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Howard Schwartz

Leaves from the Garden of Eden

One Hundred Classic Jewish Tales

Leaves from the Garden of Eden

by Howard Schwartz

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Leaves from the Garden of Eden

One Hundred Classic Jewish Tales

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selected and retold by
Howard Schwartz

illustrations by
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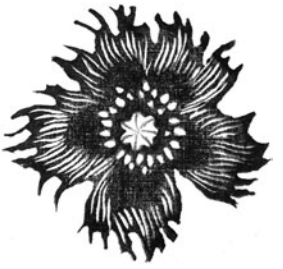

For Tsila,
Shira,
Nati,
Miriam,
Ari,
and Ava

If a man could pass through Paradise in a dream,
and have a flower presented to him as a pledge
that his soul had really been there,
and if he found that flower
in his hand when he awoke
—Ay!—
and what then?

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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Introduction

Summoning the Patriarchs

According to Jewish folk tradition, Abraham and Sarah never died. Ever since they took leave of this world, the patriarch and his wife are said to make their home in the Garden of Eden. During the week Abraham wanders through the Garden and gathers leaves that have fallen there. And on the eve of the Sabbath, Sarah crushes those leaves and takes the powder made from them and casts it into the wind. Then winds guided by angels carry it to the four corners of the earth, so that all those who breathe in even the smallest speck have a taste of Paradise, and their Sabbath is filled with joy, for that is the spice of the Sabbath.[1]

Just from this one little tale we can learn a lot. First, Abraham and Sarah are so deeply imprinted on the Jewish imagination that they are said to still be alive, even though Genesis clearly reports their deaths.[2] So, too, is the affection for them very great. Abraham is known as *Avraham Aveinu*, "our father Abraham," and even today, most Jews still think of themselves as "descendants of Abraham."

This tale also answers the question of where Abraham and Sarah can be found—in the Garden of Eden. After all, nothing is said in Genesis about the fate of the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were expelled from it, and in Jewish folklore it still exists. Even Franz Kafka makes this assumption in his parable "Paradise": "We were cast out of Paradise, but it was not destroyed. Our expulsion was in a sense fortunate. Had we not been cast out, Paradise would have had to be destroyed."[3] Additionally, this legend explains why, although alive, Abraham and Sarah are still beyond our reach, as is the Garden.

From a mythic perspective, an original myth about the Garden of Eden has been created, in which Abraham and Sarah take on the roles of a new Adam and Eve. Just as the expulsion from Eden of Adam and Eve represents a fallen state, so does the presence of Abraham and Sarah in the Garden represent hope of redemption. This is consistent with the rabbinic view that history started over again with Abraham and Sarah, the first Jews. In addition, it is a Sabbath myth, providing a mythical explanation for why food seems more delicious on the Sabbath. The myth transforms a proverbial phrase, "the spice of the Sabbath," into an enchanted spice emanating from the Garden of Eden.

Abraham and Sarah are not the only figures in Jewish tradition who are said to still be alive. Similar myths exist for Adam, Enoch, Jacob, Moses, King David, and Elijah.[4] According to one interpretation, God

intended for Adam to be immortal, but when he tasted the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge he lost his right to immortality.[5] That is why God exiled Adam and placed the Cherubim at the gate of the Garden of Eden with the flaming sword, *to guard the way to the Tree of Life* (Gen. 3:24). Note, however, that in the rabbinic commentaries there is an alternate interpretation of the statement that "Adam was not meant to experience death." According to this reading, Adam never died and still exists.[6] This would place Adam in the category of the great figures who never died, whose continued existence is reported in many folktales. In "The Princess and the Slave," Samuel, an old Jewish slave, is sent on an impossible quest to find Moses—and succeeds. In "The Cave of King David," a sultan sends Rabbi Rafael Recanti on a quest to find King David, and he finds him living in a cave near the fabled city of Luz, where no one dies. This folk tradition about King David is so widespread it is the subject of an ancient song with lyrics that mean "David, king of Israel, lives and exists" (*David melekh Yisrael hai hai ve-kayyam*). And it is certainly true that King David, along with Abraham and Sarah, is still alive in Jewish folklore.

The notion that the patriarchs still exist is suggested in this brief tale, "Summoning the Patriarchs," from the cycle of stories about Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague:

> During the reign of Emperor Rudolf II, the great Rabbi Judah Loew, known as the Maharal, lived among the Jews of Prague. Not only was he a master of the Torah, he was well-versed in all of the mysteries and he was a great master of Kabbalah. Now it happened that the emperor heard of Rabbi Loew's reputation and sent for him with a strange request: he wanted the rabbi to invoke the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the sons of Jacob, to summon them from their graves. Rabbi Loew was appalled at this request, but when the emperor threatened the well-being of the Jews of Prague if he did not comply, Rabbi Loew agreed to attempt it. The rabbi warned the emperor, however, that under no circumstances must he laugh at what he saw, and the emperor promised he would not. Nor could anyone else be present.
>
> Then emperor and Rabbi Loew went to a secluded room of the castle, where Rabbi Loew pronounced a spell that summoned the patriarchs and the sons of Jacob. And to the great amazement of the emperor, they appeared one after the other in their true form, and the emperor was amazed at the size and power of each of them, which far exceeded that of men in his time. But when Naphtali, the son of Jacob, leaped with great ease over ears of corn and stalks of flax in the vision, the emperor could not contain himself and began to laugh. Suddenly the apparitions vanished and the ceiling of that room began to descend and was on the verge of crushing the emperor, when Rabbi Loew succeeded in making it halt with the help of another spell. And it is said that the fallen ceiling can still be seen today in that room, which is kept locked.[7]

Rabbi Judah Loew is best known for creating the Golem, a man made out of clay who protected the Jews of Prague, but there are many other tales recounting the marvels of the Maharal, as Rabbi Loew is known. Many of these concern his use of powers deriving from his knowledge of Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition. Only the purest and most eminent sages were considered capable of engaging in kabbalistic studies. Therefore the emperor's demand to see the patriarchs was not only unreasonable but also inevitably exposed him to danger. This follows the pattern of many warning tales about those who lost their sanity or even their lives by undertaking mystical studies without the proper background or preparation.[8] Here the king is saved from destruction only because Rabbi Loew is able to prevent the ceiling from collapsing.

The magic of being able to invoke the vision of the patriarchs reflects the rabbinic principle that past, present, and future all exist at the same time.[9] This tradition of immortality reflects the vivid presence of the patriarchs in the lives of the people, where they were very much alive.

Two arks were said to accompany the Israelites in their desert wandering, one containing the remains of Joseph, and the other, the Ark of the Tabernacle.[10] The one represents the past and the other, the future. This accurately portrays how past and future are linked in Jewish tradition, carried side by side, at the head of the caravan. In this way past and present exist at the same time, and the past, as portrayed in these tales, is very much alive.

Four Types of Jewish Tales

The Jewish people are known as the People of the Book with good reason. They love to read books, especially the Bible. But they could also be called the People of the Stories, for as they wandered from place to place, they always took their stories with them. The stories a people tell not only serve as bearers of their tradition but also reveal a great deal about them, especially their fantasies and fears. Folktales emerge out of an anonymous folk process that reshapes the tale every time it is told. They are a crucial stage in the evolution from myth to literature. These stages include myth, legend, folklore and, finally, literature. Myth, the earliest expression of a people, focuses on the sacred stories told about gods and creation, heaven and hell, and existence before and after this world. Legends recount the exploits of heroes, some historical, some imaginary. Just as Jason and Hercules are heroes in Greek tradition, so Jewish heroes include King David and King Solomon, the legendary Rabbi Adam and the Ba'al Shem Tov. So, too, are the forces of evil portrayed in these tales, not only as evil wizards and witches, but also as every kind of demonic being, including the dybbuk, an evil spirit who takes possession of a living person.

Folktales are truly a mirror of the lives of the people, transmitted orally within a community until they are finally written down. Jewish folktales

find expression in many types of tales, but the most popular are fairy tales, folktales, supernatural tales, and mystical tales. This collection focuses on these four types of tales, which represent the vast majority of Jewish folktales.[11] Readers will soon discover that each of these types of tales has its own distinctive characteristics.

There is a seamless link between the four stages of the evolution from myth to literature, and each prior phase continues to exist as a substratum of the new one. So that legend is built on myth, and folklore on myth and legend. Literature draws on all these forms and invents new ones of its own. The long era of anonymity that shaped myth, legend, and folklore comes to an end, and for the first time, creators are self-conscious about their creation and insist on taking credit for it.

Most Jewish folktales follow the recognizable models of world folklore. Fairy tales, the most popular and best known type of folktale, share all the themes and magical elements found in the classic fairytales collected by the Brothers Grimm. Magic rings and magic carpets are as common as they are in the *Arabian Nights*. In the stories gathered here, there are a multitude of kings and queens, princes and princesses, arduous quests to enchanted kingdoms, witches and wizards, magic mirrors, and magic pools, where whoever immerses himself recovers his youth. There are enchanted kingdoms and invisible beings, such as angels, spirits, and demons. A good half of the tales collected by the Israel Folktale Archives are such universal tales, without explicit Jewish elements.[12] Many of these are variants of famous tales told throughout the world, such as Rapunzel, Cinderella, Bluebeard, and Snow White. Yet, by reading closely, it is possible to recognize the Jewish elements even in these universal tales.

The telling of tales represents an important transmission of tradition. As rich as is the written tradition in Judaism, the oral tradition is just as abundant. That is because it was given legitimacy by the ancient belief in the divine origin of the Oral Torah, an oral commentary on the Torah, said to have been given by God to Moses along with the Written Torah.[13] Thus Judaism has two Torahs, one written and one oral, and the oral tradition has flourished ever since.

The major development in the study of Jewish folklore in the twentieth century was the methodical collection of orally transmitted Jewish tales. The body of folklore collected in Eastern Europe in the expeditions of S. Ansky, the first Jewish ethnologist, and other early Jewish ethnologists, and those collected in Israel by the Israel Folktale Archives, founded by Professor Dov Noy, include oral variants of stories that have been told and retold in Jewish tradition for a thousand years or more. There are even striking oral variants of biblical stories, daring in their own ways to retell the old tale. Here, for example, is an oral retelling of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22, collected from Jews from India:[14]

> Abraham and Sarah lived in the Land of Israel and their lives were good, but they didn't have any children. One day Abraham prayed

to God and said, "If You give me a son, I'll give him to You as a sacrifice."

At the age of one hundred, Abraham had a son and he named him Isaac. The boy grew and Abraham forgot his promise to God. After several years God came to Abraham in a dream and said, "Abraham, you promised that you would give Me your son as a sacrifice."

In the morning, when Abraham awoke, he remembered the dream, and he said to Sarah, "I am going to take my son to study. Don't worry about him. He will be with me."

Abraham took Isaac and went to the forest. They were both silent. But when they arrived, Isaac said, "Father, why did you bring me here?" Abraham said, "My son, before you were born I had to make a vow that if I had a son, I would sacrifice him to God."

Isaac said, "Father, I am ready." So Abraham tied the hands of Isaac behind his back and laid him on the wood, and he took the knife in his hand and put it on Isaac's neck. At that instant Abraham heard the voice of God: "Abraham, Abraham, leave the child. I have already received the sacrifice you wanted to give Me. Look, there is a sheep. Sacrifice it to Me instead of your son." So Abraham untied his son, caught the sheep, and sacrificed it to God.

