



SHLEMAZEL AND THE REMARKABLE SPOON OF POHOST

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Lazy Shlemazel is tricked into believing that fame and fortune await him—if only he uses a very special spoon in the correct way.

Rewarding work, a family to share one's life with, and the ability to help others along the way—this is the fulfilling life that *Shlemazel's* well-meaning friends wanted for him. Why did the people of Pohost bother with *Shlemazel*? Was it right for them to try to trick him? *Shlemazel* may have needed a nudge to make his life meaningful, but one might ask: What did luck have to do with it? Eventually *Shlemazel* is able to grow and change to find happiness—with the help of his friends—making a compelling statement about life's possibilities.

JEWISH FOLKTALES

Folktales play a central role in Jewish literature. Many immigrants brought their stories with them, and upon arriving in their new home, these legends became an important part of Jewish folklore which was handed down for generations to come. Most well known among these tales are the stories from Chelm; the mythic European Jewish *shtetl* (village) of fools. These tales, populated with “wise men” trying in vain to make sense of the world provided the roots of modern Jewish comedy. While this story does not take place in Chelm, *Shlemazel's* view of the world identifies him as a silly fellow with much to learn.

MAZEL AND SHLEMAZEL

The common term “*mazel tov*” is meant to convey a wish for good fortune or to extend congratulations, and is a combina-

tion of the Yiddish word *mazel* (originally meaning “planet” or “star,” among other things) and *tov* (from the Hebrew, meaning “good”). The name *Shlemazel* means one who has no luck. It is sometimes said: “You work hard, do all you can, and the rest is *mazel*.” In other words, there are no guarantees in life. Judaism does not purport that luck leads to success—rather, it is achieved only with great effort. *Shlemazel* may not have realized it at first, but it was clearly hard work that eventually brought him a life of blessings.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Reading this book presents a great opportunity to talk with your children about what brings true happiness. Point out that contentment is often found in our own back yard, especially when we are with those we love and have the blessings of the things we need. To illustrate this point you might ask, was the “amazing, remarkable spoon of Pohost” really a lucky spoon? Why did *Shlemazel* not feel lucky?

The rich language of this story also makes for wonderful discussion. What does it mean that *Shlemazel* sat “until birds nested in his hair...and snow filled his pockets”? What image does it bring to mind to know that Moshke “thought and thought until a plan was simmering in his brain”? What other common phrases have similar meaning to “pancakes and honey will rain from the sky before *Shlemazel* changes his ways”? Pj