

The Dybbuk

By: S. An-Sky

Play no. 3

Opening show: 31/01/1922

Hebrew by: CH. N. Bialik

Staged by: I. Wachtangoff

Setting : N. Altman

Music : I. Engel

Musical Direction: Fordhaus Ben Zissi

The Cast

Batlan I: D. Vardi

Batlan II: S. Bruck

Batlan III: Zvi Ben-Ami

Meir, beadle of Synagogue: M. Beniamini, Z. Fridland

Hanan: L. Varshaver, Z. Fridland

Henoch: R. Klatchkin

Meshulach: Yehoshua Bertonoff, Ari Kutai

Genessia: T. Robins

Sender, Merchant: S. Finkel

Leah, his daughter: H. Rovina, H. Govinska

Frieda: T. Yudelevitz

Gitl, Leah's friend: T. Robins, Ada Tal

Bathia, Leah's friend: A. Tal, M. Zohar

Asher: H. Hendler

Sender's Family: N. Buchman, I. Bareket

Sundel: H. Amitai

Shalom: Zvi Ben-Haim

Berzik: S. Bruck

Rafael: A. Meskin

Dalfan: R. Klatchkin

Dwossa: N. Shein, T. Pardo

Dreisl: S. Duer

Jachna: Bat-Ami

Bobchia: H. Hendler

Menashe, Leha's groom: S. Bar-Shavit

Nachman, his father: I. Rubinstein

Mendel, his teacher: Shlomo Bertonoff

Azriel, the Zaddik: D. Vardi

Michael, his attendant: Z. Fridland

Shimshon, a Rabbi: S. Bruck

Chassidim: A. Meskin, Z. Ben-Ami, L. Varshaver, H. Amitai, M. Beniamini, A. Kutai, N. Buchman, S. Bar-Shavit, S. Fridman, S. Bertonoff, S. Atzmon

Act One

An old synagogue. Students are studying Gemara. At one side sits the Meshulach (the messenger). Three "batlonim", half starved but cheerful, pass the time singing a song, "For What Cause?" and telling each other stories of the greatness of the Zaddikim.

A woman runs in weeping. She wished to pray at the Sepher Torah for the health of her dying daughter. She gives the batlonim a few coins, and they leave their table and go and pray for the invalid.

Hanan remains alone. His thoughts are concentrated upon Leah. They love each other, but Leah's father, Sender, wants a rich bridegroom for her. Till now, Sender has not found one. All his efforts have been in vain. Hanan thinks this failure is due to his (Hanan's) opposition. Even now, although absorbed in spiritual matters, Hanan thinks aloud about Leah: "To whom – to whom will Leah belong? She must belong to me! If not through heavenly power, the – What fearful thoughts!"

Hanan's companion, Henoah, rebukes him. "You have no more faith in the Gemara". "The Gemara is cold and dry", answers Hanan. "It holds one down to earth. But Kabbalah! The great veil". Hanan becomes more and more enthusiastic. "What is the most awful sin of all? "What sin is the most irresistible to man, and is the most difficult to overcome? Passion for woman. But if one should purify this passion with flame, so that there should remain only a pure spark, then it is transmuted into holiness, a Song of Song!" And from Hanan's lips there breathes the sounds of a verse of the Song of Song: "Thou art fair my beloved, thou art fair!"

Then something unusual happens. Leah comes into the synagogue, accompanied by her old nurse, Frieda and her friend Gittel. Leah has come to look at the Holy Curtain covering the Sacred Ark, planning to make a new one as a gift to the Synagogue on the anniversary of her mother's death. The beadle of the shows them the old curtain. Leah sees Hanan. For a time he has lived in Sender's house, eating at the same table, where he was considered to be a future Zaddik. While Leah's companions kiss the Sepher Torah, Leah and Hanan greet each other, for the first time in their lives. The women leave. "I have won!" Hanan bursts out in joy. And one of his comrades, Asher, brings him the news that Sender's newest plan for Leah's marriage has also failed.

But this is not true. The prospective fathers-in-law have come to terms and the marriage will take place. This news is brought by Sender himself, who comes to the synagogue to make the student rejoice with him. Hanan is stunned. How is it? All his fasts, all his penitential wanderings, all his prayers – to no avail? He tries to find salvation in the book of the angel Raziel (one of the most sacred books of Kabbalah), but his strength fails him. He dies.

Meanwhile, Sender sends for wine and dainties. One must celebrate the betrothal of his only daughter with one's brother-Chassidim! They sing, they dance, more and more swiftly and gaily. "All must dance! Call the students! Hanan! Where is he? Hanan! Hana!"

The Meshulach lifts up the book which fell from Hanan's hand as he died. "The Book of the angel Raziel".

Second Act

Leah's Wedding. According to custom, a meal has been prepared in Sender's home for the poor people, so that they may join in the celebration before the wedding. The beadle and Sender's relatives wait on the guests.

Sender appears, and the singing and dancing begins again in his honour. All are delighted with the meal. What rejoicing! What good cheer! At the beggars are greeted by the bride herself. All dance in the honour. Afterwards the women dance in turn with the bride. This honour is granted to all except the imbecile, Dresel. She insists on her right. For forty years she has not danced. For a moment everybody's attention is diverted by the distribution of money, but Dresel remain insistent. She suddenly seizes the bride, and again begins to dance. The bride is half-terrified, half-pleased. She feels that they are her friends. Soon her strength fails, but Dresel, together with the whole crowd of beggars, insist, "More! More!"