This oral retelling of the binding of Isaac resembles the biblical account, but makes some crucial changes in it. Instead of being a divine test, it is a bargain arrived at between man and God. The oral tale from India follows a folk model in which a parent desperate for a child is forced to give that child back as a sacrifice. Rather than being portrayed as a divine test, as it is in the Bible, the story is presented as a primitive agreement between God and Abraham. This version probably evolved over a long period of oral transmission, to the point that it had become a variant of the biblical tale. Nevertheless, this oral tale ends as does the biblical one, with God stopping the sacrifice at the last minute.[15] Above all, the oral tale shows how the biblical stories are still being retold in far-flung Jewish communities, such as the Bene Israel of India, where the oral tradition is still alive. And it provides an indication of the remarkable quality of these oral tales, which were transmitted orally for centuries before they were written down.

Each of the four primary types—fairy tales, folktales, supernatural tales, and mystical tales—seems to have its own purpose. Fairy tales are fantasies of enchantment. Folktales portray the lives of the folk as they imagined them, with a rich helping of magical and divine intervention. Supernatural tales portray fears about the powers of evil, such as demons and *dybbuks* and other kinds of supernatural beings, especially the ubiquitous demoness Lilith. And mystical tales serve as teaching stories of some of the greatest rabbis, such as Rabbi Akiba, Rabbi Isaac Luria, or the Ba'al Shem Tov. What follows is a brief characterization of each of these four widely represented types of tales.

Jewish Fairy Tales

Fairy tales are no longer regarded as belonging solely to the realm of children. As scholars such as C. G. Jung, Maria Von Franz, and Bruno Bettelheim have demonstrated, fairy tales can be understood in many ways—as fantasies or as psychic maps. Fairy tales not only reveal a great deal about human nature and psychology but they are also a magical mirror into the fantasy lives of past generations. Equally they serve as teaching stories of determination and faith, for every fairy tale includes immense obstacles that must be overcome.

A common theme in many fairy tales is that of a poor man who marries a princess, or, as in Cinderella, a poor maiden who marries a prince. Of particular interest is "The Princess in the Tower," an eighth-century version of Rapunzel, which may well be the world's earliest version of this tale.[16] According to the Talmud, God makes matches, pairing this one with that one, and, it is said, every match is as hard to make as parting the waters of the Red Sea. Here a bird reports to King Solomon what it has overheard flying through the heavens—that his daughter, the princess, is destined to marry a poor man within a year. To prevent the decree from taking place, Solomon sends the princess to live in a tower on a desert island. Naturally fate intervenes—in the form of the Ziz, a giant mythical bird that brings a sleeping young man to the balcony of the princess. By the time King Solomon arrives at the end of a year, she has a husband, a poor scribe from the city of Acco, and they have a child, a boy whose name is Solomon. Thus King Solomon learns that not even the wisest of men can outfox fate.

In Jewish folklore there is an interesting amalgam of the magical and the spiritual. For example, King Solomon has a magic ring with God's Name, known as the Tetragrammaton, engraved on it. Using the power of the ring, he can accomplish anything—fly on a magic carpet to a mysterious palace or defeat and capture Ashmodai, the king of demons. The powers of that ring are inextricably linked to the power of God's Name, which, like God, is limitless. In Jewish mysticism, a word contains the power of whatever it signifies. Thus God's Name has unlimited power for King Solomon, who knows how to pronounce it. Later this secret knowledge was said to be known only by one sage in each generation.

More than half of Jewish fairytales are quests. In "King Solomon and Ashmodai," from ancient Israel, Solomon sends his general, Benayahu, on a quest to capture the king of demons. In the sequel, "The Beggar King," King Solomon, reduced to being a beggar, goes on a quest for ten years to recover his throne. "The Golden Mountain," from Morocco, is an Aladdin-like quest for hidden treasure. And in "The Golden Tree," from India, a king sets out to find the golden tree of his dreams.

Above all, all the tales included in this section are recognizably fairy tales, following the familiar pattern, fully making use of magical devices, as well as divine intervention. As in all fairy tales, every obstacle is overcome and everyone lives happily ever after. While other types of Jewish tales may include some fairy-tale elements, such as magical spells or quests, in no others is it as certain that good will triumph over evil.

FOLKTALES

In broad terms, all one hundred tales in this collection are folktales. The term is used here in that sense, but also to identify a characteristic type of story that is not a fairy tale, not a supernatural or mystical tale, but still a recognizable Jewish tale. These stories are identified here simply as folktales. They often involve divine intervention, as in "The Sabbath Lion," when the Sabbath Queen sends a lion to protect a boy who has been abandoned by his caravan because he refuses to travel on the Sabbath. So too do they often involve dreams or visions. In "The Cave of Mattathias," a Hasid trapped in a snowstorm dreams of meeting Mattathias, the father of the Maccabees, who lived long ago, in a cave in the Holy Land. Mattathias gives him an important message to deliver to Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Riminov, and then miraculously transports him to the rabbi's home, saving the Hasid's life.

Such miracles appear in almost every tale in this section, but not in the context of an enchanted world, as with fairy tales, or in the Kingdom of Demons, as in many supernatural tales. Instead, miracles are brought about by great sages who demonstrate almost unlimited powers. In "A Flock of Angels," Rabbi Asenath Barzani pronounces a holy name, and angels appear out of nowhere to beat out a synagogue fire with their wings. Or in "The Magic Wine Cup," the wine cup at Rabbi Hayim Pinto's seder grows large enough to magically bring forth a treasure chest that was lost at sea.

The Talmud, codified in the fifth century, is the source for many kinds of Jewish folktales. Many of these stories serve as models for later variants, so that a great many types of Jewish tales find their source in the Talmud. Some retell stories about biblical figures, such as Abraham and Moses, and recount tales of great rabbis, such as Akiba, Meir, and Shimon bar Yohai. Some of the earliest tales about King Solomon are found in the Talmud, such as "An Appointment with Death," about the mythical city of Luz, where no one dies:

> One morning, as King Solomon awoke, he heard a chirping outside his window. He sat up in bed and listened carefully, for he knew the language of the birds, and he overheard them say that the Angel of Death had been sent to take the lives of two of his closest advisers. King Solomon was startled by this unexpected news, and he summoned the two men and revealed what he had learned of their fate.
>
> The two were terrified and begged King Solomon to help them. Solomon told them their only hope was to find their way to the city of Luz, for the Angel of Death was forbidden to enter there. Therefore the inhabitants of Luz were immortal—as long as they stayed within the walls of the charmed city. The location of that city was a well-kept secret, since it would otherwise be deluged by those seeking immortality, but it was well known to King Solomon. He revealed it to the two frightened men, and they departed at once. They whipped their camels across the hot desert all day, and just before nightfall they finally

saw the walls of that fabled city. Immortality was within reach and they rode as fast as they could to the city gates.

But when they arrived, they saw, to their horror, the Angel of Death waiting for them. "How did you know to look for us here?" they asked. The angel replied: "This is where I was told to meet you."[17]

The name of this city comes from Genesis 28:19: *He named that site Bethel, but previously the name of the city had been Luz.* Since the location of that city was such a holy place, the Talmud asserts that anyone who lived there was safe from the Angel of Death. In this brief tale, King Solomon, the wisest of men, tries to deceive the Angel of Death by sending the two doomed men there, to escape him, but in the end he discovers that he cannot outfox fate. This is the same moral of several stories about King Solomon, as the point is made that no one can escape the dictates of fate.[18]

Even more elementary, we can read into this tale how powerful is the fear of death and the Angel of Death. Out of this fear grows the fantasy of a city of immortals. Many cultures have such a myth, and it is still a popular theme in modern works of fiction, including John O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra* and James Hilton's *Lost Horizon.* The version in the Talmud appears to be the earliest expression of this motif.

Supernatural Tales

Fairy tales give expression to fantasy. But there are also other kinds of fantasies, including sexual ones, and those inspired by fear—dark tales of the unknown. These manifest themselves in supernatural stories about demons, dybbuks, witches or wizards, and various kinds of invisible beings. The battle against the forces of evil was a pitched one, with demonic dangers waiting at every turn. These tales, such as those from *Sefer Hasidim*, are darker, and they generally do not have a happy ending.

These supernatural tales are a direct mirror into the world of Jewish superstition and fantasy. Since ancient times, Jewish storytellers have described a world with invisible creatures—angels, spirits, and demons. Angels serve as messengers of God. Spirits of the dead haunt this world as ghosts. And demons are forces of evil, capable of stealing a person's soul.

Belief in these mysterious, invisible creatures has lasted for thousands of years; even today, in some Jewish circles, people still believe in them. This supernatural world is balanced with the forces of God, such as the angels, opposed to the forces of evil, a multitude of demons. In addition to angels and demons, the other world includes spirits—souls of the dead who are still present among us. Sometimes one of these wandering spirits, while seeking to evade avenging angels, enters the body of a woman, taking possession of her as a dybbuk. That is what happens in the Italian folktale "The Dybbuk in the Well." Such possession by dybbuk requires an exorcism, an elaborate rite requiring ten rabbis.[19]

As for demons, they are ruled over by Satan, who also appears in the Bible. In the pseudepigraphal literature, Satan was said to be a fallen angel, also known as Samael, Lucifer, or simply as the Devil. Jewish folklore, on the other hand, holds that demons are ruled over by Ashmodai, the king of demons, and Lilith, his queen. They make their home in the Kingdom of Demons, but their primary role is to try to lead people astray. A bride who is not careful may end up marrying a demon instead of her intended groom, while the charm sewn into a dress may drive a pious woman to lascivious behavior.

Belief in such things as marriage with demons and the existence of ghosts gave birth to many remarkable tales. In these tales, anything is possible. A young woman can be married to a river demon without even knowing it; a man can encounter the ghost of the fiancée he abandoned; a bridegroom who vanished on the day of his wedding can return 130 years later. These stories explain the role of the supernatural creatures in people's lives, and serve as miracle stories as well as warning tales. This is the lore of the supernatural that so intrigued Isaac Bashevis Singer, whose stories often draw on supernatural themes.

Some of the best known of these supernatural tales concern a young man or woman who is tricked into marrying a demonic double, as happens in the story "The Other Side," from Eastern Europe.[20] Others concern Lilith, who appears both as the incarnation of lust and as a dangerous witch. These dual characteristics made the presence of Lilith in the lives of the people inescapable, especially for women, for whom Lilith threatened not only the lives of their infants, but also their husbands' affection. The kind of temptation Lilith posed, even to the most righteous, is found in "The Woman in the Forest," a Hasidic tale about Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizensk:[21]

> The holy rabbi, Reb Elimelekh of Lizensk, was once a young man. He spent all day studying in the house of study, and at night he walked home through the forest, always taking the same path. One night, as he was walking through the forest, he saw a light in the distance. Curious about it, he left the path and followed the light. It was coming from a cottage deep in the forest. As he came closer, he peered into the window, and there he saw a young woman with long, dark hair, wearing a thin nightgown.
>
> As soon as he saw her, Reb Elimelekh knew he did not belong there, and he turned to go. Just then the door to the cottage opened, and the woman called out: "Reb Melekh, wait! Please, come in." So, being a polite young man, Reb Elimelekh went in. As soon as he came in, the woman closed the door and stood before him and said: "Reb Melekh, I have seen you pass through the forest many times, and I have often hoped you would visit me. You know, I bathed in the spring today and I am clean. Surely the sin would be slight, but the pleasure would be abundant." And she dropped her gown.
>
> Reb Elimelekh wrestled with himself, as did Jacob with the angel. And at last he wrenched out, "No!" At that instant the woman

vanished, and the cottage disappeared, and Reb Elimelekh found himself standing alone in the forest, and there were glowworms at his feet.

