

Yonatan and Little Grandpa יונתן וסבאקטן

By Rivka Elitsur

Translated (& slightly abridged) by Rahel Halabe

Yonatan lived in an ancient big house with his mother and father and an old grandfather.

There were large rooms in this ancient home, and old squeaky doors. Yonatan used to run from room to room, opening doors and forgetting to close them. And the old doors used to angrily squeek, co-o-o-old... ba-a-a-ad... but Yonatan wasn't cold, he was fine.

He was a happy, active child who loved to run around the house and the garden.

The garden too, was ancient. It had tall heavy trunked trees. Yonatan loved to climb them high. The birds in their nests were not scared of Yonatan. They knew that Yonatan loved the birds and will cause their little fledglings no harm.

One day Yonatan climbed a tall tree and found himself a comfortable spot to sit among its branches. He perched there and looked down at the garden. On the bench under the tree sat his grandfather. Grandpa leaned with his two hands on his stick. The sun warmed his bent back. His head lay on his arms. He was dozing.

'Grandpa is asleep', thought Yonatan, 'asleep, asleep. Grandpa is bored and I am bored... too bad... too bad grandpa is not sitting up here among the branches. Too bad he cannot run and jump and play. Poor grandpa... It would have been great if we could be friends!'

Yonatan laughed at himself. How could this be?! How could it be that Grandpa will be like a little boy, happy, quick, and active. It cannot be. But... too bad!

Suddenly Yonatan heard a snore. He looked and saw on the branch close to him, an owl. Her big eyes were closed. She was breathing heavily and was deep asleep.

"Hi, Mrs. Owl!" called Yonatan.

"What? Who? Why?" Asked the owl startled and opened her eyes.

"Sorry, Mrs. Owl", said Yonatan, "Don't you think it's better to sleep at night and stay awake during the day? Look at the beautiful day. The sun is shining, the garden is in bloom".

"How dare you", called the owl and blinked, "waking me in the middle of the day. I hardly finished half a dream. The sun is shining, all is full of light. That's the time to sleep and snore!" So she said, and closed her eyes again.

"Please, please Mrs. Owl", asked Yonatan, "Just a little. Wake up just for just a little while and play with me. Look, I don't have a friend. I am alone! Who can I talk to. Who can I play with?"

The owl opened one eye, turned it around, looked at the garden and said, “With Grandpa”, and closed her eyes again.

“With Grandpa? But he is asleep”, said Yonatan. “And besides, it is impossible. He is old. He has no energy. He cannot run. He hardly walks. How can I play with him?”

“It’s because of the rocks”, said the owl. “Go, throw away the rocks that he has on his back.

“What? Throw away the rocks? What rocks?” asked Yonatan.

“O.K. O.K. one moment”, grumbled the owl and sighed, “They won’t let you sleep in this garden... I forgot you cannot see well”.

“I cannot see well?” wondered Yonatan.

“Yes...Yes.... Just a minute... Just a minute...” And the owl rose, flew towards Yonatan and waved her wings against his eyes like a fan. It seemed to Yonatan as if she removed something from his eyes, as if there was some very thin curtain, thin threads which suddenly disappeared. Yonatan saw everything so well now. Yes, he saw things that he had not seen before. Suddenly everything was brighter, clearer. On the tree leaves he saw tiny little insects running around. On the small branches he saw dew drops sparkling like gems.

“Look at your Grandpa now”, said the owl in a tired voice, one of her eyes already closed.

Yonatan looked down at his sleeping Grandpa.

“Yes, I swear, really, rocks!” Yonatan called with great amazement. There lay a pile of rocks on Grandpa’s back.

“Who put these heavy rocks on Grandpa’s back?” asked Yonatan.

The tired owl opened an eye and whispered: “One every year. Every year a rock is added to the pile on his back. One after another, one year after another. That’s it... Now there is a whole pile... Yes. That’s how it is... Now it’s time to drowse, it’s my time to sleep.”

And she stood back in her first spot inhaling and exhaling and ready to sleep.

“Poor grandpa”, said Yonatan, “What a heavy load!”

