

TRIGGER SCRIPT .....

WHEN IS IT TIME FOR ME?

by Zelda Wolf Jacobs (Adath Israel Sisterhood, Cincinnati, Ohio)  
Written for the Women's League Biennial Convention 1988

CAST

*Kol Isha* (Every woman whose narration links the vignettes)  
Single woman, her biological clock running out  
Woman with divorced daughter and grandchildren  
Woman with elderly parent  
Widowed woman/divorced woman  
Super woman  
Friend

TIME

25 minutes + discussion

**KOL ISHA:** A woman is a multi-faceted being. She begins as a daughter and then she becomes many things ... a sister, a girlfriend, a wife, a second wife, a mother, a career woman, a nurturer, a caregiver, a divorcee, a single parent, a widow, single by choice, single by chance, half a couple, a grandmother, alone ...

She is pulled in many different directions and is confronted by multiple choices, some thrust upon her and not by her own volition. And every once in a while, she justifiably asks, "When is it time for me?"

Do you remember your dreams when you were a little girl? I remember mine. I loved playing make believe and I dreamed that someday I would grow up, meet someone tall, dark and handsome, get married, have four children, and live happily ever after. It didn't turn out that way.

VIGNETTE I: SINGLE WOMAN, BIOLOGICAL CLOCK RUNNING OUT

**WOMAN:** You know we've been friends for a long time. We've gone through a lot together, and I want to share something with you. I've thought about this a long time and I've finally made a decision: I'm going to have a baby.

**FRIEND:** Are you sure? Babies are forever!

**WOMAN:** Don't think I don't have a lot of misgivings, but I'm 35 years old and pretty soon it'll be too late. It doesn't look like I'm going to be married any time soon.

I would have loved to have had a traditional marriage and family, but that just didn't happen. I didn't want to get married when I was in school, and then I didn't find anyone with the right chemistry. Anyway, I wasn't ready to settle down. I had career goals. By the time I reached 30, there were fewer opportunities, and where do you find eligible Jewish men at my age?

**FRIEND:** I hear you. But what will your parents say about an unmarried daughter and a grandchild?

**WOMAN:** My mother will be upset at first but then she'll be supportive. My father won't talk about it. He'll hope it'll just go away.

**FRIEND:** What will you do about your job? Can you work all the way through your pregnancy? How will you explain it to your co-workers?

**WOMAN:** I don't have to give any explanations and I'm not doing anything I'm ashamed of. I'll take vacation and maternity leave just like everyone else having a baby.

**FRIEND:** But how will you cope as the kid grows older? What will you do when the baby is up all night with colic or teething? And what about when the baby's sick?

**WOMAN:** Look, I'll have to work it all out. I know I want this baby more than anything. I want something of me left when I'm gone.

**FRIEND:** Have you thought about this person you're talking about? Babies grow up. What will you tell the kid when it asks about its father? He was a sperm bank donor?

**WOMAN:** I've always done what was expected of me. I've been a good daughter and a successful businesswoman. Should I feel guilty about doing something that is so important to me? **When is it time for me?**

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSIONS

1. Is the woman justified in denying her child a male role model?
2. Is she justified in bringing a child into the world in an artificial situation to satisfy her own desires?
3. Could the Zero Population Growth argument be relevant here? Or is the opposite relevant, in view of the need for Jews to increase their numbers?
4. Can and should the Jewish community provide support for women in this situation? How?

**KOL ISHA:** Life has a way of playing tricks on you, doesn't it? Perhaps your story is a little different. Perhaps you did marry. Perhaps you did have those children. What did you dream for them? Happiness? A family of their own? Financial independence and the *naches* of seeing them get on with their lives? Sometimes it does happen that way, but sometimes .....

### VIGNETTE II: MOTHER WITH DIVORCED DAUGHTER AND GRANDCHILDREN

**WOMAN:** Rachel's back home with us, now that her divorce is final. I ache for her. After ten years, her marriage is a statistic. And what a change for us, having her home! Three generations in one house, and each with a different way of living.

**FRIEND:** I'm so sorry to hear that. How old are your grandchildren?

**WOMAN:** David is 9 and Mollie is 7.

**FRIEND:** What made Rachel decide to move home? I'd have thought that she'd want to stay where her friends are.

**WOMAN:** She thought she'd be better off near us. The divorce and move have been really tough on David and Mollie and living here gives them some stability. But it's tough on me.

**FRIEND:** I don't know if I could live with my daughter again no matter how well we get along. And as for my grandchildren, I like to love them and leave them.

**WOMAN:** Everyone's been trying really hard, but it's been difficult. Bedtime is hectic. Rachel lets them stay up much too late. Meals are worse. I don't say too much because there are enough stresses on the three of them without my adding to it. But I can't stand shoes and clothes all over; their music shatters my ears; we don't like the same television shows. Should I have to buy another television set to keep peace in the house? I'm trying to be reasonable and Rachel is trying, too. It's just hard to walk the line between being understanding and having reasonable expectations.

