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Jason Haxton

THE
דיבוק אקס

Jason Haxton

AFTERWORD BY HOWARD SCHWARTZ



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*To Lori, my wife, and to Ross and Laurel, my children.
In spite of my mental wanderings, my family is my greatest interest and
passion—they are my real obsession.*

“By divine providence, a Jew believes that nothing happens by chance. The box has ‘fallen’ into your hands. Maybe you are the one who can unravel the mystery and bring peace to whatever is not at peace.”

—Rabbi Yonosan Golomb, Sheffield, England, 22 March 2004

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Howard Schwartz

Preface

Because of my own curiosity of the item and its story, I freely chose to become connected to the Dibbuk Box. I quickly learned that in this day of instant connection through the Internet and cell phone, many thousands of people were following this artifact's journey and they all seemed to want access to the Dibbuk Box and anyone associated with it. As a result, my name has ended up on thousands of websites and blogs. Hoping to free myself from constant e-mails and phone calls, I created a detailed website to keep these people updated on my progress, but even now, almost seven years after my purchase of the Dibbuk Box, strangers still search me out to ask me about my experiences.

My privacy has already been compromised from being tied to this item, but I understand that just because someone has been involved with the Dibbuk Box doesn't mean they want to be part of an open forum to anyone and everyone. For this reason, I have been selective in using people's names. For those who have remained relatively anonymous, I use only a first name or identify the person only by relationship. For people who are already identified with the Dibbuk Box on public websites, podcasts, and forums, or who have granted permission, I have used both first and last names.

My written account of my experiences is absolutely truthful and upfront from the first pages to the final comments. I have no interest in misleading or falsifying the facts about this artifact that came into my possession through a series of coincidences. I have documented my experiences from start to finish. Here is a journey of seven years . . . watching, researching, and learning. And I have come to two conclusions, which happen to contradict each other in all details.

First, without a doubt the item known as the Dibbuk Box is a genuine artifact of amazing power and magnetism. The box clearly has some type of

mystical significance, with all the required elements for ritual use. This box was created by a person or by persons with a Jewish upbringing or at least a deep understanding of Jewish culture, as is evident from the Hebrew prayer carved on the back. The manner in which the name of God is carved in the Shema hints at a deeper understanding of the Hebrew written language and of Jewish tradition. Also, the box contains a uniquely constructed piece made of multiple stones that was used ceremonially to focus one's prayer and to protect one from the direct power of God when praying. The granite stones are combined to act as a subtle energy source, much like a spiritual battery. The "tokens," or familial items inside the box are genuine and their ages span a period of one hundred years.

I have read on Internet websites that many people fear the power of the Dibbuk Box . . . and yet, in some cases, they *want* its power. People from different educational backgrounds and many cultures are drawn to it. Even insects are oddly attracted by its potency. Wherever it is stored, insects gather in colonies to be near it. Accounts of health problems, accidents, and death that follow mysteriously in its wake are numerous and are documented. Each owner of the Dibbuk Box and some of their family members swear that this item is authentic and has haunted and traumatized them.

Some members of the Portland family responsible for the creation of the Dibbuk Box believe that, once it had been released from that family, its powers were set in motion to reveal a dark story. I believe that this forgotten story is tied to the Shoah—the Holocaust—and that it centers on a single man from a small city in rural America. It was to this same city to which the Dibbuk Box was mysteriously "called," and where it now, having completed its mission and journey, permanently rests.

Second, without a doubt the Dibbuk Box is a fraud; the story was created to turn a quick profit and deceive its buyer, and its contents have no meaning beyond the obvious. It is a powerless wooden wine cabinet from the 1960s with a hodgepodge of meaningless items stuffed inside to make it appear spiritual or mystical. Other members of the same family who first owned the box have made it very clear that they know its story and that it is simply not true—it was created by a sibling with an overactive imagination.

Friends and coworkers of its creator, who have been familiar with the object from the time it was first mentioned have documented their own accounts, indicating that it was created by combining found pieces, perhaps as a hoax.

All illnesses associated with the Dibbuk Box seem likely to be psychosomatic or coincidental. The original eBay listing to sell this item identifies people who, in reality, are composites of several people with false histories. Their purported experiences with the box are untrue based on interviews. Various sources tell me that the Dibbuk Box and the written online account were conceived and created by a person who, on the other hand, continues to insist that the story was not faked and that the other sources are mistaken.

