



## CAN HENS GIVE MILK?

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*Tova lives with her family on a small farm in Chelm. The farm has hens and a rooster, but no cow. Then one night, Tova's father has a dream about how to get milk without actually owning a cow. Can it be done? Finally, the wise rabbi comes to the rescue—with a little help from Tova.*

Judaism has always recognized the importance of using oral tradition to pass down its heritage from one generation to the next. In fact, our rabbis once resisted writing down oral law (now referred to as the Talmud, codified around 200 C.E.) because they knew that students who learned the customs and legends of our tradition through stories would act as the best narrators for the next generation.

Folklore has always conveyed the joy, wisdom, and collective hopes of our people. Our stories reinforce ethical teachings, often using humor to help us persevere through the hardest of times. The Talmud contains humorous anecdotes and even lends itself to satire. The sages employed parables and riddles to sharpen the minds of both the student and teacher.

A famous passage from *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of our Fathers) 4:1 asks “Who is rich? Those who are happy with their portion.” The challenge we all face is finding the perfect balance between being content with our lot and always remembering to dream for tomorrow. What can we learn from *Can Hens Give Milk* about happiness and the challenges that we face when searching for it?

### USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

There is a genre of Jewish storytelling that takes place in the mythological village of *Chelm*. According to Jewish folk-

lore, the citizens of *Chelm* are often portrayed as foolish or simpleminded people. Because of this, stories based in *Chelm* are sometimes referred to as “noodlehead” stories and often contain an element of lighthearted humor or silliness. Consider working with your children to create a humorous *Chelm* story of your own. You can use the prompts listed below to help create a story that follows the pattern of a typical *Chelm* story:

- Begin with an idea that is too good to be true or that is in some way unbelievable
- Think about what would need to happen in order to transform that idea into reality
- Choose a “wise of person of *Chelm*” to come to the rescue and save the day!

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After reading the book with your children, consider the following questions:

- What did the rabbi suggest to help solve Shlomo and Rivka's problem?
- Were there any wise people in this *Chelm* story? Who were they?
- Why do you think Shlomo and Rivka dreamed of what they might gain if their hens could give milk?
- What do you dream about? Pj