



THE ELIJAH DOOR

Written by Linda Leopold Strauss

Illustrated by Alexi Natchev

Elijah was a prophet in Israel in the 9th century BCE. He is credited with many miracles, and folktales describe his mysterious appearance in different guises. According to Jewish tradition, Elijah will usher in an era of peace for all mankind, so he is a popular presence in Jewish rituals.

Elijah is traditionally invited to the Passover seder, which recounts the story of the Israelites' freedom from slavery in Egypt. Often the youngest child opens the door to welcome Elijah to the seder; many families have created fun customs which include an adult sneaking a sip from Elijah's cup, trying to convince the youngster that invisible Elijah was indeed present.

Peace is a central concept to Judaism. Some sages say peace is the purpose of all Jewish teachings. The Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, comes from a root meaning completeness. Pursuing peace is not automatic; it takes work. Just as in this book, the ancient rabbis agree it is acceptable to "utter a falsehood for the purpose of making peace between man and his fellow" (Babylonian Talmud).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN READING:

- How does the rabbi plan to bring the feuding families together? How and why is the community involved?
- Can you think of an incident where a misunderstanding became a big problem?

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

The Passover seder (literally, order) is a ritual feast with storytelling and songs. The *haggadah* (which comes from the Hebrew word "to tell") is the prayer book or guide to the seder. It includes the Passover story, the meaning and blessings of symbolic foods, and many prayers. The *haggadah* is the most often reprinted Jewish book. You might be surprised at the number and variety of *haggadot* (plural) available. Visit a Judaica store or search the Internet to see examples that include interesting art, poetry, and thought-provoking questions. Many have been created specifically with children in mind.

A Passover seder is often a multi-generational affair with friends and family. The days, or sometimes weeks, of planning are all part of the fun. Traditional families clean every corner of the kitchen and use different dishes for the entire holiday. Some families bring out their best dinnerware or rarely-used family heirlooms. Everyone can participate in preparations, from cleaning and cooking to guest lists and creative table decorations. Your family might invent a guessing game or an unusual way to tell the Passover story.