



SOMETHING FROM NOTHING

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Joseph's grandfather, a tailor, made him a blanket when he was a baby. As Joseph grows and changes, his grandfather makes the blanket change, too – into a jacket, a vest, a tie, even a button. What happens when the last of the blanket finally disappears?

JEWISH CONCEPTS

Joseph loves his special blanket. When it starts to wear out, his mother suggests it's time to throw it out – but Joseph and his grandfather come up with a better solution! *Bal tashchit* (Hebrew for “do not destroy”) is a core Jewish value that urges us to preserve the earth and its resources. Although Judaism is an ancient religion, its laws guiding us to live in an environmentally responsible way are perhaps even more significant today than when they were first written. The Talmud (the core collection of rabbinic writings) says, “Whoever destroys anything that could be useful to others breaks the law of *bal tashchit*” (Kadoshim 32a). Joseph understands this innately – and his mother learns from him, just as we parents learn from our children in countless ways, every day.

This book shares the important value of *bal tashchit* in a classically Jewish way: through a folktale, one that helps transmit a Jewish culture and religion to a new generation. When parents pass down old folktales like this one, they're sharing a piece of history. The illustrations in this book show striking details about life in a *shtetl* (Yiddish for little town). From the grandfather's work as a tailor to the bagel salesman, the organ grinder to Joseph's mother doing laundry in the stream, and the schoolroom to the food market, these pictures can be a jumping-off point to discussing life during this very different time in Jewish history.

USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

Joseph isn't the only one making good use of his blanket – so are the mice that appear at the bottom of each page in this book! They enact their own story as they receive more and more of the discarded snips of blanket. Watch them as they move in, set up house, and make use of all the extra pieces of fabric. When Joseph loses the final piece of his blanket – the button – it is found by the mice and put to good use.

You and your child can practice *bal tashchit* at home. Go through your child's closet together and select clothing that either no longer fits or is too “old and worn” to be used anymore. Now think of some ways you can put that clothing to use! An old pair of jeans can be repurposed into shorts. A T-shirt can be transformed into a tote bag or a pillow.

Of course, you don't have to restrict yourself to clothing. Consider your other belongings and talk about how you might find creative new uses for them. Old socks make fun hand puppets. Paper towel rolls can be telescopes or flutes. What else can you come up with? Once you start thinking about how to reuse things, you might find you start looking at everything differently.