There is wild confusion Leah faints. The beggars, set her down and ren away dismayed. Leah gradually comes to her senses. "A kind of unearthly force seized me and carried me far, far away", she tells her nurse. "Is it true that the souls of those who died before their time love among us, surround us?" But instead of her nurse, there suddenly appears the Meshulach. "The souls of those who died before their time return to earth in new incarnations", he says. "But it also happened that the staying soul takes possession of the body of a living person, assimilates this soul, and fulfills his destiny there. Such a spirit is called a "Dybbuk".

He disappears. But his words have pierced Leah's heart. After receiving her father's blessing Leah goes with her nurse to the cemetery, to invite her dead mother to the wedding. She finally also gets her nurse's permission to invite Hanan, too.

At this moment appears the bridegroom, his father, and his rabbi. There is music. The fathers go away to make a final settlement as to the dowry and other important matters. The rabbi tries to make the bridegroom rehearse to speech which he must make after the wedding meal.

The beggars appear again. Their meal is over. They criticize everything. And the crowd streams threateningly towards Sender's house. The master of the house himself appears. All step back, and, hiding their animosity, become silent. Sender is irritated. "Where is the bride?" At last she also appears, and goes to dress herself for the wedding. The beggars help to put things in order for the ceremony.

Now the melancholy strains of the wedding song are heard. The bride is solemnly led in and seated upon a chair. They lead the bridegroom to her. But when Menashe prepares to cover the bride's face with the veil she springs up and thrusts him back.

"You are not my bridegroom!" she cries out. And from her very heart there bursts forth Hana's voice in the melody of the Song of Songs.

Third Act

At the house of Rabbi, the Zaddik, in Miropol. The after-sabbath meal. Rabbi Azriel is restless. He is troubled with feeling that he is needed to bring salvation to a Jewish soul. The call has already come. Sender has brought his daughter to him so that the Dybbuk may be driven out of her.

As first the Rabbi feels helpless, and pities himself. "Who am I that people come to me from the four corners of the earth to get relief? I alone am

nothing". But reminding himself of his great ancestors, his confidence is strengthened. "Call in Sender!" he orders his attendant.

Rabbi Azriel examines Sender asking whether he knew Hanan previously, and whether he even put Hanan to shame. Sender answers: "I knew him; but I did not put him to shame, as far as I know. But who can be certain? We are only human beings".

The Zaddik and Leah remain alone. As long as Leah speaks herself she is weak and submissive, but when Hanan, hidden within her, begins to speak, her words are full of extra ordinary perversity. To all the requests and pleadings of the Zaddik, the Dybbuk answers the same thing. "I will not go out of her. In the whole world my soul has found only this one home, and do you wish to drive me out of there also? I will not go out!"

The Rabbi of the town enters hastily, together with his two Dayonim (assistants). The night before, he has thrice dreamt of Nisan, the dead father of Hanan, who asked that Sender be brought before a religious court of law. Evidently his has a connection with the Dybbuk. Rabbi Azriel immediately calls the court of law before him. Rabbi Shimshon and his assistants beg the Zaddik to preside. On one side is the plaintiff, the dead Nisan, on the other side the trembling defendant, Sender. The explanations make it clear that during their youth Nisan and Sender were friends. But, soon after they parted and never met again. Sender, who had become rich, had a daughter, Leah; Nisan, who died poor, had a son, Hanan.

When these souls, predestined for each other, met, Sender interfered, and opposed their union. In vexation of soul, Hanan fell into the snares of Satan, and passed away prematurely. His father, Nisan, thus remained cut off from both worlds without offspring and without a Kaddish (a son to pray for his soul).

The court decrees that Sender shall say Kaddish all his life for Nisan and Hanan, and that he must give away half his wealth to the poor. Then the court asks the spirit of Nisan to forgive Sender because he did not know whose son Hanan was. The court also asks Nisan to command his son to leave the body of Leah. But when the question is asked as to whether the two parties accept the judgment of the court, Sender alone answers yes, while Nisan disappears, without giving a reply.

Rabbi Azriel is determined to bring the matter to an end. His plan is, in his opinion, a righteous one. Among living persons one must give first consideration to the living. The soul of dead Hanan must be driven out of Leah, and Leah must be married to a living being. But the Dybbuk refuses to go out of his own accord. So Rabbi Azriel takes steps to excommunicate the spirit. The assembly gives unanimous approval. They raise the Sepher Torah; black candles are lit, the Zaddik blows the Shofar. Three times the Zaddik commands the Dybbuk to go out. Finally, solemn excommunication is pronounced in its most severe form, Hanan's soul is compelled to leave Leah's exhausted body... She faints. Rabbi Azriel congratulates Sender, and bids him call the bridegroom to prepare for the wedding. The Chassidim, with Rabbi Azriel at their head, march with joyful songs towards the bridegroom. Leah remains alone in the magic circle which Rabbi Azriel had made around her. A groan is heard from outside the circle, and then another one from within. "Who groans?" asks Leah, coming to her senses. The melody of the Song of Songs is heard. "I hear your voice, but your face I do not see. Who

are you?" she asks. "I have forgotten; but the memory of the lives in your heart!" "Ah, it is you! I am coming to you, my bridegroom!"

The Song of Songs is heard from both. With the strength of her love, Leah breaks through the magic circle, in which Rabbi Azriel placed her. Her soul unites with the soul of Hanan, and her body falls dead.

The messenger covers her up just as he has formerly covered the body of Hanan. "Too late! too late!" he calls out when the sounds of the wedding music are heard. It grows dark. "Blessed be the truthful Judge!"

The curtain, falls to the sound of the same melody: "For what cause, for what cause, did the soul descend from the loftiest height into the nethermost abyss?"