



## THE LEGEND OF FREEDOM HILL

Written by Linda Jacobs Altman

Illustrated by Cornelius Van Wright and Ying Hwa-Hu

*In Gold Rush times two friends, one an African American, the other Jewish, work together to earn the money to free the mother of one of the girls from a slave trader.*

**H***achnasat Orchim*, the welcoming of guests, is a vital Jewish *mitzvah*. Tradition teaches that Jews are to remember what it was like to be “strangers in a strange land” during the time of slavery in Egypt. The active welcoming of others is not simply good manners, but a “*mitzvah*,” an obligation and an ethical imperative. Jewish tradition teaches that *hachnasat orchim* is as crucial to a meaningful life as prayer and religious study. Our Biblical ancestors Sarah and Abraham are considered prime examples of hospitality: it is said that their tent opened on all four sides to demonstrate to strangers that they were always welcome.

In *The Legend of Freedom Hill*, we read that the two main characters probably became friends “because they were both outsiders.” Talk with your child about those they know who might be considered outsiders. Discuss the fact that similarities and differences in people helps make life fascinating! Think aloud with your children about the following:

- In what ways were Rosabel and Sophie different? In what ways were they alike?
- How can you tell that *hachnasat orchim* was an important value for Sophie’s family?
- Which characters were “strangers in a strange land?”
- In what ways were slavery in the U.S. and the slavery of Israelites in Egypt similar? How were they different?

Your family’s answers to these questions can be powerful life lessons of developing an open and loving heart.

### LEV TOV (CARING)

The Hebrew term *lev tov* (literally, “good heart”) is concerned with the basic value of caring for others. As with *hachnasat orchim*, it is not enough to act when we see others in need; we are to actively seek out those who need our help. Sophie’s parents’ assumption that Rosabel will spend the night at their home—“they just acted like that was how things ought to be”—is a beautiful example of *lev tov* at work.

With your child, create a *lev tov*. With materials as simple as construction paper and scissors, fashion a large heart. Fill it with words, illustrations, or photos of ways in which people can care for each other. Displaying this creation in your home will give your children the clear message that these behaviors are valued in your family.

Talk with your child about someone you know who possesses a good heart. What makes this person special to you? Which of her/his qualities have had a positive effect on your life? Communicate with your children the importance of expressing loving feelings toward people you care about. You can be a spectacular *dugma* (role model), showing your children that something as simple as an unexpected note or phone call, or an off-the-cuff invitation to the local ice cream shop can have a strong and joyous effect on someone’s life. Pj