

Episode 1: “I-TELL-YOU”

Transcription

An actor reads “Our Congregation,” by Rabbi Louis Wolsey

Boys and girls, I have been particularly impressed with the loyalty of your parents to the congregation. I have rarely met with a group that is so deeply and sincerely proud of its congregational life and history. And when I seek the cause for their loyalty and their pride, I do not have to look far.

Their parents and grandparents have been members for four, five, and even six generations. Some of them occupy seats in the synagogue that were owned by their grandparents. Of course, we all love that which has been held sacred by our families for many, many years. Just the other day, they celebrated the 125th anniversary of the congregation.

That is a remarkable fact. It makes us think of what America was and what Judaism in America was 125 years ago. The colonies had just concluded their war of independence and had established the constitution and formed themselves into a nation. There were probably not over 2000 Jews in all of the 13 colonies at that time. And yet, there were a few in Philadelphia who were eager to establish a congregation and they did it humbly with the help of God.



Host Aaron Henne: Jewish communities for a good deal of recorded time have been spread across much of the globe, often existing as minority groups within a variety of dominant cultures. As such, that which was created, read and listened to in these communities can provide glimpses into the ways in which people navigate challenging social, political and cultural waters.

I'm Aaron Henne, Artistic Director of theatre dybbuk, and I'd like to welcome you to The Dybbukast, a show in which we ask, what do novels, mythological narratives, poems, plays and lyrics from throughout history tell us about the times in which they were created, and what do they reveal about the forces still at play in our contemporary societies.

In this first episode, we will experience selections from a children's Hanukkah play called *The Little Hasmoneans* found in *I-Tell-You*, a 1926 religious school journal from Congregation Rodeph Shalom in Philadelphia. We will also hear essays written by both the students and clergy featured in the same publication.

Dr. Miriam Heller Stern, National Director of The School of Education, and Associate Professor of Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, helps us unpack the journal's meaning and what it has to say about education, assimilation, cultural expression of identity, and the complications of community.

Now, onto the play:



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 Debborah 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.



Aaron Henne: Here I am today with Miriam Heller Stern, and Miriam, it's such a pleasure to have you with me to discuss this really interesting piece from the 1920s. So thank you for being with me.

Dr. Miriam Heller Stern: It's my pleasure.

Aaron: First, Miriam, paint the picture for us of what is happening for American Jewry in 1926.

Miriam: 1926 is the interwar period in American history. It's a moment of relative calm and prosperity following the great war. It's a time when we see a rise in patriotism and belief in American democracy and belief in America as a beacon for the world, and certainly the West. And this belief in America is accompanied by a rise in nativism and suspicion of immigrants. And so we have just seen in the previous couple of years, in 1924, the closing of doors to an immigrant population after a wave of 40 million immigrants over 40 years.

At this same moment, we see an expansion of secular cosmopolitan culture, a rise in humanist values in American culture, and in accompanying religious decline. Some historians have called this moment, 1925 to 1935, a moment of religious depression; when prosperous, rising middle-class Americans turned away from churches, were turning away from synagogues, and focusing more on their ethnic selves. And so you see the beginning of a trend in Jewish life of affirming Jewishness, more than Judaism itself. So an affirmation of an ethnic identity, more than a religious identity or one of religious practice.

Aaron: This is indeed a complex time. As you have indicated, the Immigrant Act recently closed the country's borders to Eastern European Jews, and there was also an increase in antisemitic sentiment in America. At the same time, there's a growth in large national Jewish organizations, including the establishment of the Jewish Institute of Religion in 1922, the Synagogue Council of America in 1925, the World Union of Progressive Judaism in 1926 and more. This seems to demonstrate a growing presence in American society, in a variety of ways, for Jews. Can you speak even more about Jews in America at the time, how they, or we, viewed our place in this particular society and how that played out on the ground?

Miriam: You see a proliferation of new Jewish organizations and the 1920s as a signal of these newer arrivals, newer Jewish communities, becoming more entrenched in American society and setting up their own shop, setting up their own organizations, because they didn't quite fit into the organizations and the values and the language of the Jews who had arrived many generations prior.

