

אהבה | Ahavah

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Synopsis:

After his Bubbie's death, Saul returns home to his family after a long absence to sit Shiva. Alice, Saul's girlfriend, joins him. Saul tries to portray the perfect version of what he thinks his family wants. However, a message from the beyond leads both Saul and Alice to some meaningful realizations.

Characters:

Alice Hobbs: Female, 30s, not Jewish

Saul Goldberg: Male, 30s, Jewish

Setting:

Sitting room of the home of Saul's Bubbie and Zayde.

Notes:

- / indicates an abrupt cut-off of the line.
- | indicates overlapping lines.
- There are additional notes and research on relevant Jewish culture after end of play.

START OF PLAY

At Rise: *Lights up on Saul and Alice in a small front room. They are in Saul's Zayde and Bubbie's home where Bubbie's reception (shiva) is taking place in the next room. Alice is in a bright-colored dress. Saul is in dark clothing. He is carrying a small tied-up grocery bag. Alice is reading a little note card with a photo of Bubbie that has a short blurb on it.*

ALICE:
Should we go in?

SAUL:
Just give it a minute. I can hear my Zayde kvetching about me.

SAUL sits, puts the bag down, and takes out his phone.

ALICE:
(mouths 'kvetching') Ok. How do I look?

SAUL:
(looking at phone) Fine.

ALICE:
Really, you've hardly looked at me.

ALICE tries to get his attention then feels defeated.

Maybe I shouldn't have come /

SAUL:
No. No, it's not you. It's just. Bubbie was as frum as they come /

ALICE:
What? I don't understand /

SAUL:
(gestures to Alice's outfit) Frum. Kosher. She was, uh, traditional.

ALICE:
So?

SAUL:
Soooo if she saw you in that dress she'd, she'd plotz.

ALICE:

But *you* love this dress.

SAUL:

I do. (*sees Alice's disbelieving reaction*) I really do!

SAUL puts his hand in ALICE's.

Sorry, I haven't seen the rest of my family in a while, and I just want everything to be perfect.

ALICE:

Just be yourself honey /

SAUL:

Right. (*laughs to self*)

ALICE:

What?

SAUL:

Hmm?

ALICE:

What's so funny?

SAUL:

Oh. Nothing. Just. Funny you should say that I should be myself. Cuz, speaking of, when we go in there, I'm a lawyer.

ALICE:

You're a paralegal.

SAUL:

Not today. They (*pointing at exit*) think I passed the bar exam. If they knew I was schlepping around work for actual attorneys, I'd never hear the end of it. I've actually been trying to figure out how to ask you to do this for me.

ALICE:

(*In disbelief, pulls away*) Seriously?

SAUL:

Alice, come on. I'm still me. Except this version of me is Junior Partner at Feinberg, Feinberg, and Gorman LLC. Oh, and I live in the West Village /

ALICE:
Of course you do.

SAUL:
(hesitating) One more thing...

ALICE:
Can't wait to hear this.

SAUL:
You converted.

ALICE:
What?! I'm Jewish now?

SAUL:
(faux excited) Mazel Tov.

ALICE:
What the fuck, Saul? Where is all *this* coming from? First, I don't think I've ever heard you utter a Yiddish word | before today --

SAUL:
(overlapping) That's just | mishegas.

ALICE:
(overlapping) -- and now all of these lies to your family. I just. Listen, I'm so sorry for your loss. I am. And I'm trying to be patient because I know how close you were with your Bubbie. But I can't believe she would want you to be this fake version of yourself.

SAUL:
You're right. You're definitely *not* a Jew.

ALICE:
And you're not a lawyer. *Yet* | I mean.

SAUL:
(overlapping) Wow. | Ok.

ALICE:
(overlapping) Not that there's anything wrong with that. So you didn't pass the bar the first time. So what? You've been able to take time off to be sure this was even something that *you* wanted. Besides, you're sitting for the bar again soon. I mean, don't you want your family's support? Like they're real support?

SAUL:

Fine. You're right. I'll avoid the whole conversation.

ALICE:

That is not what I said.

SAUL:

Listen, I just want to get through today, ok?

ALICE:

Sure. Fine. Whatever.

