



YITZI AND THE GIANT MENORAH

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The mayor of Lublin has given the people of Chelm a beautiful gift – a giant menorah to light up the nights of Hanukkah. How can they ever thank him? Yitzi comes up with an idea!

JEWISH CONCEPTS

The real town of Chelm is about 40 miles from Lublin in Poland, but the fictional town of Chelm exists in the imagination. Jewish folk tales about the foolishness of the people of Chelm date back to the 1880s, and hundreds of stories describe the outlandish antics of the people who live in the town. Known in Yiddish as *Khelemer khakhomim*, there is a robust history of legends about the “Wise Men of Chelm,” in which their entertaining and decidedly *un-wise* actions are described in great comic detail.

In this tradition, the inhabitants of Chelm are confident about their collective intelligence, but their good ideas are hilariously impractical. *Yitzi and the Giant Menorah* includes several instances of this kind of silliness. Spinning a dreidel to determine which route to travel, or transporting snow on a sunny day—these are typical examples of the absurd logic that prevails in the fantasy village of Chelm.

The real town of Chelm was home to one of the oldest Jewish communities in Poland. Scholars note that many Eastern European cultures have similar folk traditions that portray and celebrate illogic and foolishness. But no one knows why, in the Jewish versions of these stories, the fools all live in a fictional place called Chelm. In this story, Yitzi is the most sensible person in the whole town!

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

What is more enjoyable than a story in which a child’s idea saves the day? The entertaining antics of the adults in this book offer an amusing backdrop to Yitzi’s simple wisdom. They also provide an outline of many Hanukkah activities you can enjoy with your family.

After reading the story together, ask your children for suggestions about how you might celebrate the holiday in your home and community. It’s great to follow their lead! Sparked by this book, they are likely to generate a list that includes:

- Lighting an eight-branched menorah
- Enjoying potato latkes with applesauce
- Making and giving gifts to others
- Creating and/or playing with dreidels
- Singing Hanukkah songs in a big group

You can also use this book as a light-hearted way to focus on the importance of giving thanks. Use examples from *Yitzi and the Giant Menorah*, or read other folk tales about the “wise” people of Chelm. Then encourage your children to think of absurd and illogical ways to show gratitude for any holiday gifts they receive. Compare their creative/ridiculous ways to say thank you with meaningful ways to express their appreciation, and help them carry out their best ideas.