

Episode One Bonus: “I-Tell-You...More”

Transcription

Host Aaron Henne: This is Aaron Henne, Artistic Director of theatre dybbuk, and I want to welcome you to this bonus episode of *The Dybbukast*. If you haven't yet, you might want to check out our first episode called “I-Tell-You,” in which actors read aloud written selections from a 1926 religious school journal. We weren't able to include all of the journals' featured pieces in their entirety, and so we thought that here you might enjoy experiencing a particularly interesting student essay in its complete form.



Actor 1: “How I Got My Name”: Back in the Stone Age, Jews, or rather future Jews, were indistinguishable. Among one of these future Israelites there was one who could fashion sharper and more polished weapons than any other. All the other Neolithic men came to him and had him make their hatchets and arrows and knives. Stone-maker, as he was called, was rich in wheat, skins, and other luxuries because of his ability.

During the course of the ages, Stone-maker's descendants were somehow isolated from the majority of the Neolithics and joined the band who later called themselves Jews. While the Jews were in Egypt, another member of this family became the most adept of the horde of slaves to smooth and polish the stones for the pyramids and temples. He was allowed to live in a hut with his family because of his skill.

Later on, the tribe escaped from Egypt and immigrated to Palestine. Here, Stone-maker's family achieved fame. When Solomon wanted someone to supervise the stone cutting at the quarry from which the stone for the temple was to be cut, the most skilled artisan was chosen. He too belonged to Stone-maker's family.

This peculiar trait was apparent in one member of the family during all the generations from Bible times down to the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70 of the Christian era. At this time, with many others, the Jews went to Europe and finally settled in Spain. Here the family of stone masons quickly gained the same fame as they had in Palestine. They were hired by all the men who could afford to have a skilled artisan prepare the stone for their palaces.

Finally, under the zeal of the Holy Inquisition, Stone-maker's family was forced to flee from Spain. They went from country to country, seeking a home. After many years of unspeakable cruelty and harshness, they moved to the ghetto of the little town of Casel, in Saxony.

Here they, like the rest, lost sight of the largeness of their history and mission and became narrow, stupid and cramped. They were the type who, instead of growing intellectually, excommunicated those who sought any other but Jewish education.

Until now, no Jew had had a surname. He was known as David ben Isaac or any other word indicating that he was the son of Isaac. Now the Emperor of Prussia, the head of the German states, decreed that the Jews had to adopt a surname. This was contrary to practice, and so these ghetto dwellers refused. Then it was made a state offense not to have a surname.

A list of names was sent around from which each family had to choose. Some of these were Nusbaum, nut tree; Fleishman, meat man, and many others, such as Rosen, roses; Fisch, or

fish; Stein, or stone. Some memory of the former ability of the family led my great-great-grandfather to choose the name of Stein from among the others.

Unlike his brothers, when my grandfather emigrated to America in 1847, he did not anglicize the name to Stone or Steen and today it is still Stein. - Henrietta B. Stein, grade 12.



Aaron: Also in our first episode, our team of actors from theatre dybbuk read a Hanukkah play called *The Little Hasmoneans* that was featured in the religious school journal I previously mentioned. In the episode, the play was presented in separate parts, with the students' essays, as well as commentary from Dr. Miriam Heller Stern appearing in between its different sections. Now here we invite you to listen to the seven-page, three-act short play on its own.



NARRATOR

The Little Hasmoneans

adapted from the Hebrew of K.L. Sylman by Anatol S. Robin.

Act one: The balcony of the house of Mattathias, facing the garden. Jochonon, Simon and Eliezer are lying on the ground. Judah, a little distance away, watching the sunset. Hannah sits on the balcony, spinning. At her feet are Jonathan and Debborah, playing. Hannah sings as she works.

HANNAH

The sun is setting in the West.
The silence of the Twilight came
Serene and quiet is God's world
God's world, so beautiful and good.

Yonder yonder from behind the hills
Comes the enemy of Israel;
Mournful and forlorn is God's own land
No one is there to lift a hand

JUDAH

Did you hear what happened today, Mother? Hilon entered our garden, climbed up a date tree and began to pluck its fruit. I told him to go down. He refused. I began to pull him down by his feet. He kicked me and called me, "cursed Jew." That made me burn with anger. I pulled him down and nearly broke his legs.

CHILDREN

Hurrah! Hurrah!

SIMON

Judah gave him a good beating.

HANNAH

What happened then?

JUDAH

He began to weep and beg that I let him go.

CHILDREN

Hurrah for Judah the mighty!

HANNAH

But don't you think you'd better not fight with Hilon?

JUDAH

What business has he to enter our garden and pluck fruit as if it belonged to him?

HANNAH

But he's our neighbor's son.

JOCHONON

His father lives in Yedaiah's house. People say that he killed Yedaiah and took his land.

ELIEZER

Well, he is an officer in the Greek army and he could do what he likes and people say that he'll kill more and more Jews.