The woman in this tale is not identified, but everyone among the Hasidim who heard it knew exactly who she was—Lilith, or one of the daughters of Lilith. So vivid was the presence of Lilith in their lives that she became the primary focus of their sexual fantasies and fears. Lilith is brazen from the first, calling Rabbi Elimelekh not by his full name, Elimelekh, meaning "my God is King," but by his familiar name, Melekh. This conveniently lets her avoid pronouncing God's name, which, as a demoness, she is forbidden to do. The fact that her hair is long indicates that she is unmarried, while having bathed in the spring informs him that she has purified herself in a *mikveh*, a ritual bath. Since a *mikveh* requires running water, many springs served as ritual baths. By telling him that about the spring, she is stating that she has purified herself for sex.

Finally, she appeals to his knowledge of the law when she tells him that the sin will be slight but the pleasure abundant. According to Deuteronomy 22:22, *If a man be found lying with a married woman, then they shall both die.* However, the expected parallel about a married man lying with an unmarried woman is missing, and according to rabbinic principles of interpretation, what is not stated is not a law. Therefore, what Lilith says to him is valid, not only demonstrating her mastery of the law but also tempting him with the knowledge that Jewish law does not identify what she proposes as adultery, a mortal sin.

Thus Lilith comes equipped with many weapons. She not only uses the power of lust, her greatest weapon, but she also appeals to his intelligence. Rabbi Elimelekh escapes, but only after a considerable struggle. The glowworms at the end indicate that Lilith has lost her power over him and has been revealed in her true form, that of a worm. Or the story can be read as a Hasidic sexual fantasy that has reached its conclusion. The fact that the tale is attributed to Rabbi Elimelekh of Lizhensk indicates that Lilith was brazen enough to approach even the holiest of men. Indeed, this was her intention, for if she could corrupt the best ones, the others would be sure to follow. Rabbi Elimelekh resists, but barely.

In discussing Lilith, it is important to keep in mind that the stories about Lilith found in traditional sources are all examples of tales told by men. Since these stories were told and preserved by men, they should be viewed as men's stories. Until the twentieth century, there were no sources of explicitly women's tales. However, beginning with the expeditions of S. Ansky and the Yiddish folktale collections of Y. L. Cahan, women's voices have begun to be heard. Approximately half of the oral tales collected by the Israel Folktale Archives, which to date has collected more than twenty-three thousand tales from sixty-nine countries, are from female tellers.[22]

These women's tales are often strikingly different from those told by men. For example, in virtually all of the men's tales about Lilith, there are strong elements of fear and lust—fear that Lilith will strangle their infants,

and lust for Lilith, who is the personification of lust. Jewish women, on the other hand, have a very different attitude toward Lilith. She threatened the lives of their children and their husband's affection. Therefore, in an orally collected story such as "The Hair in the Milk," from Yemen, the midwife, who knows all of Lilith's tricks, traps her in a bottle, and prevents her from harming the newborn infant. She shows no fear of Lilith whatsoever, and forces the demoness to do her will. In these women's tales, the heroine is often the old midwife, who knows secrets not only of healing but also of how to protect against the forces of evil. The midwife also plays a heroic role in "The Underwater Palace," p. 318, from Eastern Europe.

It seems clear that any modern study of Jewish tales should include these orally collected tales, especially those told by women, and that the boundaries of the canon of Jewish folklore should include the stories collected by early Jewish folklorists such as S. Y. Ansky and Y. L. Cahan, and preserved by the YIVO Archives in New York and the Israel Folktale Archives in Haifa. Such oral tales are well represented in this collection, where a third of the stories included are from oral sources.

Mystical Tales

Wondrous stories about the powers of the rabbis are a staple of Jewish literature. Such stories are told about the talmudic sages, the kabbalistic rabbis, and the Hasidic masters. A body of stories inevitably grew up around the key figures, such as Rabbi Akiba, Rabbi Isaac Luria, or the Ba'al Shem Tov. These stories are inevitably hagiographic, and many of them attribute unlimited powers to these sages. In "The Cave of Shimon bar Yohai," the prophet Elijah visits Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai every day in the cave where he is hiding from the Romans, and brings him teachings from on high, and that is the origin of the *Zohar,* the central text of Kabbalah. In "The Angel of Forgetfulness," the Ari knows where to find water from Miriam's well, the well that was said to have followed the Israelites in the wilderness, so that they always had fresh water. In "The Tree of Life," the Ba'al Shem Tov brings his Hasidim into a mysterious garden, which turns out to be the Garden of Eden. There are cycles of stories about each of these rabbis and many others, recounting miracles and showing them to be mystical masters.

Virtually all of the mystical tales included here serve dual purposes as teaching stories and hagiographic tales. They often draw on talmudic models, drawing intentional parallels with the great sages. The Ari modeled himself on Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, as he is portrayed in the *Zohar*. The Ba'al Shem Tov modeled himself on the Ari. And all subsequent Hasidic masters modeled themselves on the Ba'al Shem Tov. Take, for example, the theme of heavenly ascent. The Talmud tells of four sages who entered Paradise.[23] They include Rabbi Akiba, who "ascended and descended in peace," and, many centuries later, the Kotzker Rebbe, who is reported to have journeyed through the palaces of heaven.[24] In the

eyes of his Hasidim, the account of such a heavenly journey reveals the Kotzker Rebbe to be as great as those sages, perhaps as great as Rabbi Akiba. For this reason, intentional parallels were drawn between earlier rabbis and later ones.

The talmudic legend of the *Lamed-vav Tzaddikim* tells of thirty-six righteous ones who live in each generation. God permits the world to exist because of these hidden saints. Each of the great sages seeks in his own way to achieve righteousness. In doing so, they serve as a model of the tzaddik for their followers, who view them as holy masters. During his expeditions in eastern Europe, S. Ansky, the first Jewish ethnologist, collected folktales, songs, and religious objects. Among the tales he collected was one about Reb Shmelke of Nicolsburg (1726–1788). Ansky later included this brief tale about Reb Shmelke's whip in act I of his famous drama *The Dybbuk* (1926):

> Two men, one poor, the other wealthy and influential, came before Reb Shmelke as litigants. As Reb Shmelke listened carefully, each presented his side of the case. Then he rendered his judgment in favor of the poor man. The rich man became livid and declared that he would not abide by the verdict. Reb Shmelke remained calm and said: "You will obey. When a rabbi renders his decision, it must be obeyed."
>
> At this the rich man became furious and said, "I abhor you and all your rabbis!" Then Reb Shmelke stood up, looked the man in the eyes, and said, "If you do not obey my order this instant, I'll take out my whip." Hearing this, the rich man began to heap abuse on the rabbi, who stood up and pulled open a drawer of his desk. At that instant the Primal Serpent sprang forth and wrapped itself around the rich man's neck. He fell to his knees, filled with terror, and begged for forgiveness. Reb Shmelke said: "Warn your children, and let them warn their children, to follow the way of the rebbe or fear his whip!" And then he removed the snake.

Reb Shmelke of Nicolsburg is a pithy character, but he is not usually portrayed as being this fierce. However, his loyalty to the poor rather than the rich is well known, and the rich man in this tale rejects the authority of the rabbi, as well as that of the Torah. The whip that Reb Shmelke uses is the Primal Serpent, known as the *Nahash ha-Kadmoni*, a kabbalistic concept that represents a kind of archetypal serpent, over which Reb Shmelke has sufficient control to call upon as he wishes.

This concept evolved in kabbalistic thought from the speaking serpent of Genesis into a more archetypal being, much as Lilith came to represent a principle of evil in kabbalistic cosmology. This suggests that the great Hasidic masters understood not only how to align their lives with the side of good but also how to control the elements of evil. It is interesting to note that in Ansky's play, four Hasidim discuss this tale after telling it, creating a kind of commentary about it. One of them argues that it couldn't have been the Primal Serpent that Reb Shmelke called forth, since that serpent was Satan, the Evil One. Another replies that there were many

witnesses to this event, and therefore it should not be questioned. The first wonders if there are any names that can call forth the Evil One, and a third replies that he can be called forth only with God's Name, the Tetragrammaton. This, then, is what Reb Shmelke must have done.

Even this little tale serves many purposes. It demonstrates Reb Shmelke's powers, invoking the serpent of Eden in its manifestation as the Primal Serpent—which, nevertheless, is under Reb Shmelke's control. Finally, it is a powerful warning tales about the necessity of obeying the rulings of rabbis and the authority of the Torah.

Other sages and rabbis take decisive action when it is needed, as in this Hasidic tale about Reb Elimelekh of Lizensk, where a single motion from the rebbe has monumental consequences:

> One Friday afternoon, not long before the Sabbath, it became known that the king was planning to sign an evil decree against the Jews. There was dismay everywhere, but Reb Elimelech of Lizensk insisted on celebrating the Sabbath as always, for, he said, "You must never turn away from the Sabbath Queen."
>
> After saying the Sabbath blessings, they sat down to the meal. Among the guests was Reb Menachem Mendel, who later became the rabbi of Riminov. A bowl of soup was set before Reb Elimelech. The others waited for him to begin eating, but he did not. He waited, saying nothing, with a distant look on his face. All at once he knocked over the bowl of soup, spilling it all over the table.
>
> Later it was learned that just as the king was about to sign the evil decree, he accidentally knocked over the inkwell. Ink spilled all over the parchment. When he saw this, the king tore up the decree and commanded that none like it ever be drawn up again.[25]

This famous tale about Rabbi Elimelekh demonstrates his role as a wonder worker. Lilith may have tempted him as a young man, but here he is portrayed as a powerful sorcerer, making use of sympathetic magic to cause the king's inkwell to spill at the instant he knocks over a bowl of soup, blotting out the evil decree against the Jews.

In almost all such stories where these mystical powers are drawn on, the rabbi is responding to a dire situation, often the danger of a pogrom. The people lived in great fear of these evil decrees, and the fantasy of magically reversing them is a common theme in many Jewish folktales. The most prominent of these is "The Golem," where Rabbi Judah Loew uses Kabbalistic magic to protect the Jews of Prague, creating a man out of clay and bringing him to life. Thus the stories about the Golem should be seen as a Jewish fantasy that grew up when the reality was that their lives were in great danger, and there was nothing they could do to stop the plague of pogroms. This tells us quite a bit about how a folktale can assuage fear with fantasy, and gives us considerable insight into the working of the Jewish imagination.

All four types of tales included here—fairy tales, folktales, supernatural tales, and mystical tales—are found in every stage of postbiblical Jewish

literature, from the Talmud to the tales of the Hasidim. Examples of all four types of tales are also found in the collections of YIVO and the Israel Folktale Archives. They are the most popular tales because they have the most compelling narratives, especially quests. All of Jewish history has been a great quest—to return to the Garden of Eden, to escape from Egyptian bondage, to return to the Land of Israel, to hasten the coming of the Messiah. The upheaval in Jewish life, which has often led to the edge of the abyss, is subjected to the powers of God at every turn in these tales. And even though this world includes witches and demons, and other figures of good and evil, ultimately God makes the final judgments, and gives an underlying order and meaning to everything. And the covenant between God and Israel assures the eventual victory of the Jews over all the forces of evil, even if that time will have to wait until the coming of the Messiah.