Yes, these two conclusions contradict each other, but I believe both to be true. My research over the past seven years has shown that they are indeed true. Subjectively, my personal experiences with the box and my investigations into the experiences of the others who have had contact with it lead me to believe that the box does have some unexplainable mystical or otherworldly power. Objectively, my scholarly training, years of research, and natural skepticism lead me to believe that the box is nothing more, can be nothing more, than a wooden box.

Read for yourself. Finish the book and decide which version of the truth—if any—you believe.

Acknowledgments

I have always been fearlessly curious about this world and what might exist beyond it. It is probably my Bohemian blood that stirs my interest in the unknown—passed down from my Czech immigrant grandmother, Marie Hajný, through my parents, Ronnie and Rhea Haxton, who always ensured there was a bit of untamed wilderness near our home for me to explore. My parents have been caring guides and supporters of my quests into both the known and unknown, showing a parent's pride in my smallest achievements. Now, grown and a parent myself, I have one last achievement for them to beam about—the strange tale of my experiences with the artifact that has come to be known as the Dibbuk Box.

When it became clear that I needed to organize everything I had learned and my personal records of my experiences and put them into a book, I looked around for help. Aside from keeping a personal journal and writing the occasional article on our museum for a magazine or newsletter, I never viewed myself as a “real” writer and the idea of a book seemed beyond me. Over the course of five years, I had serious discussions with four different people about writing this book with me. The first three didn't work out, so I had a good feeling when I found a writer and journalism professor to work with. We had become acquainted when we were both invited to participate in a paranormal podcast: me to talk about the Dibbuk Box and him to talk about his third and most recent paranormal book. In July 2010, he was ready to dig into my research and start writing. He stayed at my house and we created an outline and came up with a plan. I thought I had all my bases covered, but within three weeks, my cowriter had resigned from the project. To this day he is unwilling or unable to even write or speak about that time, but he did agree to let me share some of the details.

He stayed at my home and we made a plan to complete our project, then he began his trip home with a box of research material. Within hours

he called to say he had become ill and suffered a severe panic attack. A few days later, he seemed embarrassed about his reactions; he had had other paranormal experiences, but this one was different somehow. He reassured me that everything was fine and he was confident that the book would be great. Within a week or so, he was setting up interviews and going through my notes and research. Then he was injured in a home accident and immediately thought of the Dibbuk Box. Next, he began noticing strange smells near the files I had given him, he and his children became ill, and his son began to have strange tastes in his mouth. At that point, he became concerned and his wife urged him to drop the project. Concerned about his family's safety and his own health, he abruptly resigned from the project. He felt that the box wanted him gone and he would not fight it.

I understood his concerns, but hoped he would change his mind. When it became clear that he would not, I started looking again. This time, I found Giles Fowler, author of *Deaths on Pleasant Street: The Ghastly Enigma of Colonel Swope and Dr. Hyde*, and a retired journalism professor and former reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. Without Giles, I doubt this book would have been written. Giles coached me on my writing, challenging me to provide more detail (or less), suggesting word choices, and forcing me to stay on schedule. As we worked together, we became friends, and I am grateful for his friendship and for his help.

I would like to thank Truman State University Press, its director, and staff for suggesting individuals who could help my writing endeavor and for giving me the opportunity to have my manuscript published, and Barbara Smith-Mandell for her careful and skillful editing.

I am also grateful for the help of all of those who contacted me through eBay or through the Dibbuk Box website to share their experiences, their personal memories, or their expertise. And I am grateful to the former owners and to their relatives, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances who were willing to talk to me about their own experiences and their memories of events surrounding the Dibbuk Box.

Prologue

It lies just a few feet from me, entombed in a dark gray plastic, shockproof shipping case I purchased at an army surplus store. As an added protective measure, it is further nestled within a wooden ark, a special religious container. Lined with 24-karat gold, the ark is fashioned of acacia wood from a single tree. Native to the Middle East, the acacia is known for having a sweet scent and almost indestructible hardness (from growing in one of the world's driest climates)—a perfect vessel to seal “it” away to protect me and the few others who have ventured near the thing, knowingly or not. People who seek the path of danger are plentiful these days; I hear from them weekly by e-mail pleading for access to “it.” They act as if they are possessed by “it,” but who am I to judge them, being likewise drawn to this risk. This thing—this “it”—goes by the name Dibbuk Box and it needs no protection from our world. Rather it is we, the curious, who have something to fear.