The American Jewish community at this time is really a community of communities. We see incredible diversity in terms of the history and roots of different American Jewish populations. And yet, in this moment in the interwar period, we start to see more commonalities forming between them. And thus a play like *The Little Hasmoneans* could have been put on in a congregation like Rodeph Shalom that was celebrating its 125th anniversary as a congregation. And it also could have been put on in a youth club in New York City by second generation, East European immigrant Jews who had more recently claimed American citizenship.



NARRATOR

Act One continues as one of the brothers, Simon, speaks.

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

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.

■

Miriam: We see themes of righteousness, faith, pursuing peace, reverence for Jewish scholarship. They have incredible pride in the prominence of Jewish figures in Jewish life and in American life and in American politics and in society.

■

An actor reads "Our Boy Scout Troop"

Two weeks ago, the Rodeph Shalom Boy Scout Troop Number 131 celebrated the anniversary of the 10th year of its affiliation with the Sunday School. In this year of celebrations for the synagogue, it is indeed interesting to note that this vital phase of youthful activity enters the ranks of veteran troops. The troop has rendered service efficiently and well. It has served the boys, the institute, the city, and the nation.



Miriam: So Jews at this moment in history are trying to thread a needle. They are trying to not appear too Jewish, too distinctive. They want to appear fully American, and accomplished as American, and committed to the values of democracy, righteousness, faith, but they want to show that they're doing it in a distinctively Jewish way. In a way they're distancing themselves from an immigrant narrative, whether that narrative was six generations ago in Philadelphia or two generations ago in New York City; whether they came from originally Sephardic or German descent, generations and generations ago, or if they were more recent arrivals. This is a moment where the American Jewish community is trying to be both part and also apart. Jonathan Sarna has described this tension as sort of a dance between cultural resistance and cultural borrowing. And we see even in how these young American Jews express themselves in their religious school literary journal, that they're doing very much all of that.



An actor reads "How I Got My Name"

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 state, 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, meatman, 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 immigrated 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: Onto the specifics of the play itself. It exists in three short scenes, two of which involve the Maccabee family and explore their concerns, and the other, which focuses primarily on Greek soldiers and their relationship to the Jews they oversee. Given the concerns we have already discussed, in what ways might this play have been used as a teaching tool for the children hearing it?

Miriam: This is a play that is reclaiming the Hanukkah story as a central narrative of what it means to be a Jew living in America. Beware of those who might lure you to idolatry, right? And of course, the idolatry that the Maccabees are resisting is a metaphor for any number of idols in American secular life.



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.



Miriam: In the aftermath of World War I, the American Jewish community has a renewed faith in itself to stand up to those foes from the outside and those foes from Europe who seek to defeat Judaism.

Aaron: I think it's interesting to think about this synagogue as a kind of symbol for similar synagogue communities. We recognize, of course, that all communities and synagogues have

their own personalities. That being said, this is a large reform synagogue that has people who are likely relatively assimilated into American society, who may also have aspirations of even greater assimilation. And yet here they are, sharing this story, in the form of a play, of being triumphant over assimilation. I'm curious if you have any insight into how parents of the time would have unpacked that complication with their children.

Miriam: I imagine that much like American Jewish parents today, they held both narratives and didn't think that deeply about where that point of conflict in the sort of theoretical, conceptual sense that you just drew out. I imagine that they saw themselves as both/and, American and Jewish. This moment in the 1920s is a moment of American Jewish synthesis and American Jews are living a narrative that blends their identities or hyphenates their identities.

I think the Hanukkah story takes on a particular resonance in this moment - in a congregation that had humble beginnings at the very dawn of the republic, in a moment when the American Jewish community was tiny, only a few thousand people, and ultimately to grow into a congregation that after 125 years is embarking on a new building campaign, much like today.

