

## THE HUMMINGBIRD AND THE FIRE

*Based on a folktale from Southern Africa, each of us should do whatever we can to make the world better.*

I first heard this story from Stephen Apkon, who founded the Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville, New York. He was preparing it for a college commencement address and wanted to talk through the story. I mention this because it points out how these simple stories can be used in many ways for all age groups. The tale captures an idea and feeling that can be described, but without the story we don't take it to heart. I used this story for a family Rosh Hashanah service at Central Synagogue in New York City along with "Moving a Mountain" and "Trapped Birds" to demonstrate how change can come through the act of one individual ("The Hummingbird and the Fire"), generationally ("Moving a Mountain," page 90), or from a group action ("Trapped Birds," page 95). For this book I composed refrains for the stories, so they are slightly longer than when I used all three in one program.

Depending on what theme is important for your service, you might choose one, two, or all three of these stories or match them up with another tale or a Bible story. Of course, it can be used as a possible companion tale with "Moving a Mountain" and/or "Trapped Birds."

### THEMES

- courage
- compassion

### BEFORE THE STORY

Today's story is based on a folktale from Southern Africa. It is about a fire. The artwork is by \_\_\_\_\_.



## THE STORY

Antelope smelled the smoke first. Run! (*Running sound*):

Te-te-Te-te-Te-te-Te-te

Te-te-Te-te-Te-te-Te-te

Then lion smelled the smoke. Run!

Te-te-Te-te-Te-te-Te-te

Te-te-Te-te-Te-te-Te-te

Then cheetah and leopard and hyena, too. Run!

Te-te-Te-te-Te-te-Te-te

Te-te-Te-te-Te-te-Te-te

And Giraffe, Zebra, and Wildebeest. Run!

Te-te-Te-te-Te-te-Te-te

Te-te-Te-te-Te-te-Te-te

Baboon, Ape, and Orangutan. Run!

Te-te-Te-te-Te-te-Te-te

Te-te-Te-te-Te-te-Te-te

And the birds. Fly!

Flap-flap-flap – Flap-flap-flap

Flap-flap-flap – Flap-flap-flap

And they all gathered at the far side of the field at the edge of the jungle. “Oh no!” they moaned. “Oh no!”

They watched the flames burning up the tall grass.

“Oh no!” they moaned. “Oh no!”

Then, just above their heads they heard a little *whrrr*:

They looked up. It was hummingbird. She was flying toward the fire!

“What are you doing?” they cried. “What are you doing?”

The animals watched as Hummingbird flew above the flames and tipped its head spilling a little water onto the flames from its tiny beak. Hummingbird flew back toward the animals, over their heads and quickly down into a little spring and filled its beak again. They watched.

“What are you doing?” they cried. “What are you doing?”

She flew back across the burning field and once again emptied her little beak full of water onto the flames. She returned and dipped her beak in the pool again and flew back toward the field.

“What are you doing?” they cried. “What are you doing?”

Again and again, Hummingbird flew with her little beak full and dropped the water on the flames and the animals asked,

“What are you doing?” They cried, “What are you doing?”

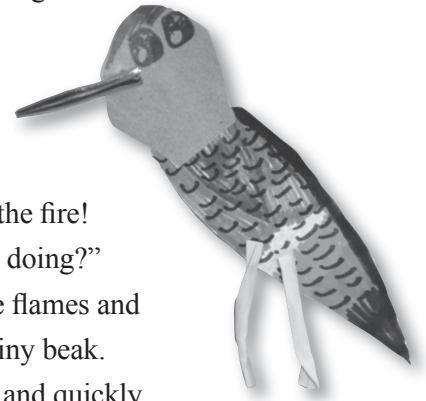
She stopped for a moment.

“What are you doing?” They cried, “What are you doing?”

She looked at the others, “I am doing what I can,” she said, “doing what I can.”

And then she sang:

♪ **I’m doing what I can  
That’s all that I can do  
To make this world a better place  
For me and you.**



*Note:* I have heard the tale told with endings after the point I finish the story. In one version God notices Hummingbird and sends a rain storm that puts out the fire. In another a rainstorm just comes and puts out the fire. I like to leave it with the focus on the courage and conviction of the hummingbird, but you may like more of a resolution, so there's an option.

## ■ AFTER THE STORY

And here each of us thinks about what we can do to make things better for everyone. Now we will sing “This Little Light of Mine.”

## ■ STORYTELLING TIPS

- This is a fun story to invite the listeners to join you in the sound of the running. Note that the run is the same each time. That is so the listeners can learn it by hearing it. If you make it different as you go, they will not join you as they cannot predict the sound you will make.
- The running could be created by having two or three children play the rhythm on drums or even just a tabletop.
- The story can end with the hummingbird saying, “I am doing what I can,” *or* she can say “Doing what I can” without the sung refrain.

## ■ ART NEEDS

- Hummingbird
- Antelope
- Lion
- Cheetah
- Leopard
- Hyena
- Giraffe
- Zebra
- Wildebeest
- Baboon
- Ape
- Orangutan
- Birds
- (optional) If there are favorite African animals of the children that are not named, you can add them to the art and to the story narrative as well.

## STORY SKELETON

- Antelope smelled the smoke.
- Run!
- Te-te-Te-te-Te-te-Te-te.
- The other animals, a few at a time.
- Run!
- Te-te-Te-te-Te-te-Te-te.
- Animals see Hummingbird.
- Fly and drip water.
- Get more water from spring.
- “What are you doing? What are you doing?”
- Fly and drip water.
- Get more water from spring.
- “What are you doing? What are you doing?”
- Fly and drip water.
- Get more water from spring.
- “What are you doing? What are you doing?”
- Finally: “I am doing what I can,” she said. “Doing what I can.”

## The Hummingbird and the Fire

Swung Bill Gordh

D A D A D

I'm do-ing what I can That's all that I can do To

7 G D A D A D

make this world a bet-ter place For me and you