**FRIEND:** You'd think that when your children get married and move out, your responsibilities and worries would be over! At least the children are in school.

**WOMAN:** That's another thing. I thought I was finished with carpooling 20 years ago. Rachel's been out looking for a job, so I have to be home to meet the school bus, then drive the kids to Hebrew School and pick them up two hours later. I never thought I'd have to do that again. And meals for five people seven days a week! Remember when your children were young, and you went into the bathroom and locked the door because that was the only place you could get some privacy? I'm doing that again.

**FRIEND:** I feel for you, but what can you do? You have to be there for your children when they need you. How is Richard coping?

**WOMAN:** Barely. He tunes out a lot. David and Mollie are his pride and joy, from afar. In the house, it's another story. He's not long on patience. I try to keep things on an even keel in the house. Why do I always end up the referee?

**FRIEND:** You need extra hands, extra wheels and extra hours!

**WOMAN:** And a different conscience. I'm angry all the time. I'm jealous of Richard because he can walk away each day. I'm angry with Rachel for not working harder at her marriage and then coming back with her children and expecting me to watch them. I really feel put upon. Now is the time when I should be free to do what I want for myself. I want to make it easier for Rachel and her children, but **when is it time for me?**

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are Jewish mothers more obligated than other mothers to manage the family?
2. When is it time to say "enough"?
3. What behavior is reasonable to expect from grown children moving back home? When should a parent permit grown children to move home?
4. What should be the responsibilities of grandparents toward their grandchildren?
5. How can everyone's space be successfully respected in a multi-generational household?

**KOL ISHA:** We are often frazzled by the hectic pace of life when there aren't enough hours in the day, and sometimes we just want to stop the world and get off. We may be sustained by the anticipation of our oldest child's getting a driver's license and relieving us of some of the carpooling. Yet we're terrified at the thought of that child behind the wheel of a car.

Sometimes we are thrust into a role we never anticipated playing. When you were young and dreaming

of your future, did you ever think you'd be parenting your parents?

**VIGNETTE III: WOMAN WITH AN ELDERLY PARENT**

**WOMAN:** I can't go with you to the meeting today. I have to take my mother to the doctor.

**FRIEND:** Isn't she driving any more?

**WOMAN:** Not if I can help it! She's getting a little confused and last week she got lost. She just couldn't remember where to turn and went way out of her way. She made it home okay but she was very upset. So now I think I need to take her wherever she wants to go.

**FRIEND:** I know what you're going through. After my mother died, my father went downhill fast. He couldn't cope. After he set two fires when he left pots on the stove, we realized he couldn't be on his own any more. That's when he moved in with us. It's been difficult, but we don't want him to go to a nursing home. Besides, he refuses to consider it. He wasn't easy to live with when I was growing up and he hasn't improved with age. Honor thy father and mother. How about honor thy children?

**WOMAN:** Growing old is the pits, isn't it, but what's the alternative? Before, it was children; now, it's my mother. I'm not complaining and if she knew I was even talking about it, she'd be upset. But, she refuses to take a cab. It's too expensive. So, because I don't want her to drive, I take her wherever she wants to go and I assure her it's because I want to be with her and not because I feel obligated. She'd feel terrible about that, and so would I. But it has changed my life.

**FRIEND:** Having elderly parents is a blessing, if they grow old gracefully and can be independent. But when they're sick ... well ... my mom had Alzheimer's disease and those last two years were terrible for all of us.

**WOMAN:** Don't we sound awful? But there went my plans. The children are finally out of college; there's no more tuition to pay. We were planning a three week trip to celebrate our anniversary, but there's no way we can be away for so long. Oh, I feel so guilty talking like this.

**FRIEND:** Don't be ridiculous. You're a wonderful, thoughtful daughter, doing the best you can.

**WOMAN:** I guess so, but I so looked forward to the children being on their own, when I could go back to school, when we could travel. But it's not going to happen. I've devoted my life to being a good wife, a caring mother, a dutiful daughter, a concerned citizen. **When is it time for me?**

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What kind of support does someone need when she becomes a parent to her parent?
2. Where does the husband/wife relationship fit in?
3. Is there ever a time when a nursing home is a better alternative for an elderly parent? How do you deal with the parent who refuses to accept this alternative? How do you deal with your own sense of guilt?

**KOL ISHA:** Do you think you've seen all my facets? Not by a long shot. I know that a woman who is single (and *not* by choice) can have a fulfilling life...or a lonely one. Me? I'm not sure. I'm married. I have children. I filled multiple roles. First, I was daddy's girl then I was a wife. Now I'm no longer

daddy's girl ... or a wife. But I am a mother. Is that all? Really, who am I?

