



JOHA MAKES A WISH

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Joha, a trickster character popular in Sephardic folklore, has found a magic stick! Unfortunately, this magic stick gets all Joha's wishes wrong. But before long, Joha figures out a way to use this to his advantage – and to hilarious effect.

Stories of tricksters and fools abound in almost every culture. In Ashkenazic tradition, humorous stories are often set in a village called Chelm, where the hapless citizens bumble their way into backward solutions. Sephardic stories, like this one, sometimes star Joha, who at times is conniving but can also be a victim of his own foolishness. Wherever he shows up, the trickster plays a special role. Humor gets at the heart of hidden truths -- it pulls apart assumptions and forces us to look at things differently. Perhaps that's why humor has long been so important to Jewish culture, everywhere in the world.

Jews of European descent are often well-acquainted with the traditions and culture of the Ashkenazic Jews, who settled in Eastern Europe. Sephardic Jews, meanwhile, have ancestors hailing from Spain and the Middle East, and like the Ashkenazim (plural), much of their culture has influenced -- and been influenced by -- their neighbors. Jewish cuisine, music, and folklore often overlap with other ethnicities in the same regions. This particular story originated with Yemeni Jews, but Joha pops up in Arabic stories as well, where he is just as much of a trickster as he is here.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Near the end of the story, the sultan takes the walking stick from Joha. When he does this, should Joha have told him the proper way to use it? What would you have done?

By the time we get to the end of this story, Joha has made many wishes. He ends up with exactly the same things he had before, yet somehow he is happier with them now. Why? Do you think he'll stay this happy?

Does your family have Ashkenazic or Sephardic roots? If you are not sure, talk with family members to learn what countries your ancestors came from. Ask about special traditions that have been passed down through the generations – recipes, stories, ritual objects, or even jokes.