The Jewish Mythical Imagination

Mythology plays a central role in Jewish folklore. Mythic motifs can be found in virtually every tale, and there are often multiple motifs interwoven in the same story.[26] These sometimes shape the central narrative, but more often their presence underlies the tale, serving as a mythic foundation. In order to fully comprehend a folktale, it is necessary to recognize its component myths, and then to examine how they impact the tale. Often, the myth finds its origin in the Torah, in a central episode or simply in a verse. Some element of the original story becomes embellished, so that a new story is created, and this new tale inspires countless others. This process of reimagining is characteristic of all postbiblical Jewish literature.[27]

Although there are a vast number of myths in Jewish tradition, they can be classified in ten primary categories: (1) Myths of God, (2) Myths of Creation, (3) Myths of Heaven, (4) Myths of Hell, (5) Myths of the Holy Word, (6) Myths of the Holy Time, (7) Myths of the Holy People, (8) Myths of the Holy Land, (9) Myths of Exile, and (10) Myths of the Messiah.[28] Each of these categories includes hundreds of myths, and these myths have been woven into the narrative threads of Jewish folklore. Whenever any allusion to them is found, we encounter the mythological strata of the story.

Consider, for example, the ram that Abraham sacrificed on Mount Moriah in place of Isaac.[29] We know nothing about it except that its horns were entangled in a bush, where Abraham found it. Yet in the rabbinic elaborations of the story, the ram came to be regarded as a kind of holy being. It is said to be one of the ten things created on the eve of the first Sabbath.[30] From this perspective, the ram had been waiting since the time of creation to fulfill its purpose at Mount Moriah. Furthermore, nothing of the ram was wasted. Its skin became Elijah's mantle, its gut was used in David's harp, one of its horns was sounded by Moses at Mount Sinai, and the other will be blown by Elijah at the End of Days.[31] Even in this brief

elaboration of the biblical tale, the binding of Isaac has become linked to Moses, King David, and Elijah. This indicates that the biblical story of the binding of Isaac was considered so seminal it was tied to the revelation at Sinai and to the redemption at the End of Days. In this way one mythic theme is linked to another, and all of Jewish history becomes a single narrative unfolding of God's plan for His people, the Jews.

To illustrate how these extensively mythic motifs are woven into Jewish folk narratives, let us examine one story, "A Vision at the Wailing Wall."[32] It appears in the first collection of stories about Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as the Ari, who lived in Safed in the sixteenth century.[33] Just before Rosh ha-Shanah, the Ari reveals to his disciple, Rabbi Abraham Berukhim, that he is fated to die that year—unless he undertakes a pilgrimage to the Wailing Wall and has a vision of God's Bride, the *Shekhinah*. Rabbi Abraham makes the journey and does indeed have such a vision, and thereby survives for another cycle of life.[34] This story takes place entirely within a Jewish framework. It takes place during the Days of Awe, the holiest time of the year. It involves the Ari, whom many regard as the greatest Jewish mystic. In all respects, it is a thoroughly Jewish tale.

At the same time, the foundation of this story is drawn from Jewish mythology. Let us consider each of the ten mythic categories for any evidence of them in the story.

Myths of God. God is said to record everyone's fate on Rosh ha-Shanah, the Day of Judgment, by inscribing that person's name in the Book of Life or in the "other book," the Book of Death. This gives God an active role in the story, since it is He who determines Rabbi Abraham's fate. Furthermore, since the *Shekhinah* represents not only God's Bride but also the feminine aspect of God, the vision of the *Shekhinah* at the core of the story must be recognized as a mystical vision of God.[35] Thus this story incorporates myths about the masculine and feminine aspects of God in one tale. Like Rabbi Abraham's vision, this indicates that the story reflects a very inclusive view of the nature of God, thoroughly incorporating the feminine into the divine, as is the case in kabbalistic theology.

Myths of Creation. The allusion to myths of creation is indirect in this story. It derives from the Ari's role as the creator of the myth of the Shattering of the Vessels and the Gathering of the Sparks.[36] This is one of the major creation myths in Judaism, along with the creation myth of Genesis and the kabbalistic myth of the ten *sefirot*. This myth is the basis of the key concept of *tikkun olam*, repair of the world, which very much reflects the views of the modern environmental movement.

Myths of Heaven. The myth of the heavenly ledgers, in which the Ari reads of Rabbi Abraham's fate, is one of the myths of heaven. God alone has access to these heavenly books, so that the Ari's ability to read in them is truly extraordinary.[37] The Torah itself had its origin in heaven, where it is said to be written on the arm of God, with black fire on white fire.[38]

Myths of Hell. The allusion to Gehenna, Jewish hell, in this story is indirect, in that the Ari instructs Rabbi Abraham to fast and repent for three days and nights. Rabbi Abraham puts on sackcloth and ashes and

repents so that his soul will be purified when he stands before God at the Wall. This is the same ritual used by the people of Ninveh in the book of Jonah (3:5–6) to repent. It is the same ritual used for mourning, when the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, is said. The Kaddish is believed to have theurgic effects on the souls of the dead, for whom it is said. This is based on the belief that most of those who die have enough sins to require punishment in Gehenna, Jewish hell, for up to a year. When their punishments end, the purified souls are set free to ascend into Paradise. The torments of Gehenna are quite terrible, similar to those found in Dante's *Inferno*, but those fortunate enough to have someone say Kaddish for them are spared these punishments.

Myths of the Holy Word. God gave Moses tablets of the Law that were written by the finger of God. God also dictated the Torah to Moses, who served as God's scribe. Thus the origin of the Torah was in heaven. The Books of Life and Death in which God inscribes the names of those who will live or die the next year are other examples of heavenly books, and there are other books of divine origin, such as the Book of Raziel. The angel Raziel is said to have given this book to Adam to reveal the future to him. Thus in reading from the heavenly ledgers, the Ari touches on the myths about such heavenly books.

Myths of the Holy Time. The story takes place at Rosh ha-Shanah, when God decides whether a person will live or die the next year. Ten days later, on Yom Kippur, God seals that fate. During this period, a person's fate can be changed.

Myths of the Holy People. The Ari is widely regarded as the greatest Jewish mystic. He is certainly one of the towering giants of Jewish tradition. He created the myth of Shattering of the Vessels and the Gathering of the Sparks that is the basis of the concept of *tikkun olam*, repair of the world. He also created (or recreated) the ritual of *Kabbalat Shabbat*, of greeting the Sabbath Queen, which has become an integral part of Sabbath services worldwide. The Ari's teachings, known as Lurianic Kabbalah, constitute a major school in the teachings of Kabbalah. In addition, an extensive hagiographic tradition has arisen about him in which he is portrayed as possessing great mystical powers. "A Vision at the Wailing Wall" is an example of one of these legendary tales.

Myths of the Holy Land. The entire tale takes place in the Holy Land. It starts in Safed, the second holiest Jewish city, and involves a quest—a pilgrimage—to Jerusalem, the holiest Jewish city, to the holiest Jewish site there, the Wailing Wall. The sacred dimension of the Holy Land is underscored throughout the tale.

Myths of Exile. When Rabbi Abraham reaches the Wailing Wall, he encounters two personifications of the *Shekhinah*: as an old woman in mourning and as a beautiful bride. Both allude to the exile of the *Shekhinah*, the key kabbalistic myth found in the *Zohar* that describes how the *Shekhinah* exiled herself from heaven after the destruction of the Temple.[39] The old woman is mourning over the Temple and over the exile of her children, the children of Israel. The bride offers a prophecy that the exile will come to an end.

Myths of the Messiah. In Rabbi Abraham's second vision, that of the *Shekhinah* as a beautiful bride, she tells him, "Know that My exile will come to an end, and My inheritance will not go to waste. *Your children shall return to their country and there is hope for your future*" (Jer. 31:17). According to Kabbalah, the exile of the *Shekhinah* will not end until the coming of the Messiah. One of the three requirements of the Messiah is to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, and when this takes place, the exile of the *Shekhinah* will come to an end. Thus Rabbi Abraham's vision includes a prophecy about the coming messianic era.

It is somewhat astonishing to find that one tale includes allusions to all the major myths of Judaism. Yet this should not be seen as an unusual case, for the interweaving of mythic elements in Jewish folklore is ubiquitous. These mythic threads reinforce the Jewish framework in which these tales exist, and work as a whole to create a unique body of literature, including scripture, rabbinic legends, biblical commentaries, medieval Jewish folklore, kabbalistic texts, and hasidic tales, that exists as part of an extensive mythic tradition.

What Makes a Jewish Folktale Jewish?

From the tales discussed so far, it should be apparent that Jewish tradition has found a way to reimagine the Bible and incorporate biblical figures into postbiblical legends and folktales. What we have is a living tradition where the Bible is not a closed book, but an open invitation to the Jewish folk imagination. This creative license grows out of the tradition of the Oral Torah, which Moses is said to have received at Mount Sinai along with the Written Torah. As one midrash puts it, "God dictated the Torah to Moses during the day, and at night He explained it to him."[40] The Oral Torah was used to justify all kinds of additions and changes to the tradition, and provided a license to reimagine the Bible. It seems self-evident that such tales, which model themselves after and build upon existing Jewish tradition, should be acknowledged as an integral part of it. But this also raises the question of how to identify a Jewish tale.

Professor Dov Noy of Hebrew University, the preeminent Jewish folklorist of our time, has proposed four main factors in determining whether a tale can be considered Jewish: the time, the place, the characters, and the message. The *time* refers to a story that takes place during Jewish sacred time, such as the Sabbath or one of the holidays, such as Rosh ha-Shanah, Yom Kippur, or Passover. The story "A Flock of Angels," for example, takes place at Rosh Hodesh, the monthly celebration of the new moon. The *place* refers to a story that takes place in the land of Israel, or in a synagogue, a sukkah, or some other Jewish context. The encounter with a ghost in "The Lost Melody" takes place in a synagogue. The *character* can be one of the patriarchs or prophets, a king or a great rabbi, or even a simple Jew. The unlikely hero of "The Wooden Sword" is a poor Jewish woodcutter, who outfoxes a king. The *message* is usually a moral or lesson. As Professor Noy notes, "There is an ubiquitous instructional element in literally all Jewish folktales."[41]

Many of these tales grow out of biblical verses. For example, the talmudic tale of "The Golden Dove," about a miraculous golden dove found in the desert, is directly linked to the verse, *The wings of the dove are covered with silver, and her pinions with the shimmer of gold* (Ps. 68:14).

Sometimes the Jewish content of a folktale can be elusive, but once it is recognized, it seems self-evident. All that is necessary is to delve into the tale and seek its roots. Consider, for example, "The Cottage of Candles," a tale collected orally in Israel from a Jew from Afghanistan.[42] Here a man sets out on a lifelong quest to find justice, searching for it everywhere, like Diogenes going through the streets of Athens looking for truth. But at the end of his life, the man who searched for justice is tested to see if he himself is just.

Remarkably, this story combines two powerful types of tales, the quest and the divine test. The quest is one of the most popular types of Jewish folktales; more than half of all Jewish fairy tales are quests.[43] But here the quest is not a conventional one for a lost princess, the sword of Moses, or a golden bird, but for an abstraction—justice, a subject central to Jewish teachings.

