



Story Guide

For

The Magic Spring

And Other Stories for the
Very Young

Retold by Judy Lubin



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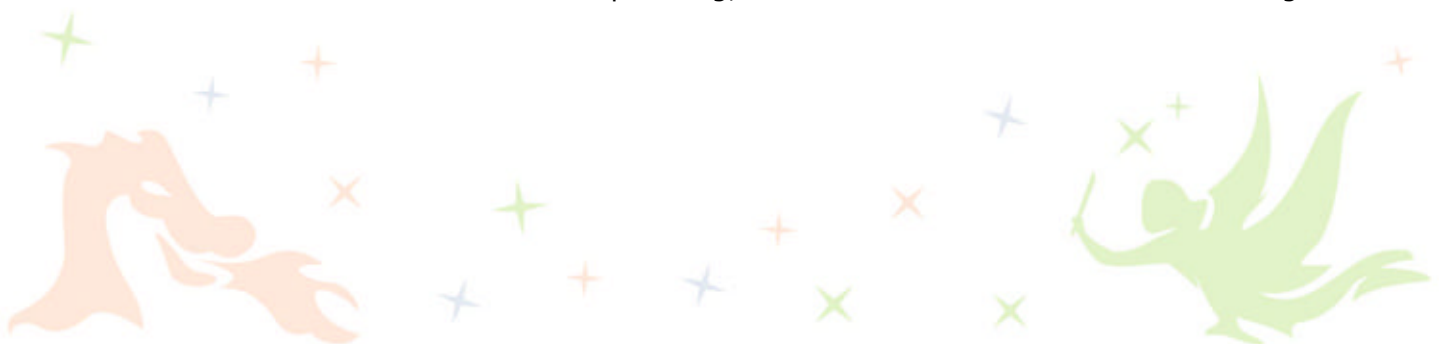
Story Guides are meant to be used by adults, and teens grades 6 and older, to help choose and use stories. They explain the hidden meaning and symbolism that I give to each of the stories when I tell them. The information in this guide is not meant to be shared with children. Children experience stories through their imaginations as a fun, engaging and concrete experience, nothing like the abstract and intellectual approach taken in the Story Guides. Telling children what we expect them to take from a story is akin to giving away the secret of a magic trick. We take away the fun and the magic! And remember, children relate best to stories when they have a chance to process them. Whenever possible, play the stories one at a time with play or quiet time in between.

Folktales are rich with deeper meaning and hidden symbolism. Every story paints a metaphorical picture of the human condition, the problems we face and the journeys we take to bring ourselves to our own "happily ever after". Every telling guides the listener through his or her own emotional and cognitive life and gives a new perspective on who he or she is on the inside.

The best way to experience the deeper levels of a story is to meet the characters on an emotional level, by imagining how it would feel to be each character. In this way, we can see that each story is a journey through the emotions that occur within some aspect of the human condition.

When children listen to stories – especially those that come with no pictures – they naturally imagine themselves as every character. And they naturally allow themselves to feel whatever they imagine the characters would feel. This gives children virtual experiences of the emotional journeys of many common life occurrences before they come to these situations in their own lives.

The stories told on ***The Magic Spring***, although they do contain deeper meaning, are meant to build the skills of inner-picturing, which is the foundational skill for taking an



inner journey, and for later reading comprehension. The stories on this CD are sweet, wholesome and magical. Children will create beautiful pictures in their minds as they listen and will learn that relating a story to themselves can be fun.

The Magic Spring

The Magic Spring is a story from Korea. The comparison of the kind and greedy neighbors gives children two different examples to follow and shows them the consequences of each. The kind old neighbor always takes the time to pay attention to others, and to the beauty of the world. Because of this, he notices the songbird and sees it as something worthy of following. The songbird in this story represents beauty and innocence, but can also represent the hidden songs of our heart – we must pay close attention to hear them. By following the songbird – the songs of his heart – he gains a rebirth and a new start on life. He finds a renewed energy, just as will happen in real life when we pay attention to the presence of a new song in our hearts.

The greedy neighbor, however, does not see the bird on his own. He sees only the results that his neighbor achieves and thinks that he can get those results without working to find his own song. And he shows us that too much of a good thing – especially something he hasn't worked for on his own – turns him into a wailing baby, symbolic of a spoiled child. But even this works out alright because of the potential for transformation. Children love the surprise ending that comes in the form of a baby and offers such a strong message of hope.

