



THE CARP IN THE BATHTUB

Written by Barbara Cohen

Illustrated by Joan Halpern

This classic story takes readers back to a time when families made gefilte fish from scratch – and tender-hearted kids got attached to the ingredients.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Many Jewish traditions are shaped by the value placed on empathy. Even as Jews celebrate happiness and freedom, we are reminded not to forget the misfortunes of others. The custom of spilling out some drops of wine during the Passover *seder* expresses the belief that our cup of joy cannot be full when others suffer. Breaking a glass during the wedding ceremony makes the point that even the most festive celebration must acknowledge that the world is an imperfect place.

The story of Passover highlights the importance of empathy. The haggadah (the text and commentary that provide the Passover *seder*'s script) teaches that in every generation, Jews are required to see ourselves as though we personally came forth from slavery in Egypt. The deepest level of understanding is needed, as participants are instructed not just to *think* about the feelings of others, but to identify with and *experience* the Exodus story of enslavement and redemption.

Barbara Cohen's reflection on her family's Passover does not focus attention on human bondage and suffering. Instead, *The Carp in the Bathtub* offers a child's perspective on the practice of empathy, providing an appealing and accessible way to enter discussions about kindness, compassion, and identifying with the experiences of others.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

This personal Passover story is filled with vivid emotional contrasts. Leah and her brother knew that having their own bathroom was lucky – but having to take two baths every week felt unfair. The carp was very lively and intelligent! But he couldn't escape the fate of being turned into gefilte fish.

Use the dramatic contrasts in this book to encourage children to discuss everyday events and activities. You might ask if they remember an experience that made them feel really lucky. Ask whether there is anything about the same experience that also felt unfair. At this age, children can be quite sensitive and even overly dramatic. You can help them accept normal ups and downs by making a game of noticing how easily the ways we view something can change.

The delightful line drawings in this book convey a tremendous amount of visual information. Ask your child to identify the different patterns and shading in Joan Halpern's illustrations, and see how many they can find and name. (There are dots, circles, stars, diagonals, checker-boards, herringbones, and many other lines and shapes.) When children express their experiences in absolute terms, consider pointing out that there is actually a lot of detail and difference to be found—even when something is (or seems) black and white!