It is important to note the futility of the man's quest for justice—"never did he find it." The story presents a bleak view of the state of justice in the world. At the same time, the conclusion of the tale, where the man fails the divine test, is equally bleak. Even though the story is a quest, there is no happy ending. Here the fact that it comes from Afghanistan seems entirely appropriate; even today Afghanistan is a harsh land where justice is hard to find. So the country of origin of a tale should be considered, for a story is somehow connected to the place it came from.

On the surface, there seem to be only two specific Jewish elements in the tale. One appears at the beginning: "There once was a Jew who set out into the world to find justice." The other is the famous biblical injunction *Justice, justice shall you pursue* (Deut. 16:20). These two elements in themselves might not make a convincing case that the story was Jewish, but a closer examination makes its Jewish roots apparent.

While the role of the verse from Deuteronomy is central in setting up the quest that is the focus of the first episode, there is another crucial verse hidden in the story: *The soul of man is the candle of God* (Prov. 20:27). This verse almost certainly inspired the second key episode, that of the cottage of candles, where the man who seeks justice is tested to see if he himself is truly just. Together these two verses serve as the foundation of the story, and testify to its Jewish origins.

That is how Jewish folklore works—like an archeological dig. In the case of "The Cottage of Candles," the two biblical verses are the foundation of the story. *Justice, justice shall you pursue* sets in motion the quest that propels the story, and *The soul of man is the candle of God* is the focus of the climactic episode about the cottage of candles. It seems likely that meditation on these biblical verses gave birth to this story over a long period of time. This makes the story itself a kind of commentary on these verses. Thus we discover that one unexpected purpose of folktales is to serve as a biblical commentary, much as do the midrashim. By putting the two

biblical verses together in the same story, the folk process that brought this story into being brings together the powerful motifs of the quest and the divine test. This suggests that verses in themselves can provide narrative inspiration.

The quest sets up the narrative framework, but it is the divine test that is the real focus of the tale. As described here, it is comparable to the divine tests given to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3), Abraham (Gen. 22), and Job (Job 1:12). Adam and Eve fail the test when they eat the forbidden fruit, but Abraham demonstrates his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, and Job retains his faith in God despite a series of tragedies. Thus Abraham and Job pass the test. In "The Cottage of Candles," then, we find another example of a divine test, this one created by Jewish folk tradition.[44] And, like Adam and Eve, the one who is tested fails the test.

So too can the old man who tends the soul-candles and conducts the test be linked to a variety of Jewish traditions. As the Keeper of the Soul-Candles, he might be Elijah, for Elijah the Prophet often appears in such roles. Or he might be one of the *Lamed-vav Tzaddikim*, the Thirty-Six Hidden Saints, who are said to be the pillars of the world and are often described as living in forests.[45] It is also possible to view the old man as the Angel of Death, who has come to take the man's soul. Or he might even be identified as God, who has descended to this world to administer the test Himself. Whoever he is, the old man in the cottage oversees the divine test, and each of these interpretations places the story firmly in Jewish tradition.

There is also an implicit parallel between the soul-candles, which burn as long as a person lives, and the Jewish custom of lighting *yahrzeit* candles on the anniversary of a person's death. These memorial candles, known as *nerot neshamah* or soul-candles, are intended to last for twenty-four hours, and remain lit until they burn out. The lighting of the *yahrzeit* candle is a ritual based the same verse that inspired the episode of the cottage of candles, *the soul of man is the candle of God.* Just as the candles are lit to commemorate the person who has died, the act of reading or telling a folktale makes it possible to commemorate the generations that created those tales, creating a bridge of tradition from the past to the present.

The man in this story, who is never named, is clearly attempting to fulfill the biblical injunction about pursuing justice. He has taken the biblical verse *Justice, justice shall you pursue* literally—he has devoted his life to pursuing justice. Thus the story grows out of a literal reading of a biblical verse. One way of reading the tale is to see that in arriving at this cottage of candles, the man is on the verge of completing his lifelong quest, but he is first tested to see if he himself is truly just. Instead of proving worthy, he attempts to lengthen his life by stealing years from someone else. But he is caught and made to face the consequences of his action. In this sense he finds justice, for justice is exactly meted out. His error was to continually seek justice out in the world, but never within himself.

For all of these reasons, "The Cottage of Candles" is a richly Jewish tale, with many links to the tradition, even if this is not apparent at first. The example of this story should indicate that many other Jewish tales

that may not appear to have a Jewish character do in fact draw on existing Jewish models, like the divine test, or respond to biblical verses, as in this tale, or have characters that can be linked to those found in traditional Jewish sources.

But what about more universal types of tales, such as fairy tales? Stories such as "The Golden Mountain" or "The Wonderful Healing Leaves" are set in enchanted kingdoms, without any apparent Jewish time, place, or character. In what way can they be identified as Jewish tales? True, tales about well-known Jewish figures such as Elijah or King Solomon, or about Lilith, the queen of demons, abound in Jewish folklore, but there are also a great many classic fairy tales, especially among the tales collected orally in the modern era that do not feature obvious Jewish elements. Indeed, approximately half of the tales collected by the Israel Folktale Archives in Israel lack explicit Jewish content, although they were collected from Jews, and served for hundreds of years—or longer—as an integral part of Jewish oral tradition. Here Professor Noy's fourth factor, that of the Jewish meaning, saves the day. For these stories inevitably have meanings that are harmonious with Jewish teachings. That is one of the main reasons why they were preserved in the first place.

Sometimes there is a melding of Jewish and the universal elements, as in "The Exiled Princess," an Eastern European version of Cinderella.[46] Here, however, the roles are reversed. This Yiddish variant of Cinderella is characterized by its Jewish elements. This Cinderella is a princess who is condemned for disobeying her father, the king, and escapes with her life. She becomes lost in a forest and is taken in as a servant by the wife of a rabbi. Like Cinderella, who attended the royal ball, the exiled princess attends Jewish weddings, wearing one of her royal gowns, so that no one recognizes her. The rabbi's son falls in love with her, unaware that she is the servant girl. But that the entire tale is a fantasy becomes apparent in the willingness of the parents to let the gentile servant marry their son after she has saved them from the fire, without concern for the need for her to convert, which would be a major factor in real life.[47]

The Stories of Reb Nachman

Then there are special Jewish stories that have been included in this book—those told by Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav. Reb Nachman is widely acknowledged as the greatest Jewish storyteller. He is very much a Jewish Hans Christian Andersen, drawing inspiration from folklore but creating original tales. His stories appear to be complex fairy tales, but they are actually allegories about kabbalistic mysteries. Despite the low status of folklore,[48] and its universal as opposed to specifically Jewish character, Reb Nachman felt drawn to this mode of expression in a powerful way. Certainly, the enchanted world of fairy tales, with its solutions that inevitably draw on the magical and the ability of the good to prevail despite the odds, had enormous appeal to Reb Nachman and reflect his own world vision, in which the power of faith can surmount any obstacle.[49]

One clue for this attraction can be found in the dreams of Reb Nachman that have been preserved. The most striking quality is their similarity to his tales, such as "The Master of Prayer" or "The Seven Beggars," as the following dream, recorded in its entirety, demonstrates:[50]

> In my dream I woke up in a forest. The forest was boundless; I wanted to return. Someone came to me and said: "This forest is so long it is infinite. All the instruments and the vessels of this world are made from this forest." He showed me a way out of the forest, which brought me to a river. I wanted to reach the end of the river. A man came to me and said: "This river is endless. All the people of this world drink from this river." Then he showed me a mill that stood at the side of the river, and someone came to me and said: "All the food for all the people in the world is ground in this mill." Then I reentered the forest, and there I saw a smith working, and they told me: "This smith makes the vessels for the whole world."[51]

Such dreams raise the possibility that Reb Nachman based his tales on his dreams, elaborating on them in the retelling. Certainly, it is clear that sacred quests consumed his imagination. Even Reb Nachman's teachings to his Hasidim were highly imaginative, as in this teaching about the angel of losses:

> There is an angel who watches over people, even in the dark. This is Yode'a, the angel of losses. He watches lives unfold, recording every detail before it fades. This angel has servants, and his servants have servants. Some of these servants are angels, and some are not. Each of the angels carries a shovel, and they spend all their time digging, searching for losses. For a great deal is lost in our lives. Every tzaddik is a servant of the angel Yode'a, for even a tzaddik who searches after lost things is himself sometimes lost. Then it is necessary to search in the dark, in the realm of the unknown. And with what do you search in the darkness? With the light of the soul. For the soul is a light planted in the tzaddik to seek after whatever has been lost. What kind of light is it? Not a torch, but a small candle. Yet even so, with it you can search inside deep wells, where darkness is unbroken, peering into every corner and crevice. It is necessary to be guided by that light, small though it may be.[52]

In this teaching Reb Nachman appears to have invented this angel, Yode'a, the angel of losses. "Yode'a" means "to know" in Hebrew. Thus the angel's name reflects its purpose, which is to recall all that has been lost. This angel recognizes how much is lost in a person's life, and searches to recover it, following the concept of *tikkun olam*, repair of the world. Indeed, the existence of this angel is another expression of the pattern of the Ari's myth of the Shattering of the Vessels and the Gathering of the Sparks.[53]

Much like Reb Pinhas of Koretz, Reb Nachman was highly aware of surrounding spirits.[54] For Reb Pinhas these were often angels. See, for example, "The Angel of Friendship," which tells of an angel that comes into being whenever two friends meet. In describing the angel of losses, Reb Nachman identifies a previously unknown angel who, along with his servants, searches for what has been lost. The efforts of this angel are clearly linked to the pattern of restoration that is the essential purpose of the myth of the Ari. This is made explicit in the second phase of the Ari's myth, about gathering the scattered sparks. These scattered sparks are not unlike the losses that Yode'a collects, for the sparks too have been lost and must be found in order to be redeemed.

Among the Bratslav Hasidim, it is believed that Reb Nachman made a vow to his Hasidim as he lay dying that he would always be their rebbe. For this reason, his Hasidim have never appointed a successor, for they believe that Reb Nachman's wandering spirit remains in this world as their guardian and guide. There are many tales about the wandering spirit of Rabbi Nachman told in Bratslaver circles. One of the most famous is about a letter from the beyond. It tells how, as a young man, Reb Yisrael Ber Odesser once ate by mistake on the seventeenth of Tammuz, a fast day, and became so downcast he even contemplated suicide. But before doing so, he decided to open a book at random to see if he could find any reason to live. He closed his eyes and took down a book from the shelf. When he looked at it, he found it was one of Reb Nachman's. And when he opened it, a letter fell out—a letter from Reb Nachman himself that spoke to him directly and transformed his life. In the letter Reb Nachman said: "It was very hard for me to descend to you. My precious student, be strong and courageous. My fire will burn until the Messiah will come. As a sign that this letter is true, on the seventeenth of Tammuz they will say that you are not fasting." This letter transformed Reb Yisrael's life, and he always maintained that Reb Nachman had sent it to him from heaven.[55]

To demonstrate how Reb Nachman fused fairy tales and kabbalistic allegories, consider his first tale, "The Lost Princess."[56] This story appears in all respects to be a characteristic fairy tale, with a king, a lost princess, a quest, three giants, and an enchanted palace. In brief, the king becomes angry with his daughter, saying "Go to the Devil!" and the next day she is gone. He sends his most trusted minister to search for her, and the search lasts many generations, until the minister learns that she is living in a palace of pearls on a golden mountain, and he undertakes a quest to find that mysterious palace.