And we see at this moment in the 1920s and '30s, the expansion of major Jewish synagogue centers attracting large populations. Those buildings become a symbol of the arrival of the American Jewish community, of the centrality and longevity of Jews in America. And of course the Hanukkah story is about the temple being defiled, and so this moment of doubling down and announcing our buildings are here to stay. Our temples in America are Jewish and American. They are enough like their Protestant church neighbors to fit right in. And yet, we still have our own story of distinctiveness, of having overcome oppression and having overcome our fear.



An actor continues to read "Our Congregation"

We plan a beautiful and majestic synagogue. It will be worthy of us and of Philadelphia. Every provision will be made for you. We shall have large, light, airy and beautiful Sunday School rooms, and we shall build large enough to take care of a thousand children. We shall have a large auditorium and theater with a fine stage where we may have interesting Sunday morning assemblies, where we may produce plays, where we may have lectures and moving pictures and not alone, learn of the great things which the Jew has done for the world in the past, but that we may ourselves do something to make Philadelphia and America a happier and more useful place in which to live. We shall learn in our new building how to be a blessing to mankind.



Miriam: In certain ways, there are a lot of parallels to the experience of being American and Jewish today. The importance of Jewish pride as a central feature of Jewish identity, the importance of community and feeling connected to one another. We see some values intention when it comes to what should the curriculum of Jewish learning be. So in this bulletin, we see essays by Jewish youth talking about major figures of Jewish scholarship, who they are looking up to as heroes.

Actor 1: Marcus Jastrow, the great sage.

Actor 2: Dr. Henry Berkowitz, a noted figure.

Actor 3: Israel Zangwill, a poet, novelist and dreamer.

Miriam: And yet we also know that they're only receiving formal instruction once, maybe twice a week.

Aaron: I think religious school is fascinating for the reason you just said; this idea of like here we are wanting you to feel really connected to the tradition, to the community. At the same time, we recognize that most of your week is spent out in the world in a fundamentally different way. It's existing in this "both/and space" as you called it earlier. And that's really interesting to even see that in the narratives that the students create, right? Some of the narratives are sort of overtly Jewish. Others, while they allude to their Jewishness, that's not the main focus of the communication.

Miriam: What we're seeing here is American morality, a culture of virtue, a culture of character building that the Jewish community is hosting in its own midst. And that's why you see the growth of Jewish clubs that are designed for moral uplift. That theme is very, very prominent in the East European populations that arrived as immigrants more recently because they needed to go through a process of Americanization and assimilation in order to become fully American, in order to synthesize their identity. And at the same time, those clubs were popular in a reform context where that Americanness was already taken for granted. So in this interwar period, you start to see a kind of convergence and realignment across these different Jewish communities within the American Jewish community, because they're in the same post-war zeitgeists of claiming liberty, democracy, justice as Jewish values.



An actor reads "What Is Charity?"

What is charity? Charity may be defined as giving happiness to others. The giving, not only of money, but of time and energy. Let us turn to the city of Philadelphia. The Federation of Jewish charities has been doing some remarkable work in the past few years. In this organization, funds have been raised to build homes for the aged, the sick, the weak, homes for the friendless orphans, hospitals, and many other places for the comfort of the poor. Charity stands big in the lives of the Jewish population of Philadelphia. It isn't only the Jews that give, but it is also the non Jews who do charitable work. What an unhappy world this would be if nobody cared. In conclusion, one should always give.

- Kathryn R. Rosenstein, grade 10, class 1



Aaron: Here we are in the interwar period of time of what seems to be relative peace, but of course, with big challenges and dangers to come for those both here and especially abroad. I'd love to hear your take on American Jewish communities' relationships to world politics, and especially to what was taking place in Europe at that time.

Miriam: So American Jews at this time feel deeply connected to the Jews of Europe, to the history of European Jewry. If you think about a reform congregation, it's only been in recent decades where their rabbis have been trained on American soil at the Hebrew Union College. Before that, their scholars all hailed from Germany, from Europe. During World War I, there

was a tremendous effort by the American Jewish community to provide relief aid to their poor brethren who are suffering during the war in Eastern Europe, in Germany.

And so they've now gotten past that moment of crisis and relief work, and those moments of crisis tend to rally the community together. And then in times of relative calm, the Jewish educational enterprise has to take over in a kind of positive engagement, focusing on those highlights, celebrating those achievements.



