

Stories for All Ages

“Hare’s Gifts” – *adapted from a story by Ken Collier*

Hare:

Hyena:

Narrator:

(Two large rolls of white paper over the wall to the floor and drawing markers).

Narrator:

(Hare Enters)

This is a story about the Hare (*one of Rabbits relations*) and his (umm...) neighbor Hyena. Back in the old days, no one lived in towns or villages. Instead, everyone just set up a hut any old place. It was a trifle inconvenient, but it never occurred to anyone to live in any other way.

(Enter Hyena)

One day Hyena decided to set up a new hut that would be the biggest and grandest ever made. He searched out a good sight near sweet water and in the cool shade of an enormous baobob tree and set out to build the hut. *(Hyena draws hut on the paper and decorates it)*. In time it was finished, and it was indeed grand. It was enormously tall and its walls were white and bright and decorated with the most wonderful designs - zigzags, spirals and circles.

Hyena was proud of his new hut and decided to have a feast to show it off. He went around to all the other huts and invited everyone – even Hare. And everyone came and admired Hyena’s hut and then stayed to have a good time – that is, everyone except Hare who didn’t bother to come at all.

Hyena: Hare! Why didn’t you come to my feast and admire my new hut?”

Hare: Grand new hut! Bah! Why should I come to your hut? I could build a better one in half the time. And as for our feast, why should I come to your feast to be bored? I could give a feast that would make everyone forget yours!

Hyena: All right it took me a full moon to build and decorate my hut. You have a half moon. And your feast had better be a good one. As for me, I expect that my winter robe will be made of hare skin. *(Hyena leaves)*.

Hare: *(to self)* You’ve really done it this time, Hare. When will you learn to keep your big mouth shut?

Narrator: And so Hare sat down to think about what on earth he was going to do. Suddenly he jumped up and ran to all of the other huts scattered across the land to ask everyone to come and help him.

Hare: If you come to help me I will give you all two marvelous unheard-of gifts and a wonderful feast when all the work is finished. *(Ask kids to come up and draw another hut)*.

Narrator: In short, Hare managed to get everyone else to do all the work. While everyone else was working, he searched around and found a hollow log and a couple of sticks. And then he spent the entire half moon fiddling around with his log and sticks. At the end of the half moon,

Hyena came back, smiling and sharpening his skinning knife. Hare showed him the new hut. There it was, looking very much like Hyena's.

Hyena: And just how is this better than my hut? (*demanding Hyena, smiling even more and testing the blade of his knife*).

Hare: What are you, blind as well as stupid? Just look around, and you'll see.

Narrator: And there arrayed around Hare's hut were the huts of all the people, arranged in a circle, all facing east, to the rising sun. And there were all the people, going about their business, laughing and talking and helping each other.

Hare: My hut is better than yours because it was built by everyone, and everyone lives near it, where I can have my fun with them.

Narrator: The people, who heard all of this, looked around and realized that it really is sweet to live together, sharing, helping, and knowing each other. And that was Hare's first gift: the village.

Hyena: Hmmmph! Well...you also promised a feast better than mine.

Narrator: And all the people ran to get the food and drink that they had prepared. And because no one had to do it all, each could contribute what he or she cooked the best, so the feast had everyone's favorite foods. And that made everyone happy, which of course, let the storytellers relax and tell their best stories. In time, just before anyone asked about Hare's second gift, he came out of his new hut dragging his hollow log and sticks.

Hare: So far this has been a pretty good feast, but I want to make it the best feast ever given. And it's also time for my second gift. Be quiet and listen.

Narrator: With that, Hare picked up his sticks and began to tap on the log with them. (*drumming begins*). At first he beat out a simple rhythm, and then he warmed to more and more complex rhythms. Soon the people began to twitch with the rhythm and sway and move. Suddenly butterfly jumped up and began to swing her body and move in a circle around the fire, and before long everyone joined her, dancing to the rhythm of the drum Hare had invented and given to them.

Now sometimes people folks argue about all of this. Some say that Hare really gave the people three gifts – the village, the drum, and music – while others claim that the music and the drum are really only one. But you know what I think? I think it hardly matters, though I'm sure Hare enjoys the argument.

“Hare's Gifts,” *Our Seven Principles in Story and Verse*, Ken W. Collier.

Source Three: Wisdom from the World's Religions, Islam
Abu Kassim's Shoes
By Gail Forsyth-Vail
From the forthcoming UUA book, Stories in Faith,
Story Notes

This story, drawn from original Persian and Arabic versions, will leave you and your listener laughing as the troubles of a miserly merchant pile up. It is a preposterous tale about the consequences of being self-centered and tight-fisted. It invites us to consider the ways that we fail to be generous with loved ones and with the world at large. As we laugh at Abu Kassim and his troubles, we are gently prodded to consider our own fondness for material goods.

