

FOLKTALES OF *Israel*

EDITED BY

Dov Noy

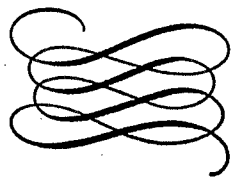
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Folktales

OF THE WORLD

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that the wayfarer was a benevolent man, and he extended his mercy to all seeking justice.

Word reached the sheik, the very one who had given the foal to the wanderer, and he came to pray. He ascended the minaret and then lay on the grave of the holy one on the hillock. But how amazed he was when he saw there the unfortunate wayfarer. They were very pleased to meet each other. The sheik asked, "Tell me, my friend, what is the name of the holy man buried here?"

The eyes of the wayfarer darkened with embarrassment, and he began stammering, "I . . . I . . . I will tell you the truth itself. No holy one but the ass you gave me is buried in the hillock. It died, and I buried it here."

The sheik burst out laughing. "Do you remember the grave of the holy one at my village and the minaret there?"

"Of course, I remember, I remember."

"If so, my dear friend," the sheik consoled him, "do not worry. No holy one is buried there, but the mother of the ass that you buried here."

. 2. *The Two She-Goats from Shebreshin*

IFA 532. Narrated to Dov Noy by an elderly Polish Jew.

On underground caves and passages (Motif F721.1) leading from the Lands of Dispersion to the Land of Israel, see Dov Noy, *The Diaspora and the Land of Israel (Hebrew)*, p. 44; *Yiddisher Folklor* (1938), ed. Y. L. Cahan, No. 20, p. 147; and the short story of the famous Hebrew novelist Sh. Y. Agnon (b. 1888), "A Story with a She-Goat," in *Collected Stories of Sh. Y. Agnon, II: These and These (Tel Aviv, 1959)*, 373-75 (Hebrew). The she-goat also plays an important role in the legends of the journey of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov to the Holy Land. Shebreshin was one of the nine Polish villages settled by Jews expelled from Spain. The folk etymology explains the origin of the name of the village from the Hebrew "Shev Rishon" (Sit first!); see Cahan (1938), No. 23, p. 148. Relevant motifs are D2131, "Magic underground

journey," D1555, "Underground passage magically opens," F92, "Pit entrance to lower world," F111, "Journey to earthly paradise," F721.1, "Underground passages. Journey made through natural subways," B103.0.5, "Treasure-producing goat," B563.4, "Animal leads cleric to holy place," and N773, "Adventure from following animal to cave (lower world)."

• IN THE WOODS near the Polish village of Shebreshin, there once lived a poor Hasid with his wife. Every Sabbath the Hasid used to go to the village to pray and study in the synagogue. And what did he do the rest of the week? No one knows. Only this is known: he had two she-goats that gave but little milk. Every day the Hasid's wife would let the goats loose in the field, and in the evening she would tie them up. The Hasid and his wife used to sell goat's milk, butter, and cheese, but they earned very little.

One day the woman went to milk the goats, but they were not there. The Hasid and his wife searched for them in the woods but did not find them. The wife remembered that in the morning she had forgotten to tether them. She began to cry and to shout, but her husband stopped her, saying with a smile on his lips, "Everything is from Heaven."

The woman looked into her husband's eyes and understood that there was something mysterious in the matter. She recalled how her husband had longed to buy the goats and to rear them. He had said then, "It is the will of Heaven."

At sunset the goats came home again and that same evening they gave a great deal of milk—more than any other time. The Hasid's wife took this as a sign that the goats had been blessed. And on the following day she did not tether them again.

Once more she could not find the goats during the daytime, but in the evening they returned, heavy with milk. The Hasid and his wife sold the milk in the village, and lo! it was unlike any other milk. This milk restored the health of the sick, and even those who were very ill became well after drinking it. Soon there were no more sick people in the whole village of Shebreshin.

Six days passed. On the seventh day the Hasid decided to follow the goats into the woods. The goats scampered along, and he

went after them. They came to a place where the trees were close upon each other, tree upon tree. The goats darted under the trees. The Hasid went after them. There was an opening in the ground near these trees, and the goats went through it. The Hasid followed them. Suddenly he found himself inside a cave and saw from afar a beam of light. The goats scrambled toward the light. The Hasid followed them.

On the way jumping black devils with tongues of red flames appeared. They shouted until they rent the skies. Stones fell from all sides. The sound of silver coins jingled behind him, and naked women appeared near him. But the Hasid went on and on. He did not look to the right, and he did not look to the left. His faith in Heaven did not leave him, not for a second. And so the evil forces who were disturbing him left him, one by one. The Hasid reached the light at the opening of the cave. Climbing out, he saw the blue sky and a young boy standing and piping a tune to his goats. Seeing the Hasid, the youth approached him and asked in Hebrew, "Are you new in our district?"

The Hasid stood in awe because he realized that his feet were on the holy soil of the Land of Israel. The youth continued to speak, "I am also new here in the surroundings of Safed. Until now I used to take my goats to the Judean Hills, to the mountains of the Holy City of Jerusalem."

The Hasid threw himself on the ground, kissed the soil and the stones, and gave thanks to the Lord. Then he sat down and wrote a letter to the Jews of Shebreshin and to all the Jews in the galuth. He called upon them to come and not to be frightened by the things they saw in the cave, which were phantoms without reality. The Hasid put the letter in a big fig leaf, tied it to the neck of one of the goats, and wrote on the fig leaf that the letter should be handed to the rabbi of Shebreshin.

That same evening the goats returned home, heavy with milk. The Hasid's wife saw that her husband had not come back and was very upset. In fact, she was so worried that she did not notice the fig leaf tied round the goat's neck.

The woman waited one day, two days, three days, and her husband still did not come. She was sure that robbers in the woods had killed him, and she asked herself why she should remain in

the woods? It would be better to move to the village of Shebreshin and live within the Jewish community! So she said, and so she did. And what does one need goats for in the village? It would be better to have them slaughtered and sell the meat. So she said, and so she did.

Only after slaughtering the goats did the shohet find the letter in the fig leaf, and he immediately called the rabbi. When the rabbi had read the letter, he began weeping, "What can be done now? The goats cannot be returned to life, and only they know the way to the Holy Land."

The rabbi decided that the Jews of Shebreshin should neither eat nor drink for three days; they should pray. Probably because of their bad deeds, the letter had not been found in time, and they would not be able to reach the Holy Land. Now they had to go on waiting in the galuth for redemption.

The rabbi of Shebreshin kept the letter for many years in the synagogue. When the great fire came and most of Shebreshin went up in flame, the letter from the Holy Land was lost too.

3. *King David's Tomb in Jerusalem*

IFA 966. Recorded by Nehama Zion from Miriam Tschernobilski, born in Poland.

The tale centers around Motifs D1960.2, "Kyffhäuser: king asleep in mountain," and C897.3, "Tabu: calculating time of Messiah's advent." Jewish folklore is filled with stories of how pious rabbis attempted, and failed, to bring the Messiah down to earth. The relationship between Elijah and the Messiah is discussed by E. Margolioth in *Elijah the Prophet in Jewish Literature* (Hebrew), pp. 156-77. In Jewish tradition the true Messiah is a descendant of King David, whereas the false one is related to the house of Joseph. Other tales connected with King David's tomb are found in J. E. Hanauer, *The Folk-Lore of the Holy Land*, pp. 89-93, 132-33. Another version of the present text is in A. Ben-Israel Avi-Oded, *Legends of the Land of Israel* (Hebrew), pp. 220-21.