

# Hard To Be A Jew

By I.D. Berkowitz

Based on: Shalom Aleichem

Play no. 209

Opening show: 23/06/1965

Directed by: Abraham Ninio

Designed by : Eliezer Sinai

Costumes by : Lidia Pincus-Gani

Lighting by: Michael Lieberman

Movement by: Bruria Avieser

The Cast

David Shapiro: R. Klatzkin

Sara, his wife: Bat-Ami, S. Sheftel

Betty, their daughter: D. Salant

Siomka, their son: D. Magar

Shneurson: S. Bar-Shavit

Ivanov: Y. Efroni

Katz "Ketzele": S. Segal

Grinsberg: A. Anski

Fradkin": I. Amir

Hurvitz: I. Rubintzik

The Head of the Gendameirie: I. Jung

The Janitor: I. Rubinstein

Students: Y. Iaacov, H. Furman

## The Play

### Prologue

In a provincial city in Central Russia before the first World War.

The graduates of the Gymnasia are celebrating their graduation, all but Shneurson, the only Jew among them, who is steeped in gloom. He fears lest the doors of the University will be closed to him in spite of the fact that he was awarded a gold medal at the graduation. His friend, Ivanov, the good natured Goy, for whom all doors are open, suggests, while being in high spirits, that they exchange names and papers for one year. He wants to show Shneurson that it's not "hard to be a Jew", as the latte

### Act One

In a central city in the heart of the Pale of Settlement, restricted only to Jews with special rights and privileges, in a period of Jewish restrictions and disabilities in Russia.

"Ketzele" brings Ivanov into the house of David Shapiro. Ivanov comes to rent a room and settle in the city, so as to enter the University. Sarah, the mother of the house, considers him to be some ne'er-do-well of Goy, but as soon as he proves that he is Jewish and his name is Hershko Shneurson, he is received and liked by all the members of the family. But the question soon arises: Does he have residential rights in the city? Ivanov explains that he applied for admission to the University and that he has a gold medal. The lady

of the house begins to question her new roomer as to his birthplace and parents. She makes him tell her that he is an orphan and that he has a rich grandmother. David Shapiro comes home and announces that a gold medal is no longer of any avail. There is a new disability: Jewish students will be admitted to the University only by lot. He then suggests to Ivanov to arrange his residential rights by registering as an assistant to a dentist. Ivanov, confused in his new predicament, calls his friend Shneurson to ask his advice. Shneurson comes into Shapiro's home under the name of Ivanov, and shows himself to be very conversant with Jewish matters. The two friends exchange their first impression. Ivanov, likes his role as Jew and is especially contented with the Jewish family and with Betty, the comely daughter. Shneurson warns him not to forget that she is a Jewish girl whereas he is but a Goy.

### **Act Two**

The Shapiros are making ready for Betty's birthday party. The daughter tells her mother about the wrist-watch she has received from their roomer as a birthday gift. The mother revels over the idea of such "a rich match". Shneurson comes in and she begins to ask him about this friend's rich grandmother. Shneurson, who is wise to his friend's intentions, wants to get something out of the mother. David Shapiro learns of the wrist-watch and orders it to be returned. In the meanwhile Betty's friends gather for the party, and a discussion ensues; they talk of the Jewish students who apostatize, and Ivanov hears Betty say that a Jewish girl, apostatizing, in order to be married to a Goy, is a traitor. Ivanov finds the opportunity of declaring his love to Betty, but she gets out of it and returns him the gift. Shneurson warns his friend not to deceive and mislead the Jewish girl, and hints to Betty to beware of his friend. Betty is bewildered by all that is happening to her. "Ketzele" comes in telling about the ritual murder the Jews are accused of. The police are looking for a Zaddik by the name of Shneurson, he is accused of the crime. The janitor of the house comes in to find out about the roomer Shneurson; he does so by order of the police.

### **Act Three**

It is the day before Pesach. In town there is fear of pogrom, and at the Shapiro's preparations are being made for Seder, to which were invited both the "Jewish" roomer and his friend the "non Jew". Shapiro brings his wife overwhelming news: their roomer's friend has been at the Rabbi's, desiring to turn Jewish and marry their daughter. The frightened mother probes her daughter about the love affair between her and the Goy, but the girl knows of nothing. Shneurson comes to the Seder, and realizes the whole confusion, which he is to blame for by his suggestion of the exchange with his friend. The Seder begins. David Shapiro brings the Kiddush when the gendarmerie come in to imprison the Zaddik, Shneurson, the roomer. In order to get his friend out of this "Jewish mess" the real Shneurson discloses of the exchange. The head of the gendarmerie orders the arrest of both friends. Shapiro resumes to tell the story of the Exile of the Jews from Egypt, and Siomka, the young son, asks the questions of "Ma Nishtana".