



DEAR TREE

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On the Jewish New Year of the Trees (Tu B'Shvat), a little boy shares his hopes and wishes for trees—and especially for the one under which he plays.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Trees have deep roots in Jewish culture, and that is especially evident in the holiday of *Tu B'Shvat* (often spelled “Tu B'Shevat”). Known as the Jewish New Year of the Trees, this is a time when Jews around the world show their appreciation for trees and the many gifts they give to human beings and to the planet. *Tu B'Shvat* falls on the fifteenth day of the Jewish month *Shvat*, which coincides with the middle of winter in the secular calendar. In ancient times *Tu B'Shvat* marked the annual beginning of the fruit crop. Farmers would offer their tithes (traditionally a tenth of their produce), which would be sent as gifts to the Temple in Jerusalem. In those days, this minor holiday was used as a marker for the age of a tree.

In modern times, the holiday is broadly seen as a time to think about humans' relationship to the earth, and the responsibility we have to take care of our environment. Where weather permits, Jews mark the holiday by planting saplings. Some families hold *seders*, special ritual meals, with “the seven species” described in the Biblical book of Deuteronomy, 8:8 – wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates, all of which were abundant in Israel in Biblical times. However you observe, making time to appreciate trees can be a meaningful experience for you and your family.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Tu B'Shvat falls on the secular/solar calendar in January or February. For many, it might seem odd to talk about trees at this time of year, but in Israel the land is dry and trees are blooming! In this warm climate, *Tu B'Shvat* marks the unofficial beginning of springtime. Israeli children often visit the forests of the Jewish National Fund, where they plant trees to help rebuild the land.

Many parts of the world are still too cold for tree-planting in January and February, but there are other ways to get into the spirit of *Tu B'Shvat*, such as having a *Tu B'Shvat seder*. Like a Passover seder, a *Tu B'Shvat seder* is a ritual meal that follows a particular routine (the word *seder* literally means “order”). Because *Tu B'Shvat* is a time to celebrate trees, a *Tu B'Shvat seder* typically includes foods that come from trees – fruits, dates, and nuts. (For ideas on what foods to serve and when, visit pjlibrary.org and search “Tu B'Shevat.”) Another great cold-weather observance of *Tu B'Shvat* is to plant seedlings in containers indoors. Many families plant parsley, which will be ready to eat several months later at Passover! No matter how you choose to mark the holiday, *Tu B'Shvat* is a perfect time for everyone in the family to think about ways to respect and give thanks for the planet.