Some readers might be tempted to dismiss "The Lost Princess" as a simple fairy tale, but they would be missing its rich allegorical meaning. For Reb Nachman based this tale on the model of the rabbinic *mashal* or parable, in which the king always represents God.[57] There are hundreds of rabbinic parables that inevitably begin, "There once was a king. . . ." This identification of the king with God signals that this tale can be read as an allegory, and all of Reb Nachman's tales—and there are ten of them collected here—function in a similar fashion.[58]

Even though "The Lost Princess" uses the universal language of the fairy tale, Bratslaver commentary explicitly interprets it as an allegory about the central kabbalistic myth of the exile of God's Bride, the *Shekhinah*. This myth is found in the *Zohar*, the central text of Jewish mysticism, dating from the thirteenth century:

> When the Temple was still standing, Israel would perform their rites, and bring offerings and sacrifices. And the *Shekhinah* rested upon them in the Temple, like a mother hovering over her children, and all faces were resplendent with light, so that there was blessing both above and below.
>
> When the Temple was destroyed, the *Shekhinah* came and went up to all those places where she used to dwell, and she would weep for Her home and for Israel, who had gone into exile, and for all the righteous and the pious ones who had perished. At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, questioned the *Shekhinah*, and said to her, "What ails you?" And she replied, weeping, "My children are in exile, and the Sanctuary has been burnt, so why should I remain here?" Now the Temple is destroyed and the *Shekhinah* is with Israel in exile and there is no joy to be found, above or below.[59]

Reb Nachman's followers view "The Lost Princess" as an allegorical retelling of this kabbalistic myth. In the Introduction to *Sippure Ma'asiyot*, the primary collection of Reb Nachman's tales, Rabbi Nathan of Nemirov, Reb Nachman's scribe, offers the following interpretation:

> "This story is about every man in every time, for the entire story occurs to every man individually, for everyone of Israel must occupy himself with this *tikkun*, namely to raise up the Shekhinah from her exile, to raise her up from the dust, and to liberate the Holy Kingdom from among the idolaters and the Other Side among whom she has been caught. . . . Thus one finds that everyone in Israel is occupied with the search for the king's daughter, to take her back to her father, for Israel as a whole has the character of the minister who searches for her."[60]

"The Lost Princess" and all of Reb Nachman's tales were read by his Hasidim with the kind of intense scrutiny reserved for sacred texts. It was an article of faith with them that his stories could best be understood allegorically, and indeed "The Lost Princess" lends itself to such an interpretation. As noted, the king is easily recognizable as God, and the six sons and one daughter can be readily identified as the six days of the week and the Sabbath. And the identification of the Sabbath with a princess naturally evokes the Sabbath Queen, which is one of the primary identities of the *Shekhinah*.

It is also possible to discern many allegorical links to biblical episodes and Jewish symbolism in this tale. Indeed, in a symbolic fashion, "The Lost Princess" retells the key stories of the Torah, from the Creation to the

giving of the Torah to the messianic era. In addition to the allusion to the six days of creation and the Sabbath, the minister's eating of the apple recalls the eating of the forbidden fruit. By eating it on the final fast day, the minister repeats the sin of the Fall and must wait for another generation, symbolized by the seventy years he sleeps. The episode of the water turning into wine can be linked with the story of the Flood and the sin of Noah in becoming drunk. Also, the three giants that the minister encounters in the desert can be identified as the three towering patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the trees they carry as staffs can be identified with the Torah, as in the passage *It* (the Torah) *is a Tree of Life to those who cling to it.*[61] The wandering of the minister in the desert suggests the wandering of the Israelites during the Egyptian exodus. So too does the minister's search for the palace of pearls repeat the Israelites' search for the Holy Land. As for the scarf with the words written by the tears of the lost princess, it represents the sacred writings of the Torah.

These symbolic parallels to the biblical chronology demonstrate that "The Lost Princess" can also be understood as reflecting the collective Jewish experience, reliving the archetypal experiences represented in these key biblical episodes. That such a collective interpretation of the text was intended is confirmed by the Haggadah for Passover, where it is stated that "we were slaves unto Pharaoh in Egypt," meaning that "in every generation each person must regard himself as if he himself went forth out of Egypt."

So too can this seminal story be understood on the level of personal inner experience. Once the link has been perceived between the lost princess and the *Shekhinah*, the allegorical meaning of Rabbi Nachman's tale reveals itself as a fairy-tale retelling of the myth of the exile of the *Shekhinah.* The king's angry words, which result in the disappearance of the princess, are equivalent to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the subsequent exile of both the *Shekhinah* and the Children of Israel. At the same time, they are equivalent to the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the wandering in the wilderness, and other variations on the myth of exile, which is another of the primary Jewish myths.[62]

From a psychological perspective, the figure of the lost princess in Reb Nachman's tale might be identified as an anima figure, Jung's concept for the feminine aspect of a man, just as an animus is the masculine aspect of a woman. As such, the lost princess represents a crucial missing element in the psychic equation, which the minister seeks to restore in his quest.

There are three strong possibilities for the identity of the loyal minister: he might be identified as being a tzaddik, a righteous one, who must search and find the lost princess and bring her back to the king or, symbolically, to God; or the minister could be identified with the nation of Israel whose task it is to search for the lost princess, or the *Shekhinah*, in her exile; or the minister could be identified with the Messiah, and here the linkage seems quite natural, for kabbalistic myth holds that the exile of the *Shekhinah* will not end until the Temple is rebuilt, which is not destined to take place until the advent of the Messiah.

All three of these interpretations of the role of the minister seem quite accurate, and each permits the tale to be seen from another important perspective. When the minister is seen as the nation of Israel, the responsibility for finding the lost princess rests on every Jew, and the importance of this doctrine to each individual is emphasized. When the minister is viewed as a tzaddik, the key role of the tzaddik in bringing about the reunion of *Shekhinah* and Messiah is underscored. And by identifying the minister with the Messiah we can recognize that Reb Nachman has combined two primary Jewish myths, that of the exile of the *Shekhinah* and that of coming of the Messiah, into one fairy tale, thus demonstrating their interdependence. Nor is it necessary to narrow these interpretations to one. In that sense, "The Lost Princess" should be seen as a kind of commentary, revealing an important connection between two guiding mythic principles, and therefore serving, above all, as a teaching story. One of the beautiful things about the process of commentary in Jewish texts is that multiple readings are not only permitted but also encouraged. Therefore we can easily accept the legitimacy of all three interpretations. That Reb Nachman was able to include such a comprehensive range of meanings within the framework of a traditional fairy tale indicates the kind of genius he brought to the Jewish folk tradition, infusing it with kabbalistic secrets and messianic longings.

So important are the stories of Reb Nachman that ten of them have been included here. The stories themselves are almost always cast as fairy tales, but they are open to many interpretations. Sometimes they serve as biblical commentaries, as in the case of "The Prince and the Slave." That story tells of a prince and a slave born on the same day who were switched by a midwife. In fact, it is a fairy tale retelling of the story of Jacob and Esau, and serves as a kind of midrash to defend Jacob's receiving the birthright and the blessing of the firstborn. Just as "The Lost Princess" includes allusions to many biblical episodes, so does "The Prince and the Slave" refer directly to the biblical source.

Since Reb Nachman's followers, the Bratslav Hasidim, consider his stories to be sacred teachings, they have created a rich body of commentary about them. Each of Reb Nachman's tales is interpreted as being as rich and complex in its meaning as "The Lost Princess." Nor do these commentaries go beyond the purpose of the tales, for Reb Nachman intended them, above all, to serve as teaching stories. But the truth is that all Jewish folktales are teaching stories, and efforts to interpret them as such are often richly rewarded.

NOTES

1. *Ma'aseh me-ha-Hayyat.* See "The Spice of the Sabbath" in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, pp. 316–317.

2. Sarah's death is reported in Gen. 23:1–2, Abraham's in Gen. 25:7–8.

3. From Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes*, pp. 61–65. See Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, pp. 445–446.

4. See "The Metamorphosis and Enthronement of Enoch," pp. 156–158, "Abraham Never Died," p. 348, and "Jacob Never Died," p. 370, in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*.

5. In *Folklore in the Old Testament*, James Frazer suggests it was God's intention that Adam be immortal. Therefore God warned Adam not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, for the Tree of Knowledge was originally the Tree of Death. Thus Frazer sees this divine test as a myth about the origin of death: "We may suppose that in the original story there were two trees, a tree of life and a tree of death; that it was open to man to eat of the one and live forever, or to eat of the other and die; that God, out of good will to his creature, advised man to eat of the tree of life and warned him not to eat of the tree of death; and that man, misled by the serpent, ate of the wrong tree and so forfeited the immortality that his benevolent Creator had designed for him." (See Theodor H. Gaster's *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament*, p. 33, which updates Frazer's *Folklore in the Old Testament*.)

6. As proof that God intended Adam to be immortal, *Genesis Rabbah* 21:5 states that "Adam was not meant to experience death." In *Avodat ha-Kodesh* 27 Rabbi Meir ibn Gabbai states that "God intended for Adam to live forever."

7. From *Sippurim: Prager Sammlung jüdischer Legenden in neuer Auswahl and Bearbeitung*. Version of L. Weisel. First published in Prague, 1847.

8. See "The Four Who Entered Paradise" in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, pp. 173–174.

9. See "Past and Present in Midrashic Literature," by Marc Bregman.

10. This brief legend embellishes the biblical observation *And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph* (Exod. 13:19), which confirms that Moses took the coffin of Joseph with him, as Joseph had required. The sources of this and other traditions about the coffin of Joseph are found in *Targum Pseudo-Yonathan* on Gen. 50:26, Ex. 13:19; *B. Sota* 13a–b; *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, be-Shalah* 1:86–110; *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 11:12. See "The Coffin of Joseph" in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls,* pp. 379–380.

11. Not included are some specialized types of tales, such as fables, parables, animal tales, nursery tales, and humorous tales. Life stories, known as *memorat*, are also not included. There have been many attempts to classify folktales, and Jewish folktales in particular. The best known of these is the Aarne-Thompson system found in *The Types of the Folktale*, which classifies folktales in more than two thousand categories. See Appendix E, p. 466. Professor Dov Noy devoted his dissertation to linking these Aarne-Thompson categories with Jewish sources. See his "Motif Index of Talmudic-Midrashic Literature." Others, such as Heda Jason, expanded the Aarne-Thompson system by adding Jewish tale types.

12. To date, the Israel Folktale Archives has collected more than 23,000 stories.

13. "God dictated the Torah to Moses during the day, and explained it to him at night." Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer,* p. 46.

14. IFA 9586, collected by Haya ben-Avraham from Daniel Sigauker of India.

15. This version of the story demonstrates how the underlying models of human sacrifice are transformed in the biblical tale, which recasts a sacrifice narrative into one that sets the precedent for no more human sacrifice. It is possible that the biblical account of the binding of Isaac intentionally changed the pattern of the pagan myth of human sacrifice into a myth of

animal sacrifice instead. This represents a major step in civilizing human society.

16. Preface to *Midrash Tanhuma.*

17. *B. Suk.* 53b. See "The Cave of King David," p. 210, and "The City of Luz," p. 105, for other tales about a quest to the city of Luz.

