If I Forget
by Steven Levenson

Dramaturgy Packet by Audrey Lang
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I. Glossary........................................................................................................page 2
II. Some Notes on Names................................................................................page 17
III. 2000 U.S. Presidential Election..............................................................page 19
IV. Israeli-Palestinian Conflict & Territory – A Timeline.........................page 20
V. Tenure: Are Professions Protected?.......................................................page 24
VI. Genocides Other than the Holocaust....................................................page 26
VII. The Term “Genocide”............................................................................page 26
VIII. Jerusalem Syndrome............................................................................page 27
IX. Jewish Voices from the Selma-to-Montgomery March.......................page 29
X. Tenleytown................................................................................................page 31
XI. Psalm 137................................................................................................page 32
XII. The Final Speech....................................................................................page 33
XIII. Program Notes by Lauren Halvorsen.................................................page 34
I. GLOSSARY

**Birthright** (Ellen, p. 10)
The Birthright Israel program was founded in 1999 in response to concerns that assimilation was reducing engagement with Jewish life and the State of Israel. The program provides every Jewish young adult worldwide, ages 18-26, a free trip to Israel. Birthright visitors meet Israelis, visit important sites, and are taught the ideas and values of the Jewish people. The goal is to strengthen Jewish identity, communities, and support for Israel, thus ensuring the future of the Jewish people. Since its founding, 500,000 Jewish young adults from 67 countries and all of the United States have visited Israel through the program.

Source: Roundabout Theatre Company’s Upstage Guide for *If I Forget*.

**The Wailing Wall** (Ellen, p. 10)
Also known as the Western Wall (in its entirety), the Kotel (in Hebrew), and the Buraq Wall (in Arabic). An ancient limestone wall in the Old City of Jerusalem; a relatively small segment of a longer ancient wall, originally built as part of the expansion of the Second Jewish Temple begun by Herod the Great. For Muslims, it is traditionally the site where the Prophet Muhammad tied his winged steed, al-Buraq, on his Night Journey to Jerusalem before ascending to paradise. It is considered a place of pilgrimage for Jews, and many will write notes and fit them into the crevices of the wall.

Source/further information: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Wall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Wall)

**Galleys** (Michael, p. 13)
A proof of typeset matter especially in a single column before being made into pages.

Source: [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/galley](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/galley)

**Kiddush Cups** (Stage Directions, p. 14) [at right]
Kiddush is a Hebrew word, literally meaning “holiness.” It is the name of the blessing said over wine or grape juice to sanctify Shabbat (the Sabbath) and holiday. A Kiddush cup is often a special glass or goblet that is a family heirloom that has been passed down, but any cup can be used as a Kiddush cup. Traditional Kiddush cups look something like this, but there is a lot of variation:

Source: [https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/kiddush-cup/](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/kiddush-cup/)
Source: [https://www.bluecrabantiques.com/store/p825/Hand_Chased_STERLING_Silver_KIDDUSH_Cup.html](https://www.bluecrabantiques.com/store/p825/Hand_Chased_STERLING_Silver_KIDDUSH_Cup.html)
Park Slope (Ellen, p. 14) [at right]
A neighborhood in northwestern Brooklyn, New York City. It is considered one of NYC’s most desirable neighborhoods and was highly gentrified in the 1980s and 1990s in particular.

Middlebury College (Holly, p. 15)
A private liberal arts college in Middlebury, Vermont. About 2500 undergraduate students.

Hillel (Ellen, p. 16)
A Jewish organization that has local chapters on many college campuses in the United States (including Ithaca College), designed to provide a Jewish community to students, as well as opportunities for leadership and connection. Events held by Hillel on campus may include regular occasions such as weekly Shabbat dinners and services, or special occurrences like panels with guest speakers, art and relaxation events, or celebrations of holidays.

Source: https://www.hillel.org/about/what-is-a-hillel
Source: https://www.ithaca.edu/religious-and-spiritual-life/hillel

Shabbat dinners (Ellen, p. 16)
Shabbat, or the Sabbath, commemorates the day that God rested from creating the world; the word Shabbat literally means “he rested.” It takes place from Friday evening at sundown until Saturday evening at sundown. Some more observant Jews celebrate Shabbat by not doing any “work,” including writing or turning lights on or off; others simply relax and spend time with family. There will always be challah (braided bread) and wine at a Shabbat dinner, as well as other food that may be more varied. Synagogues will hold Friday evening and Saturday morning services, as well as other services.