The story starts and ends with Abu Kassim's shoes, which symbolize his stinginess. When telling the tale, linger over the shoes, describing their patches and emphasizing how "heavy" the shoes are. Use a heavy, deep tone of voice when you mention the shoes and allow your shoulders to sag and your body language to suggest being weighted down. Encourage listeners to help you tell the story by acting out the weighted down posture each time the shoes are mentioned.

Abu Kassim's Shoes is a cautionary tale, one that warns us against a particular kind of behavior. There is nothing subtle about this tale! Children and adults alike will delight in imagining the absurd scenes as the tale unfolds, and will easily grasp the message that comes at the conclusion as Abu Kassim is transformed by his experience and learns to engage in the world as a generous and responsible person.

Story: Abu Kassim's Shoes

Once there was a merchant who was known throughout Baghdad. He was a clever merchant, perhaps the richest in the city, but he was known everywhere for being a mean old miser. He never gave even one penny away, and his family lived in a house with no furniture and had only the poorest of clothing.

Abu Kassim's stinginess showed in the way he dressed. He wore a tattered and patched old robe and a headscarf that was so faded that no one could tell its original color. He was known most of all for his worn, patched shoes. He had had them for twenty years, seeing no need ever to replace them when they wore out. He simply had the cobblers patch them, until the shoes were just a mass of patches sewed on top of patches, and so heavy with all the extra leather that he could barely pick up his feet when he walked. When people heard his shuffling step, they said: "There goes Abu Kassim and his big heavy shoes. A tighter-fisted man we have never known!"

Now it came to pass one day that he had made an unusually good bargain. He had purchased some lovely jars at a very good price and some nice perfume to fill them. Leaving the jars on his windowsill, he went off to celebrate by having a massage and a warm soak at the public bath.

When Abu Kassim came out of his bath, refreshed, he was amazed to find a brand new pair of soft leather shoes in the place where his had been. Thinking that someone had made him a present, and muttering to himself about the stroke of luck that got him out of buying new shoes, he slipped on the brand new pair and strode off down the road.

It was not long after that that the chief judge of the town came out of the bath and looked for his brand new shoes. Instead, he found in the corner some tattered and patched, stinking and fuming old shoes. He knew instantly who had taken his brand new shoes, and ordered that Abu Kassim be arrested and brought to court.

“Abu Kassim!” shouted the angry judge. “You stole my shoes and now you must pay a fine of five-hundred dinars or go to jail.”

No matter how much Abu Kassim tried to explain that it was all a mistake, the judge would not listen. Abu Kassim left the court five hundred dinars poorer, carrying his heavy, tattered shoes by the laces.

On the way home from court, Abu Kassim threw the shoes into the Tigris River. It wasn't long after that when some fishermen downstream pulled on their net, thinking that they had an extraordinarily big fish. When the net finally surfaced, they saw that it held Abu Kassim's famous shoes. The nails from the shoes had ripped holes in the net that would require a full day to repair. Angrily, they took the shoes and threw them through Abu Kassim's window, smashing all his little jars of expensive perfume. As Abu Kassim looked at the shoes sitting in the middle of a mess of broken glass and perfume, he resolved to get rid of them somehow.

He went outside to dig a hole and bury them. Now in the town of Baghdad, it was against the law to bury treasure. A neighbor who had never been fond of the tight-fisted man who lived next door reported to the authorities that Abu Kassim had buried treasure. The merchant found himself back before the same angry judge! “Fifty-thousand dinars fine this time!! You will not break the law, you stingy old miser!”

On the way home from court, Abu Kassim cursed the heavy old shoes and threw them into an open sewage channel that took away the town's wastewater. “You belong with the sewage,” he said to his shoes, flinging them away.

The shoes floated down the sewer pipes, from the larger pipes to the smaller, narrower ones. Eventually, they came to a stop, blocking the sewer pipe completely. The pipe filled with sewage, and then it backed up into the streets, and into people's homes. When the workmen came to fix the problem, guess what they found? Abu Kassim's shoes blocking the pipe. Back to court he went. “You and your shoes have damaged the whole town. I order you to pay five-hundred thousand dinars for the clean-up work!” Abu Kassim had to pay, but it took almost all the money that he had hoarded for all of his working life to do so.

Abu Kassim, desperate, decided to burn his shoes. He set them outside on the second floor porch to dry out so he could burn them. It wasn't long before a puppy came and started to play with them, dropping one onto the head of a passing woman and knocking her to the pavement.

