

Hierarchy of Needs (2019)

By Adel Darwish

Duration 80 minutes

Cast size 2-8 actors, as well as 6-8 actors appearing digitally

Excerpt

(SWEDISH ACTRESS sits down on the floor and ADEL moves to sit on the chair. But the plant is on the chair.)

ADEL (*speaking to the plant*)

May I sit here?

SWEDISH ACTRESS (*assuming the role of the plant and responding to Adel's question instead*)

If I say no, then you can't sit down, right? Hahaha...

ADEL

Why are you wilting? I should water you. Yes, of course you need water.

(*He waters the plant*)

SWEDISH ACTRESS (*hysterically*)

No! Anything but water! Anything but water! You torment me when you pour water on me. Listen to me! Ever since I was created I have drunk nothing but water. Why? Why am I doomed to only drink? I'm hungry. Where is my mouth? I'm tired of routines. I want to eat something, anything. I can eat shit/garbage. Oh, God, why didn't you give me a mouth? Do you hear me, you evil bastard? Stop it! I can't hear myself. Stop, please, please, no, no!!

She faints.

Adel can't hear any of this. He just keeps watering and smiling. A song that fits the situation comes on the radio. He dances as he waters the plant. He stops when the actress faints and then he sits down on the chair to write.

AUDIENCE (*the audience is played by actors. They talk about the plant*)

It died, it's alive, it's dying, it's alive.

AUDIENCE 1

It's dying.

AUDIENCE 2

No, it's alive.

AUDIENCE 3

No, can't you see? It's dead.

AUDIENCE 4

Excuse me! I think you're the one who can't see. It's alive.

AUDIENCE 3

If you think about it the right way, you can see it's dead as a doornail.

AUDIENCE 2

Show me the evidence!

AUDIENCE 1

Does God exist?

AUDIENCE 2

Of course.

AUDIENCE 1

Show me the evidence!

AUDIENCE 4

Look, we can say it died and we can say it's alive. If we consider it from a philosophical standpoint, we can see it's dead, but in reality it's alive.

AUDIENCE 3

...and, like, which one is most powerful? Reality or philosophy?

AUDIENCE 5

God is most powerful.

AUDIENCE 6

Just because there's no evidence, that doesn't mean the issue is settled. Maybe we can find evidence tomorrow for whether the plant is dead or alive.

AUDIENCE 7

Maybe we can find evidence in ten years too.

AUDIENCE 8

Why do I feel like we're doing *Twelve Angry Men* by Reginald Rose? That was the same situation. Twelve jurors arguing about a boy's trial. Was the boy a murderer or not?

AUDIENCE 2

Exactly! They were looking for evidence. Evidence is the most powerful.

AUDIENCE

Incidentally, the play ended with the twelve angry men deciding that the boy was not the murderer. But in reality he was.

AUDIENCE 2

Show me the evidence that he was the murderer!

AUDIENCE 1

Does God exist?

AUDIENCE 2

Of course.

AUDIENCE 1

Show me the evidence.

AUDIENCE 5

The boy was the murderer.

AUDIENCE 4

The plant is alive.

AUDIENCE (actors)

It's dead. He was the murderer. The plant is alive. He isn't the murderer.

Suddenly ADEL makes contact. The audience falls silent. The actors in Syria pop up on the screen. They're at a theater in Syria talking about something. They don't realize they're onscreen. ADEL sits at the table, writing. The Swedish actress sits still on the floor, and the audience looks at them. The Syrian actors are speaking in Arabic and there are subtitles on the screen.

SYRIAN ACTOR 1

I expect that when I turn on the tap, the water will flow.

SYRIAN ACTOR 2

There is no water, darling.

SYRIAN ACTOR 4

Come on! The water was turned off a month ago, so of course there is water.

SYRIAN ACTOR 3

It's impossible for the water to come out now. Electricity and water at the same time? It's practically a miracle, hahaha.

SYRIAN ACTOR 1

If we consider it from a philosophical standpoint...

SYRIAN ACTOR 5

How can we consider anything from a philosophical standpoint when this is a material debate? There is nothing philosophical about it.

SYRIAN ACTOR 1

Ok!

