



A TREE IS NICE

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Why is it nice to have a tree? This book describes a variety of ways in which people make use of trees and explains some of the many reasons that they are so important to us all.

You might wonder why PJ Library has chosen *A Tree Is Nice* as one of its selections. What, you may ask, is inherently Jewish about this book? After all, no Jewish holiday or activity is observed in its pages, and there is no Hebrew language or mention of Israel. *A Tree Is Nice* is included in our selections because the premise, content and messages of the book—the appreciation for the innate beauty of a tree, the expression of nature’s bounty in a tree’s fruits, the use of trees for the shelter and protection of God’s creatures—are basic to Jewish thought and action.

The ideas expressed in the book transcend any religion or life practice, yet they are intrinsically Jewish. Environmental awareness through conservation, reuse, and recycling has been and continues to be a Jewish imperative. We hope this book inspires your family to consider and act in concert with nature in new and meaningful ways.

CELEBRATING TU B'SHEVAT

Each year, as the seasons change and the time of rain comes to Israel, a unique celebration takes place—*Tu B'Shevat* (the 15th day of the Jewish month of *Shevat*), or The New Year of the Trees. On this day Israeli schoolchildren plant trees as a celebration of the critical role trees play in our environment and for itself. Around the world, Jews raise money for tree-planting and celebrate nature by eating tree fruits: pomegranates, figs,

dates, olives, etc. *Tu B'Shevat*, which may seem unusual, teaches the environmental awareness and respect for the gifts of nature that have been part of the Jewish way of life since ancient times. The Torah (the first five books of the Bible) reminds us to avoid wastefulness of all kinds, and the Jewish sages of old taught that every living thing is important. Each blade of grass, the sages advised, has an angel standing guard above it, encouraging it to grow. How lovely for our children to learn respect and care for all living things through consideration and celebration of the many life-enriching qualities of trees!

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Weather permitting, read this book with your children under a tree, either in your backyard, at a friend’s home, or at a nearby park or forest. Where better to appreciate both the book and its subject?

As a family, plant a tree, perhaps doing so on a birthday or other special occasion, such as *Tu B'Shevat*. Measure the tree the day you place it in the earth and again each year on the anniversary of its planting. Be sure to have your children participate in this activity, as even little hands can help dig, pat the earth in place, and water. When outside, make it a habit to notice and talk with your children about the special qualities of trees, pointing to the individual differences that, much like those in children, make them unique. Pj