



IT'S TU B'SHEVAT

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With rhyme and colorful illustrations, this book tells the story of a boy and his family who plant a tree in honor of the Tu B'Shevat, the Jewish holiday known as The Birthday of the Trees.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Believe it or not, *Tu B'Shevat* is one of four new years in the Jewish calendar! It is the New Year of the Trees and can be equated to the American Arbor Day. It is a time when Jews around the world give thanks for trees and eat food native to Israel in appreciation of the fruit they offer.

Like many holidays, the name *Tu B'Shevat* refers to its date on the Hebrew calendar: the 15th of the month of *Shevat* (*Tu* represents the Hebrew letters *tet-vav*, which is the alpha-numerical expression of the number 15.) Historically *Tu B'Shevat* marked the beginning of the fruit crop.

Farmers would offer their tithes (a tenth of their produce) which would be sent as gifts to the Temple in Jerusalem. In ancient times this minor holiday was used as a marker for the age of a tree. In the 17th century, mystics in Safed, Israel, created a special seder for *Tu B'Shevat* that involved drinking four glasses of wine (in the same way that a Passover seder involves drinking four cups of wine). At the *Tu B'Shevat* seder, one glass of wine is white, one is pink (white with a bit of red), one is dark pink (red with some white) and the final glass is red. This is to reflect the four seasons.

While it might seem odd to talk about trees and the earth in January or February (when *Tu B'Shevat* usually falls on the secular/solar calendar), in Israel the land is dry and trees are blooming! *Tu B'Shevat* marks the unofficial

beginning of springtime. Israeli school children often visit the forests of the Jewish National Fund where they plant trees to help rebuild the land.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

This story offers several suggestions of the many gifts that trees give the world. Why are trees important to you? Why is it important to plant trees? Point out to your child all the things in your house that originally came from trees.

Take a walk with your children and look at some particularly big trees in your neighborhood. Together try to imagine what the world must have looked like when that tree was planted.

Plant! A fun project is to plant some parsley seeds in a styrofoam cup. Draw a face on the side of the cup. Once the parsley spouts, it looks as if it is the hair on the head of the face. Then you can use the parsley at your Passover seder!

Create a *Tu B'Shevat* seder. You can look for models on the Internet or in Jewish books, or create your own. Sing songs with your children, pile your table high with different kinds of fruit and nuts (extra points for foods from Israel) and talk about where the foods come from.

Donate money to have a tree planted in Israel through the Jewish National Fund. As a family decide if you would like to plant that tree in honor or in memory of someone special.