



THE LITTLEST LEVINE

Written by Sandy Lanton

Illustrated by Claire Keay

Poor Hannah. She's always being told she's too little for this, too little for that. But now that Passover is almost here, the day is coming when being the littlest Levine means having a very big role indeed.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Why is this Levine different from all other Levines? It's not easy for Hannah Levine to be the youngest in the family, but when Passover comes she gets a chance to shine. With her grandfather's help, she learns *Ma Nishtanah* (the Four Questions), which dates back to the *Mishnah* (Jewish oral tradition written down over 1800 years ago). These questions are an important part of the Passover celebration and are customarily sung by the youngest participant at the *seder*, the traditional holiday meal. The questions, which begin with "Why is this night different from all other nights?" are brilliantly designed to engage children in the Passover story. You will find them in the *Haggadah*, the text that outlines the *seder* and tells the story of the holiday. When Hannah asks and then answers the Four Questions, she becomes an important teacher for the others at the table.

At the *seder*, it is traditional for the extended family to eat and be together. The *Haggadah's* themes of thanksgiving and freedom from slavery are passed down *dor l'dor* (generation to generation). It is also traditional to practice *hachnasat orchim* (welcoming guests) and to invite to the *seder* those who might not otherwise have a place to celebrate.

Passover is a time of liberation. For Hannah, liberation came when being little enabled her to perform a very big role--one she could not have done had she not been the littlest Levine!

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Hachnasat orchim is an important Jewish value with special relevance for Passover. At one point during the *seder*, we are asked to open the front door and invite all who are hungry to join the meal. Invite a guest, or even a family, to join you at your *seder*. Consider letting your child suggest who it should be, and design and send a very special invitation!

When you are getting ready for the *seder*, ask your child to help you with the place cards. As you write out each name, think with your child about what is special about each person at the table. Perhaps brother Sam loves to play baseball or Grandpa likes to read. Your child can draw something about each person on their place card and then, as the *seder* begins, the cards can be shared with all the others at the table.

There are many ways to go about learning *Ma Nishtanah*, and chances are, children who can learn even a portion of this part of the *seder* will feel very proud. If your child wants to be like Hannah Levine, find a recording of the Four Questions on the Internet. Anyone who isn't brave enough to sing them as a solo might be comfortable singing along with an older cousin or even an adult.