

Three Short Folktales

These tales were told by Jews in North Africa and preserved in the Israel Folktale Archives. As you read, check off the folktale characteristics on Appendix B and the values on Appendix A.

Folktale #1: Reciting Psalms

TUNISIA

A poor man owned a shop that earned almost nothing. On the eve of Passover, instead of rushing to earn money as his wife urged, he sat in his shop reciting Psalms. An old man came in and bought some wood. As he left, he touched one of the wooden beams of the shop. When the shopkeeper looked up, the beam had turned to gold! He ran after the old man shouting, "Elijah the Prophet!" The townspeople thought he was crazy, but thanks to the golden beam, his family had everything they needed for Passover. His devotion had earned a visit from Elijah, the performer of miracles.

Folktale #2: Rabbi Shelomoh the Lion

MOROCCO

Rabbi Shelomoh of Morocco was a tzaddik, a righteous man. Every summer he fasted for six days and studied Torah day and night. During a time of conflict, three men chased him, and he escaped into a cave. Inside he saw a lion holding up one paw. The rabbi was not afraid. He saw a thorn stuck in the lion's paw and gently pulled it out. In return, the lion protected him from the dangers of the cave. The Jewish community feared the rabbi had died and sent a search party. At the cave they saw a light glowing inside: it was the rabbi, riding the lion. From then on, he was called Rabbi Shelomoh the Lion.

Folktale #3: Observing the Sabbath

EGYPT

One Shabbat, a man saw a mouse carrying gold coins out of a hole in his house. Because it was Shabbat, he did not touch the coins. When Shabbat ended, he reached into the hole and found one gold coin. He gave it to a merchant friend leaving on a journey and asked him to buy something with it. On the way home, the merchant remembered his promise and bought a crate of cats for the coin. A storm drove his ship to a strange shore, where the people were plagued by mice. They paid a fortune for the cats. The merchant returned home and gave the whole fortune to his friend, who prospered ever after.

Summarized by JIMENA from tales published in Dan Ben-Amos, ed., *Folktales of the Jews, Volume 3: Tales from Arab Lands* (Jewish Publication Society), drawn from the Israel Folktale Archives.