Chapter One

Minding My Own Business

TO BE HONEST, it was surprisingly easy to bring the Dibbuk Box into my life. As I discovered its strange qualities, I wondered whether I really had a choice in the matter. In fact, evidence gained through my research has led me to suspect that the box found me. That was its destiny and mine too. Seven years ago I knew nothing of the Dibbuk Box. It had been in existence for almost fifty years, but I was completely unaware of it, perhaps just as it was unaware of me.

I have had the good fortune of spending most of my life working at universities, a “professional student” who was lucky enough to find a niche in academia. One perk of campus work is almost unlimited access to education and degrees at little or no cost. Beginning with undergraduate studies in art history and the commercial arts, I moved on to graduate work in counseling, the humanities, and higher education. My collection of college credits, plus my campus work experiences, finally landed me my dream job as director of a midsize museum of medical history, which is connected to an osteopathic medical school.

It might surprise you to learn that museums in general display only about 10 percent of their collections. Limitations in gallery space require a rotation schedule to show items from the collection, although prized pieces remain on permanent display. The remaining objects are stored out of sight, not unlike the contents of your attic. A big difference, however, is that the museum’s objects are thoroughly documented and stored with the best long-term preservation methods available.

One aspect of my job and that of the museum staff is to select, study, and interpret these historic pieces, and present them in context so their relevance can be understood and appreciated. Almost daily, single items or boxes of items find their way to our office. For some artifacts, the museum is a last chance, a final home. Some of those we cannot use are offered to organizations that might be able to use them. Others are sold, or bagged and carted off to the dumpster. For my staff and me, this constant sorting of trash and treasure is a daily routine. We find ourselves almost literally wading through decades of accumulated items—a backlog of historic oddities brought to the museum by well-meaning donors who passed on anything even remotely related to medicine.

To catch up on this workload, I often turn to the nearby liberal arts university to enlist college students seeking work experience, internships, or part-time jobs in the field of museum and library collections. On rare occasions I am able to provide paid positions thanks to small museum grants. When this opportunity presents itself, I seek out punctual, autonomous, and—most importantly—low-maintenance students.

In the summer of 2003, I hired Brian, who had already performed two years of volunteer work with us, to be my part-time office manager. Brian dreamed of a museum career much like mine. His dedication to the collection and his warm disposition toward visitors and staff made him a favorite—and an ideal hire. Unfortunately, an impulsive action by Brian's roommate eventually involved the entire museum staff, to one degree or another, in a definitely high-maintenance situation, turning both the museum and my world around. I never saw it coming and, in fairness, neither did Brian.

It was on June 7, 2003, that Brian began working as a paid staff member of the museum. Not surprisingly, Brian's first week of work went smoothly. He picked up the basic skills of scheduling, transferring calls, and receiving artifacts from donors with little guidance. The dates and the details of what happened are easy for me to recall because I have kept a daily journal for well over twenty-one years. I began doing this on a whim when I learned my wife was pregnant with our first child. I thought that one day my children might want to learn about and re-experience their upbringing. That whim has grown into 140 filled journals; I can travel back to any day of my life in seconds.

These daily entries predate my knowledge of the Dibbuk Box, so I have a very accurate description of my thoughts, feelings, and actions from when I first heard about the Dibbuk Box and the evolving information I gathered after the box came into my care. It is from this trove of documented material that I am writing this factual account of what really happened.

Brian's quiet demeanor in general led me and my staff to assume he was a somewhat introverted and self-motivated person—perfect for museum work. He was fitting in quite nicely with our daily routine, which typically begins with a staff meeting, for which we take turns bringing in glazed doughnuts or the occasional coffee cake. Updates on the day's tours, incoming donations, and projects needing assistance from staff members are mixed with news on each staff member's home life. Most everyone on staff is married, with school-age children and a pet or two, living in an older home by choice. So it is not unusual for us to digress into a child's school success, the latest home renovation project, or a pet's illness, and we all freely share our life experiences with the problem at hand. Rousing discussions wrap up by eight thirty, when we part to start the day's work.

As our only college-age adult on staff, Brian had none of the life experiences of his older colleagues, and each morning I watched him sit in silence as we discussed our family lives and concerns. Was Brian bored? Definitely. But I figured our morning chats were good preparation for the day he finally left the artificial utopia of college and settled into domesticity.

