

Lesson 10:

Sephardi Storyteller

Appendix C – Jewish Folktale – Iraqi Oral Tradition

Note to teacher:

Make enough copies for each student.

Jewish Folktale - Iraqi Oral Tradition

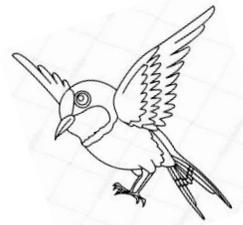
The Bird of Happiness

There once was a young boy named Aaron, who had spent his entire life wandering in the desert. His parents had been slaves, but they had run away to find a place where they could be free. Every day they searched for food and water, while the sun beat down on their backs, and sand blew in their faces. Still, Aaron never lost hope, for his mother would say, “One day the Bird of Happiness will guide us to Jerusalem.” For that was their dream—to reach the city of Jerusalem. But how could they find their way there?

Every night, when they stopped to rest, Aaron’s father would teach him what it meant to be a Jew. They had no books, but his father remembered the Bible stories he had learned as a boy, and he remembered the Ten Commandments, and these he taught to his son. Aaron took them to heart and let them be his guide.

So, it was that they wandered for many years, and still the desert stretched endlessly before them. Then one night, Aaron had a strange and vivid dream. In the dream he was traveling with his parents when the world suddenly grew dark. Aaron’s parents said, “Quickly, Aaron, crouch down and cover yourself with a blanket. A sandstorm is coming!” And as soon as he did, sand started swirling around him and beating down on the blanket, and the sandstorm lasted a long time. At last it subsided, and Aaron and his parents threw off the blankets. But when they did, they found that their food had been scattered and their water spilt, and, even worse, their foot-prints had been covered by sand, and they could no longer tell where they had come from or where they should go.

Just when everything looked hopeless, Aaron saw something on the horizon. At first it was only a speck, but soon he saw that it was a beautiful white bird. That bird came closer and closer, and just as it flew over Aaron, it dropped something from its beak, and in the dream, Aaron caught it! At that moment Aaron woke up and discovered that he was clutching something in his right hand—a glowing stone. Aaron jumped up and showed it to his parents, and when they saw it and heard his dream, they were amazed, and his mother said, “This means that the Bird of Happiness is coming that much closer.”



After that Aaron hung the glowing stone from a leather thong around his neck, and it proved to be a wonderful guide. For when they were traveling in the right direction, the stone would glow, but when they were going in the wrong direction, it remained dark. In this way the glowing stone guided them to every oasis, where pools of fresh water were surrounded by trees bearing sweet fruit. And each time they came to such an oasis, they said a prayer of thanks.

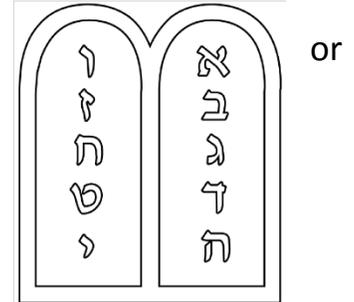
So, it was that after years of wandering through shifting sands and blazing sun, Aaron and his parents finally came to the walls of a great city—the first city that Aaron had ever seen. As they passed through the gates, they were surprised to see a huge crowd had gathered in the streets. Aaron wondered about this, because his father had told him that in cities people live in houses. Aaron’s father went up to a man and said, “Excuse me, sir, but could you tell us what city this is?” The man said: “Why, don’t you know where you are? This is Jerusalem.” “It is?” said Aaron’s father, and they were astonished, for that meant they had finally reached the city of their dreams.

Then Aaron’s father asked why everyone was standing the streets. The man said, “Three days ago our king died. And it is the custom in our city to let the will of heaven decide who will be our next king. So, on the third day after the king’s death, the rare Bird of Happiness is released and circles above the city, and whoever the bird lands on is chosen to be the next king of Jerusalem. The bird is about to be released. That is why everyone is standing in the street.”

Just then there was a great shout from the crowd, and Aaron looked up and saw a white bird soaring on high and circling above the city, and there was something strangely familiar about that bird. It spiraled lower and lower, while Aaron’s glowing jewel glowed more brightly than ever before. And suddenly the bird swooped down and landed on Aaron’s head! There was a great shout from the crowd, and all at once Aaron was picked up and carried off, while his parents ran after them, crying, “That’s our son. Where are you taking him?”

The crowd brought Aaron to the king’s palace, where he was placed on the king’s throne, with the Bird of Happiness still perched on his head. Everyone bowed low before him, and they declared that he, Aaron, the poor boy wandering in the desert, the son of slaves, was their king. At first Aaron thought it must all be a dream, but then he felt the tugging of the bird’s talons in his hair, and he knew that it must be real.

Three days later there was a great coronation, and Aaron was officially crowned king of Jerusalem. After that Aaron and his parents lived in the palace. No longer did they wonder what they would eat or drink where they would sleep at night. As king of Jerusalem, every important question was brought before Aaron to decide. Now while Aaron had never gone to school or even seen a book, he let the Ten Commandments be his guide in deciding what was right and what was wrong, and he found that they served him very well. Plus, he had the secret assistance of the glowing stone. For whenever the answer to a question was yes, the stone would glow brightly. But if the answer was no, it would remain dark.



At first the nobles of Jerusalem were worried that the fate of the city was being entrusted to such a young boy. But as they listened to his decisions, they came to realize that he was very wise. There was only one thing they wondered about. The young king had asked that a simple shack be built out of branches next to the palace. There he spent an hour each day—but no one knew what he did.

Finally, the king’s minister could not contain his curiosity, and he asked the young king about his strange actions. Aaron said, “When I go into that shack, I put on the rags I was wearing when I came here, and I stand before the mirror so that I can remember where I came from. For only then can I know where I must go.”

When the minister heard this, he knew that heaven had truly blessed them with a wise young king. After that he served Aaron faithfully for many years, and in this way, Aaron became one of the great kings of Jerusalem, as great as King David, as great as King Solomon. And every day Aaron and his parents thanked God for all their blessings—and especially for the Bird of Happiness.

—Iraq: oral tradition

From: **The Bird of Happiness** as told by Miriam Kanani

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