

It's Good to Die for our Land!?

Trumpeldor – the Pioneer and Warrior

Program for Intermediate and High School Grades

GOALS

- To get to know the life story of Trumpeldor as a leader and warrior by tracking main stations of his life.
- Emphasis on components of construction, production and leadership in Trumpeldor's personality, in addition to his military image.
- Clarification of the concept of self-sacrifice, as connected to the act of heroism

Activity Plan

1. Introduction

Show pictures of Trumpeldor and/or the picture of the monument of the roaring lion.

Ask the students know about Trumpeldor, and gather information together.

You may obtain questions – as to what interests the students, what they do not know that they would like to know about Trumpeldor.

2. Every student / group of students is given information about highlights of Trumpeldor's life.

Each group is presented with a situation or a dilemma Trumpeldor had met up with. The students are asked to suggest what Trumpeldor should have done in these situations? And what they think he had actually done.

At the end of a short discussion, you could supply the answer as to how Trumpeldor reacted in these situations. They are asked to examine whether the given answer matches the one they had thought about, and they are asked to present the dilemma orally or by means of a short performance to the rest of the class.

Recruitment to the Army

Trumpeldor was influenced by Tolstoy's philosophy. Under this influence he became vegetarian since the age of 14 and trained his body to adapt to uncomfortable conditions. Under this influence he opposed militarism and aggression (a view that opposes the use of force is called pacifism). When he came of age for enlisting in the Russian army, he deliberated whether or not to join the army, being that he suspected that his basic opposition to militarism would be interpreted as cowardice, and that his fear and faithlessness to the homeland stems from his being a Jew.

- What do you think Trumpeldor should do?
- Should he enlist in contrast to his belief in order to defend the attitude to Jews, or should he stick to his belief without considering the impact of his acts?
- What do you think Trumpeldor did?

Trumpeldor decides to enlist to the army and not to avoid this, despite his beliefs due to his fear that this would be interpreted as an act of fear - being a Jew.

"In the past my beliefs Tolstoyist (anti-military) and when I was recruited to the army, I also considered refraining from giving the vow. Yet I retracted this plan, perhaps, primarily out of the fear that "they" may say: "The dirty Jew behaves like a trickster: He relies on beliefs, but he actually fears army service... According to my beliefs I am not a man of war and I would not hold weapons unless I have no other choice."

Dealing with an Injury in Battle

Trumpeldor enlists in the Russian army in 1903 after he had studied dentistry. As an academic soldier he is given better conditions than other soldiers, and he could be released from menial jobs, yet he refuses to take advantage of these privileges. When the Russian-Japan war breaks out he participates in the warfare and gains fame for his courage and bravery. In one of the battles his arm is injured by a shell. This injury results in the amputation of his hand. Such a serious injury is sufficient reason for discharge a person from the army or at least from giving him a position far from the front.

- In your opinion, what should Trumpeldor do?

- Should he terminate his term of service and then try to get released from the army, or should he continue to serve at the front despite his injury?
- What do you think Trumpeldor did?

Trumpeldor approaches his commanders and asks to continue battling with his comrades despite his amputated arm. His request is received with great amazement and he is given a badge of honor.

And the commander issues the following announcement to his battalion:

Sergeant of the Seventh Company, Joseph Trumpeldor, writes a request to his company officer: "I have one arm left, but it is the right hand. Since I wish to continue to battle alongside my comrades, I ask his honor, to support my request by giving me a sword and my dagger". These words ought to be written with golden letters in the annals of our troop. And they ought to be especially praised since this concerns a Jew -I am sure that every officer and soldier in this battalion and I at their lead, know how to honor this type of self-sacrifice for the homeland..."

In Captivity

Trumpeldor enlists in the Russian army. He fights bravely in the Russian-Japan war, loses his hand and returns to battle with his friends, for which he is given a badge of honor, and a rank promotion. In 1905 he falls in Japanese captivity, together with many soldiers. The captives are divided into camps according to their religion. Trumpeldor is imprisoned with other Jewish soldiers. Many soldiers do not know how to read or write, and their behavior is contemptible and disrespectful. Trumpeldor has no official role in the camp.

