

Forty Fortunes

Told by Aaron Shepard

Adapted by LHU Language Center

Characters:

Narrators 1–4, Ahmed, Jamell, Woman, Minister's Wife, King, Servant, Chief,
(Diviners/Thieves/Guards)

NARRATOR 1: Once, in the royal city of Isfahan, there lived a young man named Ahmed, who had a wife named Jamell. He often told his wife,

AHMED: (*cheerfully*) If you can dig a hole, you can always earn enough to stay alive.

NARRATOR 4: That was enough for Ahmed. But it was not enough for Jamell.

NARRATOR 2: One day, Jamell went to the public bath to wash herself in the hot pool. But at the entrance, the woman in charge told her,

WOMAN: You can't come in now. The wife of the King's Royal Diviner is taking the whole place for herself.

JAMELL: (*angrily*) Who does she think she is? Just because her husband tells fortunes!

NARRATOR 1: That evening, when Ahmed handed her his wages for the day, she said,

JAMELL: I won't put up with this any longer. Tomorrow you'll sit in the marketplace and be a diviner!

AHMED: Jamell, are you insane? What do I know about fortunetelling?

JAMELL: You don't need to know a thing. When anyone brings you a question, you just throw the dice and mumble something that sounds wise.

NARRATOR 4: So the next day, Ahmed bought the dice and the board and the robe of a fortuneteller.

NARRATOR 2: Hardly had he gotten settled when there ran up to him the wife of one of the King's ministers.

MINISTER'S WIFE: Diviner, you must help me! I wore my most precious ring to the bath today, and now it's missing. Please, tell me where it is!

NARRATOR 3: Ahmed gulped and cast the dice. As he desperately searched for something wise to say, he happened to glance up at the lady's cloak. There he spied a small hole.

AHMED: Madam, I see a hole.

MINISTER'S WIFE: (*leaning closer*) A what?

AHMED: A hole! A hole!

MINISTER'S WIFE: (*perking up*) Of course! A hole!

NARRATOR 4: She rushed back to the bath and found the hole in the wall where she had hidden her ring for safekeeping and forgotten it. Then she came back out to Ahmed.

MINISTER'S WIFE: God be praised! You knew right where it was!

NARRATOR 2: And to Ahmed's amazement, she gave him a gold coin.

AHMED: *(stares at coin in his hand and shakes head in amazement)*

NARRATOR 3: That evening, when Jamell saw the coin and heard the story, she said,

JAMELL: You see? There's nothing to it!

AHMED: God was merciful on this day, but I dare not test Him on another!

JAMELL: Nonsense. If you want to keep your wife, you'll be back in the marketplace tomorrow.

AHMED: *(sighs in resignation)*

NARRATOR 1: Now, it happened that on that very night, at the palace of the King, the royal treasury was robbed.

NARRATOR 2: The theft was reported next morning to the King. He commanded,

KING: Bring me my Royal Diviner and all his assistants.

NARRATOR 3: But though the fortunetellers cast their dice and mumbled quite wisely, not one could locate the thieves or the treasure.

KING: Frauds! Throw them all in prison!

NARRATOR 1: Now, the King had heard about the fortuneteller who had found the ring of his minister's wife. So he sent two guards to the marketplace to bring Ahmed.

KING: Diviner, my treasury has been robbed of forty chests. What can you tell me about the thieves?

AHMED: Your Majesty, I can tell you there were . . . forty thieves.

KING: Amazing! None of my own diviners knew as much! But now you must find the thieves and the treasure.

AHMED: I'll . . . do my best, Your Majesty, but . . . but it will take some time.

KING: How long?

AHMED: Uh . . . forty days, Your Majesty. One day for each thief.

KING: A long time indeed! Very well, you shall have it. If you succeed, I'll make you rich. If you don't, you'll rot with the others in prison!

AHMED: (*gasps softly*)

NARRATOR 1: Back home, Ahmed told Jamell,

AHMED: You see the trouble you have caused us? In forty days, the King will lock me away.

JAMELL: Nonsense. Just find the chests like you found the ring.

AHMED: I tell you, Jamell, I found nothing! That was only by the grace of God.

NARRATOR 4: Ahmed took some dried dates, counted out forty, and placed them in a jar.

AHMED: I will eat one of these dates each evening. That will tell me when my forty days are done.

NARRATOR 2: Now, it happened that one of the King's own servants was one of the forty thieves, and he had heard the King speak with Ahmed. he hurried to the thieves' meeting place and reported to their chief.

CHIEF: Go to his house and find out what you can.

NARRATOR 3: So the servant climbed up to the terrace on the flat roof of Ahmed's house. Just then, Ahmed took the first date from the jar and ate it.

AHMED: That's one.

SERVANT: *(gasps loudly, nearly falls over)*

NARRATOR 4: The thief was so shocked. He hurried back to the meeting place and told the chief,

SERVANT: This diviner has amazing powers. Without seeing me, he knew I was on the roof! I clearly heard him say, "That's one."

CHIEF: You must have imagined it. Tomorrow night, two of you will go.

NARRATOR 2: So the next night, the servant returned to Ahmed's roof with another of the thieves. As they were listening, Ahmed ate a second date and said,

AHMED: That's two.

SERVANT: He knew there were two of us! We heard him say, "That's two."

CHIEF: It can't be!

NARRATOR 1: So the night after that, he sent three of the thieves, and the next night four, then five.

NARRATOR 1: And so it went till the fortieth night, when the chief said,

CHIEF: This time, I'll go with you myself.

NARRATOR 4: So all forty thieves climbed up to Ahmed's roof to listen.

NARRATOR 2: Inside, Ahmed gazed at the last date in the jar.

AHMED: That's forty. The number is complete.

JAMELL: (*gently*) Ahmed, I was wrong to make you be a diviner. You are what you are, and I should not have tried to make you something else. Can you forgive me?

AHMED: I forgive you, Jamell, but the fault is mine as well. I should not have done what I knew was not wise.

NARRATOR 1: Just then came a loud banging at the door.

AHMED: (*sighs*) The King's men already!

AHMED: All right, all right, I know why you're here.

NARRATOR 2: He swung the door open. To his astonishment, he saw forty men kneeling before him.

CHIEF: Of course you know, O great diviner! Nothing can be hidden from you. But we beg you not to give us away!

AHMED: Very well, I won't turn you in. But you must replace every bit of the treasure.

CHIEF: At once! At once!

NARRATOR 4: Early the next morning, Ahmed appeared before the King.

AHMED: Your Majesty, my magic arts can find either the treasure or the thieves, but not both. Which do you choose?

KING: The treasure, I suppose—though it's a pity not to get the thieves. Tell me where the treasure is, and I'll send my men right away.

AHMED: No need, Your Majesty.

(Ahmed waved his hand in the air and called,)

AHMED: *Pish posh, wish wosh, mish mosh.* By my magic, the chests have returned to their place.

KING: You are truly the greatest fortuneteller of the age! From this day forth, you shall be my Royal Diviner!

AHMED: *(bowing)* Thank you, Your Majesty, but finding and restoring your treasure was so difficult, it used up all my powers. I shall never be a diviner again.

KING: What a loss! Then I must doubly reward you.

NARRATOR 1: So Ahmed returned home to Jamell, safe, rich, and a good deal wiser.

ALL: They lived happily ever after.