Actors read, "The Jew and Peace"

Actor 1: At the present time, there are four contestants contesting for the Universal Religious Peace Congress. Dr. Henry A. Atkinson, who is general secretary of the Church Peace Union, suggested this Congress two years ago and at that time established a committee to prepare to hold an International Congress at which all the nations of the world would be represented.

A committee of 1000 is now being formed, representing the 11 great living religions of the world, whose purpose is to discuss the problems relating to international justice and peace, and to give their views concerning these questions. These religious groups are Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, Buddhists, Confucianists, Shintoists, Taoists, Hindus, Parsees, Jains, and Sikhs.

These 11 religions will be represented in this committee in proportion to their numbers. This Congress is based upon the theory that world peace can be secured only when every nation and religion is willing to recognize the brotherhood of man.

Actor 2: One of the greatest drawbacks of our civilization has been based upon the belief that the killing mania is a part of human nature and therefore wars can never be abolished. The world is just beginning to realize that this idea was merely used by the militarists for the intimidation of mankind. But this is not true of the Jews for they have always stood for peace and have looked forward even in their darkest hours to the Messianic era, which means an era of peace. A world conference on final and absolute disarmament was formulated 2,600 years ago by the Hebrew prophets, Isaiah and Micah. The prophet Micah described this ideal society as a society where everyone will dwell satisfied with his lot in the shadow of his own vine and fig tree. The Torah exists for the sake of peace.



Miriam: Those multi-generational families of German stock might still have roots, cousins in Germany. And those who had come much more recently from Eastern Europe might have those family members as well. Recall that those who were coming from Eastern Europe tended to be those who chose to make the journey, who chose to venture out and take that leap of faith, that life in the Golden Medinah, right? Life in this golden land of success and promise was going to, in fact, deliver promise. Many stayed in Europe because they viewed America as the Trefa Medinah, as the land that could not sustain them religiously. And so that's why you have whole communities in the shtetl who don't leave, who resist that industrial push out of the Pale of Settlement. They stay where they are, and then they are still present by the time World War II rolls around.



Actors continue to read from "The Jew and Peace":

Actor 1: The Bible's messages to humanity is to love thy neighbor as thyself. The 10 commandments tell us thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal. In addition to this, all the profits and great men of Jewish history have favored peace and pleaded for it. The great Hillel said, "Love peace and preach peace." One of the reasons that the Jew stands for peace is that international war is disastrous to the Jew because he is thereby forced to kill his fellow Jew. The Jew occupies a unique position in history because he's scattered all over the earth. There's hardly a country in which the Jew has not settled. He adapts himself very easily to the life of his particular country. And while this has its advantages, it also possesses disadvantages. In war time, this is a considerable disadvantage -

Actor 2: - because he has to fight against his own brethren. If we want peace, we must try and prevent wars. In order to prevent wars, we must find out the underlying causes of them. Generally, wars are caused by a greed for wealth, land and material things. This very unworthy cause of war proves that wars are absolutely wrong. When we stopped to consider the loss of life and unhappiness caused by wars, besides the loss economically, would it not be much better to utilize these combative instincts in a creative way, rather than in a destructive fashion? War not only destroys life, but also breeds crime and destroys morality and culture. For these reasons also -

Actor 3: - Judaism has never been in favor of wars. The central conference on American rabbis has committees on international peace. A Jew was the godfather of that famous world peace meeting, the first Hague Conference. One of the winners of the Nobel Peace Prize was a Jew, Dr. Alfred A. Fried. This great philosopher dedicated 30 years of his life to the bitter warfare against war. He wrote a library of pacifism that included nearly 2000 articles and essays. He is indeed the great pioneer of the pacifist movement.

Oscar Straus also devoted a great deal of his energy to peace. In all ages in history, Judaism has been a staunch defender of peace, and it is Israel's mission to establish everlasting peace throughout the world. If we are to live up to the highest teachings of Judaism, we should spread the doctrine of peace among all the nations.

