

# THE ADVENTURES OF RABBI HARVEY

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## Discussion Questions

- This book combines Jewish and American folklore and storytelling traditions. Can you think of other ways to combine these elements in stories or other art forms? Do you find yourself combining elements of Jewish and American culture in everyday life?
- One common theme in Jewish folktales—and in Rabbi Harvey's adventures—is that the hero often triumphs over evil using wisdom or trickery, rather than physical might. How might the realities of Jewish history have contributed to the prominence of this theme in Jewish stories?
- Discuss the ethical teaching in these stories. Do you think these teachings are still relevant today? Is there one story that seems particularly relevant or useful to your own life?
- In the story "Forgive Me, Rabbi" (p. 77), Harvey bases his actions on his belief that when one wrongs a fellow human being, asking God for forgiveness is not good enough. Do you think he's right about this?
- In the story "Stump the Rabbi" Harvey answers some tough questions with the help of bits of wisdom from a variety of sources. The "Why weren't you Harvey?" question (p. 104) comes from the 18th century Hassidic master Rabbi Zusya, who, on his deathbed, was struck by the realization that in the world to come he would not be asked "Why weren't you Abraham or Moses." He would be asked, "Why weren't you Zusya?" Do you ever have this concern about yourself?
- The final exchange in this story (p. 107) comes from recent times, as some have wondered how God could have permitted the Holocaust to occur. "Where was God?" many have asked. One response—which has been suggested by Eli Wiesel among others—is: "Where was Man?" Do you find this answer at all satisfying?
- In the Talmud Rabbi Tarfon and Rabbi Akiva debate this question: Which is more important—learning or action? Rabbi Akiva insists that learning is more important. Rabbi Tarfon makes the case for action, arguing that study and wisdom are valuable only when then they are put to practical use. The other rabbis listen to the debate, and finally decide that learning is more important—but only when it leads to action. How would you have ruled on this question? Do you see any evidence that this might be one of Rabbi Harvey's favorite Talmudic passages?