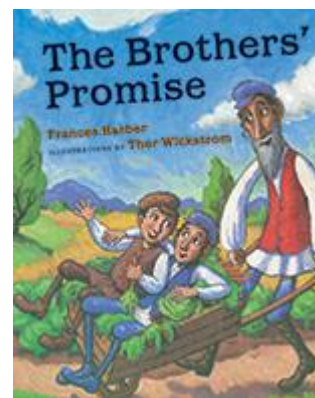


The Brothers' Promise

By Frances Harber

Illustrated by Thor Wickstrom

Published by Albert Whitman & Company



On one foot: This book is based on an ancient Mideast folktale. There is some controversy regarding the origins of this story. Some claim the tale is from a Talmudic legend, while others say it is an ancient Arabic legend. For more information: http://www.storiestogrowby.com/stories/two_brothers.html

Highlighted Jewish Values:

Caring for the earth

שְׁמִירַת הָאָדָמָה
Shmirat ha'adamah

Loving others

וְאַהֲבַתָּה לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ
V'ahavta lereicha kamocho

Connection to *shmita*

In order to prepare for a Sabbatical year when no crops are planted, farmers store food in advance. The plot of this book hinges on the foods stored by the brothers.

Optional preparation for reading the story:

Gather pictures that represent pieces of the story, such as a fiddle, beets, rain, etc.

Display props to catch the interest of the children, such as beets, potatoes, a shovel or wheelbarrow

Before You Read

Jewish Values and Background Information

Caring for the earth

Three aspects of this value to consider

- We are dependent on the earth for sustenance
- A great deal of work goes into farming and growing food
- We have mutual responsibility to sustain the gifts of nature

Though many people think of Tu B'Shevat as the Jewish Earth Day, taking care of the earth is a year-round obligation. The Torah teaches us not to waste natural resources (*bal tashchit*), to be kind to animals (*tza-ar ba-alei chayim*), and to let the earth rest in the seventh or *shmita* year. "When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land shall rest a Sabbath to the Lord. You may sow your field for six years, and for six years you may prune your vineyard, and gather in its produce, but in the seventh year, the land shall have a complete rest..." (Vayikra/Leviticus 25:1-4).

Loving others – *Ve-ahavta lerei'acha kamocha*

Three aspects of this value to consider

- Love yourself, understand your own needs, and be content with who you are
- Honor the different ways in which people live their lives
- Loving others goes beyond emotion; it means taking action to help one another

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18) is a core Jewish value. There is an often-told Talmudic story about the famous sage, Hillel. A noted troublemaker knocked on Hillel’s door and challenged him to teach the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel responded, “What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your neighbor. That is the entire Torah; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it” (Shabbat 31a). The idea of loving one’s neighbor is the basis for many mitzvot and acts of kindness. This teaching, expressed in a variety of ways and often referred to as The Golden Rule, is an ethical tenet in every major religion.

When You Read

Introducing the story and engaging the children

Set the stage with questions

What is a promise?

What do you think these brothers will promise to do?

Choose a storytelling technique (optional)

1: Children choose pictures based on their interests (loves music, likes vegetables, loves to read, loves quiet, etc.) Ask children to pantomime their picture as it comes up in the story.


2: Place farm-related objects in the center or around the room. See what questions arise about these objects. Use your lively conversation to introduce your story. For example, “I’d like to read you a story about two brothers who use these objects as part of their everyday life.”

After You Read

Making connections and making it personal

Caring for the earth	Loving others
Discuss	Discuss
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The brothers lived and worked on a farm. What type of farming chores do you think the brothers needed to do on their farm? • In addition to farmers working hard, what else might we need to make sure that the food on a farm will grow? 	<p>The title of the story refers to the promise that the two brothers made to their father before he died. What did the brothers promise to do? (How close is this to your guess at the beginning at the beginning of the story?)</p>



<p>Caring for the earth</p> <p>The book teaches us that water is very precious and important. In what ways can we conserve water in our classroom? How can we avoid wasting water in our homes?</p> 	<p>Loving others</p> <p>In what ways did the brothers take care of each other? How do you take care of and help your brothers, sisters, or other family members? Part of working together and loving one another involves honoring, respecting, and appreciating differences. In what ways were the brothers similar to one another? In what ways were they different? How are you like other members of your family? How are you different? In the Torah we're told "you should love your neighbor as yourself." What do you think this means? In what ways are the people in a family similar to neighbors?</p>
<p>Activities</p> <p>Don't be a drip: We talk about conserving water, yet we are often not aware how much water we use. Take a walk around your building and identify all of the fixtures that use water. Take note of any dripping faucets or any water waste you see. Finish up with a song, such as "Ushavtem Mayim" Four corners - brachot: Label four corners of the room with <i>nun</i>, <i>gimel</i>, <i>hay</i>, and <i>shin</i>. Ask everyone to choose a corner. One person spins a dreidel to select corner. All in that corner come to center. Teacher names a food. Students say the appropriate blessing and name another food in that bracha category. Repeat. Brothers' banquet: Learn the brachot for the vegetables you see in the book – cook a meal.</p>	<p>Activities</p> <p>Make someone happy: In this story each brother considered the needs of the other brother. Think about three people you know and what they need to make them happy. Differences and similarities: Partners sit back to back. Set timer for one minute. Student #1 describes their day's activities. Repeat with second student. Everyone reports one thing they heard that was similar to their day and one thing that was different. Someone else's shoes: Everyone puts one shoe in a pile or bag. Choose a shoe at random. Find the person whose shoe you chose. Ask "What is an interesting or faraway place these shoes have taken you?"</p>
<p>Taking it home – caring for the earth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite parents into the classroom to sample the foods you prepare. Have the children teach them the appropriate <i>brachot</i> for your nosh. • The book teaches us that water is very precious. Drought continues to be an issue. How much water do we use in a day? Try putting a bucket in the shower with you to see how much water you use in the shower. 	<p>Taking it home – Loving others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask parents to discuss the similarities and differences between family members at home.