- Caroline Kallman, grade 12



Miriam: I think you see the aspirations of youth in this bulletin, and you also see echoes, of course, of the aspirations of their rabbi, their teachers who edited this bulletin. And in many ways, the journal is a compilation of both.



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.



Miriam: I think we see here both a comfort in being American and Jewish. And yet we see, because of the surrounding society at the time, because of the social forces at the time, the nativism, the antisemitism that accompanies nativism, the rise of the KU Klux Klan at this time. This is the beginning of Sunday orations on radio, some of which are quite white supremacist, which leaves Jews in a vulnerable position in society. Jews are still being kept out with quotas, with "No Jews, No Dogs Allowed." And so there are certainly social forces that are pushing back against the possibility of Jewish integration. Jewish endogamy is at a high because we didn't have an issue of Jews marrying out at this time. There is a desire to affirm Jewishness and there is a desire to affirm Americanness precisely because a dual loyalty is always in question. We see, for example, in this bulletin, an ode to Rodeph Shalom Sunday School, written to the tune of "America, The Beautiful."

Actors sing:

Our banners bright, we hold upright
 For Rodeph Shalom's name
And may not never darken them
 Or dim their path to fame

So that through all our after-lives
 Shall linger sharp and clear
Those days in Rodeph Shalom's halls
 A memory of cheer!

Miriam: During the 1880s through 1920s, as masses of East Europeans were arriving, many arriving in poverty, there was a major concern that these Eastern European Jews would somehow damage the image of the already Americanized, refined Jew who had been here for generations.

■

An actor continues to read "Our Congregation":

As their parents and grandparents erected this building, so do they mean to leave you something of which you may be proud, something whereby you will carry forward the faith with as much love and zeal as they have done throughout their lives. Greater than our synagogue is Judaism. Greater than Judaism is God. And while buildings may come and buildings may go, our religion, like the word of God, will go on forever.

■

Miriam: In many ways, the history of American Jewish education is a story of a fight for Jewish survival. And what we see in this era is a shift from a Jewish focus on physical survival, to a Jewish focus on spiritual survival.

■

NARRATOR

Act Three concludes as 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!



Miriam: Once Americanness can be taken for granted, and especially in this little moment of religious decline in American society, rabbis and educators need to put in a little muscle to insist that the next generation being engaged in Jewish learning and Jewish life. And so the desire to entertain them, to engage them, to inspire them is different from more traditional forms of education, the focused on recitation, memorization, just practicing the saying of blessings.

And so the cultural production actually reflects a new progressive way of thinking about what learning should look like and how learning actually does contribute to identity, contribute to ethnic religious pride and contribute to the strengthening of an ethnic group like the Jewish community.

Aaron: Thank you for listening to this first episode of The Dybbukast, which featured actors Perry Daniel, Joe Jordan, Julie Lockhart, Clay Steakley, Diana Tanaka, Jonathan CK Williams and Mark McClain Wilson. Scholarship was provided by Dr. Miriam Heller Stern. Our theme music is composed by Michael Skloff, produced by Sam K.S.. The series is edited by Mark McClain Wilson.

A note of gratitude to our friends at Judaism Unbound for featuring this inaugural episode on their feed as well. They're doing great work, and if you haven't already, you should check out their podcast indeed. And thank you to the Covenant Foundation for its support of The Dybbukast and our development of related educational resources.

Speaking of which, if you want to go deeper into the subjects that were discussed, please visit us at www.theatredybbuk.org/podcast, where you will find links to all manner of great information, as well as teaching guides for those who work with students. And if you want to know more about theatre dybbuk's work in general and what we are up to, please sign up for our mailing list on that same website, on the contact page.

If you have found the show edifying or even entertaining, we invite you to leave a review on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. It really does help to raise awareness. Thanks.

New episodes of The Dybbukast will be available every second Friday of the month. You can listen to our next one, exploring the Book of Enoch and presented in collaboration with The

Philosophical Research Society on December 11th, 2020. This episode was presented in collaboration with Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion and was produced by theatre dybbuk.