Source/more information: https://toriavey.com/what-is-shabbat/

Anacostia (Howard, p. 17)
The location of a former housing project for Blacks in Washington, D.C.

Source: https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004667418/

2000 U.S. Presidential Election (Michael, Ellen, Holly, & Howard, p. 20; Michael, p. 72-73; Michael and Sharon, p. 82-83; Michael and Howard, p. 86)
Including references to George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Al Gore, Joe Lieberman, Ralph Nader, and Florida’s role in this election.
See larger section (page 19).

Hamas (Michael, p. 21)
“Hamas” is an acronym for the Arabic name of the Islamic Resistance Movement. It is a Palestinian Sunni-Islamic fundamentalist militant organization, and has a social service wing
called Dawah and a military wing called the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Bridgades. Hamas has been the de facto governing authority of the Gaza Strip since its takeover of the area in 2007, and during this period has fought several wars with Israel. It is regarded, either in whole or in part, as a terrorist organization by several countries and international organizations, in particular, Israel, the United States, and the European Union. Russia, China, and Turkey are among the countries who do not regard Hamas as a terrorist organization.
See larger section (specifically page 22).
Source/more information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas

**Intifada** (Michael, p. 21; Michael, p. 72)
An Arabic word meaning a rebellion, an uprising, or a resistance movement. In its contemporary Arabic usage, it refers to a legitimate uprising against oppression. Literally translated, it means a “tremor,” a “shivering,” or a “shuddering.” In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see larger section on pages 20-23, particularly pages 22-23), the word “intifada” refers to attempts to “shake off” the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the First and Second Intifadas.
The First Intifada occurred from 1987-1991, ending with the Madrid Conference, though some date its conclusion to 1993 and the signing of the Oslo Accords.
The Second Intifada occurred from 2000-2005, so when Michael says in July 2000 that “Hamas is in the streets, calling for a new intifada,” this second intifada is coming just two months later.
Source/more information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intifada
Source/more information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Intifada
Source/more information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Aqsa_Intifada

**Arafat, Barak, and Camp David** (Holly and Michael, p. 21)
Yasser Arafat was a Palestinian political leader, including being Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization from 1969-2004 and President of the Palestinian National Authority from 1994-2004. He was an Arab nationalist.
Ehud Barak is an Israeli general and politician who served as Israel’s Prime Minister from 1999-2001, succeeding Benjamin Netanyahu.
Both were part of the Camp David Summit in 2000 with U.S. President Bill Clinton, which involved negotiations attempting (but failing) to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
(See larger section on pages 20-23, particularly pages 22-23.)
Source/more information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasser_Arafat
Source/more information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ehud_Barak

**Anti-Semite** (Holly, p. 22)
Anti-Semitism is the belief or behavior hostile toward Jews just because they are Jewish. It may take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, for instance, or political efforts to isolate, oppress, or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudiced or stereotyped views about Jews.
Source: https://www.adl.org/anti-semitism

**Washington Hebrew** (Holly, p. 22)
Source: https://www.whctemple.org/
XI. PSALM 137

Psalm 137 is used in liturgies of several different religions, including Judaism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Protestantism. It is called Psalm 137 in Judaism because it is the 137th psalm in the Book of Psalms. In English it is known as “By the rivers of Babylon,” and indeed the translation used in If I Forget seems to be the King James Version. In the Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate versions of the Bible, the numbering system is slightly different so it is known as Psalm 136 or in Latin, “Super flumina Babylonis.” It is a lament about being in exile following Babylonian captivity, and yearning for Jerusalem.

After Nebuchadnezzar II’s successful siege of Jerusalem in 597 B.C.E. and other subsequent campaigns, inhabitants of the Kingdom of Judah were deported to Babylonia, where they were held captive until sometime after the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.E.

It is only partially excerpted at the beginning of If I Forget and seems to provide the inspiration for the play’s title:

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand forget her cunning.
If I do not remember thee,
let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth...