- What should Trumpeldor do?
- Should he keep away from the inferior Jewish soldiers?
- Should he try to influence them, educate them and concern himself with their needs? By what right and authority could he act?
- What do you think Trumpeldor did in this situation?

Trumpeldor started taking action to arrange the life in the captives' camp: He established a loan fund, from which funds were taken to build several workshops, a barbershop, a shoemaker etc. He arranged a school teaching various subjects to analphabets. With the lack of schoolbooks on hand,

he wrote them himself. He arranged a library and a theatrical band, he assisted in obtaining religious items and was especially engaged in Zionist activities. He established a Zionist Association, published a newspaper, of which he was the editor and the writer of most of the articles. In the Zionist Society Trumpeldor began to develop his ideas for the establishment of colonies of cooperative workers in Israel. In the city of Takaishi, Japan, in which the captive's camp was located, an exhibition was put up in memory of Joseph Trumpeldor. It turns out that the respectable way Trumpeldor represented the Jewish captives to the administration of the camp and his charismatic image of a warrior with a single arm, generate appreciation and admiration in Japan till today. For his activities in the Prison Camp, Trumpeldor was given yet another honorary medal from the Russian Czar (king) and a prosthetic hand from the Czarina (the queen).

Immigration to Israel and Fulfillment of Group Residency

Back in his days of his army service, Trumpeldor was preoccupied with the Zionist idea of immigration to Israel and organization of independent Jewish life. During his days of captivity in Japan he consolidated the idea of Jewish cooperative agricultural colonies. With his release, he begins to take action to materialize the idea. Yet there are many obstacles on the way. There are no means of purchasing land nor working tools. There is a necessity to locate partners and to train them for work. The land is far, desolate and under-developed, and there is a lack of a work force. At that time, very few Jews lived in Israel, among which the farmers were even a lesser percentage. And these lived in the colonies of Baron Rothschild (managed and financially supported by the baron, as opposed to being independent). Trumpeldor is deliberating, with his friend, Tzvi Shatz about when to immigrate to Israel and how to materialize the plan.

- In your opinion, what ought Trumpeldor do? Should he take advantage of his position as a famous warrior, and live a comfortable life in Russia? Should he give up the implementation of his idea and promote Zionism in Russia with propaganda, raising funds etc.? Should he immigrate to Israel and join existing frameworks? Should he try to implement the idea of a cooperative agricultural society despite the hardships, the poverty, the lack of experience and the hunger?
- What do you think Trumpeldor did?

Trumpeldor takes measures to organize the group and to obtain the means for immigration and settlement. He warns his friend, Tzvi Shatz to refrain from immigrating too soon, before getting trained for work and for living under difficult conditions. Following a period of pre-arrangements, a gathering of a small group of friends, and consolidation of the ideas, Trumpeldor and his friends immigrate together as a group headed towards the colony of Migdal, in order to train themselves with agricultural work. The dire conditions of hunger and deprivation, lead to tension within the small group and Trumpeldor demands hard work and readiness to live with the bare minimum. After several months, the group dissipates, yet all of its members continue their paths, each attempting to fulfil the principle of a Jewish-cooperative – agricultural settlement in his/her way. Trumpeldor does not give up and blames the small size of the group as the reason for failure, and begins to devise a plan for a cooperative agricultural colony or to create a network of colonies. These ideas are to materialize later on by the Halutz Movement, the Labor Brigade and the Large Kibbutz.

Trumpeldor writes the following to his parents from his captivity camp in Japan:

It seems to me that now is the time to initiate actual Zionist activities, for this reason, dear parents, we have resolved to immigrate to the Land of Israel now, with no delay. And my group is a good one: almost all of them are craftsmen, straight people, who know how to work. We shall return to Russia, to seek the necessary means, and after a short while, we'll go out to the Land of Israel to work there. We're all single and as such we'll set out to establish the colony and we would be able to marry women afterwards. We may possibly find a few others that are honest and have good natures, who would be suitable for us and would agree to live as we wish to- the life of a commune and perhaps also you and more of our people may immigrate and join us.

