



## Jewish Stories & Tales on Disabilities and Inclusion



### The Shepherd A Story about Prayer

For many of us, instead of opening our hearts to prayer, Hebrew school had the effect of silencing our natural instinct to prayer. It's like the story of a simple shepherd, who every day would offer his personal prayer to God: "God, I love you so much, that if you were here, I would give you half of my sheep. If it was raining and you were cold, I would share my blanket with you." One day a great rabbi was walking by the field, and he heard the shepherd praying. He ran up to him, and said "do you call that praying? Are you kidding? What would God do with your sheep? Of what use would a blanket be to God? Here, let me show you to pray properly before you further desecrate God's holy name!" The rabbi then got out a siddur, and gave a brilliant lecture on the structure and meaning of the various prayers, and explained what to say when to the poor illiterate shepherd. As soon as the rabbi left, the shepherd sat there dumbfounded. He didn't understand a word of it. But he knew the great rabbi was quite upset that his prayers were not proper. So he stopped praying.

For too many of us, that's where the story ends.... Fortunately for the shepherd, there *is* more to *his* story

Up in Heaven, God noticed the silence, and said "what happened to the beautiful prayers of my humble shepherd?" He decided to send an angel down to go and find out what was wrong. The angel found the shepherd, and the shepherd told him the whole story of his meeting with the rabbi. The angel said, "what does that rabbi know? Would you like to see how we pray in Heaven?" The shepherd instantly agreed and the angel whisked him off to Heaven, where he saw a Heavenly Host standing and proclaiming: "God, I love you so much, that if you were here, I would give you half of my sheep. If it was raining and you were cold, I would share my blanket with you." The shepherd happily went back to his prayers, and God happily listened.

This story, based on a Talmudic tale, is available in full in *Days of Awe: Stories for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur* by Eric Kimmel (Puffin, 1993). The above abridgment is found in Rabbi Barry Leff's Rosh Hashanah sermon, 2003: <http://www.jacksonsnyder.com/arc/Midrash/56.htm>.

Original available at <http://boardofrabbis.org/Disabilities-Awareness>

## The Turkey Prince

*From Tales From Reb Nachman (Artscroll / Mesorah)*

*Retold for children and illustrated by Dovid Sears*

Once upon a time, there was a prince who decided that he was a turkey. So he took off his clothes and sat under the royal table. There he pecked at bones and crusts of bread – and even at people's legs. Sometimes he made turkey sounds so loud that everyone had to run out of the room holding his ears! Famous doctors from Austria tried to cure him, but they all gave up. His father the king didn't know what to do. All of his wealth and power didn't seem to matter anymore.

At last, a wise man came to the palace. He wore a long black coat and hat, and his high boots were muddy and worn. His beard had been gray for many years, but he still seemed young and strong. "I will cure the prince," he said. "But you must let me do it my way, even if it seems strange."

The king agreed. He ordered his servants to do everything the wise man said.

The next morning after breakfast, the wise man took off his clothes. He sat down under the royal table near the king's son. And he, too, pecked at crumbs and bones, as if he always ate this way.

"Who are you?" asked the prince. "And what are you doing here?"

"Who are you?" asked the wise man. "And what are you doing here?"

"I am a turkey," answered the prince.

"I am also a turkey," answered the wise man.

Then they both continued to crawl across the thick carpet on their hands and knees. They clucked and gobbled and looked for pieces of food. They did this together for many hours and became friends.

The next afternoon, after a lunch of corn flakes and dust, the wise man signaled the royal butler to bring two shirts. The wise man asked the prince, "Do you think turkeys can't wear shirts just like people? We can wear shirts and still be turkeys!" And they both put on shirts.

A day later he signaled again, and the butler brought them pants. As before, the wise man asked, "Do you think turkeys can't wear pants just like people? We can wear pants and still be turkeys!" The wise plan worked well. In a few days he and the prince were dressed like everyone else in the palace. But they still crawled and pecked at crumbs.

Now it was time for the second part of his plan. The wise man signaled again, and the servants brought platters of meat and potatoes, salads and fruits and sweet rolls from the table. "Do you think turkeys can't eat good food just like people?" asked the wise man. "We can eat everything people eat and still be turkeys!" So they still sat under the table, but they ate the same food as the royal family.

Finally, the wise man asked, "Do you think turkeys can't sit at the table just like people? We can sit at the table and still be turkeys!"

For many days the wise man continued talking to the king's son in this way. Then, finally, the prince awoke one morning and realized that he was not a turkey after all.

[http://www.nachalnovea.com/breslovcenter/articles/article\\_tprince.html](http://www.nachalnovea.com/breslovcenter/articles/article_tprince.html)

An illustrated comic version of this tale by Art Spiegelman can be found in *Little Lit: Folklore & Fairy Tale Funnies*, edited by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly, published by Raw Junior/HarperCollins, 2000.

# The Flute

*This story is slightly adapted from the version found on the Lambda Publishers Web page.*

[www.lambdapublishers.com/year/english/kippur\\_stories.htm](http://www.lambdapublishers.com/year/english/kippur_stories.htm)

Meir was a good boy. He always listened to his parents and helped out around the house, but no matter how hard he tried, he wasn't able to speak. Instead of going to school, Meir tended his father's cows. Every morning he led them to a meadow, where he would take out his flute and play them the most beautiful tunes. When he put his flute away, the cows knew it was time to go home.

Meir was thirteen when his father took him to the Ba'al Shem Tov on Yom Kippur. "Maybe the presence of such a great man will do Meir some good," his father thought. For a while, it even seemed to work. Meir was excited to be in the same synagogue as the Ba'al Shem Tov, but he was also very sad that he didn't know how to pray.

As the long service came to an end, Meir had an idea. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out his flute and began to play. "This is how even I can pray," he thought proudly. No one agreed, though; in fact, the entire congregation was outraged. How dare this boy disturb their prayers? They jumped up from their seats to throw Meir and his father out of the synagogue. Even the Ba'al Shem Tov rushed toward them.

The Baal Shem Tov looked at Meir and hugged him. "Thank you," he said. "All Yom Kippur I wondered whether our prayers would be answered. We said all the words, but we lacked the passion. Then I heard your flute, so simple and sincere, and I knew our prayers would be answered."

The Ba'al Shem Tov turned to the congregation. "I see you've risen to thank this boy. After all, his flute opened the Gates of Heaven to our prayers."

-Ba'al Shem Tov  
Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1698–1760)