Lizard and Coyote

Lizard and Coyote is a tale from the Pueblo people. Its silly characters teach about greed, foolishness and sharing. In Native American stories, Coyote is often much more than a Coyote. He is the trickster spirit that can transform himself into any shape and clearly represents a very gray area in the division between good and evil. He is both a hero and a fool. In this story, however, Coyote is nothing but a foolish animal. The full version of Coyote the Trickster is too mature for young children, who need a clearer line between good and evil, and so should not be exposed to the full identity of Coyote the Trickster.

In this story, foolish Coyote does not seem to understand that sharing does not mean gaining full and sole possession. Lizard does understand this and is willing to sing, and sing again; for songs, like a candle flame, can be shared without any loss to the giver. But Lizard is still an animal, and a reptile at that. Reptiles represent our unreflective, instinctual side. Lizard cannot perform under the pressure of fear, which teaches us the downside of using force to get what we want.

Silly Juan

Silly Juan is a tale from Argentina. Juan's antics are great for building inner picturing skills. Children love imagining the silly situations that Juan gets himself into. In folktales, the princess who has never laughed symbolizes a state in which the higher self is not yet activated – if we cannot stand back and laugh at ourselves, then we are missing the bigger picture. The story tells us that when our mistakes become so bad as to be outrageous, we can't help but learn from them. The story also reminds parents that our children do, indeed, listen to us, so we have to be careful of what we say!

A Present for a Princess

A Present for a Princess is a story from the Middle East. It is told in Palestine, and the basic motif shows up in different contexts in several Jewish folktales. The princes learn the opposite lesson that Coyote learns in Lizard and Coyote. Sometimes sharing does mean sacrifice. This type of sharing is more difficult to do, but brings greater rewards of the heart. Some Rabbis call this "Transformational Sharing" because of the learning and growth that comes of sacrificing your own comfort for the benefit of others.

The general motif of the plotline is one that is found throughout Jewish stories and stories from the Middle East. It is meant to help us think about what aspect of compassion is most important. When the first brother sees the sick princess in his mirror, he metaphorically gives the gift of noticing the problem. This is the first step towards compassion. We must notice the need for healing before we can begin the healing process.

When the second brother takes the trio on his magic carpet, he metaphorically "gets us there" in order to begin the healing. While the brother in the story is physically getting there, we can relate that to emotional arrival. Can we allow ourselves to feel the pain of another in order to initiate an act of compassion? We are emotionally "there" when we feel connected to the person in need and to the problem. So, the second brother represents emotional connection.

The third brother's gift represents the action itself. He gives of himself in a way that represents a sacrifice to himself. In Jewish culture, as in other cultures, there is a belief that "actions speak louder than words". It is, indeed, important to notice another's pain and to allow ourselves to feel that pain and connect to it. But it is all for naught if the noticing and the connection do not lead to action. That is why the third prince's gift is found to be the greatest, even in versions in which the single use of the apple is downplayed or left out. Compassionate action is the culmination of the process

The Four Seasons

The Four Seasons is a story that I have adapted from a Slovakian tale to focus on lessons of inner peace and living in the moment. The original tale was one in which a poor orphan (Marushka) was abused by a cruel stepmother and stepsister. When I gave Marushka some autonomy and allowed her to make her own choice about helping her complaining sister, she took on an almost Zen-like ability to appreciate the moment through inner happiness.

Throughout the story, Marushka pays attention to the world around her. She notices the sound of the snow under her feet and appreciates the food in her basket. Her sister, however, is always thinking about the past – how much snow she has already seen; or the future – the time at which she will finally be done picking berries. The two sisters have the same life on the surface, but Marushka's ability to pay attention to all that she has and to appreciate her world, gives her a beautiful life compared to her sister's miserable life.

But, when life becomes so miserable that we can't ignore it – symbolized by the storm that hits Holena after she complains about the apples – we are forced to pay attention. This is equivalent to the "rock bottom" that some self help groups discuss. The storm acts as a wake-up call for Holena and causes her to notice everything around her, both good and bad. As soon as she does, she comes to appreciate the good life that she always had.

Sweet Porridge

Sweet Porridge is a story from the collection of the Brothers Grimm. In its essence, it is a story that ponders the question: "How much is enough?". One sister worries that she will never have enough, and then ends up with too much. But the younger sister knows that there is always enough to share, and so her pot is always full, but not too full! The original story comes from Grimms; however, it is a fable or parable in Grimms. The Grimms version tells of a mother who acts foolishly and must be saved by her pious daughter. Since fables are best for older children, I have modified the ending to encompass more of a learning experience, and have chosen to make the mother character a sister in order to avoid questions of why a mother would behave in such a manner.

The Blue Coat

The Blue Coat is a Jewish tale that tells of change and renewal in a fun and playful way. It is a great story for the Jewish New Year, because of its theme of renewal. Through this story, we learn how story itself helps to renew our viewpoints and our lives.