



The Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education
Seidman Educational Resource Center



Traditional Tree Tales

Adapted by Lyndall Miller,
ACAJE Consultant for Early Childhood Education

Honi the Circle Maker

Adapted from a story from the Talmud

Many, many years ago in the Land of Israel lived a man called Honi the Circle Maker. Sometimes he would talk to God, asking God for rain for the hot dusty land, while standing inside a circle he had drawn on the ground. That's why he was called, "Honi the Circle Maker"! One day, Honi was not making circles and asking for rain. He was walking along the road, when he saw a man planting a tree. Honi asked the man, "How long will it be until the tree you are planting will give you something to eat?"

"Seventy years," said the man.

"So why are you planting that tree? Do you think you will be around to eat its fruit in seventy years?" asked Honi.

"I don't know," said the man, "but I DO know that I found trees with fruit that someone ELSE planted a long time ago. I want to plant trees so my children will find trees with fruit as I did." Then Honi understood how important it is to plant trees. We eat the fruit from trees that someone else planted a long time ago, and we plant trees so that our children might get to eat it!

The King's Daughter and the Slave

An adaptation of a Jewish Fairy Tale from Morocco

Once upon a time, there was a king with a very beautiful daughter. Everyone wanted to marry her, but the princess could not make up her mind that she wanted. Meanwhile, the king, her father, kept having a dream that his daughter was going to marry a slave, Samuel! This dream had him very worried. He wanted his daughter to marry a prince, not a slave! He had the dream so many times that he finally thought of a way to send the slave away from his kingdom. "Samuel," said the king, "I want you to go and find Moses and ask him a question for me. The world has many gardens in it, but what garden can hold the whole world inside? Go, and ask Moses for the answer to this riddle, and don't come back until you do!" The king thought that Samuel would NEVER find Moses and would NEVER find an answer to his question, and so he would NEVER come back.

Samuel was very sad to have to leave, but he was the king's slave and he had to do what the king told him to. He walked for a very long way, and was very hot, tired and hungry. He saw a large tree, and lay down underneath it. But before he could fall asleep, he heard a strange, whispering voice say, "Where are you going?" Samuel sat up and looked around. He couldn't see anyone. Then he heard the voice again. "Where are you going?" The tree was talking to him!

"I'm looking for Moses," said Samuel. "I have to ask him a question."

"Can you ask Moses a question for me, too?" whispered the tree. "Ask him why such a big tree like me doesn't have any fruit! If I had some fruit, you could eat it and you wouldn't be so hungry and thirsty!"

"Of course," said Samuel. "I'm not sure I'll ever find Moses, but if I do, I'd be glad to ask him your question." And, after a rest, Samuel continued on his walk, looking for Moses so he could ask him about how the whole world could be in a garden.

Samuel walked for many, many days. His feet were so tired. His legs were hurting him. He could hardly keep himself moving. Finally he saw another tree, and this one was full of ripe oranges. He picked one, then another, then ate as many as he wanted. He lay down under the tree and had a long rest. When he woke up, he saw there was a man looking at him.

"Who are you?" asked Samuel.

"I am Moses," said the man. "Why have you come here?"

"I have come here looking for YOU!" said Samuel. He was very excited! "I have a question to ask you! Would that be alright with you?"

"Of course," said Moses, smiling. "Ask me anything you want!"

"Tell me, Moses, if a garden can be in the world, how can the world be inside a garden?" asked Samuel.

"Just look around you!" said Moses, laughing. "The whole world IS God's garden!"

"So the whole world is in God's garden . . ." said Samuel. "That's wonderful! I'm in God's garden . . . Oh, yes, and Moses, why doesn't that great big tree back there have any fruit? The tree wanted me to ask you."

"That tree has something else that's special," said Moses. "The leaves of that tree are medicine. If you put them on someone who is sick, the sick person will get better right away."

"Thank you, thank you, Moses!" said Samuel. "Now I can go back to my king. But first I'll tell the tree what you said."

"You're welcome!" said Moses. "Have a safe trip back home."

Samuel walked as fast as he could back to the tree. "I have great news for you!" he cried. "You don't have fruit, but your leaves have special medicine that can make sick people well."

"Oh," said the tree. "That IS good news. Samuel, why don't you take some of my leaves? Maybe you will find someone who is sick and needs help."

"Thank you very much! I'll just take a few," said Samuel. He carefully picked some leaves off of the big tree and then continued on his way back home.

Once he got into the city he noticed that everyone looked sad. He asked someone why all the people were walking around with their eyes full of tears. He found out that the king's daughter had fallen asleep. Now, everyone falls asleep once in a while, but this girl had fallen asleep and no one could wake her up! Samuel felt very sad for a few minutes, and then he remembered – he had special leaves! Maybe their medicine could help the king's daughter. He ran to the palace. He had been gone so long that it took a while for people to recognize him, but finally they let him in. He rushed to the king's daughter's room and placed the leaves on her sleeping face. And, of course, you know what happened – she woke up! And I think you know what happened next – she fell in love with Samuel, and they got married. But because this is a JEWISH fairy tale, it doesn't end here. The king talked to Samuel about what he learned from Moses. He liked their talk so well that he decided that he wanted to learn more from the Torah. And so our story ends with Samuel and the king (and maybe even the king's daughter!) studying Torah and learning more about God's garden.

The Shkaydiah – The Almond Tree A Traditional Israel Tu BiShevat Story

Everyone was whispering in the forest. "The birthday of the trees is coming, the birthday of the trees is coming!" they said. The whole forest was happy . . . all except the shkaydiah, the almond tree. She looked at her dry, brown branches, and said, "I wish that I had a pretty birthday dress to wear." She was very sad that she would have to celebrate her birthday without anything nice to put on. She was afraid that everyone but her would be dressed in something special at the big birthday celebration. What should she do? She was so sad that she decided to hide!

The day before the trees' birthday party arrived. No one had seen the shkaydiah for a while. Everyone was wondering where she was. Finally, a drop of rain saw her crying in her hiding place. "Don't worry, little shkaydiah," said the raindrop. "The sun and I will help you get a pretty dress for the birthday party."

"Oh, thank you, raindrop!" said the shkaydiah, "I'm so glad you and the sun will help me." The shkaydiah felt much better, and stopped hiding. That night, when she went to sleep, she dreamt that she had a beautiful pink and white dress for the party. She woke up the next morning to find that she WAS covered in pink and white – in pink and white FLOWERS!

When the animals and the other trees found her at last, they didn't even know who she was! Finally they recognized her, and everyone told her how wonderful her dress of flowers was! They all went off to the trees' birthday party together. Ever since then, the shkaydiah has always been the FIRST to get ready for Tu BiShevat, the birthday of the trees, by getting dressed in her beautiful pink and white flowers. If you are ever lucky enough to be in the Land of Israel in the spring, you will get to see her, and tell her "Happy Birthday!"

The Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education
7607 Old York Road
Melrose Park, PA 19027
215-635-8940 Fax: 215-635-8946
www.ajae.org info@ajae.org