

A Good Samaritan

(Originally written for the "On the Way" Sunday morning kids 9-12 program. First public performance was 2/18/2011 at the Ann Arbor Civic Theatre.)

A short play in 6 even shorter scenes
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Dramatis Personae:

Jesus
Aboram, a lawyer
Costoram, his not-so-bright friend
Barachel, an earnest listener
A Priest
Malachi, the Priest's servant
A Body
A Levite
Servant to the Levite
Samaritan
Samaritan's donkey
Alecheim, the innkeeper
Yetzel, the innkeeper's wife

Scene I. Just off the main market in Jerusalem. Jesus is telling stories, and has drawn a small crowd.

Aboram: ...so, Rabbi, what do you say I should do to inherit eternal life?
Jesus: What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?
Aboram: 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.'
Barachel: And don't forget, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'
Jesus: That is correct. Do these... and you will live.
Aboram: Yes, Rabbi. But... (*testing*) who exactly *is* my neighbor?
Costoram: Good question, Aboram! My neighbor Hymie, he's drunk all the time, even on Shabbas sometimes, and I hardly think...

Jesus: (*interrupting*) Let me tell you a story... A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. By chance a certain priest was going down that way...

(Scene II: an isolated stretch of road among the hills outside Jericho. The sun is high in the sky. Enter priest around a bend in the road, followed by his servant).

Priest: Malachi!
Servant: Yes, master? (*stops short as he notices the body in the road*)
Priest: Get this... thing... out of my way.
Servant: Yes, master. Is he... dead?
Priest: He is clearly unclean. That is all that matters.
Servant: Uh... yes, master. (*Goes to move the body.*)
Priest: Not with your hands, you idiot! If you touch him, and then touch me, I will be unclean for a week. (*Takes a pose, and begins to lecture.*) For as it saith in the Torah, in the 19th

chapter of Numbers, “Whoever touches the dead body of any human being will be unclean for seven days. The unclean person must use this water on the third day and the seventh day...”

Servant: *(interrupting)* Yes, of course, master. I'm so stupid, master, of course I knew that.
(Looks about, and then finds a stick to move the body.)

Body: *(weakly)* ...water...

Servant: *(pushes the man off to the side of the road, while the priest carefully avoids looking at the scene)* Hush, you. You're supposed to be dead. Don't you dare profane my master with your words or your breath or your spit or your blood or...

Priest: Malachi!

Servant: Yes master! I'm sorry, master. It's just that he's so... filthily, so **dirtyly**, unclean.

Priest: Purge him from your mind and think only holy thoughts. We must be off, or I will be late for the evening prayers. *(Priest walks away, quickly.)*

Servant: *(pauses, looking back and forth between the priest and the body, then spits on the body)* There! There's your water! *(Runs after the priest.)* Coming, master!

(Scene III: Several hours pass. The sun is setting, and the air is growing cooler. A Levite appears, riding on a donkey, followed by his servant, on foot.)

Levite: *(droning)* “...and the peoples shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the LORD for servants and for handmaids: and they shall take them captive, whose captives they were...”
(sees the body, and pauses; then nudges his donkey to the other side of the road, and continues riding)

Servant: *(distracted by the movement, almost walks on the body. Pauses for a moment.)* Master? Shouldn't we, um, do something?

Levite: *(continuing to look away).* Nonsense, boy. Look away from this wretch. As it says in the Holy of Holies, “For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?”.

Servant: *(confused)* Master?

Levite: Do not trouble your mind with that which the LORD hath ordained. Your impulse does you credit, but turn your eyes to the heavens.

Servant: *(even more confused)* But... Master?

Levite: *(impatiently)* **Shift it!** *(continues riding around the next bend)*

Body: *(weakly)* ...water... for the love of... God... ...water...

Servant: *(pauses, looks back at his disappearing master, then bends down to the man on the ground. Opens his water pouch, and pours a thin trickle of water into the man's mouth.)* Here, take it easy. Drink it slowly.

Body: ...ahhhh... so... weak...

Levite: *(from a distance)* BOY!

Servant: COMING, MASTER! *(turns back to the man)* Look, I can't... I mean, I want to help and all, but I can't get involved.

Body: *(moans)*

Servant: *(in a rush)* My master... he's really strict, you know? My dad's gone, and my mom's sick, and I had to take this job to buy her medicines, and my master's gonna **kill** me if I don't... ah, what am I **doing**?! Here, take the water, here's my cloak, keep warm, don't... *(runs off, crying).*

Body: *(weakly)* ...bless...

(Scene IV: Early the next morning. *A Samaritan is walking down the road, leading an old donkey.*)

Donkey: *(brays twice, impatiently)*

Sam.: Yes, good steed, I know. But there's an inn not far from here, with fresh hay. As it says in the Good Book, "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him..."

Donkey: *(brays again, nosing the Samaritan towards the body)*

Sam.: Yes, I... hello, what have we here? *(bends down to examine the body)*. Alive? But stripped and beaten... and then covered with a cloak? *(Turns to look at the donkey, conversationally.)* Who knew that the robbers hereabouts were so compassionate?

Body: *(moans)*

Sam.: Truly a mystery, and I, alas, no Daniel to reveal it. But this man looks to be a Jew out of Jerusalem, and thus no friend nor burden of mine.

