



THE WOODEN SWORD

Written by Ann Redisch Stampler

Illustrated by Carol Liddiment

Disguised as a servant, an Afghani shah slips out of his palace to get to know his people. When he encounters a poor Jewish shoemaker full of faith that everything will turn out just as it should, he decides to test that faith. Will the shoemaker's cheerful optimism be shaken when faced with a matter of life and death?

In this folktale, a poor shoemaker welcomes a beggar into his home for a *Shabbat* meal, who is secretly the Shah of Kabul! This *mitzvah* (Jewish commandment or obligation) in Hebrew is called *Hachnasat Orchim*, which means, “to welcome or bring in guests.” Although the shoemaker has little to give, he continues to open both his home and his heart to the beggar, even when life tests his sense of *emunah*, his faith in God.

The Torah (the first 5 books of Moses) tells us in Genesis 18:1 that when Abraham is greeted by three guests, he runs to meet them as he sees them approach. Our tradition teaches us that the virtue of *hachnasat orchim* is not only about standing at the door and inviting our guests in; rather one is to go outside and bring in the guest or stranger.

Consider creating a welcome mat with your family to place at your front door. Decorate it with messages of hospitality and warmth, reflecting how you would like your guests to feel while staying with you! Then, think about how you can find ways to run and greet strangers in your community!

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

The Jewish poet Ahad Ha'am is quoted as saying, “More than Jews have kept *Shabbat*, *Shabbat* has kept the Jews.” Although

we live in communities around the world, it is our common heritage that keeps us tethered. The beauty of our collective observance is in the different religious and cultural ways we choose to greet this special time of the week.

The poor shoemaker and his wife come together over the nectar of sweet raisins by the light of their two Sabbath lamps and indulge in the presence of sweet apricots at their *Shabbat* table. Do you and your family have a unique *Shabbat* ritual that you practice?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The very heart of this story reflects a message of the good that comes from having *emunah*, faith in God.

- Can you think of a time when you found it hard to believe in God?
- The Shah eventually realizes that he has much to learn from the poor shoemaker. Would you hire the shoemaker as your advisor? Why? Pj

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