ALICE goes towards the door.

Oh, I sent a beautiful arrangement of flowers. I wonder if they arrived yet.

SAUL:

You *what*?!

ALICE:

Yeah, I sent roses. I knew Bubbie was special to you, so I got the "ethereal elegance package" with these white ribbons down the side. Oh, and the roses are in the shape of a heart /

SAUL:

Food, Alice. Not flowers, or bows, or ethereal packages. You bring food.

SAUL holds up the grocery bag; it contains a wrapped container of Matzah Ball Soup.

See! Matzah Ball Soup.

ALICE:

Oh that's what that smell was /

SAUL:

Yes, Alice. That's the smell of love and exile and (*trails off*) a bissele of this and a bissele of that. I don't really know all the ingredients, it's from this place off 3rd Avenue. Their soup is second only to Bubbie's. She'd make it for me whenever I was sick, or sad, or looking too thin; it's basically Jewish penicillin.

ALICE:

(*opening cap of the container and looking into the bowl*) Yum, yummy, oh, and look at the little balls floating. (*Mustering up enthusiasm*) Mmmm delicious, honey.

SAUL:

Don't try and cheer me up.

ALICE:

There's more food in there, right? (*heading towards the door*) We should head in /

SAUL:

(*gently grabbing ALICE's hand*) Wait. So you'll go along with *everything*, right?

ALICE:

They'll see right through me.

SAUL:

You're right. Ugh! What was I thinking? I'm such a schlub.

SAUL begins pacing around.

Is it getting hot in here? It feels warm, right? Wait. Is that? D'you hear that? (*a realization*) Rabbi Abramowitz is in there! What am I saying? Of course, he's here! He visited Bubbie every week at the hospital to replay his Shabbat sermon. I can't lie to him or even around him. I'm done for. (*SAUL starts loosening his tie a bit*) Oy, I'm schvitzing.

ALICE:

Hey hey. It's okay. Just be yourself in there. Your sweet, awkward self.

SAUL:

But that's just it. The Rabbi will see right through me. He always has /

ALICE:

I'm sure that's not true.

SAUL:

Listen, Al. This man knows me. He was my Sunday school teacher age 4 to 18, he was my Bar Mitzvah tutor, and he was my moyal. In fact, he moyaled three generations of my family. He did me, he did my uncle Jack, and my nephew Zev. So when I say he'll see right through my lies... he will.

ALICE:

Ok. That *is* a rather... intimate connection, but I, I think you might be in your head too much about this. (*grabs soup container*) Maybe you should have a bite to calm your nerves.

SAUL:

(*looking at container*) No thanks. I can't eat at a time like this.

SAUL pushes the container. In the process, he spills on his pants.

SAUL (cont.):

Damn! Great. | Just great.

ALICE:

(overlapping) I'm | sorry!

SAUL:

(overlapping) It looks like I pissed my pants.

ALICE:

I don't have anything to wipe it with.

SAUL starts emptying his pockets. He takes out a few things including checks. ALICE also checks her pockets to no avail.

SAUL:

Perfect. All I have is this stuff and one of Bubbie's checks.

ALICE:

Check? *(takes it)* \$13.00?

SAUL:

(distracted while wiping pants) Hmm? Oh. Yeah. I've got a bunch of these checks from her.

ALICE:

You never cashed them?

SAUL:

Nah. I thought maybe Bubbie was getting a little forgetful.

SAUL takes more checks out of his wallet. ALICE is looking at checks.

ALICE:

\$13.00, \$13.00, they're all for \$13.00.

SAUL:

I guess so.

ALICE:

Oh damn. (*handing check to SAUL*) Look in the memo of this one.

SAUL:

(*reading check*) “Alice.”

ALICE:

Why?

SAUL:

I dunno. Look. She wrote “Bar” on this one. And this one just says “Ahavah” /

ALICE:

More like “I’ll have a” (*pronouncing it mockingly like “Ahavah”*) little more money than \$13.00 thank you Bubbie.

SAUL:

Jesus /

ALICE:

Sorry. I know; too soon for jokes.

