



THE WAY MEAT LOVES SALT

Written by Nina Jaffe

Illustrated by Louise August

In this Cinderella-like Jewish tale, a rabbi's youngest daughter is banished from her home, but with help from the prophet Elijah, she is reunited with her family.

A fundamental Jewish value is that of hospitality. The quintessential role models for this were Abraham and Sarah, our Biblical ancestors. When three guests unexpectedly arrived at their tent, Abraham and Sarah warmly welcomed them, made them feel comfortable, and fed them generously.

ELIJAH THE PROPHET

Elijah is probably best known for being the mysterious presence for whom we open the door toward the end of the Passover seder. As Anita Diamant notes in her wonderful book *How To Be a Jewish Parent*

The Prophet Elijah, the legendary harbinger of the messiah, is often portrayed as a beggar who tests the practical morality of people...Parents who open their home to friends and neighbors—welcoming people for meals and conversation, keeping a cot or foldout couch for out-of-town visitors—are teaching their children a vital lesson in Jewish living.

In our story, Elijah's role is slightly different—highlighting the limitations of people's generosity by allowing Mirele to transform her physical appearance.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

This story beautifully illustrates the mistake often made when people are judged on their appearance. Mirele's ability

to change her appearance by simply changing her clothing is enough to radically transform people's impression of her. Reading this story with your child provides an opportunity to discuss what it's like to be judged based on what you wear, rather than your character and inner being. As Rabbi Meir taught in *Pirke Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers), we should "not look at the jug, but at what is in it."

It is interesting to note that Mireleh demonstrates more wisdom and goodness than her father and the Rabbi who takes her in. Highlighting this aspect of the text will allow you to talk with your child about the times that they have shown great wisdom. While we want our children to learn from and respect us, we also hope to celebrate their insights, even if they are right where we were mistaken.

Many cultures have their own version (or versions) of the classic Cinderella story. Esme Raji Codell has a wonderful list of Cinderella's "international cousins" (as she calls them) in *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading* (page 266). You might discuss the ways in which the story is transformed by different nationalities and cultures. What makes the "Jewish" Cinderella different from the Korean or Mexican Cinderella? What does the Jewish aspect of the story add to the Cinderella tale? Finally, what does it mean to love someone "the way meat loves salt"? Pj