

Stories for the Fall Holidays

Long ago in a small village there lived a young boy. He was a shepherd and had never gone to school. He spent his days watching his sheep and playing his flute, which he loved very much.

One year he begged his father to go to the synagogue on Yom Kippur. He took his flute along.

The shepherd boy listened to the beautiful praying and singing. He wanted to join in, but did not know how to pray.

Then he remembered his flute and asked to play it for God. His father warned the boy not to disturb the congregation.

During the afternoon service the boy asked again, and again his father said, "No."

Finally the time came for *Neilah*, the closing prayer. Suddenly the boy could not hold back any longer. He took the flute from his pocket, put it to his lips, and played. He played the sound that he felt in his heart.

His father became angry.

But the Rabbi turned to him and said, "All Yom Kippur I have prayed hard so that our sins might be forgiven. But I felt that my prayers were not heard. When this little boy played on his flute, I knew at once the gates of heaven had opened. The boy's simple song to God came from his heart, and through him, all our prayers were lifted to heaven."



There was once a poor countrywoman who had many children. They were always begging for food, but she had none to give them.

One day she found an egg. She called her children and said, "Children, children, we have nothing to worry about anymore; I have found an egg.

"And being a wise woman, I shall not let us eat the egg, but I shall ask my neighbor permission to put it under her hen until it hatches into a baby chick.

"And we shall not eat the baby chick, but shall let it grow until it lays more eggs which will hatch into more chicks.

"But we will not eat even these. Since I am such a wise woman, I shall sell them and use the money to buy a cow.

"But we shall not eat the cow. Instead, we will let it grow, and the cow will have baby calves.

"And since I am such a wise woman, I shall sell them and use the money to buy a field.

"And we will have fields, and cows, and calves, and chickens, and eggs.

"And we will not be hungry anymore."

While the countrywoman spoke, she turned the egg round and round in her hands. Suddenly it slipped, fell to the ground, and broke.

We are all like the countrywoman. We make many vows and promises. We say to ourselves, "I promise to do this, and I promise to do that." But the days slip by, and our promises do not lead to action.



Every Friday during the month of *Elul* the Rabbi of Nemirov would vanish. He was nowhere to be seen. Where could the Rabbi be?

In heaven, no doubt, the people thought, asking God to bring peace in the New Year.

Where could the Rabbi be? A villager decided to find out.

One night he sneaked into the Rabbi's home, slid under the Rabbi's bed, and waited. Just before dawn, the Rabbi awakened, got out of bed, and began to dress. He put on work pants, high boots, a big hat, a coat, and a wide belt. He put a rope in his pocket, tucked an ax in his belt, and left the house. The villager followed.

The Rabbi crept in the shadows to woods at the edge of town. He took the ax, chopped down a small tree, and split it into logs. Then he bundled the wood, tied it with the rope, put it on his back, and began walking.

He stopped beside a small broken-down shack and knocked at the window.

"Who is there?" asked the frightened, sick woman inside.

"I, Vassil the peasant," answered the Rabbi, entering the house. "I have wood to sell."

"I am a poor widow. Where will I get the money?" she asked.

"I'll lend it to you," replied the Rabbi.

"How will I pay you back?" asked the woman.

"I will trust you," said the Rabbi.

The Rabbi put the wood into the oven, kindled the fire, and left without a word.

Now whenever anyone reports that the Rabbi has gone to heaven, the villager only adds quietly, "Heaven? If not higher."

When a person helps another who is in trouble, the deed is like a prayer.



Once there was a child who loved to tell stories about his friends. Sometimes the stories were true, and sometimes the stories were not quite true. The neighborhood children did not like their gossipy friend. One day they decided to ask the Rabbi's advice.

The Rabbi heard their complaints, and called the child to his house.

"Why do you make up stories about your friends?" the Rabbi asked.

"It's only talk," replied the child. "I can always take it back."

“Perhaps you are right,” said the Rabbi, and he began to talk of other things.

As the child was ready to leave, the Rabbi asked, “I wonder if you would do something for me.”

“Of course,” said the child.

The Rabbi took a pillow from the couch and handed it to the child. “Take this pillow to the town square. When you get there, cut it open, and shake out the feathers. Then come back.”

The child was puzzled, but agreed to do what the Rabbi said. He carried the pillow to the town square and cut it open. The breeze scattered the feathers across the sky.

The child returned to the Rabbi’s house and told him what he had done.

The Rabbi seemed pleased. He handed the boy a basket and said, “Now please go back to the square, and gather the feathers up again.”

The child gasped. “But that’s impossible.”

“You are right,” said the Rabbi. “So it is not possible to take back all the untrue things you said about others. Be careful with the words you spread. Once spoken and sent on their way, they cannot be gathered again.”



Once it happened that a boy from a small village came to the city for the first time.

In the middle of the night he was awakened by the loud beating of drums. He asked the innkeeper what the noise meant. He was told that when a fire breaks out, the people beat their drums, and before long the fire is gone.

When the boy returned home, he told the village leaders about this wonderful system for putting out fires. The people were excited and ordered drums for every household.

The next time a fire broke out, the people beat their drums. As they waited for the fire to go out, many homes burned to the ground. A visitor asked what was happening. When told of the fire and the drums, he exclaimed, “Do you think a fire can be put out by beating drums?”

“They only sound an alarm so people will wake up and go to the well for water to put out the fire.”

Blowing the Shofar is also an alarm, warning us to change our ways.