“Enough,” said Abu Kassim when the woman's husband had hauled him back before the judge.

“You may have everything I own! But please,” he said to the judge, “Please write an order that allows me to disown any responsibility for what my shoes might do from now on.” Trying hard not to smile, the judge agreed.

Abu Kassim was a different man after that. He paid attention to others, giving to the poor and helping his neighbors. He took proper care of his family's needs. And when his shoes wore out, he did not fail to buy himself a new pair!

Meaning and Wisdom for Unitarian Universalists

Finding a sense of calling

This story calls us to share what we have and to engage with our families, our neighbors, and the world. Abu Kassim, weighted down by the impossibly patched old shoes, unable to keep himself and the shoes from damaging everything they touch, calls us to a renewed examination of our own behavior. Where in our lives might we be more generous and more engaged?

Opening to new revelation

Abu Kassim reminds us that money is for spending. It is not an end in itself, but is rather a means of creating and sustaining that which we value – our families, our communities, and our own lives. The merchant was seduced by money and was unable to part with it for even the most basic of items, a pair of shoes. His old shoes, symbol of his stinginess, are impossibly heavy. The shoes and his stinginess make it impossible for him to interact with his neighbors, his family, and the world. This story leads us to ask what it is that is weighing us down and preventing us from engaging more fully and more generously with the world around us? What damage is being done as a result? How can we “renounce” that which weighs us down and invite a renewed spirit of generosity and engagement into our lives?

Finding wisdom and awe through our Sources and Principles

The wisdom contained in this story is wisdom from the Islamic tradition. The other “character” in the story, the one that suffers damage from his lack of generosity and engagement is the community at large. The shoes certainly afflict Abu Kassim, but the primary victims of those shoes and of Abu Kassim’s stinginess are members of the community – his family, his neighbors, the fisherman, and ultimately the entire town. Abu Kassim is slow to learn that what is necessary in order to stop the ever-increasing damage is that he renounce his shoes and his tight-fistedness. The wisdom that we take from this tale is wisdom that Abu Kassim learned at a very high price. When we are weighted down with self-centered behavior, not engaged with our families, communities and the world, we suffer.

Connecting with our Lives

In our faith community

This story begs for dramatization. Help children make Abu Kassim’s “shoes” by adding patches and other “weights” to an old pair of shoes. Assign roles as members of Kassim’s community: neighbors, court observers and judges, fishermen, merchants at the bazaar, and so on. Perform the story; encourage children to invent more adventures for Abu Kassim and his shoes to add to the drama. Musical people could write a ballad telling the story of the shoes to accompany the play.

Use the story at the start of the congregation’s stewardship drive, as a way to address generosity. Point out that Abu Kassim’s wrongdoing was in not taking part in the community. He hoarded money and did not take care of those things that he was responsible for and to – his family, his relationships with neighbors, and the well-being of those who were less fortunate. Invite children to consider what they are responsible for and to and to name those things. Make a large poster that lists all of the ways that children contribute to the wider world and are generous in spirit. Some examples may include social justice work, environmental stewardship, and service projects

Emphasize the heaviness of Abu Kassim’s shoes and his self-centeredness. Who is hurt by the shoes? Other people and the community itself are the ones who are hurt. It is when the community demands retribution through fines that Abu Kassim suffers as well. Invite children to invent stories in a similar vein about who is hurt by another’s stinginess. Record those stories on tape or act them out. Invented stories will allow children to share their own experiences in a non-threatening way. Following the invented stories, ask children how their stories would change if the people involved had been generous.

In our homes

Have a good laugh over this story. Fully imagine all of the scenes in the story and all of the ways in which Abu Kassim's shoes get him into trouble. As a family, have a symbolic ceremony and discard your old shoes, inviting each person to name a way in which they will be more generous as they discard each old pair of shoes.

Talk with your family about the "weight" of Abu Kassim's shoes. Whom did the shoes hurt most? Who is hurt when we are stingy? Talk about the ways in which stinginess hurt both Abu Kassim and those in the community around him. Share with your family your own financial and volunteer commitments and the reasons why you make those commitments. To whom do you donate money and/or time and why? Which causes, organizations, or communities claim the largest portion of your gifts and why?

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Other Resources:

- ☺ *On the Other Side of the River*, Joanne Oppenheim.
- ☺ "The Rolling Coin," *One Hundred Wisdom Stories from Around the World*, Margaret Silf.
- ☺ Indra's Net (Buddhist myth)
- ☺ "Eat My Fine Coat," at <http://www.tolerance.org/storybooks/eat/index.html>