



## BEFORE YOU WERE BORN

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*Peace and gentleness are evoked in this nighttime rendition of the central Jewish prayer of God's oneness, the Sh'ma.*

Whether through the miracle of birth or the miracle of adoption, the welcoming of a child into a family is an occasion for great celebration! We read in the Talmud, the collection of rabbinic thought and Jewish law compiled during the period from 200 B.C.E. to 500 C.E., that, "With every child, the world begins anew." For the Jewish family, this wondrous occurrence offers a broad range of opportunities to act in uniquely Jewish ways—from choosing a name, to announcing the arrival, to welcoming him or her (or them!) into the larger Jewish community. This may be accomplished through informal as well as traditional means, such as *brit milah* (ritual circumcision) and *brit bat* (covenant naming ceremony for a daughter). Remember, there are as many ways of "parenting Jewishly" as there are Jewish parents; finding one's way in this, as in life, is a never-ending journey on an exhilarating path.

### USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Consider using *Before You Were Born* as a stepping-stone for reflection on your own earliest memories. Was extended family a presence in your home? In what ways did Judaism play a role in your childhood? How might your early experiences affect your parenting and your home?

Though infants will not comprehend the story's meaning, even the youngest of babies will benefit from the soothing words of *Before You Were Born*. As you read aloud and cuddle with your little one, think of what gives this book its

gentle tone. Is it the vocabulary itself? Do the illustrations complement the words? Does the subject matter lend itself to quiet contemplation?

### MIDRASH & BEFORE YOU WERE BORN

There exists a boundless expanse of Jewish literature. Some narratives in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), for example, may leave one contemplating "the rest of the story." With that in mind, the rabbis of old offered the *midrash* (from the Hebrew for "study" or "investigate"), a story that imaginatively explains a Jewish truth or elaborates a sketchily-told story. A *midrash* may explore characters in the Bible or unexplained happenings. A modern-day *midrash* is Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*, telling of Dina, whose life is only touched-upon in the book of Genesis.

*Before You Were Born* is a book that can be read with children of varying ages. For youngsters aged 4 to 7, you might discuss the many and varied languages of the world. How many different languages can you name? Do members of your family speak multiple languages? Examine a world map or globe together, matching languages with countries you locate. You might create a story (a *midrash!*) together to explain how the world came to have so many languages.

Lailah is said to imbue each soul with great stories. What stories do you love? Do you recognize stories from the book's illustrations, such as *Thumbelina* or *The Little Mermaid*? Pj