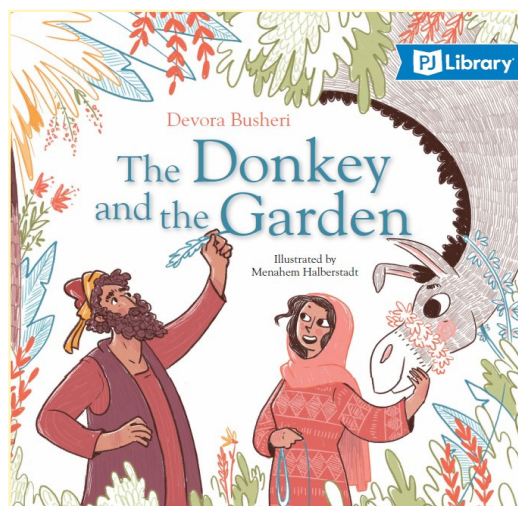


The Donkey and the Garden

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{ What new things are you learning to do? }

Akiva the Achiever

Like other ancient leaders of the Jewish people, Rabbi Akiva (circa 2nd century CE) started out as a shepherd. “When I stand tall, I can see where each and every little lamb of mine has wandered,” he says confidently to his wife, Rachel. But when he enters the schoolhouse, his confidence leaves him. Perhaps this humbling experience is what helped him to become such a well-respected teacher. Rabbi Akiva’s legacy lies in his teachings, his yeshiva (learning academy), and the thousands of students who followed him. He is also famous for emphasizing the importance of the idea to “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18), the special words that appear at the end of this book. To learn more, visit pjlibrary.org/donkeygarden.

HANDS ON!

Animal Surprise

In this book the people in the market aren’t sure what to think of the donkey-garden. Here’s a fun game to create your own unexpected creature combination.

Supplies:

Two small bags

Construction paper

Markers / crayons / colored pencils

Scissors

Optional: Pipe cleaners, string, popsicle sticks, cotton balls, glitter, stickers, beads, gluesticks . . . any crafting supplies you’d like to help decorate.

Write a list of ten animals down one side of your paper, leaving room between each animal (could be a fox, a whale, a unicorn – whatever you like). Now write a list of ten everyday objects down the other side of the paper (a chair, a truck, a rainbow – anything!). Again, leave room between each object. Cut out all the words (or have your grownup help you). The animals go in one bag, and the objects go in the other bag.

Now comes the fun part: pick one word out of each bag to see what kind of surprise creature you will be making. Draw your animal and give it a name. How would people in the marketplace react to your surprising animal?

A Crown for Rachel

The donkey in this story is funny, but the true star is Rachel. Jewish sources tell us that Rachel’s wealthy father did not approve of her decision to marry Akiva, so he cut her off from the family fortune. Still, Rachel encouraged her husband to go and learn, and went to great lengths to support him. According to one tale, she sold her hair in the marketplace to help buy oil to light Akiva’s lamp so he could study late at night. Later, after Akiva became successful, some stories say that he bought his wife a beautiful headdress that looked like a golden city or even like Jerusalem itself. This crown was a reward for Rachel’s patience (he was gone a long time!) and faith in her husband.

Father and Son

Rachel understands that Akiva is frightened to make the leap from shepherd to student, but she also sees that he longs to transform – to become a person who can read “the wondrous letters on the writing board.” In that connection, the tale included at the book’s end is extra sweet. According to tradition, when Rabbi Akiva started to study, he was in a classroom with his own son, and they held the writing tablet together. When their teacher started writing the letters of the aleph-bet (Hebrew alphabet) on the tablet, father and son began their learning journey together. It’s never the wrong time to learn something new – in fact, learning can

TALK IT OVER WITH YOUR KIDS

WHY do you think Akiva didn’t want to go to school, even though he wanted to learn to read and write? Have you ever been afraid or embarrassed to try something new?

HOW did people react to the donkey with the garden on its back when they first saw it? Why did their response change?

IF the donkey could speak, what do you think it might have said when it went to the market?