



RAISEL'S RIDDLE

Written by Erica Silverman

Illustrated by Susan Gaber

In this Jewish variation on the Cinderella theme, Raisel is a heroine who understands what is important in life as well as what it takes to be truly happy.

The holiday of Purim, celebrated on the 14th of the Hebrew month of Adar, falls in late February or early March. It is especially beloved to children as it is celebrated by getting dressed up in costumes, making noise, putting on plays and eating treats!

The book of Esther (found in the Writings section of the Hebrew Bible) tells of courageous Esther who saved the Jewish people in Persia from certain extermination by the King's evil advisor, Haman. To observe the holiday, Jews traditionally get dressed up as characters from the story and read the Book of Esther in synagogue, shaking noisemakers at the mention of Haman's name in order to drown it out. Other highlights of the holiday include eating *Hamentaschen* (cookies in the shape of triangles with poppy or jam filling, thought to look like Haman's hat); giving baskets of food and goodies to friends and family; having a big feast on the day of *Purim*; and donating enough money to poor people so they too can enjoy a festive *Purim* meal.

THE TALMUND

The Talmud is a collection of rabbinic writings discussing the Oral Law (in Hebrew the *Mishna*), and is the companion collection of laws to those of the Hebrew Bible, also known as the Torah (or Five Books of Moses).

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Raisel's Riddle is a lovely retelling of the Cinderella story, set in Eastern Europe during the holiday of *Purim*. Like Cinderella, Raisel is caught in a household that takes advantage of her poverty and lack of resources. And like Cinderella, Raisel is able to shine through with the help of a little magic. However, unlike Cinderella who is praised for her beauty, Raisel's noteworthiness comes from her intelligence and her willingness to work hard and do kind deeds. Compare and contrast these stories with your children, focusing on the traits that allowed Raisel to shine.

Raisel exemplifies the spirit of Esther, the heroine of the Purim story, by standing up for herself and what she believes in. Talk with your children about other examples of such courage. They can be people they hear about at home, learn about in school, or know in their own lives.

- Why does Raisel tell the rabbi's son: "Look not at the flask but at what it contains."? This question is, of course, analogous to the adage "Don't judge a book by its cover."
- What made Raisel deserving of the three wishes?
- What made Raisel deserving of the rabbi's son's attention?

Read this story alongside the traditional version of Cinderella and ask your children about the differences and similarities. What does Erica Silverman's "Jewish version" of Cinderella choose to highlight? Pj