindi  
No. I'm a coward. I keep coming to the mikveh... only so that David would carry on believing the impossible was possible - He wanted many children and I ...I wanted to give them to him

Shoshana

And your prayers were answered. You had a baby after twelve years of marriage – that’s a miracle!

Hindi

No, Shoshana, it was no miracle. *(Pause)* After years of immersing in the mikveh, of hopes. Disappointments. I lost faith. I knew the problem wasn’t mine...

*Elisheva brings Hindi a glass of water.*

Hindi

Thank you, Elisheva. *(tries to touch her face but the child shies off)*

Hindi (cont’d)

*(with a bitter outcry)* Yanki’s not even David’s son.

Shoshana

*(overlap on /)* What? How? ...Hindi?

Esti

Whose son is he then?

Hindi

Mine! I bought him. One can. There’s a bank. A sperm bank. *(Silence)*

Shoshana

But how, Hindi? They look so much alike, David and Yanki

Hindi

Have you ever seen two men with black hair, black beards and black suits—that don’t look alike?

Shoshana

And David?

Hindi

He doesn’t know a thing. He’s certain Yanki’s his. And, he is. He truly is. *(Pause)* If I hadn’t given him a son, he would have divorced me.

Shoshana

What are you talking about?! David loves you so much...

Hindi

Maybe. But only after the mikveh he loves me – like a woman... I was afraid that if I stopped coming to the mikveh – he’d stop touching me... stop loving me... *(to Shira)* so I lied. I lied and I’m truly sorry, Shira. *(to Shoshana)* I didn’t see any man.

Shoshana

Hindi!

Esti

Just a minute - I don't understand... Did she commit adultery or not?

Hindi

She didn't.

Est

I knew it!

Shoshana

*(angry, offended, confused) ...How could you do this to me? (considers what Shira's been through) Shira...Shira...*

Shira

Forget about it. *(looks at Hindi)* We have something much more important to see to now – Chedva -

*From outside there are sounds of knocking, and stones thrown through the window  
A window smashes,*

Miki

And these are the guys doing God's PR? No wonder his rating's gone down

Shoshana

We have to get out of here  
*Elisheva goes to block the door.*

Shira

Stop letting them run your life!

Shoshana

It won't work Shira! They're much stronger than us! Elisheva please move .

Shira

That's what they want – to split us up. Divide and conquer. Let's stand up to them for once – together

Shoshana

I can't, not today—it's Tuesday--someone's waiting for me... Elisheva....will someone please take the child?

Chedva

Come here Elisheva. Please God everything will be alright. *(Elisheva doesn't move.)*

Shira  
Shoshana, Racheli will understand.

Shoshana  
I must give her money... She has nothing to live on!  
*(Elisheva continues to block the way)*

Shira  
Give her the money tomorrow.

Shoshana  
Tomorrow it's impossible! If Moishe finds out--

Shira  
Why? Because they've brainwashed you that you're not allowed to be in touch with her?  
For heaven's sake -- you're her MOTHER!

Shoshana  
I'm not risking all I have left [in life]!

Shira  
But they're bullies, Shoshana! You said so yourself! Pinchas isn't God and the **Tzinius**  
Patrol is not halocha – we have to change their terms!

Shoshana  
To change the *halocha*?

Shira  
No!

Shoshana  
*Halocha is the red line! Elisheva! (Elisheva won't budge)*

*Shoshana grabs Elisheva to move her –but the force makes the child fall. Shoshana herself is shocked by what she did*

Chedva  
DON'T YOU DARE TOUCH HER! He never touched her. The first time Pinchas hit me in front of her I begged Elisheva to go to her room, not to look ... she wouldn't move... after a few minutes when I was sure I was going to pass out, she screamed "Daddy stop it, Daddy Stop! It's forbidden by the Torah! Daddy stop it!..." He turned around and said to her, quietly, that if she dared open her mouth again he would beat her to death. Since then, she hasn't said a word.

Shoshana

*(realizing what she has done)* ...I'm...sorry...

Shira

“ Women who are ordered: give us one of you and we shall defile her and if not- we will defile all of you, all should be defiled and not sacrifice one soul!” That is the *Halacha*.

