

Taken from the playbill for *Acts of Faith*, Mosaic Theatre at the 92nd Street 'Y'
December 12, 1987 - January 17, 1988

From the Author:

ACTS OF FAITH is my first play. Before turning to playwriting two years ago, I was a designer of social science curricula, working to help students gain a deeper understanding of different world views.

To me, differences are inherent in what drives people, claims their loyalty, shapes their sense of self.

Writing this play offered an opportunity to explore an encounter between two world-views not yet presented on the American stage. Ahmed, a young Shiite, divides the universe into good and evil and is devoted to the letter of theocratic law. Barbara, a young Jewish-American psychologist raised in the sixties, has a firm faith in people and is devoted to the cultivation of individuality and human relationships. A fundamentalist meets a humanist.

Barbara has never met with brutality; Ahmed has never met the "enemy." What would happen to the pacifist immersed in violence-to the terrorist captured by compassion?

Writing ACTS OF FAITH also allowed me to explore aspects of my own Jewishness and the meaning of that heritage, What is the legacy of centuries of persecution and assimilation? What are the dimensions and demands of Zionism? What are the implications of belief or non-belief in an afterlife? What values are implied by the story of Abraham and Isaac-might a woman have responded differently to God's test?

And finally, writing the play forced me to confront my own relationship to faith, and the many forms that faith can take: Faith in the divine word versus faith in the human spirit; faith fueled by the recognition of evil in the world versus faith that is destroyed by that recognition; unquestioning faith versus the type that harbors doubt.

A Yiddish poem by Aharon Zeitlin expresses these various forms of faith, and is also very much in the spirit of the play ACTS OF FAITH:

"Praise me," says God, "and I will know that you love me."
"Curse me," says God, "and I will know that you love me."
"Praise me or curse me and I will know that you love me."
"Sing out my graces," says God.
"Raise your fist against me and revile," says God.
"Sing out my graces or revile,
"Reviling is also a kind of praise." says God.
"But if you sit fenced off in your apathy," says God.
"If you sit entrenched in 'I don't give a damn,' says God.
"If you look at the stars and yawn."
"If you see suffering and don't cry out."
"If you don't praise and you don't revile."
"Then I created you in vain." says God.

Aharon Zeitlin translated from the Yiddish