

A child's journey through story

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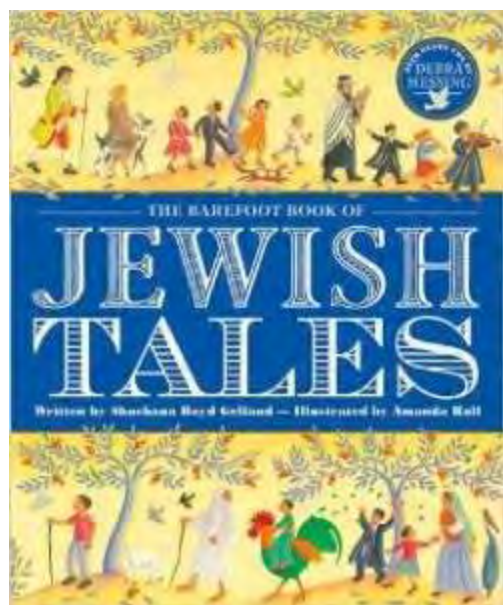
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How do you do *Hoon Dok Hae* with little children? One of the key traditions of the Unification community is the daily habit of beginning each day with all the generations of the family gathering to read & study God's words. And while Father Moon established a routine of studying for at least an hour every day from 5am, I confess that I find it virtually impossible to involve my young children in such a daily act of devotion. I want my children to inherit the *Hoon Dok Hae* tradition, so my wife and I have been scratching our heads trying to figure out a workable solution.

Our current arrangement is simple and we've been able to practise it consistently for some time, although I admit that it is unorthodox.

Once all the children have woken up – which is usually between 7 am and 7:30 am in my household during the current season – I invite them to join me in greeting God and True Parents with a traditional bowing ceremony that we augment with a family group hug. Immediately afterwards I invite the children to sit on the sofa, before eating breakfast, so that I can read to them from the pages of a storybook. This invitation is frequently met with declarations of protest, with some of the children insisting that they don't like sitting to read stories. I only read 2 or 3 pages each day, which can take only 3-5 minutes of time, and conclude the reading with the children left wanting more. It's ironic that despite starting the simple *Hoon Dok Hae* with so much reluctance, the children become really engrossed in the stories and beg me to continue, to which I occasionally concede!



My family has a shelf dedicated to suitable children's literature. One of the books we've nearly completed is a real gem: *The Barefoot Book of Jewish Tales*. It is a collection of 8 gorgeously illustrated and beautifully told fairytales. Each tale comes from a twentieth century source, so these Jewish tales are not strictly biblical. They do, however, capture the rich essence of Jewish spirituality in a captivating fashion. I love how each story hooks each child. And their value is not lost on children; I enjoy the stories thoroughly. I included one of the stories from this book in my most recent sermon and could see the interest on the faces of the members of the congregation as they listened. Another thing I like about the stories in this publication is the recognition of other layers of interpretation or extrapolation, which can yield far more ethical lessons than a child could possibly recognise.

Alas, with children, repetition is so important for learning. All living things tend to learn by imitation and the more times a good behaviour is modelled, the more likely it is to sink in. My hope is that when we return to reading the tales of this book in the future, the stories will become embedded even more deeply into the emotional identity of each of my children. But I also hope that with their wider perspectives about community and relationships, they might begin to associate symbolism within the stories to real life situations around them.

My wife has various books similar to this for the purpose of reading with the children every day. Many of them are collections of stories from other faith traditions; learning about these beautiful religions is deeply enlightening. I concede, however, that I'm not reading True Father's words with my children, but I could complain that few suitably written texts, if not none, exist that deliver True Father's words in a format palatable to my young children. Father Moon's autobiography, *As A Peace-Loving Global Citizen* comes close to this specification, perhaps for older children, but there is scarcely anything else suitable. My wife and I feel compelled to develop and create our own study materials for children, and what this book of Jewish Tales convinces me is the power of story to

communicate powerfully. Jesus taught with parables and stories; True Father used signs and symbolism to teach Divine Principle. This method of education works because human beings like a good story. Those stories say something about our identity and who we profess to be. When (not if!) my wife and I write literature for children to do *Hoon Dok Hae* based on True Father's words, I imagine the genre of story will be employed frequently.

Image Credits

<http://www.northamptontownshiplibrary.org/children-and-teens/storytimes/>

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Barefoot-Book-Jewish-Tales/dp/1846868831>