



NACHSHON, WHO WAS AFRAID TO SWIM

Written by Deborah Bodin Cohen

As the Israelites rush to leave Egypt after being freed from slavery, young Nachshon is the first to brave the water that must be crossed, even though he is afraid to take the plunge.

It is said that courage is not lack of fear but the ability to move forward in spite of fear. While retelling the powerful story of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt, *Nachshon, Who Was Afraid to Swim* illustrates the symbolic and subtle passage to freedom of a boy imprisoned by his fear of swimming. Nachshon, a kind and enterprising child, is undaunted: he acts courageously in the face of fear, but he does more: though he has never known freedom, Nachshon dares to hope.

Though a strong leader, Moses struggles with a chronic uneasiness of speaking in public; he perseveres through trust in God and faith in himself and counsels Nachshon to do the same. Ultimately, Nachshon's strength of character leads to two kinds of freedom, neither of which is complete without the other.

Each of us has fears to overcome – from the swimming pool to the dentist's chair to things that go bump in the night – but these have no bearing on our character or intelligence. Talk with your children about fears you may have had as a child that you overcame with the passage of time, through hard work, or both

The story of Nachshon provides a window into the time of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt: after being held captive for many generations, Moses arrives to orchestrate the Hebrews' freedom. Pharaoh's resistance to freeing the slaves is intense; his intransigence leads to ten plagues suffered by the Egyptian people. Following the dramatic climax of these events, in which Pharaoh repeatedly changes his mind about freeing the Israelites, they cross the Sea of Reeds and wander in the desert for generations before coming into the land of Israel. Every spring during Passover, Jews around the world celebrate this passage to freedom and its meaning for us all today.