Establishment of the Hebrew Legions

After immigrating to Israel, and following a hard period of trials to fulfil the plan of creating a cooperative Jewish settlement, WW1 breaks out. Russia and Turkey (who governed Israel at that time) are at war with each other. Trumpeldor and many other Jews who were Russian citizens located in the area governed by Turkey, are forced to leave the land and they arrive to Egypt. Ze'ev Jabotinsky tries to convince Trumpeldor to agree to the idea of establishing a Jewish military force within the British army against the Turks, in order to bring an end to the Turkish rule and to elicit a commitment of the British to support Jews and their wish to settle the Land of Israel after the Jews assist them in their battle. Trumpeldor is convinced, but the British agree to accept only a force of transporters, mule drivers as opposed to a combat force, and on condition that the commander be British. Jabotinsky opposes this. Trumpeldor needs to decide whether to recruit people and to take command over a non-belligerent force, under British command.

- What do you think Trumpeldor should do?
- Should he commit himself to a mission that entails danger, yet lacks honor and prestige? Should he agree to the condition of British command, while it's not positive that the goal of creating a Hebrew battle force and the commitment of the British would be obtained? Should he continue despite the opposition of Jabotinsky | ?
- What do you think Trumpeldor did?

Trumpeldor takes on the task despite Jabotinsky's reservations. He succeeds at recruiting people, most of whom lack military training. The force is sent to a most difficult front (Gallipoli in Italy) and is treated with contempt by the British command. The conditions are difficult and dangerous and Trumpeldor is compelled to use strict disciplinary measures to prevent the troop from falling apart, due to injuries and casualties, low motivation and instances of desertion and obstinacy. In addition, he must fulfil the orders of the British commander, even when he does not agree with him. Thanks to his personality, his personal example and discipline, Trumpeldor manages, with great difficulty, to keep the company under his command from disintegrating, unlike the two other companies of the battalion. Despite his strict policies he was able to even gain some enthusiastic supporters.

Defending Tel Hai

Trumpeldor, who in that period leads the "Halutz" organization in the Diaspora, which organizes Jews and trains them for Aliya, is summoned by the Committee of Defense to assist with the protection of the settlements in the Galilee. The settlements of the Galilee were located in the territory under French control while the rest of the Land of Israel was under British rule. The Galilee region had a large Arab population, and there were confrontations between the French authorities and the Arab inhabitants. The French, whose control over the area was inadequate and the isolation of the small Jewish settlements led to a controversy about whether to evacuate the settlements and concentrate the few forces into locations that could be protected or try to maintain them despite the difficulties and the limited forces. In the days leading up to the attack, the settlements had requested assistance from the commanders of Hashomer, but the aid did not arrive.

- What, in your opinion, ought Trumpeldor do? Should he respond positively to the request to aid in defense of the Galilee settlements? Should he remain there despite the small number of settlers and the evaluation that it would be impossible to defend the settlements under such circumstances? Should he retreat and persuade his young partners to abandon the settlement?
- How should he handle the lack of assistance from the Galilee Command?
- What, in your opinion, did Trumpeldor do?

Trumpeldor, who was called to assist with the defense over the Galilee settlements, arrives at Tel Hai and remains there with the young people who were already there, for about two months, despite his wish to return abroad. Although Trumpeldor, himself, opposed the continued existence of these settlements, when he was called to stand at their side, he committed himself to the task. He tried to ask for help from the Committee of Defense and this is what he wrote to them: "A new generation, Jews of the Land of Israel, who are free, are located on the border, ready to sacrifice their souls over the protection of this boundary and there – in the center of Israel, there are endless negotiations, whether to approve the budget or not, in other words: whether to assist the defenders of the homeland or not".

On that very day, Arabs from the surrounding area asked to enter the courtyard of Tel Hai to check whether or not French soldiers are hiding within. After they are admitted, the Arabs open fire and a



shootout is initiated. Trumpeldor is fatally injured and five people are killed. He lies badly wounded until evening when an evacuation force arrives. According to the doctor, his last words were: "No matter, it is good to die for our land."

Trumpeldor turned into a symbol of heroism, courage and self-sacrifice, and his death and his last words are spread out immediately.

In recent years there are deliberations as to whether or not Trumpeldor actually uttered this famous statement. Yet his letters allude to the fact that he had made similar statements earlier, and these and his actions proved time and again - his courage and his readiness for such a sacrifice.