HANNAH

Nonsense, children. The Greeks will not kill the Jews.

JUDAH

I agree with you, Mother. The Greeks will not kill us. I am going now, Mother. I will return soon.

DEBBORAH

Mother, where is Mount Tabor where Deborah the Prophetess fought Siserah?

HANNAH

Not far from the hills, Daughter.

JONATHAN

And where is Greece? Also near Mount Tabor?

HANNAH

No, Precious. Greece is far, very far from here. It is not in the land of Israel.

JONATHAN

Then why are they here?

HANNAH

They are wicked people. They want to take what is ours.

JOCHONON

And they come to our gardens and plunder.

SIMON

And they place idols in our cities and tell us to bow down to them.

ELIEZER

And their children tease us.

SIMON

The Greeks are a terrible people.

DEBBORAH

Terrible. Terrible was the story Daddy told us last night about Hannah and her seven sons. One by one, the poor children went to their death. Even the smallest held fast to God, rather than bow down to the idol.

HANNAH

Oh, how much courage was in their hearts. How much love for their people and God.

DEBBORAH

Jonathan wept so much and I too could not keep back my tears.

JOCHONON

Even Father wept, as he told us the story.

SIMON

Only Judah sat and listened silently.

DEBBORAH

He looked as if he was dreaming.

JOCHONON

Father said that if the sons of Hannah had grown up, they would have saved our people.

HANNAH

There is no doubt about that. They would surely have driven the enemy out of our land. They would have gathered armies, great and mighty Jewish armies, and the Lord God of Israel would have helped them.

DEBBORAH

Are there many Greeks in our land, Mother?

HANNAH

Many, many.

DEBBORAH

Since when are they here? Were they also here in the days of Deborah and Barak?

HANNAH

No, my dear. In those days, there were no Greeks in our land. We always had our mighty men, our heroes, who saved their people from the hand of the oppressors. We Jews love freedom and have always fought hard to get it and to keep it.

JOCHONON

But is not much Jewish blood shed in these wars?

HANNAH

Surely, my son, but what is life without freedom, an enemy in your land?

DEBBORAH

King David was the mightiest hero, wasn't he, Mother? He slew the lion and the bear and Goliath, didn't he, Mother?

HANNAH

Yes, Precious, but where is Judah? I thought he was coming back soon.

DEBBORAH

I want to tell you something, Mother Dear. Judah took a walk with me in the garden this morning, and he said that he heard that the Greeks are going to place an idol in our village. He got terribly angry and clenched his fist and said, "I hate the Greeks. I am going to fight them." Maybe he will become one of the great Jewish heroes, but the Greeks didn't place an idol yet, did they, Mother?

HANNAH

Not yet, my child, but what did you say to Judah?

DEBBORAH

I said I would also fight with him.

JONATHAN

And I too.

ELIEZER

So will I.

JOCHONON

You may count on me also.

SIMON

Me too.

ELIEZER

They say that four soldiers guard the idol.

DEBBORAH

But we are six, five sons and one daughter.

NARRATOR

Judah enters.

JUDAH

Here, brothers. I gathered stones. Let's learn how to throw without missing. We'll show them how to place idols in our village. We'll break it to pieces. Come on. Let's practice.

ELIEZER

We must learn to fight. It is the only way we can regain our freedom.

JOCHONON

Judah is right!

JUDAH

Here. Take these stones. Eliezer, get the board. We'll imagine it's the idol. That's right. Come on! One, two, three.

Sound of stones hitting the board.



NARRATOR

Act two. Same scene. A few days later. Mattathias is coming out of the house. Hannah follows him.

HANNAH

Why are you so excited, Mattathias, and where are you going?

MATTATHIAS

The people are aroused.

HANNAH

There were only a few in the morning near the altar at the time of the riot. How can I keep our sons in check? They are planning in secret, gathering stones and making all kinds of preparations.

MATTATHIAS

Are you afraid, my wife?

HANNAH

Do you know Deborah asked me whether I am like Hannah, who lost her seven sons?

MATTATHIAS

No. You are like Hannah, the mother of Samuel who dedicated her child to God's service. See, Hannah, the blood of the traitorous Jew is still upon my cloak. My hands, the hands of Mattathias the priest, shed blood.

HANNAH

Woe, woe. How will this thing end?

MATTATHIAS

I have faith in the Lord God of Israel. I am like Elijah who slew the false prophets.

HANNAH

By this time, it must be known to the Greek general and he is surely marching upon our village.

MATTATHIAS

I do not fear the end. I know our people will win.

HANNAH

Go, and may the God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, send his help.



NARRATOR

Act three, night, same day. Opposite the house of Mattathias. A statue of a Greek god is guarded by four soldiers.

SOLDIER 1

Are we to stand here all night and watch the statue?

SOLDIER 2

It is the General's command.

SOLDIER 3

And for this we had to leave our land?

SOLDIER 2

Isn't it a sacred duty to guard the statue of a god?