He jumped and climbed quickly down the tree. He ran towards Grandpa, grasped one rock and threw it to the ground. Then he threw away another rock and another rock, one more and one more. Yonatan threw all the rock from Grandpa’s back.

Grandpa sighed a big sigh as if he woke up from a deep sleep. He covered his face with his two hands, rubbed his eyes and suddenly raised his back, sat straight and removed his hands from his eyes.

Yonatan looked at Grandpa and could not believe his eyes. Who is this? Who is sitting here on the bench? This is not Grandpa! No! This is a little boy! nice and curly boy. His face is smooth and handsome and his big eyes looking at Yonatan, as if he does not know him.

The boy closed his eyes, rubbed them again and looked again at Yonatan.
“Who are you?” asked the boy.

“I am Yonatan, and you.... “Yonatan wanted to say: ‘and you are my Grandpa’, but he kept still. How could he say to a little boy, ‘You are my grandpa’!? He kept silent for a moment and then said: “And you... were asleep... and now you woke up”.

“Yes”, said the boy. “I was really deep asleep. I was hot, and I was tired because of work”.

“What work?” asked Yonatan.

“I helped Dad hoe around the sapling we planted. right here.”

And the boy, Little Grandpa, stood suddenly and looked around astonished.

“What’s this? We planted the sapling here... where is it?”

He looked at the big wide tree, lifted his eyes high, high and saw the tall branches and the top.

“Wait a minute.... Maybe it wasn’t here?”

He looked around and around. “Where is the hole? Where is the sapling? and the hoe? And the watering can? Dad told me to put them in the tool shed”.

Little Grandpa looked at Yonatan with surprised, questioning eyes.

“It’s O.K. It’s not important”, said Yonatan. “Come now. Let’s play. Let’s climb this tall tree!”

But Little Grandpa stood there and looked at the tall tree, looked and looked.

“Let’s see who gets up there first!” called Yonatan and started climbing the tree quickly.

“Me too!” called Littlegrandpa and rushed to climb after Yonatan. Both were agile, but Yonatan arrived first, because he knew well all the branches that one could hold to. The two of them sat on Yonatan’s branch happy and laughing.

They heard the owl snoring. “Oh, here is our owl” said Littlegrandpa, “Such luck!, I saved her from the fire. She slept on the roof of the shed in the yard, and did not feel the fire... When all was full of smoke, the poor bird could not fly... I climbed on a ladder and brought her down. She was burnt, poor thing”.

The owl heard Littlegrandpa's words. "Yes, I heard the story", she said to herself, "in my childhood I heard them telling this about my great grandmother of blessed memory".

"Do you want to see my kids?" Asked Little Grandpa.

"Let's run to the goats shed. I have two little kids there. My father gave them to me the day they were born. One is as white as snow, and one is black with white spots".

Little Grandpa climbed down the tree and Yonatan followed him.

'What's going to happen?' thought Yonatan when he ran after little Grandpa, 'What 's going to happen?. There are no goats and no kids all over the garden...'

And indeed little Grandpa stood and looked surprised all around.

"Where is the goats' shed? Where are the goats?"

Green grass covered the whole area.

"What's this? When did they take the goats shed apart? Where are my kids? Maybe the shepherd took them to the field and they did not tell me. Come, Yonatan, let's run and ask Dad".

Little Grandpa ran to the house and Yonatan ran after him.

"Dad!" called Little Grandpa and rushed into the house. "Dad, where are you, Dad?"

Suddenly he stood and looked around him with startled eyes.

"What's that? Is this my house? ... Yes... Here are the doors, the windows. This is the big cupboard... but who hang this curtain on the window, and this table cloth... is it ours? And this rug, I don't know it..."

Little Grandpa stood, looked around and could not understand. Suddenly he smiled: "Ah! I smell a good smell of a cake. Mom is baking a cake in the oven. Do you smell it, Yonatan?"

Yonatan too smelled the good smell of a cake. His mother was baking a cake for Shabbat.

"Let's run to Mom in the Kitchen. Maybe she will give us a piece" said Little Grandpa.

"No... We shouldn't..." tried Yonatan to stop him, but Little Grandpa already ran to the Kitchen and Yonatan followed him..

