



HERE IS THE WORLD

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The cycle of the Jewish year is a world of joy, significance, and wonder, especially for a new baby encountering each holiday for the first time. As the leaves turn gold, flutter to the ground, and are ultimately replaced by fresh green buds, we follow the Jewish year from one milestone to the next.

JEWISH CONCEPTS

“Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). This injunction from the first book of the Bible helps us understand the special place children hold in Judaism. Family is at the core of Jewish values and Jewish life. Children are included in many aspects of Jewish observance -- during holidays and every day. The cycle of the Jewish year can hold a great deal of interest for little ones and their parents alike. For small children, each experience that accompanies holiday traditions is exciting and new – the sight of a candle flame, the sound of a holiday song, the smell of a celebratory treat. For parents, seeing these traditions come alive in the next generation can be deeply gratifying. That’s one of the many wonderful things about the cycle of the Jewish year – each celebration and observance is at once steeped in tradition and a brand-new experience.

Jewish ceremonies that hold great meaning for many new parents are the *brit milah* (literally, the covenant of circumcision) for boys, and baby namings for boys and girls. A *brit* (sometimes called a *bris*) is held when a baby boy is eight days old, and is a time to rejoice as well as hear the baby’s name for the first time. Baby girls are often named in synagogue on the first Shabbat after their birth. Each child who enters the world is a celebration for the parents, the extended family, the surrounding community, and even the world. As the *midrash* (interpretation of text) says, “With each life, the world begins anew.”

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

When you read this story to your child, point out how the scenery in the background changes. The story starts at *Rosh Hashanah*, the head of the Jewish year, which arrives in early autumn. As the year progresses through *Sukkot* (the harvest holiday), *Hanukkah* (festival of lights), *Purim* (which commemorates the Book of Esther) and *Passover* (a remembrance of liberation from slavery), the baby develops, growing and changing with the passage of time.

While very young children don’t yet understand the passage of time, they can appreciate their own growth. Set up a chart and measure height at each Jewish holiday. Decorate the chart with appropriate holiday symbols that are associated with the activities below, which your children are sure to enjoy.

- At Rosh Hashanah, dip apples in honey to symbolize a sweet new year.
- At Hanukkah, spin a *dreidel* (a four-sided wooden top specific to the holiday).
- At Purim, dress up as a character from the Book of Esther, or anything you like!
- At Passover, set up a seder plate to commemorate the exodus from Egypt.

Including children makes the holidays come alive for them – and enhances your celebration too.