



OY VEY: LIFE IN A SHOE

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Poor Lou! He lives in a shoe – with a LOT of kids. The rabbi has an idea of what to do – but it seems like his suggestion will just make life worse for Lou!

JEWISH CONCEPTS

This rhyming chronicle of Lou Greenbaum and his bustling family brings an old folktale into the present day. Although life in a shoe is hardly realistic, the meaning of the tale transcends its setting, emphasizing the fundamental value of appreciating what you have.

The Tenth Commandment, “Thou shalt not covet,” might be understood simply as a reminder of the commandment not to steal. Instead of guiding how we should act, however, this commandment is directed at our internal experiences.

In instructing us not to covet the home, spouse, or livestock of another, the final commandment focuses on cultivating inner values of acceptance and appreciation. Some people believe that covetous feelings cannot be eliminated, but behave morally when we restrain ourselves from acting on emotions like envy or yearning. Others interpret “Thou shalt not covet” to mean that we should not feel jealousy because we never really know what another person’s life is like. How can we desire what we don’t truly understand?

More than two thousand years ago, the sage Shimon ben Zoma asked, “Who is rich?” and answered the question, “One who is satisfied with his lot” (*Pirkei Avot*, 4:1). According to this definition, the rabbi’s guidance helps make Lou a rich man, content with his life in a shoe.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

After reading this book together, encourage members of your family to express their own occasional feelings of unhappiness or frustration. Then, like the rabbi in the story, think of ways to exaggerate the circumstances that contribute to these feelings! Inflating and embellishing upon grievances can be a source of amusement, and can help develop values of perspective, appreciation, and gratitude.

The vocabulary in this story—particularly the Yiddish words—may be puzzling to some readers. Try acting out the story with larger-than-life tones and gestures, then asking children to guess the meanings of the unfamiliar words. You may want to dramatize these lines, found on pages 9, 20, 21, and 30:

*But the husband **kvetched** from day to night.*

*“We’re **meshugga**,” he said. “The place is a zoo.”*

*“**Oy vey**,” Lou sighed, and bowed his head.*

*Singing, laughing, **kvelling** too*

kvetched	=	complained
meshugga	=	crazy
Oy vey	=	Woe is me! Oh my goodness!
kvelling	=	showing happiness and pride