So it surprised us all on the morning of Tuesday, June 17, 2003, when Brian actually spoke at the morning roundtable. Perhaps he was beginning to feel part of the museum team and wanted to be in on the domestic discussions. Or perhaps Brian had reached his limit with the ongoing saga of the arthritic dog being carried down the porch steps to do its business. Whatever the reason, Brian cleared his throat and calmly stated, "This weekend my roommate bought a haunted box."

The sudden quiet must have surprised even Brian, as all eyes turned and focused squarely on him. He could see by our puzzled expressions that he definitely had our full attention; all thoughts of kids, houses, and pets had evaporated. None of our experiences could top his statement.

Brian repeated with a little more confidence and energy, “My roommate bought this haunted box on eBay. Really, he did, and I can show it to you.” Brian got up, walked over to the front-desk computer, and started typing to pull up the eBay listing. As we crowded around the monitor, he said, “See, there it is.” The image on the screen could hardly be described as scary. It was a small, worn wooden cabinet of simple design, with two doors adorned with distinct appliqué clusters of grapes. Triangle-shaped brass hinges held the doors shut and there was a small lower drawer that pulled out. This “wine cabinet” seemed a bit worn from many years of use. The image we saw only added to our initial confusion. Had we misunderstood Brian? Was this pleasant looking knickknack the “haunted box?”

We took turns reading aloud the following account by the seller, Kevin Mannis of Portland, Oregon.

All the events that I am about to set forth in this listing are accurate and may be verified by the winning bidder with the copies of hospital records and sworn affidavits that I am including as part of the sale of the cabinet.

During September of 2001, I attended an estate sale in Portland, Oregon. The items liquidated at this sale were from the estate of a woman who had passed away at the age of 103. A granddaughter of the woman told me that her grandmother had been born in Poland where she grew up, married, raised a family, and lived until she was sent to a Nazi concentration camp during World War II. She was the only member of her family who survived the camp. Her parents, brothers, a sister, husband, and two sons and a daughter were all killed. She survived the camp by escaping with some other prisoners and somehow making her way to Spain where she lived until the end of the war. I was told that she acquired the small wine cabinet listed here in Spain and [that] it was one of only three items that she brought with her when she immigrated to the United States. The other two items were a steamer trunk, and a sewing box.

I purchased the wine cabinet, along with the sewing box and some other furniture at the estate sale. After the sale, I was approached by the woman’s granddaughter who said, “I see you got the Dibbuk Box.” She was referring to the wine cabinet. I asked her what a Dibbuk Box was, and she told me that when she was growing up, her grandmother

always kept the wine cabinet in her sewing room. It was always shut, locked and set in a place that was out of reach. The grandmother always called it the Dibbuk Box. When the girl asked her grandmother what was inside, her grandmother spit three times through her fingers [and] said, a Dibbuk, and *keselim*. The grandmother went on to tell the girl that the wine cabinet was never, ever, to be opened.

The granddaughter told me that her grandmother had asked that the box be buried with her. However, as such a request was contrary to the rules of an orthodox Jewish burial, the grandmother's request had not been honored. I asked the granddaughter what a Dibbuk and *keselim* were, but she did not know. I asked if she would like to [pry the lock off and] open it with me. She did not want to open it, as her grandmother had been very emphatic and serious when she instructed her not to do so, and, regardless of the reason her grandmother wanted to keep it closed, she wanted to honor her grandmother's request.

I decided to offer to let her just keep it, as it seemed to me that it must be a very sentimental keepsake. At that point, she was very insistent and said, "No, no, you bought it!"

I explained that I didn't want my money back, and that it would make me feel better to do what I thought was an act of kindness. She then became somewhat upset. Looking back now, the way she became upset with me was just plain odd. She raised her voice to me and said, "You bought it! You made a deal!"

When I tried to speak, she yelled, "We don't want it!" She began to cry, and asked that I please leave—now, and she quickly walked away from me. I wrote the whole episode off to the stress and grief that she must have been experiencing. I gathered up my items, paid the cashier, and quietly left.

At the time I bought the cabinet, I owned a small furniture refinishing business. I took the wooden cabinet to my store, and put it in my basement workshop where I intended to refinish it and give it as a gift to my mother. I didn't think anything more about it. I opened my shop for the day and went to run some errands leaving the young woman who did sales for me in charge.

After about a half hour, I got a call on my cell phone. The call was from my salesperson. She was absolutely hysterical and screaming that someone was in my [basement] workshop breaking glass and swearing. Furthermore, the intruder had locked the iron security gates and