

Purim Spiel (A Purim Play)

By Levin Kipnis

Illustrated by Nachum Gutman

Come see the show!

The song *Purim Spiel* or *Purim Play* is written as a humorous script based on the Book of Esther. It is an invitation to watch a children's play with a big cast, all dressed up as *Megillah* characters: Mordechai, Queen Esther, King Achashverosh and Haman.

Humor-filled performances have been staged in various Jewish communities on Purim since the 16th century. In Yiddish they were called *Purim Spiel*, in Arabic – *Kal'aat Purim*. Levin Kipnis perpetuated this Purim tradition in a song which is in fact a script for a children's play, to be performed by them. His words were put to music by Nahum Nardi as part of a children's Purim play, and later illustrated by Nachum Gutman. The book in its current format was first published in 1933, and the songs in it have been an integral part of many a Purim among Israeli children.

Happy Purim!



Ideas for Family Activities

- ❖ You may enjoy looking together at Nachum Gutman's special, 80-year-old illustrations. Did you notice that all the characters in the book, even the horse, are actually children in costume? You could make simple animal costumes at home using paper or foam sheets to create ears, belts for tails, or any other similar idea. Now the kids can crawl on all fours and turn into neighing horses, barking dogs, bleating sheep and so on.
- ❖ Do you know the tune to *Purim Play*? You may want to listen to the song, clap along to the music, or accompany it with your own instrument, and dance together.
- ❖ Many children love to dress up, and not only on Purim! You can make costumes at home using clothes, colorful kerchiefs, and simple accessories found in every home. How about making paper crowns and tiaras, or clown's hats, and having a family costume party?
- ❖ Do you remember a particular Purim costume from the time you were a child? Did you also dress up as Mordechai or Esther? Have you saved photographs from previous years? You may want to share those with your child.
- ❖ You could tell your child about the custom of sending each other *mishlochei manot* - Purim baskets of food. You may want to prepare such a basket at home, placing pastries, fruit or candy on a pretty napkin, and give it to your neighbor, friend, or favorite babysitter.



Levin Kipnis (1890–1990)

Levin Kipnis was one of the founding fathers of Hebrew children's literature. He was born in the Ukraine and immigrated to what would later become the State of Israel in 1913, with the aim of studying painting at Bezalel. However, upon feeling that there were not enough holiday songs and stories in Hebrew suitable for young children, he decided to dedicate his life to enriching young people's world. He wrote hundreds of children's poems and stories, and even decorated and illustrated some of his own work. Kipnis set up and managed the first children's theater in Israel, and also edited numerous journals, anthologies and text books. His collaboration with kindergarten teachers contributed greatly to the shaping of Israeli holiday traditions. Among his numerous works are well-loved songs and stories such as *Svivan Sov Sov Sov* ("Spin Spin Spin, Dreidel") for Hanukkah, *Saleinu Al Ktefeinu* ("Our Baskets are upon our Shoulders") for Shavuot, *Eliezer Vehagezer* ("Eliezer and the Carrot"), and *Hamitriya Hagdola shel Abba* ("Daddy's Big Umbrella").

Levin Kipnis was a particularly prolific author, and won many awards, including the Israel Prize in 1978, and the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 1988.



Nachum Gutman (1898–1980)

Nachum Gutman was a master painter, illustrator, sculptor, and author. He was regarded as a trailblazing children's illustrator in Israel, having illustrated children's poetry by Bialik, Tchernichovsky, and others. Gutman illustrated stories, poems, and articles in the children's weekly magazine *Davar Liyladim*, and designed many stage sets. He even created the colorful figures and sets for the famous Tel Aviv Purim Parade (*Adloyada*). Nachum Gutman wrote books for both children and adults, such as *In the Land of Lobengulu King of Zulu*, *An All Blue Donkey*, and *A Small City with Few People*, describing the early days of Tel Aviv.

Gutman won many awards, including: the Hans Christian Andersen Literary Prize in 1962; the Fichman Prize for Literature and Art in 1969; and the Israel Prize for his contribution to children's literature in 1978. The Nachum Gutman Museum, showcasing the artist's original work, opened in the Neve Tzedek neighborhood of Tel Aviv in 1998.