SOLDIER 4

You are all fools. The General's aim is not to watch over the statue but to beat the Jews and to conquer their land.

SOLDIER 1

Conquer? For whom?

SOLDIER 3

Not for me. We'll never conquer the Jews anyway.

SOLDIER 4

And why do you complain? Is it too cold for you in this land?

SOLDIER 1

Certainly. The nights are very cold. I am shivering all over.

SOLDIER 2

Well, there is a remedy for that.

SOLDIER 1

What is it? A woolen garment or a feather quilt?

SOLDIER 2

Uh-uh. You see those vineyards? Well, they're not ours yet, but they will be soon. There are treasures of the best wine hidden in them. Nothing can so warm you up like Jewish wine.

SOLDIER 3

Did you taste it?

SOLDIER 2

The very first day I came here I entered a wine shop on Jerusalem Street. The Jew was very hospitable and he told me he likes the Greeks and he wished there were more of us in this land.

SOLDIER 4

That's right. This Jew was a friend of our general. He visits him at night for fear his fellow Jews would kill him.

SOLDIER 3

What's his name?

SOLDIER 1

Avigail.

SOLDIER 3

Why he's the man that was killed today by the priest.

SOLDIER 4

Why?

SOLDIER 3

Because he wanted to offer a sacrifice to our God.

SOLDIER 4

And what did the other Jews do?

SOLDIER 3

They shouted for joy.

SOLDIER 4

And you were not afraid to stand there?

SOLDIER 3

Well, I confess when they began to look too much at me, I retreated to the general's courtyard.

SOLDIER 2

Wine, brothers. Let's drink to the Jews death.

Sounds of satisfaction as they all drink.

SOLDIER 1

It sure does warm you up. Tell me, what did the priest who killed the Jew look like?

SOLDIER 3

Like one of our priests, and his courage was even greater than the courage of our men of valor.

SOLDIER 1

Even rulers are awed by Jewish priests. Alexander the Great once fell off his steed when he saw one of their high priests.

SOLDIER 4

Did you tell it to the general?

SOLDIER 3

I did. He said the Jews are preparing for war.

SOLDIER 2

Aww, don't worry. Nothing will come of it. Let's drink, brothers.

ALL OTHER SOLDIERS

No. This is too serious.

SOLDIER 2

What are you afraid of?

SOLDIER 3

How thick the darkness is. I see only one star and it is red.

SOLDIER 1

It means blood.

SOLDIER 2

It means wine. Come. Let's drink and forget our troubles.

SOLDIER 1

Perhaps they will start war tonight.

SOLDIER 2

You are fools. I am going for more wine. The dead Jew has lots of it.

SOLDIER 4

He goes away, that drunkard. And the general said that we should watch the statue.

SOLDIER 1

He did well to go there. The rebellious Jews will fall upon us.

SOLDIER 3

I was once a servant in the house of a Jew and I learned their language. I heard the father tell his sons how their patriarch, Abraham, even as a child broke his father's idols.

SOLDIER 1

If that's the case, I'm going too. Let our general come and watch the statue.

SOLDIER 3

I never had such a night. I was never so afraid in my life.

SOLDIER 4

You are right about the red star. It is terrible. And look at the thick clouds. I believe it will rain soon. Come, let's go into the tent.

NARRATOR

Judah and his brothers, all dressed in white, appear.

JUDAH

Simon and I are now coming from the assembly. The place is crowded with people. Many of them are afraid to start the fight. Father urges them to open war tomorrow. He demands that we drive all the Greeks out. How great and valiant he is, like Moses, like our master Moses.

SIMON

Look, we're at the idol, but where are the guards?

ELIEZER

They went to sleep, like last night.

JUDAH

Come brothers. Let's stone it. (*Sounds of stones being thrown*) No one here. No one sees.
Come, let's shatter it to pieces.

ALL

Abomination! Idols! Shatter! Turn it into powder!

NARRATOR

Mattathias appears, followed by other men.

JUDAH

Father, we destroyed the idol.

MATTATHIAS

My sons, my heroes, you have done a great thing. You have started the rebellion. You are going to lead the people in their struggle for freedom.

JUDAH

We shall fight for our people, for our land, for our God.

MATTATHIAS

The God of Israel liveth!

ALL

The God of Israel liveth!



Aaron: Thank you for listening to this bonus episode of *The Dybbukast*. The essay, "How I Got My Name," was read by Julie Lockhart. *The Little Hasmoneans* featured actors Perry Daniel, Julie Lockhart, Clay Steakley, Diana Tanaka, Jonathan C.K. Williams and Mark McClain Wilson. The episode was edited by Mark McClain Wilson. Our theme music was composed by Michael Skloff and produced by Sam K.S. Our next episode, exploring the Book of Enoch and presented in collaboration with The Philosophical Research Society, will be available on December 11th, 2020. *The Dybbukast* is produced by theatre dybbuk.