O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed:
happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth
thy little ones against the stones.

The phrase “Next year in Jerusalem,” or in Hebrew, “L’Shana Haba’ah B’Yerushalayim,” is often repeated at the end of the Passover Seder and at the end of the concluding service of Yom Kippur. It is evocative of a common theme in Jewish culture of a desire to return to a rebuilt Jerusalem, and has also been suggested to be a reminder of the experience of living in exile. Though the particular exile referred to by “Next year in Jerusalem” is not the same Babylonian one to which Psalm 137 refers, it is worth noting that Levenson sends more than one message with his choice of hymn, and of which lines are excerpted from that hymn. He tells us with his first verse that it is the responsibility of Jews not to forget Jerusalem—as some of his characters seem to believe, too. Other verses not included in his excerpt would reflect this as well. However, the second and third verses of the psalm that Levenson includes, while they would still be in favor of the exiled Jews, do not land in quite the same way—because of the killing and destruction they encourage a reader or listener to enact on the Babylonians. Used in this context, these lines tie more closely to Michael’s points about the complications of what modern Israelis have done to Palestinians, and to our lack of cognizance that the occurrence of genocides against groups other than Jews are still instances of the Holocaust mantra “Never again.”

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm_137](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm_137)
Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Shana_Haba%27ah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Shana_Haba%27ah)
XII. WHAT ABBY SAID IN ISRAEL

I saw where Jesus Christ entered on a donkey past the gates of the Old City (the ancient city). I saw where the Prophet Muhammad traveled through the night from Mecca on a dream. I saw where David laid the foundations of the Temple and I saw the walls and the altars and the sashes of the priests and I smelled the incense of the burnt offerings. I heard the wailing and gnashing of teeth of the widows and orphans and strangers. I saw the Greeks and the Romans and the Persians and the Turks. I saw the famed warriors of Babylon, the terrible legions of Caesar and Suleiman…Righteous servants all of the One God and the One Faith…brandishing cold steel to the throats of the infidels. I saw the Crusaders in their armor. I saw the Crusaders, sweaty and reverent, burning the bodies of the unbelievers in great pyres under the stars. I saw men in many uniforms, speaking many tongues…And I saw them all pass away…one by one…by one. By one. Back into the sand from whence they came. I saw kingdoms rise and crumble in a moment…in a breath. I saw the visages of emperors, hard faces stamped on coins of gold and silver, their names long forgotten, lost to time…vanished back into the sand. Everything back into the sand. Gradually, everything, all of us, everything in time, swallowed back into the sand.

Notes:
- The Old City is an area in Jerusalem surrounded by the ancient walls and is where many of the holy sites are, including the Western Wall, the Dome of the Rock Islamic shrine, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.
- The Prophet Muhammad travelled from Mecca to Jerusalem in a single night on a strange winged creature called Buraq. From Jerusalem he ascended into heaven, where he met the earlier prophets, and eventually God.
- “Where David laid the foundations of the Temple”: King David of Israel gave the instructions for how to build the ancient Temple in praise of God.
- The Greeks, the Romans, the Persians, and the Turks are all ancient civilizations which at one point or another captured Jerusalem and the Jewish people, as were the Babylonians, as discussed in the previous section. Caesar was the Roman leader and Suleiman was the Ottoman (Turk) leader.

Perhaps the end of Abby’s vision reflects Michael’s earlier comment on pages 29-30 of the play, that we should really aspire, as the Zionists did, “To make a world where Jews wouldn’t even exist—there would just be one single international human brotherhood.” She says, “I saw men in many uniforms, speaking many tongues.”

The idea of everything going back into the sand is reflective of a verse from Genesis: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” It’s a concept that is reflected as well in Paula Vogel’s Indecent, another relatively new Jewish play that similarly has the potential to become canon: “In an opening scene, whose shattering symbolism will take some time to be revealed, seven actors and three musicians are introduced almost as spirits, the sleeves of their garments releasing wispy trails of dust.” This scene is repeated at the end of that play, when they are taken to the gas chambers. Levenson, like Vogel, then, has an awareness of the idea that in the end, all returns to dust.

Source: https://deadline.com/2017/04/broadway-review-indecent-1202071471/