

The Bird of Happiness

A Jewish folktale from Iraq

Long ago, a boy named Aaron wandered the desert with his mother and father. His parents had once been slaves, and they had escaped to search for a place where they could live in freedom. Day after day they looked for food and water under the burning sun. Still Aaron never gave up hope, because his mother always told him, "One day the Bird of Happiness will lead us to Jerusalem."

Each night, beside the fire, Aaron's father taught him what it meant to be a Jew. They had no books, so his father told him the stories of the Torah he remembered and taught him the Ten Commandments. Aaron took them to heart.

One night Aaron dreamed that a terrible sandstorm swept over them, scattering their food and burying every path. Just when all seemed lost, a white bird appeared on the horizon, flew over him, and dropped something from its beak. Aaron caught it and woke up holding a glowing stone. When his mother heard the dream, she said, "The Bird of Happiness is coming closer."

Aaron wore the stone around his neck, and it became their guide. When they walked in the right direction, it glowed; when they turned the wrong way, it went dark. It led them from oasis to oasis, and at each one they gave thanks.

At last they reached the gates of a great city, and inside, the streets were crowded with people. "What city is this?" Aaron's father asked. "Jerusalem," a man answered. "Our king has died, and by our custom, the Bird of Happiness will choose the next king. Whoever it lands on will rule."

A white bird rose over the city and circled lower and lower, while Aaron's stone glowed brighter than ever. Then the bird landed on Aaron's head. The crowd cheered and carried the poor desert boy to the palace, and three days later he was crowned king of Jerusalem.

Aaron had never been to school, but he judged every question by the Ten Commandments, and the glowing stone helped him know right from wrong. The nobles soon saw that their young king was wise. Only one thing puzzled them: each day Aaron spent an hour alone in a simple hut of branches he had built beside the palace.

Finally his minister asked him why. Aaron answered, "In that hut I put on the rags I wore when I came here, and I look at myself in the mirror, so I remember where I came from. Only then do I know where I must go." From that day on, the minister served him faithfully, and Aaron became one of the great kings of Jerusalem. Every day, he and his parents gave thanks for their blessings, and for the Bird of Happiness.

Retold by JIMENA for classroom use from an Iraqi Jewish oral tale collected in Israel. A published version appears in Howard Schwartz, *Elijah's Violin and Other Jewish Fairy Tales*. Listen to the tale told by storyteller Miriam Kanani: [The Bird of Happiness \(audio\)](#).