Hindi

*(Stands opposite Shoshana)* I hate her being right, but if they have to institutionalize Chedva, then they have to institutionalize me as well– all of us... I am staying.

Shira

Hindi!

Esti

*(quickly)* Me too.

Shira

Esti!

Miki

What guts! You're great, the lot of you. And I thought orthodox life was boring!

Shira

You're great too Miki!

Miki

*(mock cynicism)* Me? What I have to lose—I've already lost, but I don't have the guts to admit it...

*Elisheva walks up to Shoshana and looks into her eyes. Pleading. It's as if her Mother is speaking what her mute daughter cannot say*

Chedva

You said they took your daughter away from you, don't let them separate my daughter fromme. Please...

*Shoshana is locked in Elishevah's eyes. Something inside her moves. She hugs her.*

Shoshana

Alright. *(a new, determined energy)* But there's nothing we can say to them! Believe me! We have to talk to our families, our husbands, to get their support...I'll call my Moishie...*(goes to the phone. The group by the door breaks up)*

Everyone

Shoshana!

Shoshana

*(with receiver on her ear ) Pray for me ! (Telephone conversation) Moishe? (a bit afraid, but bucks up) Ah, You've already heard about this nonsense...Nu...Shoyne(1)... I'm a rebellious wife?! I'm always at your side, always. And now – you be by my side ... another word and I'll show you what a rebellious wife is !! ... Moishi! This is a matter of life and death! "We're saving a jewish soul" ... What ? Of course you musn't vote for him!!...To do? OY! First of all, get all the bullies from the Tznius(55) Patrol away from our door – and make sure that Chedva - ...Who asked ? So tell him the truth! You can be proud your wife is here... Listen, we still have a lot of calls to make – ...No, no, no! We don't need anything– Good-night Mush...(she's a bit surprised by her success. Chedva embraces her)*

Shoshana

Well-- what are you waiting for? Only I have a husband to speak to ? Hindi ! Esti ! I'll call the *rebezn*(63)!

Shira

Shoshana, thank you... you have no idea what a big mitzvah you've done!

Shoshana

Shah, shhhah... It doesn't matter! You speak to Amatzia – that's what matters.

Shira

I...yes, sure.

*Shira gets her cell phone. In the meantime, other conversations have started. Esti doesn't have a cell-phone; Chedva gives her hers. Hindi puts her wig back on before dialing.The calls are simultaneous*

Miki

Sammy, lovie – What's up?

Shoshana

Bella – this is Shoshana from the mkveh– You heard Chedva came to find a safe shelter here?

Esti

Froyke! You know I'd never do anything that would keep me away from my children!

Shoshana

Bella Hoyzman, the Rebetzin, she's in!

Shira

...I'm ungrateful? He beats his wife...

Esti

He's a rebellious woman himself!

Shira

... So I'm supposed to shut up because he got me this job? That's the way he deals with everyone – including you!! (*listen*)

Miki

Even if it's the last thing you do for me – I want you to bring the whole Yeshiva over – including the rabbi – because if you don't – I swear – I'm never dipping again – forever blocked!! Get it?

Shira

It is my business and your business and anyone who considered voting for him tomorrow's business...

Hindi

Hadassah! I want all the neighbors down here tonight – then come in pajamas – just put on your *Shaytal* and come...

Shoshana

Who haven't we called yet ?

Miki

Forget it, Sammy – we'll manage... without you ... yeh, seeya!

Shira

It's me – Shira – who took care of you for two years, me, who gave up everything I wanted to do in the last ten years ... because you

Miki

Bye, Sammy, bye ...

Shira

Don't threaten me, Amatzia ... [An affair?] If that's what you really think – then divorce me...

*A moment between Miki and Shira who've both realized their marriages are over*

Shoshana

There are 40 women are on their way here! It's a miracle—*mamesh*, a miracle!

*Chedva comes to Shira, hugs her*

Hindi

I've never seen anything like it...I have never seen anything like this in my life.

*They all gather around Chedva except for Elisheva who left during the calls*

Chedva

Thank you. I...thank you...I know this is just the beginning—it's not over yet but I want to thank every one of you (*looks for an doesn't see Elisheva*) Where's Elisheva?