Donkey: *(brays loudly and sharply)*

Sam.: Reproach your master, will you? Truly the End Days have come, when beasts claim more wisdom than men. *(Looks skyward, opening his hands as if in argument)* Still, as it says in the Good Book, "Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Have you healed that which was sick? Or bound up that which was broken? Or..." *(suddenly realizing whom he is addressing, he lowers his head, and sees the body once again)*. Yea, Lord, this is the day that thou hast made, and I am... *(sighs in mild exasperation)* your servant.

Donkey: *(moves over next to the body and waits patiently)*

Sam.: *(addressing the body)* Come, friend, your ride awaits. I hope he gives you an easier ride than I have received. *(Lifts the body onto the donkey, and begins binding up his wounds with strips of cloth torn from his robe. The three of them slowly move on down the road.)*

(Scene V: Near Jericho. *Inside an inn that has seen better days*)

Sam.: Hello, the inn! Is anyone about?

Innkeeper: *(coming out of the kitchen door, distracted, suddenly notices his guest and his donkey)*
Hey, you – get that donkey out of here!

Sam.: Peace, my good man! This Jew here is sorely wounded, and I am not so young that I can carry him into your *(coughs)* fine establishment all by myself. *(Moves closer to the innkeeper, and holds up two denarii)*. But I will pay in advance for his lodging and doctoring...

Innkeeper: *(examines the coins, and bites them)*. Well.... all right. But that's another sesterti for stabling that animal! And make sure the man doesn't bleed on...

Wife: *(rushing into the room and interrupting)* Alechein, you chiseler! You want to be known as a gonif? This man offers charity to a wounded traveler, and already you have your hand in his purse? Some days I think Mother was right about you...

Innkeeper: *(pleading)* But Yetzel, my sweet, this man, he's a, he's a Sam...

Wife: *(stomps on his foot, unseen by the Samaritan)*

Innkeeper: Oww!

Wife: That's right, sam-**how** we'll manage to match this good man's charity. *(Looks at the Samaritan, and improvises swiftly)* In the, uh, words of the prophets, "Do not bind the hands of the sowers of grain." Sir, my own daughter will bring clean linen and fresh-pressed oil for this poor man's wounds. Tomorrow we will send for a doctor to attend on him until he is well.

Sam.: *(trying not to smile)* That will be well then, indeed. I thank you, and your *learned* wife, and *(yawns)* please excuse me, so I may tend this traveler and take my own rest. *(exits)*

Innkeeper: Yetzel, two denarii will barely cover our costs. Who's going to pay for the doctor? And he's a **Samaritan**!

Wife: Samaritan, Shamaritan – he's a **customer**! As my mother always said, “Never let your sense of morals prevent you from doing what is right!”

Innkeeper: But... but...

Wife: Alechem, use your head for something other than holding up your yarmulke! When the word gets around, people will flock here from all over Jericho just to see the wonder of a Samaritan who took care of a Jew – **and** the noble and generous innkeeper who served them both. Then, when they're here, they'll want something to eat, and something to drink... hmm, better slaughter **two** calves for tomorrow. And I'll send for my niece, Mirriam – she nursed all her cousins through childbirth, she's a better doctor than any of those yutzes in town, and cheaper, too.

Innkeeper: *(shakes his head)* Yetzel, Yetzel – Some day you will run this town. What would I do without you?

Wife: Just make sure you remember that. *(Punches him affectionately.)*

(Scene VI: return to Jesus' story-telling)

Jesus: Now which of these three do you think seemed to be a neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?

Aboram: *(reluctantly)* The Sam... the one who showed mercy on him.

Jesus: Then, go and do likewise.

Costoram: *(confused)* Wait a moment. So does that mean that even our, uh, **neighbor's** neighbors are still our neighbors? I mean, the ones that we still have to care about?

Aboram: Yes, that's what the Rabbi meant.

Costoram: But a Samaritan? They're barely even Jews. Next you'll be saying that even our neighbors who are Gentiles are, well, our neighbors.

Aboram: *(grinning)* Yes, that does follow, doesn't it?

Costoram: *(stands in outrage).* But that's messhugah! Why would God want us to... *(sees Aboram holding back a laugh, and suddenly the light dawns)* Aboram! You trickster! I almost fell for that!

Aboram: *(stands, laughing out loud, slaps Costoram on the back)* Had you there for a minute, didn't I?

Costoram: *(now also laughing)* Gentiles as neighbors!

Aboram & Costoram: *(simultaneously)* **Ridiculous!** *(walk off, arm in arm)*

Jesus: *(sighs, and rubs his forehead)*

Barachel: *(earnestly)* But, Master? If we are to love our neighbor, shouldn't that also include... *(pauses)* well, Gentiles, too? Why were they laughing?

Jesus: *(with a sad smile)* Let me tell you another story. Behold, there went out a sower to sow...

Mark 4:1-20

Behold, there went out a sower to sow: And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some a hundred. And he said unto them, He that has ears to hear, let him hear.

Luke 10:30-37

Jesus answered, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. By chance a certain priest was going down that way. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also, when he came to the place, and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he traveled, came where he was. When he saw him, he was moved with compassion, came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. He set him on his own animal, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, and gave them to the host, and said to him, 'Take care of him. Whatever you spend beyond that, I will repay you when I return.' Now which of these three do you think seemed to be a neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?" He said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."