

Celebrating Jewish holidays has never been sillier than in *Chelm, the Village of Fools!*

While the Chelmites try to solve problems—like outsmarting bees to get Rosh Hashanah honey, and keeping menorah candles lit without enough oil—their foolishness causes even more chaos. Enjoy these tall tales, old and new, one for each of ten holidays throughout the Jewish year.



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CHELM for the HOLIDAYS

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INTRODUCTION

A long time ago in the Old Country, there was a tiny Jewish village called Chelm. Many people say that when the angels were distributing silliness throughout the world, their bowl tipped, spilling all the silliness into one town—Chelm. They say that the people of Chelm once sentenced a rebellious fish to death . . . by drowning. Did they really milk their horses so the cows wouldn't feel pressured? And when the man who knocked on people's doors to wake them for morning services grew too old to leave his house, did the foolish people of Chelm really pull their doors off the hinges and bring them to him, so he could knock on their doors without the lengthy walk?

The people of Chelm of course celebrated all the Jewish holidays, from Rosh Hashanah through Shavuot, and then round and round again. But on holidays in Chelm, the foolishness always seemed to get in the way . . .



THE HONEYBEES OF CHELM

A Rosh Hashanah Story

Rosh Hashanah was coming, but for some reason, this year there was no honey in the marketplace in the village of Chelm. What would the people of Chelm do? How could they bake their honey cakes? How could they dip their apples in honey?

How will we celebrate Rosh Hashanah without honey? thought Schlemiel. He was the most useless man in the village. He liked to lie on his back and nap all day long, but even he knew something needed to be done about the honey.

Schlemiel had a wife, Mrs. Schlemiel, and a baby, Little Schlemiel. Mrs. Schlemiel was always yelling at Schlemiel for being useless. But now her lip quivered. “No honey for Rosh Hashanah! The baby’s

first New Year and not a drop of honey.”

Schlemiel shuffled his feet. *The New Year was much like the old year*, he mused. The old year had ended with Mrs. Schlemiel yelling at him, and it seemed the New Year was starting the same way.

“I remembered to buy honey in the market last Rosh Hashanah. And I remember what happened. I traipsed all the way to market and back, in the burning sunshine, and I bought a big jar of honey. But the truth is . . .” Schlemiel cleared his throat. “. . . after all that work, I thought a tiny taste wouldn’t hurt. So I stuck in my finger and tried just a drop. Then I tried a bit more. And a bit more. It was so good! Then I resolved to stop, and I had a drink of water since the honey was so sticky. But after my drink, all the honey taste was gone. So I had to try just a nibble more. And after that taste—what could you guess?—I needed more water. Well, after a while, all the honey was gone!”

But this year there was no honey to be had in the market. Schlemiel paced the house. Even if there was no honey in the marketplace, surely he could find honey somewhere else. He stopped so suddenly that he tripped over his feet and nearly went sprawling. The pasture south of town!

It was a beautiful meadow, filled with succulent blossoms and, of course, bees. And the bees made honey, didn't they? But how to collect it without being stung?

"I will disguise myself as a flower," Schlemiel decided. "Bees like flowers so much they would never sting one." Schlemiel hurried into the bedroom and pulled the yellow-flowered quilt off the bed. With a flourish, he draped it around himself. The back dragged in the dirt, but from the front, he fancied that he looked quite colorful. A handful of Mrs. Schlemiel's daisies, plucked from the garden and stuffed into his scraggly gray beard, completed his disguise. Thus prepared, he picked up his empty honey jar and scoop and went out.

When the villagers saw him, they mumbled and whispered. What was Schlemiel doing? "Have you gone crazy?" asked Ehud the Baker.

"No. He's bringing flowers to his wife but carrying them in his beard," Grandma Faina cackled.

"I'm hunting for honey," Schlemiel explained. "The bees will think I'm a flower, so they will let me take their honey and will not sting me."

"Dressed like that?" Avram hooted, chewing on an apple. "All you'll get is dirt. Some hunter!"

Children ran behind Schlemiel giggling and shouting. Adults stuck their heads out the windows, attracted by the commotion. By this time, quite a crowd was following Schlemiel as he trooped to the bee pasture. The pasture was beautiful, with autumn flowers blushing pink and orange against the grass. The bees were buzzing in fuzzy yellow spirals.

“Ignore him, bees. He’s just a flower,” called little Tzipporah. Soon everyone took up the cry. Schlemiel clutched his honey scoop and jar.

Bees zipped around him in confused circles. Who was this giant creature invading their hive? Schlemiel’s face burned red and hot from the sun, so much so that the bees couldn’t fail to spot it. One of the boldest flew at him, aiming straight for his bulbous, sunburned nose.

With a shriek, Schlemiel swatted the bee away. Too late! His nose bulged to twice its normal size, throbbing with a painful bee sting. Schlemiel turned around and dashed for home with the entire angry swarm of bees behind him.

It was a hilarious sight. Schlemiel raced through the fields, pudgy arms pumping, flushed face sweating, red nose throbbing. His beard blew in his face, nearly masking the swollen nose and covering his

eyes. Daisies from his beard scattered in all directions. Mrs. Schlemiel's yellow-flowered bedspread flapped behind him like a bedraggled cape. Following him came the swarm of bees, all intent on puncturing his backside. How he ran! How they flew!

At last, Schlemiel reached his house, flung open the door, and raced inside. He slammed the door before any of the bees could reach him.

Later that day, Schlemiel sat slumped in his favorite chair. His wife continued to wail about the lack of honey.

"Oh, the baby's first Rosh Hashanah. Ruined, ruined!" Her sobs pulsed in time with Schlemiel's aching nose until he was ready to cry himself. And still no honey for the holiday. At last, Mrs. Schlemiel slammed the bedroom door and left him with a cool cloth on his swollen nose.

Suddenly, there was a knock at Schlemiel's door. Very cautiously, he opened it a tiny crack. Bees had never knocked politely on his door before, but there was a first time for everything.

It wasn't the bees. It was his neighbors. Ehud held out a large jar. "It's honey," he said. "And you certainly earned it. L'shana tova."

“Where did you get honey?” Schlemiel protested. “Don’t you need it to make your own honey cakes?”

“Oh, it’s not our honey, it’s yours,” Ehud said, beaming. “After you led all the bees away from the hive, we gathered all the honey. This was a great idea, Schlemiel! Maybe next year you can do it again and we’ll all have honey for Rosh Hashanah!”

Schlemiel stood there in his tattered bedspread, covered in dirt and sweat. He’d lost one of his shoes in a mud puddle. A few drooping daisies hung from his tangled beard. The bee sting on his nose throbbed achingly. “I may be a schlemiel,” he said. “But even I know this is no job for me!”

He thanked his neighbors, took the honey, and shut the door.

Even though Schlemiel refused to be the future bee distracter, the people of Chelm weren’t about to discard a good idea. Every year from that day on, one of the villagers donned a colorful quilt and pretended to be a noisy flower until the bees chased him away and the other villagers could collect the honey. Every Rosh Hashanah, Schlemiel could be found hiding under his kitchen table, in an old bathrobe with a protective bucket on his head, awaiting his share of honey.