SYRIAN ACTOR 2

There is no water, darling!

SYRIAN ACTOR 1

There's water now.

SYRIAN ACTOR 3

No, there isn't.

SYRIAN ACTOR 4

Yes, sure there is.

SYRIAN ACTOR 5

Show me the evidence!

AUDIENCE 1 (*interrupting in Swedish*)

Does God exist?

Silence. The Syrian actors now realize they're live, so they approach the camera and see Adel, the Swedish actress, and the audience. ADEL stares at his friends. SWEDISH ACTRESS gets up and looks at the Syrian actors.

The Audience, Adel, and the Swedish actress always speak Swedish, even to the Syrian actors

SWEDISH ACTRESS

Who are they?

ADEL (*surprised*)

My friends! Am I dreaming? (*he shouts*) Hello, friends! Can you hear me? Hi, here I am.

SWEDISH ACTRESS

Do they understand Swedish?

ADEL

No!

SWEDISH ACTRESS

Then why are you speaking Swedish to them?

ADEL

...because the audience has to understand, right?

SYRIAN ACTOR 2 (*speaking Swedish*)

What about us?

SWEDISH ACTRESS (*to the Syrian actors*)

Do you understand Swedish?

SYRIAN ACTOR 1 (*in Swedish*)

No!

SWEDISH ACTOR

If you don't understand Swedish, how can you answer my question?

SYRIAN ACTOR 1 (*speaking Arabic without subtitles*)

Adel! Tell her we've been rehearsing for two months, so we know what you're talking about.

ADEL (*translating into Swedish*)

They say they've been rehearsing for two months. So they know what we're talking about.

AUDIENCE 4

So you know how this play ends?

SYRIAN ACTOR 3 (*laughing*)

Yes!

AUDIENCE 1

Ok, listen to me. Is the plant dead?

SYRIAN ACTOR 3

(*laughter*)

AUDIENCE 8

Who are you?

SYRIAN ACTOR 4 (*a brief silence. Speaking Arabic with Swedish subtitles*)
We're actors without a theater.

SYRIAN ACTOR 2
...without a life.

SYRIAN ACTOR 5
Without a homeland.

SYRIAN ACTOR 3 (*laughing*)
Without water.

SYRIAN ACTOR 1 (*cheerfully*)
The water is on!

Everyone is overjoyed and runs to see. The Syria set is empty but the camera keeps filming.

SWEDISH ACTRESS
What's going on?

ADEL (*embarrassed*)
The water is running now.

ANOTHER SCENE

Adel and the Swedish actress speak to Adel's friends through a digital screen.

SWEDISH ACTRESS
Are you live?

ADEL
Yeah, of course!

SYRIAN ACTOR 2 (*in Arabic*)
Nope. We're not live. We recorded this video two months ago.

ADEL (*translating*)
They're not live. They recorded the video two months ago.

AUDIENCE 1 and AUDIENCE 2
What???

AUDIENCE 2

You're not live?

SYRIAN ACTORS 3 and 4 (*laughing, in Swedish*)

Nope.

SYRIAN ACTOR 4 (*in Arabic*)

You know the internet doesn't work very well here, so we had to prerecord the video.

ADEL (*translating*)

They say the internet doesn't work very well there, so they had to prerecord the video.

SYRIAN ACTOR 3

(*prolonged laughter*)

SWEDISH ACTRESS (*tentatively*)

Why are you laughing so much?

SYRIAN ACTOR 3

One time my dad was reading me a book at bedtime. I smiled and closed my eyes. My brain took me to another world. I traveled there without a passport, without a visa, without borders. I floated wherever the story took me. I smiled and then the reader and the book were murdered with a gunshot. I looked at the killer and I was still smiling from the shock. I looked at my dad. He was dead and smiling. Then I looked at the killer again and laughed out loud. I was scared and I panicked. My brain couldn't comprehend what was happening. So my brain decided to laugh out loud. The adrenaline in my body revolted. The killer laughed with me and said: the girl went crazy. I don't need to kill her, and then he went away. If my dad hadn't been smiling, I wouldn't be here performing in a play in front of the audience whose story was in that book.