#### VIGNETTE IV: WIDOWED AND DIVORCED WOMEN

**WIDOW:** We were married for 20 years. How could he leave me with three kids? He was a wonderful father. What will we do without him? There are so many decisions I have to make by myself now. Who do I take the car to for repairs? How do I prepare the taxes? Whose going to shovel the snow? I'm frightened about finances. Will I have enough money to maintain the same standard of living? Will I be able to help the kids in school and as they start their own careers?

Besides being devastating, his death made other big differences. I'm now a fifth wheel. Oh, my friends are very nice about inviting us for *Shabbat* meals. But for social occasions, a woman alone makes for an awkward number. When I am invited with other couples, it's a funny feeling. This is the first year I won't be going to the synagogue dinner dance. All the single women end up at one table.

Weekends are the worst. Everyone does things as a family. We're a family, but part of us is missing. I know he didn't want to die, but I'm angry at him for leaving us.

We had such dreams, but we didn't have time to fulfill them. We were going to travel, babysit our grandchildren and grow old together. Well, the children will grow up and get on with their lives, but what about me? I'll probably grow old alone. But I'm not ready. **When is it time for me?**

**DIVORCED WOMAN:** I'm still angry. We had our differences in the 20 years we were married. All married couples do. Nothing extraordinary. But how could he leave me with three children?

What will we do without him? What do I know about stopping a toilet from running? I have to call a service man for everything and it costs so much. I'm frightened about finances. Will I have enough to maintain my lifestyle? I want the children to go to camp, to college.

His running off was a rotten thing to do to me, but it was a *terrible* thing to do to his children. They don't understand how their father could leave them. I think I hate him. They still hope for reconciliation, but it will never happen.

The divorce has made a huge difference in my life. I'm now a threat. Everyone I know is a couple. I find myself only socializing with other singles. Weekends are the worst. Everyone does things as a family. We're a family, but one of us is missing.

We had such dreams. We were going to grow old together. The children will grow up and get on with their lives, but what about me? I'm not finished yet. **When is it time for me?**

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can children be helped to understand that their parents are divorcing each other, not them?
2. What support mechanisms can the synagogue and Sisterhood offer for the single person?
3. How can the Sisterhood encourage networking for singles?

**KOL ISHA:** Lest you think this is only a sad story, let me assure you that there is a song in my heart! There are many, many more facets to *Kol Isha*, this voice of *everywoman*. She's super woman, she's super

daughter, she's super wife, she's **supermom!**

#### VIGNETTE V: SUPERWOMAN

**FRIEND:** I think you're amazing. Ask you to chair an event and you're right on it. It's true what they say: if you want something done, ask a busy person to do it. You're one of the busiest people I know.

**WOMAN:** C'mon, you're embarrassing me. Anyway, I'm just super organized. I wake up in the morning, plug in the coffee, shower, put make-up over my puffy eyes, nudge the kids to get dressed, eat breakfast and get to the bus. I zoom through my breakfast, wake up David and pour his coffee. I make it to work for eight hours of intense creativity, and if I'm lucky there aren't any calls from school about anything requiring stitches.

In the evening, while the kids do homework, I do laundry. I think it grows during the day. When Sara ran for class president, I listened to her speech folding sheets because I couldn't get to school to hear her give it. After they're in bed, I work on my volunteer commitments.

My life is speeding by. As long as everything falls into place, I'm ready.

But there are so many possibilities for glitches. If one of the kids gets sick, it's me who has to stay home. That's affected my career. I love my job and I'm good at it. But I also worry about my kids. We have such hectic schedules and the pace is affecting my marriage. Something has to give. Aren't you sorry you asked me?

**FRIEND:** When do you find time for your parents? I spend a lot of time driving mine around.

**WOMAN:** Actually, we're going to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary in May and we're having an open house in their honor. I'm doing it all myself.

**FRIEND:** You leave me breathless.

**WOMAN:** Actually, you'd be surprised at what really goes through my mind about being a "super mother, wife, daughter, volunteer." I'd like to be able to sleep late one day or take piano lessons or just read a novel. What am I trying to prove? Sometimes, it's just not fun. It's hard to be all things to all people. **When is it time for me?**

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can someone successfully accommodate her "super" visions and still have time for herself? How?
2. When is it time for a women to stop and "smell the roses" and take stock of her own needs?
3. When both parents are working, should the mother alone have the responsibility to stay home with a sick child? How can a family with two working parents restructure itself?
4. Should a mother have to put aside her career goals when her children are young? If so, how can she make up for lost time when her children grow older?

**KOL ISHA:** A woman is multi-faceted. She begins as a daughter and then she becomes many things: a sister, a girlfriend, a wife, a second wife, a mother, a career woman, a nurturer, a caregiver, a divorcee, a single parent, a widow, single by choice, single by chance, half a couple, a grandmother, alone...

She is pulled in many directions and is confronted by multiple choices, some made easily, some made