This story about Meshka, a complainer, is in the tradition of those many Jewish folktales of the shtetl (Yiddish for a small village), in which hardships were many and long-lasting. Meshka’s path was one of bemoaning her fate and living unhappily. She saw the proverbial glass as always less than half-full! Enter the wise and trusted rabbi, who led Meshka to see a better way of dealing with life. This book provides a clever means of contemplating the difference a positive attitude can make.

To bring about rich family discussion, ask your children to consider the following:

- What caused Meshka to be unhappy?
- How do you think others must have felt when they were around Meshka?
- Did the rabbi advise Meshka as you would have done?
- Do you know a “kvetch?” How might you help that person to be happier and less complaining?
- Does this story show you new ways of dealing with disappointment or unhappiness?

HUMOR IN FOLKTALES
How did humor become such a common component of Jewish folktales? Explanations are abundant, including the fact that the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) contains irony and that humor is evident in the extensive legal arguments of the Talmud (the texts comprising Jewish law). Through times of adversity, the Jewish people have used humor not only to survive but to thrive.

USING ART
With Meshka, we see the results of her complaining. While enjoying this book, encourage your children to use art to explore its theme. Provide materials for painting, collage or sculpture and have your youngsters create people whose bodies change as a result of their complaints. A second illustration can compare how a person might change again as the result of a positive attitude.