



# THE ALWAYS PRAYER SHAWL

Written by Sheldon Oberman

Illustrated by Ted Lewin

*When Adam emigrates from Czarist Russia to America, his grandfather gives him a prayer shawl to remember him by – not just any prayer shawl, but the one Adam's own grandfather had given him. The shawl is a reminder that though the world around young Adam may change, the most important things remain constant.*

## JEWISH CONCEPTS

Jewish immigration to America has a long history – as long as the history of the United States itself. The major immigration push for Eastern European Jews began in 1880 and continued through the early 1920s. People fled areas of intense anti-Semitism in numerous countries for a peaceful and better life in the United States and other nations, just as Adam's family did. As Jews made their way in the New World, they brought with them their folklore, music, languages, theater, humor, foods, and religious traditions, and introduced them all to their new neighbors. American culture has been deeply influenced by Jewish immigration, just as American Jews have been undeniably influenced by the land they have been so happy to call home.

Adam's grandfather's prayer shawl (called a *tallit* in Hebrew or a *tallis* in Yiddish) gained added significance for his family when they left home for unfamiliar surroundings. In a time of flux, ritual can be a source of great comfort. The tallit – a large, rectangular cloth with knotted fringe hanging from the corners, called *tzitzit* – is a ritual object dating back to biblical times. Jews have worn a tallit during prayer for hundreds of generations. Ritual objects can act as powerful ties to our cultural, familial, and religious histories, just as the prayer shawl did for Adam and his family, in both the old country and the new.

## USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Friendships between grandparents and grandchildren are special. In Judaism, these relationships are encompassed by a value known as *l'dor v'dor* (literally, “from generation to generation”) – connections between the generations. While this phrase refers to the responsibility of the older generation to educate the younger generation in the ways of Judaism, it also implies the special loving bonds that exist between elders and the young, such as the one between Adam and his grandpa.

As a boy in Eastern Europe, this story's original Adam lived a life very different from his grandson's. Concepts of time are sometimes difficult for children to fathom; *The Always Prayer Shawl* presents an opportunity to explore how life changes over the years. Discuss with your children how the older Adam's childhood helped shape the man that he became. For example, he had a lot of chores, like chopping wood and gathering eggs; talk with your children about what kind of effect they think that might have had on him, and how it compares with the kind of life many children lead today. What must it have been like for Adam to leave his home in Russia for a very different life in the United States? If you have stories of your own family's background to share with your children, that may be the start of another lively discussion.