18. See "The Princess in the Tower," p. 50, and "The Maiden in the Tree," p. 160.

19. See the final act of S. Ansky's drama *The Dybbuk* for an accurate reenactment of an exorcism ceremony. For another example of a tale of dybbuk possession, see "The Widow of Safed" in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, pp. 228–230.

20. See "The Other Side," p. 283. For other tales about marriage with demons, see "Yona and the River Demon, p. 287, "The Cellar," p. 260, and "The Queen of Sheba," p. 230.

21. *Ohel Elimelekh*; *Sefer Or Yesharim* story no. 199; *Zikaron Tov.*

22. For examples of orally collected stories gathered from women, see Barbara Rush, *The Book of Jewish Women's Tales.*

23. *B. Hag.* 14b. See "The Four Who Entered Paradise" in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, pp. 173–174.

24. "The Ocean of Tears," p. 374.

25. From *Em la-Binah*, edited by Yekutiel Aryeh Kamelhar (Lemberg, 1909).

26. To assist in identifying the underlying myths in many of these stories, the commentaries on the stories, beginning on page 381, often include references to these myths in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism.*

27. See the editor's *Reimagining the Bible: The Storytelling of the Rabbis.*

28. For further elaboration of these mythic categories, see Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism*, pp. xlv–lxii.

29. Genesis 22.

30. *B. RH* 16a.

31. Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 31.

32. This story can be found on p. 333.

33. *Shivhei ha-Ari.*

34. The twenty-two years the Ari prophesizes for him represent the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, therefore a new cycle of life.

35. See Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, xlvii–xlix. For myths of the *Shekhinah*, see pp. 47–63.

36. See "The Shattering of the Vessels and the Gathering of the Sparks" in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, pp. 122–124.

37. See "The Book of Life and the Book of Death" in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, pp. 289–291.

38. *Aseret ha-Dibrot* in *Beit ha-Midrash* 1:62; *Merkavah Rabbah.* See "The Torah Written on the Arm of God" in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, p. 252.

39. See "The Exile of the *Shekhinah*" in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, pp. 57–58.

40. Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, 46. See Schwartz, *Reimagining the Bible*, pp. 3–40.

41. See Dov Noy, "What Is Jewish about the Jewish Folktale?"

42. IFA 7830, collected by Zevulon Kort from Ben Zion Asherov. The story can be found on p. 325.

43. Indeed, virtually half of the stories collected here are quests. The list of quest stories can be found in Appendix D, p. 464.

44. It is interesting to note that his quest in this tale is in many ways parallel to that of the man from the country in Kafka's famous parable

"Before the Law" from *The Trial*, who comes to the gates of the Law seeking justice. Readers have long noted that Kafka's parable is relevant to both human and divine justice. Therefore it too can be regarded as an example of a divine test. Kafka's friend and biographer, Max Brod, comments on Kafka's story: "Kafka's deeply ironic legend 'Before the Law' is not the reminiscence or retelling of this ancient lore, as it would seem at first glance, but an original creation drawn deeply from his archaic soul. It is yet another proof of his profound roots in Judaism, whose potency and creative images rose to new activities in his unconscious"; *Johannes Reuchlin und sein Kampf* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1965), pp. 274–275. Moshe Idel identifies the quest in Kafka's tale as the remnant of a mystical one. See *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 271.

45. See "The Thirty-Six Just Men," in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, p. 397. For a list of stories about the *Lamed-vav Tzaddikim* included here, see Appendix D, p. 465.

46. From *Yiddishe Folkmayses* (Yiddish), edited by Yehuda L. Cahan. Cahan was an important early Jewish folklorist and one of the founders of the YIVO archives.

47. Such a conversion takes place in "The Flight of the Eagle" in Schwartz, *Elijah's Violin*, pp. 82–88, where a young man marries a princess, who converts to Judaism and takes on the name of Sarah.

48. In the eyes of the rabbis, folklore lacks the status of the sacred books of Jewish tradition, such as those of the Bible, the Talmud, the Midrash, and the Kabbalah. Traditionally, the folktales that were preserved in these texts were explicitly linked to Jewish tradition. Therefore, the work of modern folklorists such as S. Ansky, Y. L. Cahan, and Dov Noy has been a revelation, as half the tales collected are universal, without explicit Jewish content, and women's tales have been collected for the first time.

49. Nor is Reb Nachman's following limited to his Hasidim. Modern scholars deeply immersed in his teachings and tales include Martin Buber, Adin Steinsaltz, Aryeh Kaplan, Arthur Green, Eli Wiesel, Gedaliah Fleer, Y. David Shulman, Ora Wiskind-Elper, and Shaul Magid.

50. From *Fragments of a Future Scroll* by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, p. 99. This book contains an extensive translation of Nachman's dreams, pp. 95–100. Additional dreams are reported in Arthur Green's *Tormented Master*, pp. 165–166. See also "The Dream-Tales of Nahman of Bratslav," in *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature*, edited by David Stern and Mark Jay Mirsky, pp. 333–347.

51. See Schachter-Shalomi, *Fragments of a Future Scroll*, pp. 95–100.

52. *Be'er ha-Hasidut*, edited by Eliezer Steinman, 1:189.

53. See "The Shattering of the Vessels and the Gathering of the Sparks" in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, pp. 122–124.

54. See "A Vision of Light" in Schwartz, *Gabriel's Palace*, pp. 231–232, and "The Souls of Trees," included here, p. 223.

55. *Michtav Mi-Rebbe Nachman* by Rabbi Yisrael Ber Odesser. Other accounts of the letter assert that Rabbi Nachman directed Rabbi Odesser to try to have Rabbi Nachman's remains moved from the city of Uman in the Ukraine to Israel, because of Reb Nachman's intense love of the Holy Land. Acting at the request of Rabbi Odesser, Haim Herzog, the president of Israel, received permission from the local authorities to move Rabbi Nachman's burial place, but this move was opposed by other leading Bratslaver rabbis and the plan was canceled. See the January 15, 1993, issue of the

Forward. For another example of a Bratslav tale about Reb Nachman, see "Reb Nachman's Chair," p. 364.

56. From *Sippure Ma'asiyot*. See "The Lost Princess," p. 119.

57. See *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* by David Stern.

58. The ten stories here told by Reb Nachman are "The Lost Princess," p. 119, "The Prince and the Slave," p. 125, "The Prince Who Was Made of Precious Gems," p. 130, "The Water Palace," p. 135, "The Pirate Princess," p. 141, "A Garment for the Moon," p. 147, "The Wooden Sword," p. 171, "The Prince Who Thought He Was a Rooster," p. 219, "The Treasure," p. 221, and "The Perfect Saint," p. 304. There are also two stories about Reb Nachman, "The Souls of Trees," p. 223, and "Reb Nachman's Chair," p. 364. Note that "The Treasure" and "The Wooden Sword" were likely existing folktales when Reb Nachman told them. The other eight stories are all his original creations.

59. *Zohar* 1:203a. See "The Exile of the *Shekhinah*" in Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, pp. 57–58.

60. *Sippurei Ma'asiyot*, Introduction and *Likutei Moharan*, p. 94.

61. Proverbs 3:18.

62. See Schwartz, *Tree of Souls*, pp. lix–lx.

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Fairy Tales

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1. An Apple from the Tree of Life

he daughter of the sultan of Turkey had fallen ill. Not even the finest doctors in all of Istanbul could heal her. The sultan brought them together and asked them when she would recover. One after another, the doctors hung their heads and said, "I don't know." But the very last doctor said, "Nothing can help her now except for an apple from the Tree of Life."

"What apple is that?" the sultan demanded to know. "And where can it be found?"

The last doctor said, "I have only heard of such an apple. But surely it can be found in the Garden of Eden. Two trees are said to grow in the center of the garden. The Tree of Life is one of them, and the Tree of Knowledge is the other. It is said that whoever tastes an apple from the Tree of Life, no matter how ill he may be, will recover his health."

The eyes of the sultan grew wide. "I must obtain one of these enchanted apples," the sultan said. "Who knows where this garden can be found?"

"Those who know best about the garden," the doctor replied, "are the Jews. What we know about the garden is told in the Bible. That is the holiest book of the Jews."

The face of the sultan grew red. "Bring in the leaders of the Jews at once!" he shouted.

Before an hour had passed, three of the best known rabbis of the city stood before the sultan, wondering why they had been summoned on such short notice.

"As you know," the sultan said, looking very grim, "my daughter is deathly ill. Her only hope is something that is in your power to supply, and supply it you must. For if you fail, my wrath will fall upon you." "Your Majesty," one of the rabbis said, "you know that we will gladly do whatever we can. But what do you want us to do?"

"Know then," said the sultan, "that I need an apple from the Tree of Life. And I need it soon—within three days. If I don't have it by then, you and all of your people will be banished!" And the sultan dismissed the three rabbis with a wave of his hand.

The three rabbis discussed the matter among themselves, and they all agreed that what the sultan was asking for was simply impossible. No one knew where the Garden of Eden could be found. And even if they did, how could anyone go there and come back within three days?

So the leaders gathered all the people in the synagogues, and they went from one synagogue to another, telling them the terrible news. All the people despaired, for no one believed it would be possible to obtain an enchanted apple from the Tree of Life in such a short time.

Now one of the three rabbis who had met with the sultan had a daughter named Leah. How she wished that such a wondrous apple could be found, so that the sultan's daughter could recover, and the danger to all the Jews would disappear.

Leah saw that her father was deeply worried by the sultan's demands, so she said, "Surely, Father, we must not give up hope. Miracles have happened before. Let us pray for one to happen to us. Tell me, is there anyone who knows the way to the Garden of Eden?"

"Only one of the thirty-six hidden saints," her father replied. "It is said that there are thirty-six righteous ones who are the pillar of existence. But no one knows where they can be found."

"But, Father," Leah said, "I have heard of an old Jew who lives alone in the forest. It is whispered that he might be one of the thirty-six."

Now the rabbi remembered that he, too, had heard such things said about this old man. So he and his daughter set out at once to look for him.

It was not easy to find their way through that dark forest, but everyone did their best to assist the rabbi and his daughter, and finally they reached the old man's house. They knocked on his door, and when he opened it, Leah was astonished to see a light surrounding his face.

The old man listened carefully as the rabbi explained what the sultan had demanded of them. Then he went to a shelf, took down an ancient book, and opened it. There, pressed in its pages, was a green leaf, perfectly preserved.

The old man took the leaf in his hand. "This leaf has been pressed between the pages of this book for many centuries. It is said to have been picked from one of the trees in the Garden of Eden. Let your daughter place this leaf on her pillow and she will dream of that glorious garden."

"My daughter?" asked the astonished rabbi.

"Yes," said the old man. "For she is the one destined to journey there."

Neither Leah nor her father could believe their good fortune, yet they were mystified that the old man had given the precious leaf to Leah instead of to her father. Still, they both thanked the old man and set out to return to their home.

On their way, Leah and her father stopped at an inn, and before she went to sleep, Leah gently placed the ancient leaf on her pillow. Even though it was so very old, it looked as fresh as if it had been picked that very day. It also gave off a most wonderful scent that filled the room.

Bathed in that beautiful scent, Leah closed her eyes, and soon she was sound asleep.

