

The Dybbuk - Synopsis

by Ofer Ben-Amots

ACT I - The Love and The Death [ca. 26:00]

1. **Introduction** – Lying on the floor as if in a deep sleep, Leah is hanging between life and death. Hearing Hannan's sighing voice, she remembers their great, unfulfilled love. [3:30]
2. **Al ma Velama?** – The eternal question: Oh, why and wherefore the soul descends from the highest heights to the deepest depths? From the depths it will rise much higher. [5:00]
3. **The Holy Grave** – In the center of town there is a tombstone known as the Holy Grave. Leah tells the story of the great pogrom of 1648-49 where the Cossacks massacred a young couple under the wedding canopy. [3:40]
4. **The Song of Songs** – Leah remembers Hannan's endless affection for her and the words of love he sang to her out of Solomon's Song of Songs. [3:30]
5. **The Broken Pledge** – A mystical Messenger arrives and tells a tale about two friends who wish to strengthen their friendship. They pledge that when they become fathers, and if a daughter and a son are born to them, they will be married once they grow up. The subjects of this promise were Hannan and Leah. But when Channan's father died and Leah's father became very wealthy, the pledge was forgotten. [6:45]
6. **Hannan's Death** – Hannan loves Leah, but being a poor Yeshiva student he knows well that her father will never pay attention to him let alone allow them to marry. Hannan tries his hand at magic and Kabbalah, hoping to turn the order of the world around and change his fate. This, however, exhausts him and causes his untimely, early death. [3:00]

———— A BREATHER ————

ACT II – The Dybbuk [ca. 21:00]

7. **The Parable of Glass** – The Messenger tells a parable about glass: when one looks through clean and transparent glass one sees other people, but when the backside of this glass is covered with silver (money) one sees only oneself. The parable refers to Leah's father. [4:30]
8. **Conversation and Aria** – Is not one born for a long life? What happens to those who die before their time? Where does the soul go? Leah sings the aria: When one dies before his time. [2:30]
9. **The Bridegroom's arrival** – Leah's father has found a new match for her, a bridegroom of a wealthy and respectable family. Leah neither knows nor loves this stranger. When she hears about his arrival she is petrified. She runs to the Holy Grave and pleads for help and protection. [3:00]

10. **Nishmot Hametim** – The Messenger explains that the souls of the dead indeed return to earth, but not as disembodied spirits. Sometimes they wander through several bodies until they are completely purified. But sometimes, a lost and forgotten soul enters a living person like a Dybbuk, and it remains there until it finds salvation. [2:30]

11. **Under the Wedding Canopy** – Leah walks down the aisle to the sound of a traditional wedding tune (Nigun of the Seven Circles.) She is just about to be wed to the new bridegroom, when the voice of the Dybbuk sounds, screaming from within her body. Leah is now possessed by the Dybbuk. [8:30]

———— INTERMISSION ————

ACT III – Between Two Worlds [ca. 42:00]

12. **Interlude, The Heart and the Fountain** – This mystical, metaphysical, and poetic tale tells about the mechanism that moves the world and keeps the universe alive: there is a singing fountain at the end of the world and a pounding heart at the other end. The fountain and the heart are attracted to each other and long to get closer, but as soon as they move from their place they lose sight of each other. Once they cannot see each other the heart would stop beating and the fountain would stop singing. Thus, they both stay in their places and sing to each other. Their song spreads over the entire world and sparks of light emanate from it. When the sparks are woven together they produce enough time for a new day to be created. [9:30]

13. **At the Rabbi's Chamber** – Rabbi Azriel of Miropol summons the maiden to his chamber. He asks the Dybbuk who he is and why he entered Leah's body. The Dybbuk responds with the aria: "I'm a Burned to Ashes Wood." [13:20]

14. **Toccata Exorcista** – A powerful verbal struggle erupts between the Rabbi and the Dybbuk. The Rabbi pleads with the Dybbuk to exit the maiden's body. The Dybbuk refuses and sings, "I won't Obey and I Won't Listen." The determined Rabbi then conducts the Exorcism Scene. With prayers and the abrupt sounds of the Shofar, he overpowers the Dybbuk and defeats him. The Rabbi commands that Leah's wedding to the new bridegroom be performed at once. [6:00]

15. **Epilogue - Coda** - Lying on the floor as if in a deep sleep, Leah is hanging between life and death. She can either come back to life and marry a stranger, or leave with Hannan, her true love, to a place of eternal peace. [3:55]

16. **I Broke Through All the Barriers** – The two arias, "I Broke Through All The Barriers" and "Lullaby to the Babies Who Were Never Born" – both sung by Leah – describe the tragedy and plight of their union. [3:25]

17. **"We are soaring and climbing"** - The final duet demonstrates the profound bond between the lovers and their decision to stay forever together. [2:30]

18. **Al ma Velama?** – The eternal question is repeated: Oh why and wherefore does the soul descend from the highest heights to the deepest depths? From the depths it will rise much higher. [2:10]