



THE CRICKET AND THE ANT

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Cricket just likes to have fun. He lets poor Ant do all the work of preparing for Shabbat. But when Shabbat finally rolls around with a crisis, Cricket finds a way to save the day.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Many special practices about food reflect important religious beliefs. The most prominent of these in the Jewish tradition are (1) the rules of *kashrut* that govern which animals and methods of meal preparation are ritualistically acceptable, (2) the symbolic food items on the Passover table, and (3) the obligation to respect Shabbat without kindling fire or cooking after the sun has set.

In this story, Cricket and Ant eagerly anticipate Shabbat as they try to prepare their meals before the sun goes down. But their long naps bring them into contact with a different Jewish tradition—the pleasure of preparing and sharing special foods with others.

Offering refreshments to guests is more than an agreeable social custom. *Hachnasat orchim* (hospitality to guests) is a *mitzvah* (commandment) specified in the Talmud. Stories in the rabbinic literature outline ways to treat one's guests: greeting and bidding them farewell at the door, offering food and drink, asking about their activities and interests, and being cheerful throughout the visit.

Marking special moments by hosting friends and family is a wonderful way to share values and customs. Offering hospitality can be personally and spiritually uplifting as we focus our attention on gratitude, appreciating the comforts we have and can share with others.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Cricket and Ant are kind and caring with each other, and they offer assistance when the other is in a tough spot. They enjoy being together and also give each other space to take a nap or sleep late! Pointing out this relaxed give-and-take is a good way to talk to your child about the qualities of a good friendship. It's always important to balance time spent with friends and time spent pursuing separate interests.

Children at this age value their friendships, and they are starting to understand the difference between right and wrong. This may be a perfect time to discuss the concept of *hachnasat orchim* and establish family rules about welcoming guests and hosting playdates in your home. For example:

Greetings—Does everyone go to the door to greet friends?

Cheerfulness—Would it be helpful to set up a “code word” to remind children about their intentions to be kind during an extended visit?

Refreshments—What will you offer as a snack? Does your child know if the friend has any food allergies or dietary preferences?

Focus—Does your child understand that people don't always think about and enjoy the same things? Are you a role model for asking others about their interests?

Farewell—When it's time for a guest to leave, does the family go to the door to say goodbye?