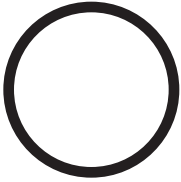


A Tu B'Shevat story

A very, very long time ago in the land of Israel there was a man named Honi HaM'agel. Honi HaM'agel, which means Honi the circle maker, was a really unusual person.

Honi used to do some unusual things that people in Israel thought were pretty cool.



For example, Honi would draw a big circle in the dirt floor where he was praying. He would jump inside the circle before he began singing prayers and he wouldn't leave until he was totally done!

Why?

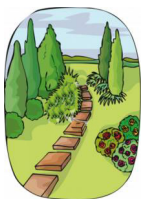
No one really knows for sure, maybe it was just Honi trying to be cool--but Honi loved to pray and many people think that this helped Honi concentrate on the words that he was saying.

Whatever the reason for the circle, people began calling Honi, Honi HaM'agel.

Honi became famous in Israel because he was a great teacher—and in a land full of great teachers, to be known as a great teacher meant he must have really been special. His students loved to listen to his teachings and after Honi died, they would tell stories about their cool circle maker so that they could teach their students too.

Sometimes the stories were true, sometimes they weren't—but it didn't really matter because each story taught a great lesson.

Here is one of those stories:



One day Honi was walking down a dirt road in the north of Israel. The sun was out and it was just beginning to get warm outside—Spring was just beginning. As Honi walked he was having a fierce debate in his head about a legal argument he was going to make with his students when he arrived at the *Beit Midrash*—his school. His head was bobbing and his arms were flailing in the air as he debated with himself. He must have been a sight to see!

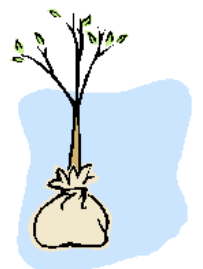


Honi was concentrating so much on the class he was going to teach that he almost didn't see a man on the side of the road with a big shovel and a mound of dirt.



The man accidentally dropped his shovel and the noise caught Honi's attention.

Honi looked over at the man and saw that he was very old—as old as Honi's great-grandfather—and he had a small sapling in his hand that he was about to place into the earth.



Honi walked over to pick up the shovel and help the frail old man.

Honi was puzzled.

"*Shalom*, sir, may I ask you a question?"

The old man who was kneeling next to the hole that he just dug nodded.

"What are you doing? Why are you planting that small tree? How long before it will even give you fruit that you can eat?"

The old man slowly stood up and brushed the dirt off his clothes. He took the shovel out of Honi's hand and said in a frail, but very strong voice:



"This, my friend, is a carob tree. It will take seventy years before it will bare fruit."

Honi became even more puzzled. Standing before him was a man who was very VERY old!

He asked: "Seventy years is a long time—are you sure you will be here to eat the fruit from this tree?"

The old man smiled and almost chuckled to himself.

He said: "You see, when I was a young boy I found a carob tree. It was planted for me by my grandfather—he never got to eat that fruit, but he made sure that I could. Today, I plant this tree for my grandchildren so that they will be able to eat the fruit from the tree."

Honi nodded and smiled at the old man. He picked up the books that he was carrying and continued on his way to the *Beit Midrash*.

Soon, however, Honi became very tired. So tired that he decided he needed to lay down and take a nap!

Honi found a great spot in the shade that had nice high grass and comfy leaves for a pillow. As Honi laid his head down on his grass and leaf bed, he looked out and could see the old man finishing planting the sapling carob tree. He tried to keep his eyes open and watch the old man, but with the birds chirping and the warm breeze blowing, Honi quickly feel asleep.

Honi slept

And slept

AND SLEPT

Honi slept so long that soon day became night, weeks became months, and even the months soon became years.

Honi HaM'agel didn't know it, but he had slept for 70 years!



You can imagine how stiff Honi was when he woke up after sleeping for so long. As he stretched and stretched he looked around.

He saw a boy standing near the road with a basket.

After a few minutes of twisting and cracking, Honi managed to get to his feet and shuffle over to the boy.

Honi asked:

"Who planted this tree?"

"My great-grandfather," said the boy

"Wow!" Honi thought, "I slept for 70 years!"

It was then, that Honi saw the final chapter in the conversation that he had with the old man so many years ago. He saw how important it was for each generation to plant trees to take care of the next generation. Each generation needed to prepare for the next.

Honi looked around for his books and found them near by. They were tattered, but still readable. He brushed them off and headed towards the *Beit Midrash*. As he walked he continued the debate in his head that he started so many years ago and contemplated the lesson he learned from the old man. He wondered if he would find any of his students still at the school—he couldn't wait to teach this new lesson!

What do you think the lesson was that Honi HaM'agel was taught by the old man?

This story is based on a story found in the *Talmud*, the section of *Ta'anit*, page 23

