

Benjamin's Travels

Adopted from the story of Mendele Mocher Sfarim by R. **Grossman**

Play no. 37

Opening show: 25/03/1937

Staged by: B. Tchemerinsky, A. Baratz

Setting by: Rubin

Music by: Fordhaus Ben-Tzissy

The Cast

Benjamin: B. Tchemerinsky

Zelde, his wife: H. Hendler

Senderil, the henpecked: I. Bertonoff, A. Baratz

elke, his wife: Bat-Ami

Reb Mendele Moche Sfarim: M. Gnessin

The mare: R. Klatzkin

Pitsi the Imperious: S. Bruk

Reb Zanzvil , the Cantor: I. Avital

Reb Nehemia: Ben-Haim

Reb Shlomo: J. Rubinstein

Yeahmiel, the Sexton: A. Amital

Fishke, the Lame: A. Kutai

The Hunchback: N. Shein

Haya Traine, a neighbour: Hariel

A "Goy" , a passer-by: L. Warshaver

First Vender: H. Amital

Second Vender: I. Rubinstein

Third Vender: Hariel

Nisan, the money lender: S. Bruk

Heikel: Ben-Haim

Orange-grinder: I. Bartonoff / A. Baratz

A blind man: I. Avital

Ivan, a boatman: L. Warshaver

Fievish: S. Finkel

Leubish: A. Meskin

Officer in the barracks: S. Finkel

Prologue

Mendele and his mare are on their way. Talking to her he tells her of the life of Benjamin and of his travels to distant isles beyond the River Sambatyon.

Scene one

Benjamin is lying on the straw roof of his shed, mapping out his travels. He prays to God that his way be successful. Zelde who is secretly lending an ear to his talk fails to understand his meaning and she not only believes it to be idle talk but considers it to be insanity. She hurries to call her neighbour, Haya

Traine, who is turn goes to call in Yerahmiel, the sexton. The latter concludes that this is the work of evil spirits. He climbs up to Benjamin and whispers some charms over him.

Scene two / In The Bitalon Congregation

In the synagogue yard. From within are heard voices of Jews quarrelling over matters of livelihood. The hunchback brings the sexton a candle to be lit during prayers; it is from her aunt who has dreamt an ominous dream. Before Long the Jews come out and make a dash for Mendele's "wares"; he has come to town a short while ago with his stack of old and rare books. Zelde comes on looking for him; she wants to return him all the books that her Benjamin bought with the few coins which she had saved up. She tells of her misfortune, that Benjamin went out yesterday and hasn't come back yet. Then there is not altogether sane. Benjamin comes on asking for the guest who brought the date from the Holy Land. He is shown it, and he goes into ecstasy, thus infusing all the others with a spirit of longing. The others give vent to their embittered feeling on life in the Galuth and to their aspirations for redemption.

Scene three / Benjamin Finds Himself a Mate

Before Senderil's house. Elke orders him to do the house work and when she is off to market she is off to market Benjamin comes on secretly. He pours out his heart to Senderil and asks him to join him on his way to "those places"... Senderil agrees and even offers to share his secret savings with Benjamin. They decide to meet at dawn at the wind-mill. They embrace, and when Elke returns, Benjamin makes off and she gives Senderil a good beating.

Scene Four / Benjamin And Senderil Are Off

At the wind-mill, at dawn. Senderil is late in coming and Benjamin is worried. Senderil is finally seen at the distance in women's clothes. Benjamin is alarmed at first, believing it to be Zelde. He soon realizes his mistake, but Senderil again shocks him by saying that he went to look for him at home. Senderil, however, calms him and says that Zelde simply cursed him and went back to sleep. After a hearty leave-taking from Bitalon they set out with a high hand in high spirits.

Intermission

Scene Five /Trials And Tribulations

Mendele and his mare pass, while he continues telling her of Benjamin travels.

Benjamin and Senderil on their way. Benjamin walks quickly but Senderil cannot keep pace. He complains of a foot-ache and of walking in general. Benjamin reprimands him for it and he acquiesces. They meet with many obstacles on their way, and it is Benjamin's opinion that it is all because they have forgotten to read their preventive charm. Benjamin sad; he believes that they are not o the right track. The "Goy" that passes by is approached but he laughs at them cruelly. They are somewhat disappointed for a moment,, yet they continue.

Scene Six / In The Streets Of Zalmona

Venders announce their wars. Some of the townfolk are seen and heard discussing the new arrivals. Benjamin and Senderil come on talking of city life and its hardships. Fishke passes on the scene; he is followed by an organ-grinder, and then come a blind man and the hunchback. Benjamin and Senderil recognize Fishke, and when the latter learns that they are heard for "those places" he gives them some coins for his sake and for the hunchback's sake. Benjamin and Senderil call on some houses begging for alms; some they leave happily, and others rather in disappointment. Before long Fishke brings Elke and Zelde; they have set out to look for their husbands. When the two husbands come on and hear those familiar voices they run off again.

Scene Seven / Benjamin And Senderil At Sea

At the Sirhon riverside. Benjamin tells Senderil that it is his plan from this point on to go a-sailing. Senderil is persuaded, in spite of his fear of water. They set sail in Ivan's boat. When the boat disappears, the two kidnapers, Feivish and Leibish, are seen talking of the two find "fish" they have caught. And when Benjamin and Senderil are through with their trip, they are cordially welcomed by the two sly kidnapers. They want to get them drunk and so they drink together, and Benjamin and Senderil are invited to their city; they are even a good steam-bath. They are somewhat hesitant but finally decide to go, but soon find that they have been misled and handed over to the army officials.

Intermission

Scene Eight / Impressed Into Service

Benjamin and Senderil, shaven head, walk about the barracks not knowing each other. They finally do recognize each other. They both feel rather dejected, and both take the reading some chapters in Psalms. The officer comes, drills them, and when he is away they take to their military drills, until Benjamin, all exhausted, falls asleep and dreams.

Benjamin is aroused and find Senderil still at his drills. When the officer returns he complains of the injustice done and argues that the army does not benefit by having him and his mate, for they are far from looking like soldiers. He suggests that he had better set them free. And, indeed, the officer does release them, and they are off again.

Epilogue

Mendele and his mare pass, while he is still telling her of the travels of Benjamin and Senderil and their hardships; they have not turned back, but are still on their-way, undergoing all sorts of difficulties and meeting with various obstacles. Mendele wishes them success.

