

## Honey on the Page: A Treasury of Yiddish Children's Literature

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**Miriam Udel, Translator**

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The fabulist translated Yiddish tales collected in *Honey on the Page* speak with grace to the tensions and joys of Jewish life.

Both didactic and celebratory, the collection first concerns itself with stories about Jewish holidays, including Purim and Lag BaOmer. Three tales emphasize how Shabbat is a time of miracles: in one, a mute girl finds her voice; in another, a gentle man finds respite in a blizzard; in a third, a rabbi in the desert shares his challah with a lion who's taking his rest, too.

The book's folk tales emphasize virtues like charity, honesty, and kindness, while its parables depart from pure religious emphases: in "The Birds Go on Strike," bird song ceases until caged birds are set free.

Sholem Asch's "A Village Saint" lauds those whose religious expressions emerge from within, rather than mimicking rote practice. In it, a boy finds a new way to pray, emerging from his sense that God is always near:

*Yashek ... saw [God] right there, where the stream flowed quietly and murmured deep secrets to the quiet, calm, grassy bank; and over there, faraway, where the cloud pulled itself across the sky with a sad darkness.*

Elsewhere, tales find shtetl Jews binding together, their communities warm and giving even when their circumstances are bleak. European antisemitism is a dark presence in tales like "Gur Aryeh," wherein a wise rabbi catches the ear of the king and the resentment of his courtiers. History lessons wind into stories that evoke the Spanish Inquisition, but humor is present, too, as with a tale of Chelm's shlemiels and schlemazels building a synagogue whose foundation is a great and heavy stone.

Miriam Udel's essential, rich collection of Yiddish tales revives the appealing stories that early twentieth-century Jewish children were told to introduce their history and traditions.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2020)

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