At the door Little Grandpa Stopped and looked startled at Yonatan's Mom, who stood there facing the hot oven.

“Mom”, whispered Little Grandpa to himself, “Where is my Mom?” He ran from one room to another all around the big house, calling: “Mom! Dad!” He went out running to the garden, ran in all directions, “Dad! Mom!” he called, “Dad! Mom!”

“Wait, wait!” called Yonatan and ran after him, “Let me explain, Let me tell you”.

But Little Grandpa did not listen to him, he ran around and around in the garden, ran back to where the goats shed used to be, encircled the garden few times, stopped, looked, and ran again. Finally he reached the bench under the tree, covered his eyes with his two hands, lowered his head to his chest and burst out crying. He cried and cried and then went silent.

“He fell asleep”, whispered Yonatan to himself.

“It’s not good! Not good!” said the owl from above the tree.

“Right”, said Yonatan nodding, “It’s not good. It didn’t work out”.

Yonatan bent, lifted one of the rocks he had heaved from Grandpa’s back and laid it on his back. Then he put back another rock and another rock, till a big pile of rocks reformed on Little Grandpa’s back.

Yonatan returned and climbed the tree. He sat up there sad and regretful and closed his eyes.

He heard the sound of the owl, snoring and breathin: “hm-ha, hm-ha.” He heard the snore of Little Grandpa who was sleeping deeply too. Then he himself fell asleep.

“Yonatan! Yonatan! Here you are, little devil! Come down. You might fall!”
Yonatan woke up and opened his eyes. There he saw Grandpa, his good old Grandpa, the usual every day Grandpa, standing down below, his stick in his hand and he is waving with it and threatening Yonatan.

“Come down, you little devil. Did you hear me?!”

Yonatan looked at his Grandpa with astonished eyes. Yes this is Grandpa... the usual Grandpa..., Grandpa of every day... but where are the rocks? There are no rocks. and the tears and the crying? There are no tears. There is no crying. Actually, Grandpa is happy and laughing.

“I am coming, I am coming!” said Yonatan. He climbed down the tree agilely, ran towards his Grandpa, hugged him and said: “Shalom Grandpa, Shalom. I love you, Grandpa”.

“Shalom! Shalom!” laughed Grandpa. “What happen to you? One would think I came back from far away and you are giving me a welcoming party ... Come, son, I think I smell the good smell of a cake that your Mom has baked. We should go now back into the house”

Yonatan his Grandpa’s hand held tightly, and they both went into the house.

<http://www.magom.com/Honi.html>

(Source of the translation is the Soncino English Talmud)

R. Yohanan said: This righteous man [Honi] was throughout the whole of his life troubled about the meaning of the verse, "A Song of Ascents, When the Lord brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like unto them that dream. (Psalm 126:1)" Is it possible for a man to dream continuously for seventy years?

One day he was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked him, How long does it take [for this tree] to bear fruit? The man replied: Seventy years. He then further asked him: Are you certain that you will live another seventy years? The man replied: I found [ready grown] carob trees in the world; as my forefathers planted these for me so I too plant these for my children.

Honi sat down to have a meal and sleep overcame him. As he slept a rocky formation enclosed him which hid him from sight and he continued to sleep for seventy years. When he awoke he saw a man gathering the fruit of the carob tree and he asked him, Are you the man who planted this tree? The man replied: I am his grandson. Thereupon he exclaimed: It is clear that I slept for seventy years. He then caught sight of his ass who had given birth to several generations of mules and he returned home. He there inquired, Is the son of Honi the Circle-Drawer still alive? The people answered him, His son is no more, but his grandson is still living. Thereupon he said to them: I am Honi the Circle Drawer but no one would believe him. He then repaired to the Beit Hamidrash and there he overheard the scholars say, The law is as clear to us as in the days of Honi the Circle Drawer for whenever he came to the Beit Hamidrash he would settle for the scholars any difficulty that they had. Whereupon he called out, I am he. But the scholars would not believe him nor did they give him the honor due to him. This hurt him greatly and he prayed [for death] and he died. Raba said: Hence the saying, Either companionship or death. **(B. Taanit 23a)**