JEWISH CONCEPTS
From princes, queens, and prophets to bakers, roosters, and a poor man with a broom, the stories in this collection range from the regal and the fantastic to the routine and everyday. Yet despite differences in settings and characters, all these stories address the idea of hidden meanings—looking beyond the obvious for clues about how to make good decisions and live an honorable life.

There are many Jewish traditions for seeking meaning. In studying Torah, for example, four specific approaches help people explore and understand the Hebrew Bible’s deepest meanings. These four methods are known by the acronym Pardes, with each consonant (PRDS) representing the Hebrew word describing the technique. The straightforward or literal meaning (Peshat), the hidden symbolic meaning (Remez), the meaning found through comparative analysis (Derash), and the text’s secret mystical meaning (Sod) are all pathways to understand beyond the literal meaning.

Another interpretive system, gematria, calculates numerical values for words and phrases, and explores their relationship to the calendar, an individual’s age, or other words and phrases with the same numerical value.

THE BAREFOOT BOOK OF JEWISH TALES
Written by Shoshana Boyd Gelfand
Illustrated by Amanda Hall

These traditional folk tales from various parts of the world offer simple, compelling messages in a uniquely Jewish context.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME
Think about the Pardes approach to interpretation described on the front flap of the book, and try exploring various ways of finding meaning. For example, when you read the following stories with your child, you may want to ask:

• In “Elijah’s Wisdom,” why is Rabbi Joshua so shocked by the decisions Elijah makes? Who is thinking in a literal way, and who is not?
• Is there a symbolic meaning to the letters that Natan throws into the air in “The Boy Who Prayed the Alphabet”?
• Do you think there is anything special about the numbers—two loaves, seven strands, and thirty years—in the tale of “Challah in the Ark”?
• Does “Heaven and Hell” remind you of other stories you’ve heard about how we should treat other people?
• Would you compare the diamond in “The Perfect Mistake” to any person or thing in your life that is not perfect? Is that a fair comparison?

The Barefoot Book of Jewish Tales invites you to “step inside” and seek the underlying meanings in these stories for yourself!