

Latkes and Applesauce

by Fran Manushkin

Do you like to eat latkes and applesauce on Hanukkah? Of course you do. Who but a fool would say no to such a question! Well, here is a story about latkes and applesauce, and perhaps a miracle. Maybe yes, maybe no.

It happened long ago in a village far away, where there lived a little family named Menashe. Papa and Mama Menashe were tailors who had two children, Rebecca and Ezra.

Rebecca and Ezra were wonderful children who helped their mama and papa. Every year when it came time to celebrate Hanukkah, they dug up potatoes to make the latkes, and they picked the apples for applesauce.

But one year, winter came suddenly and snow began to fall – not just a lazy flake or two or little bit of a flurry. No! This was a tremendous blizzard – as if all heaven’s featherbeds had burst!

And when did this furious blizzard begin? Of course – on the first night of Hanukkah!

“Come, sunset is upon us,” Papa called to his family. “It’s time to light the candles and celebrate the Hanukkah miracle.” So Papa sang the blessings and Mama lit the shammes, and Rebecca lit the first candle.

“Ah!” they sighed together at the beautiful light. Then Papa set the Hanukkah menorah in the window so all could see its glory.

“Now,” declared Papa, “for the next eight days we shall celebrate the miracle of Hanukkah with feasting and gladness. Bring on the latkes and applesauce!”

“Papa,” said Mama, “the blizzard has swallowed our feast. All of the potatoes are buried in the snow, and as for apples, this year we had so few.”

“No latkes?” gasped Papa, and his bright eyes dimmed. “Ah well, then let us sip our soup.”

So, sitting as closely as birds in a nest, Mama and Papa and Rebecca and Ezra sipped their soup together. Then they sang a joyful Hanukkah song with the wind whistling along through the walls.

“Sssh!” said Rebecca, suddenly. “I hear someone crying.” Soon they all heard it – a mewing and crying – as if all the sad spirits in the world were set loose! Rebecca opened the door a crack, and in walked a wet orange kitten!

“*Mew, mew, mew!*” the kitten cried.

Rebecca quickly patted her dry with a rag. “Papa,” said Rebecca, “the kitten must have seen our candles!”

Mama filled a tiny dish with milk. After the kitten lapped it up, she purred, falling asleep in Rebecca’s lap.

“Now, Rebecca,” said Papa firmly, “we must return this kitten to her mother.”

Rebecca shook her head. “Papa, this kitten hasn’t got a mother. No mother would let her kitten wander along in a storm!”

“Yes,” agreed Ezra. “That is why the kitten was crying. And since you said we mustn’t be sad on Hanukkah, I think we should keep this kitten.”

“Sad? A cat?” Papa pulled at his beard.

“A cat is one of God’s creatures,” declared Mama. “Of course we will care for her.”

Rebecca leaped up and hugged her mother. “Mama, what shall we call her?”

“A name should fit as well as a glove,” said Papa. “Take care to name her well.”

“I will,” Rebecca promised, “but right now I want to play dreidel.”

The little kitten spun the dreidel so well, she won two nuts and a raisin! And when the candles flickered out, everyone went to bed.

On the second night of Hanukkah, the snow came down even harder! Again Mama lit the candles, and Papa placed the Hanukkah menorah in the window, and again the family sat down to their soup.

“I’m not complaining,” Papa said to Mama. “I like soup as much as you, but I’d love to wrap my mouth around a latke!”

“Miracles have happened before,” answered Mama. “Remember, two thousand years ago – “

“*Shush!*” interrupted Papa. “Did you hear that noise?” It was a shrill bark – right outside the door. Ezra leaped up and opened the door a crack – and in walked a skinny brown dog.

"This dog looks hungry as a bear!" said Ezra. He scooped the last drumstick from his soup, and the dog quickly gobbled it up.

"Ezra," praised Papa, "you are a generous boy. But you know we cannot keep this dog. We have hardly enough to feed ourselves!"

"But Papa," said Rebecca. "This dog is *starving*. Haven't you said that we must feast on Hanukkah?"

"Feasting? A dog?" Papa pulled at his beard. "Ah well, a dog is one of God's creatures too. Let him stay and share what we have."

Ezra leaped up and gave Papa a hug. "I will think of a good name for our dog," Ezra promised. "A name should fit as well as a glove."

That night, the dog played dreidel with the kitten. And when the candles flickered out, everyone went to be.

On the third night of Hanukkah, the snow was still falling. Mama sighed, "Our soup is dwindling like a burning candle. If the snow doesn't stop, we'll surely starve!"

"Now, now," said Papa sagely. "Where there's life, there's hope." On the fourth night, as the snow kept falling, Papa repeated these words. As he did on the fifth night, when bread was all they ate. And on the sixth and seventh, when crumbs were all they had.

On the eighth night, after Mama lit the last candle, Papa said, "I see the sky is beginning to clear. Let us go out and gaze at the stars. Perhaps they can help us forget our empty stomachs."

So everyone piled on their sweaters and pants and socks. The kitten and the dog already had their own cots, so they rushed out ahead.

The dog leaped around in the moonlit snow. He leaped and ran and sniffed and dug.

"Papa?" asked Ezra. "Why is our dog digging?"

"It is in a dog's nature to dig," said Papa, stepping closer to admire the dog's work.

All of a sudden, Papa gasped. "Oh, what a world of wonders this is! Our dog has dug up potatoes!"

"Potatoes in the snow?" shouted Mama. "It's a miracle!"

"We will have latkes tonight!" shouted Papa.

"*Mew, mew, mew*," came a cry from above. Papa gazed up at the heavens. "The Holy One doesn't mew," said Papa, "so our kitten must have climbed this tree."

"Why is she crying?" Rebecca asked.

Papa answered sagely, "It is in a kitten's nature to climb and cry to come down, and it is in a person's nature to help her." Quickly Papa tucked his sweater into his pants and began climbing up the tree.

After slipping and struggling and huffing and puffing, he reached the highest branch. "Come here, little kitten," Papa called gently, and he tucked her under his sweater.

Then, sitting far out on a limb, Papa called, "Ah, how beautiful is God's creation! From here I can see all the way to Minsk!"

"What can you see?" the children asked.

"Apples, my children! Your papa sees apples, red and round, hiding their glory under the snow!"

"Apples?" gasped Mama. "Apples still on the tree? A miracle is happening here!"

"Apples are *always* a miracle," declared Papa as he joyfully tossed them down.

Quickly, they all rushed back inside their warm house. Mama and Papa peeled the apples and potatoes. And in the oil she had wisely saved just for Hanukkah, Mama fried so many latkes, they were heaped up high – a golden treasure!

Before the family sat down to eat, they sang a joyful song as they gazed at the final Hanukkah candles.

"Papa," Ezra said, "I have decided to name our dog Latke, because he found our potatoes."

"A wise choice, indeed," said Papa smiling. "The name fits like a glove."

"And our cat's name is Applesauce!" said Rebecca.

"Because she found the apples! A perfect name!" said Mama.

Then Mama and Papa and Rebecca and Ezra and Latke and Applesauce ate latkes and applesauce – as much as their bellies could hold.

Now, was this a miracle? Who can say? It happened, and that is miracle enough for anyone!