In her dream, Leah found herself in the most splendid garden she had ever seen. Every kind of fruit tree grew there, and the whole garden was filled with a beautiful, unforgettable scent. Leah suddenly realized that she had indeed traveled to the Garden of Eden. She knew that she must hurry, she must find the Tree of Life before it was too late. Tomorrow was the last day the sultan had given them to bring back the enchanted apple.

Leah looked up and saw that there was an angel sleeping in every tree. She called out to one, and when the angel opened its eyes, she asked for its help in finding the Tree of Life. The angel agreed to serve as her guide, but told her that it could take her only to the center of the garden. She would have to figure out for herself which of the two trees that grew there was the Tree of Life.

With the angel's help, Leah soon found herself in the center of that wonderful garden. There two trees grew, each a mirror image of the other. Apples hung from the branches of both trees. She looked from one tree to the other for a clue as to which was the Tree of Life. But which one should she choose?

Then Leah happened to notice a serpent hidden in the branches of one of the trees, and she was certain that must be the Tree of Knowledge.

Without further hesitation, she plucked a ripe apple from the other tree, and in the same instant, she woke up.

Leah opened her eyes, surprised to find herself back in the inn. Then she saw it—a ripe and shining apple resting on her pillow right where the fragrant leaf had been. An apple from the Tree of Life! Somehow she had brought it back in her dream. Leah could barely believe her eyes. She realized that a miracle had truly taken place, and she jumped up, grabbed the apple, and showed it to her father, who had not slept a wink. His eyes opened wide when he saw it, and even wider when she told him her dream. He shed tears of joy, for now he knew that they could still be saved.

Wasting not a moment, they set out for the sultan's palace, and when they arrived, the rabbi presented the sultan with the apple. When the sultan saw the rabbi's joy, he, too, was overjoyed. He himself brought the fragrant apple to his ailing daughter, and held it beneath her nose. All at once she opened her eyes. Then he asked her to take a bite of it, and as soon as she did, the color returned to her face, and she sat up. Within the hour she had made a miraculous recovery.

The sultan hugged his daughter and declared that day to be a holiday for all. Then the sultan publicly thanked the Jews for saving her, and never again did he threaten them.

As for Leah and her father, the sultan invited them to live in the palace, and Leah and the sultan's daughter became the best of friends. Leah never tired of telling her about her astonishing dream, and about the enchanted apple she had brought back. And the sultan's daughter never tired of hearing this tale, for she, better than anyone else, knew that every word was true.

—Eastern Europe: nineteenth century

2. Elijah's Violin

nce upon a time there was a king who had three daughters. Now he loved them dearly, but one day he had to leave them to go off to war. Before he left he spoke to his daughters and said, "If I am victorious in this war, I will bring each of you a gift. Tell me, what would you like?" The eldest spoke up and said, "I would like a diamond in the shape of a star." And the second daughter said, "I would like a gown woven from pure gold." But the youngest said, "I only want you to come home safely from the war." The king was pleased to hear this, and he said, "Thank you, daughter, for your good wish. But you must ask me to bring you something, as your sisters did. Think it over for three days, then tell me before I depart what it is that you want."

Now the youngest daughter was sitting alone on a rock next to the lake outside the palace, when there appeared before her an old woman, who asked her, "What is wrong, child?" And she replied: "I do not know what gift to ask of my father, the king." The old woman said: "You must ask your father for Elijah's violin." So the princess agreed that this would be her request.

At the end of three days the king said to his daughter: "What gift have you decided upon?" And the princess replied: "I would like you to bring me Elijah's violin." The king agreed and set out to war.

Now the king led his troops to victory in every battle, and after his triumph he sought and found the gifts for his two eldest daughters, the star-shaped diamond and the golden gown, but he was unable to find Elijah's violin anywhere. The king asked his generals if they knew where it could be found, but none of them had heard of it. And he asked his wise men, but none of them had read of it in any book. And he asked his soothsayers, but none of them could find it in the stars. So the ship of the king departed, and sailed until it came to land. The king ordered his crew to cast anchor there, to see if Elijah's violin was to be found in that place. And in this way he embarked on a long quest, which took him to the four corners of the world. After many trials and tribulations, he was led to an old man who lived in a cave, and the old man said: "Elijah's violin is in the possession of the king of this country." He also said that the king had a daughter imprisoned in stone and whoever freed his daughter from the stone would be richly rewarded. Then the old man gave the king three long hairs and he said: "These three strands are from the bow of Elijah's violin. Burn these when you are in the presence of the princess."

The king thanked the old man, and took the three hairs from the bow of Elijah's violin, and put them safely away. Then he asked the old man what

he might give him in return. And the old man said: "There will come a day when you will repay me in full, for your daughter will set free the imprisoned melodies." And the king wondered at this, and he said: "Tell me, old man, what is your name?" The old man replied: "My name is Elijah." And then the old man returned to the shadows of the cave, and the king set off to rescue the princess who was imprisoned in stone.

When the king approached the palace in which the stone princess lived, he advised his generals and wise men and soothsayers that he preferred to proceed on his own, and that they should camp there and wait for him. And when he came to the gates of the palace and announced that his purpose was to set free the imprisoned princess, he was given an audience with the king and queen at once. For they had left orders that no one who offered to free her was to be refused, but that anyone who failed was to be put to death. That same day the visiting king was taken into the presence of the princess.

Now it was a great shock for him to see the princess, for she seemed to be alive and dead at the same time, as if she were a living sculpture. But much greater was his surprise when she began to speak—for the enchantment under which she had fallen permitted her the power of speech but no other. While the princess was speaking, it seemed as if she were alive. But when she fell silent, it was as if she had turned completely to stone. He could not bear her silence, so he asked her: "Tell me, how did it happen that you were turned to stone?"

The princess replied: "One day I was wandering through the palace, and I came upon a stairway I had never known about, and I followed it until I came to a room where there was a mirror with a golden frame. As I stood before it, my mirror image stole out of the glass and forced me to take its place within. And from that moment I found myself turned to stone, with only my power of speech remaining. No one has known how to set me free. Since then there have been reports that someone who looks exactly like me, and claims to be me, has been seen in the kingdom, but slips away like a shadow if anyone comes too close." And then the princess was silent, and it was the silence of stone.

The king remembered the strands from the bow of Elijah's violin that the old man had given him, and took them out and threw them into the fire that until then had done little to keep the room warm. Then the chill of the room seemed to melt, and at the same time the stone princess turned to flesh and blood again. And the king who had set her free said to her: "Now that you have been freed from this spell, your mirror image surely has been returned to its place in the mirror. To keep it there you must blindfold yourself and take a stone and shatter the glass. That way your mirror image will remain in its world of reflections, and will not take your place in this world again." The princess promised she would do this, and she did so before the end of the day. Her father, the king, was so grateful that he told the king who had broken the spell that he could have any gift of his choice. Nor did he refuse him Elijah's violin, for that is what he requested as his reward.

Now that the king had gathered the gifts for all three of his daughters, he sailed with his soldiers directly home. And because the winds were with

them, it took them only seven days, and when the king arrived he gave the gifts to his daughters. The first two took their gifts and hurried off to try them on, but the youngest hugged her father first, and then took the violin to her room. And that is how the princess who was the youngest daughter of the king came to possess Elijah's violin.

Now when the princess first opened the case of the violin, what did she find? A small, perfectly carved violin that had been preserved for many centuries, and next to it a bow. And when she put the bow to the strings, a clear melody sailed forth, effortlessly. And while she played the violin, it seemed that the violin was playing itself, as if it had many melodies stored up, which sought to emerge from within. And even before she finished playing there appeared before her a handsome young man, who asked her: "Why have you brought me to this place?"

The princess was amazed to see him, and she said: "But how did you enter this room?" He showed her the window through which he had entered. Then the princess asked: "But where do you come from?" To which the young man replied: "From far away." And the princess asked: "Then how did you come to be here?" The young man answered: "The music of the violin brought me." Nor did the princess question him more than that, for she understood at once that the violin she had played was enchanted, and that she and the prince, for he was a prince, had been brought together through its magic.

After that, the princess would take out Elijah's violin whenever she missed the prince, and each time she would play it, the prince would arrive soon after the melodies floated outside her window. Before long the prince and the princess exchanged rings and vowed that one day they would be wed.

Then it happened, after some time had passed, that the eldest sister of the princess heard her speaking to the prince in her room. She hurried to the second sister, and said: "Someone has been visiting our sister in her room." They decided to search her room to see what they could learn, and so they persuaded the youngest princess to join them in the baths. When they arrived there the eldest said she had forgotten her soap, and left to fetch it. But instead she went to her sister's room and began to search through it. When she found the ring of the prince, she threw it and broke the window through which the prince entered the room. And when she saw the case of the violin, she opened it and began to play, but the melody that emerged was a dark one, filled with brooding. And as the music filled the air, the prince was compelled to appear. He sought to enter by the broken window, but was wounded by the sharp glass and was forced to turn back.

When the youngest princess returned from the baths, she could feel that something had happened in her room, but she did not know what it was. So she took out Elijah's violin and began to play, but this time the prince did not appear. Then she saw that the window was broken, and that three drops of blood were on the curtain. When she realized that her sisters must have discovered her secret, and brought harm to the prince, the princess became very sad and left the palace to sit on the rock by the lake. While she was sitting there the old woman appeared, and asked her what had happened. The princess told her all that had taken place, and the old woman said: "Pretend

that you are ill, so that the doctor will order that no one be admitted to your room until you are well. Meanwhile, you must set out and find the prince who has been wounded, for only you can heal him. To do so you must pluck three strands from the bow of Elijah's violin, and take them with you. Then you must burn those strands when you are in the presence of the prince."

The princess did as the old woman had said, and the doctor ordered that no one be admitted to her room. She then set out on a quest to find the wounded prince, so that she might heal him.

So it was that the princess walked and walked through all of that kingdom and the forest surrounding it, until she grew tired and sat down to rest beneath an elder tree. She was so tired that she lay down to sleep. But no sooner did she close her eyes than she discovered she understood the speech of the doves that perched on the branches above her. When she opened her eyes, their speech sounded only like chirping, but when she closed her eyes once more, the language of the doves was clear to her, and she heard them say: "The prince has been wounded, and the way to his palace is impossible to find without a map. And where can a map be found? Only in the leaves of this tree."

Then the princess arose at once, and plucked one of the leaves from the tree. And when she looked at it, she found she was able to read it like a map. She saw where she stood in the forest, and the way she must take to emerge from there, and how she could reach the palace where the wounded prince waited to be healed. After this she followed the map directly to that kingdom. There she disguised herself as a man, and presented herself as a doctor before the king. The king warned her that thirty-nine doctors had already tried to heal the prince, and all had failed and been put to death. The fate of this doctor would be the same as that of the others if he did not succeed.

The disguised princess agreed to these terms, but requested that she be left alone with the prince. As soon as she entered the prince's room and saw him asleep on the bed, she was overcome with emotion and wanted to embrace him. But, remembering her purpose, she cast the strands from the bow of Elijah's violin into the flames of the fireplace, and as soon as they started to burn, the wounds of the prince healed, and he opened his eyes and saw the princess, who had cast off her disguise. Then she called in the king and queen, who were overjoyed to find that the prince had recovered, and they agreed at once that the prince and princess should be wed. So it was that they came to be married and that they lived together in great wealth, peace, and virtue for all the days of their lives, and many were the times when the melodies of Elijah's violin were heard drifting over that land.

—Egypt: oral tradition