Shira

Tehila!!

### ***The Pool and the Waiting Room***

*Lights up on mikveh pool.*

*Elisheva is standing over the pool satring at Tehila's dead body.*

Elisheva

Ahhhh! Tehilaaaaa! ... TEHIILLAAAAAAA!

*On the screen we see Tehila, wrapped in a prayer shawl, floating lifeless on top of the waters.*

*The women all gather around Elisheva*

*We hear music: the psalm:*

*Because my father and mother abandoned me God will gather me up. I do believe I shall yet see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

END OF PLAY.

### **Yiddish Glossary**

*The Yiddish in the play, for the most part, is written as pronounced rather than with the 'correct spelling'—this is for the sake of the actresses. Sometimes there are a few possible meanings to one word\phrase – the translation given refers to what is meant in the specific context. If the word or phrase reappears with a slightly different meaning then it will appear again under a new number.*

1. Nu Shoyne = oh , well
2. Mitzvah = a good deed
3. A mechayer = so reviving!
4. tuchus = backside
5. Roysh Choydesh = The new moon.The 1st of the Hebrew month.
6. Nu? = well?
7. loch'n'kop =hole in your head
8. a mechayer = a relief
9. Gevult =goodness!
10. metziya = a bargain
11. Ich veyse = I much know

12. Chuppah = The Chuppah is a marriage canopy that symbolizes the couple's first home together. During the Jewish wedding ceremony, the bride and groom stand under the Chuppah. Under the Chuppah, blessings are recited, the wedding ring is given, the Ketubah is read out loud, and the glass is broken.
13. kenain ehora (kineayn a'hura) = let no evil come to them!
14. Gottinue = nickname for God
15. Nebach = poor soul
16. Gernisht = nothing
17. Choyzer Betshuvah = one who becomes religious rather than one being born into a religious family (can be considered of lower status within the community)
18. Nebach = poor thing's  
100
19. noch = in addition
20. T'vila = immersions
21. maidele/ maydeleh = young lady
22. Vus? = What?
23. Shkoyech! = may his strength be with him/well done 24. mazel = luck 25. Eyzer Knegdo = helper – saying used only for wife to husband as she was created to help him.
26. yidishkeyt = jewish spirit 27. Oy Vey! = Oh no! 28. Halocha = Jewish law
29. Kala = bride
30. hefsek = date of your last period 31. Rebayno shel oylam = God almighty 32. Chuppa = wedding canopy 33. Gunze = whole 34. otazoy = that's the way/that's right!
35. mamesh = truly/literally
36. Oy! Ich hob nisht kan koyach = Oh! I've got no more strength 40. Mitzvah = holy command
41. Och! = an exclamation that cancels what was said before. In this case it's meaning "Don't be stupid!!"
42. Gib a kick = look at this!
43. A Chutzpa! = what a cheek!
44. A shiktzer = an abomination/abominator
45. tzures = troubles
46. sheitle = wig (religious women have to cover their head after marriage. Many modern women use wigs as opposed to hats or scarves)
47. kala = bride
48. Shiduch = an arranged marriage  
101
49. Yichus = family background (before a couple meet they know everything about the family and their status within the religious community)
50. yeshiva-bochers = yeshiva students- The phrase refers to a young man, enrolled as a full-time student in a school of Judaic studies, at any level corresponding roughly to high school through college. Considered a good catch for their high level of religious learning.
51. Shoyn = well then...
52. Nishtgaducht = one shouldn't know!
53. tzadik = righteous man
54. Yom Kippur = Judgement day. Holiest day in the Hebrew calendar
55. Tznius = Modesty

56. kugelhof = A Gugelhupf or Kugelhupf is a classic cake said to have originated in Austria or in the Alsace region of France.
57. ba'labusta = is a Yiddish expression describing a good homemaker
58. Choydesh tov = happy new month
57. shool (shul) = synagogue
58. hatzola = jewish community first aid
59. macher =salesman by nature
60. Meshigana = crazy person
61. tallis = a prayer shawl worn by jewish men
62. kippot = yarmulke
63. Rebezn = rabbis wife