SAUL:

No. Rabbi Abramowitz. He said in his last visit to her, she spoke of Ahavah and the importance of love. I guess it was the topic for his sermon that week. (*a thought*) Wait. No. 13. 13...

SAUL takes out his phone and is intently searching the internet.

(*Realizing*) Oh Bubbie.

ALICE:

What? What’d you find?

SAUL:

I just realized something about Ahavah and 13. So I googled the two words together. And guess what? (*reading from phone*) “Ahavah” means “love” in Hebrew.

ALICE:

Oh.

SAUL:

Yeah. According to this, “the Jewish mystics remark on the affinity between the word ahavah and the numerical value of the letters being 13. Oneness, unity, is the aspiration of love, it is without conditions. Love is Giving.”

SAUL hands the phone to ALICE.

ALICE:

(reads phone) “The more we give, the more we show love without condition.” Damn. Wait. *(rifles through checks)* “Bar.” Saul, look. She must have known about your bar exam results.

SAUL:

What? How could she? I never told her. *(takes the check)* But she, she never said anything.

ALICE:

And yet she loved you anyway.

SAUL:

(looking through checks) She knew about everything. *(Then he takes the check that was in his pocket)* And she didn’t just love me here.

ALICE:

What?

SAUL:

(handing check to ALICE) Al. She loved you, too.

ALICE:

(reading check) “Alice.”

ALICE turns to say something to SAUL but sees he is crying. She holds him in her arms. SAUL holds her tighter.

SAUL:

I just. I miss her so much.

ALICE:

I know, honey. I know.

SAUL:

(after finally gaining his composure back) She loved you. She didn’t care if you were Jewish, or not Jewish, or anything about that. She knew I loved you, and that, that was good enough for her.

ALICE:

She was a beautiful woman.

SAUL:

She was. I, I don't like talking about her in the past tense. Feels strange to think she isn't here.

ALICE:

I'm pretty sure she'll always be with you. (*refers to checks*) She always has been.

SAUL smiles at the thought of this and after a moment he gets an idea.

SAUL:

You know what I think?

ALICE:

What's that?

SAUL:

I say, let's go in there. As ourselves. Me and /

ALICE:

Your shiksa goddess.

They share a laugh. SAUL reaches for her hand.

SAUL:

I was going to say my *girlfriend*. (*He kisses her hand*) No lies. Just the *real* us. This is what Bubbie would've wanted. Me to just be me.

They start to exit.

(Turns abruptly) Balls /

ALICE:

Yes, it takes a lot of *chutzpah* to be yourself.

SAUL:

No, we forgot the Matzah Balls. (*Gestures to where they were left*) I may be brave but I'm not stupid enough to go in there empty-handed. (*grabs the soup container, as they start to exit again*) Also, can we talk about how you used not one but two Yiddish terms just now?

ALICE:

You noticed that huh?

SAUL:

Hard not to. Hey. I love you.

ALICE:

I love you, too.

SAUL:

Good. Now let's go in there and schmooze.

They smile at each other, hold hands, and exit.

END OF PLAY

Additional Notes:

Ahavah -

<http://www.betemunah.org/thirteen.html>

Ahavah means "love" in Hebrew. The Jewish mystics remark on the affinity between the word ahavah, "love," and "echad," one. The numerical value of their letters is the same: 13.

Ahava rabbah is a prayer and blessing that is recited by followers of Ashkenazi Judaism during Shacharit immediately prior to the Shema maybe that can be a song* that is played we hear it through the door or to set the scene

Song: Ahavah Rabbah: How Deeply You Have Loved Us <https://youtu.be/8w-eQopk5zk>

Sheet music: <https://elanaarian.com/shop/ahavah-rabbah-sheet-music-download>

*Production would be responsible for securing rights to song; many public domain versions exist.

Food at funeral -

[https://dresslerjewishfunerals.com/shiva/#:~:text=Shiva%20Meal%20\(Seudat%20Havra%20Dah,boiled%20eggs%2C%20bagels%20or%20lentils.](https://dresslerjewishfunerals.com/shiva/#:~:text=Shiva%20Meal%20(Seudat%20Havra%20Dah,boiled%20eggs%2C%20bagels%20or%20lentils.)