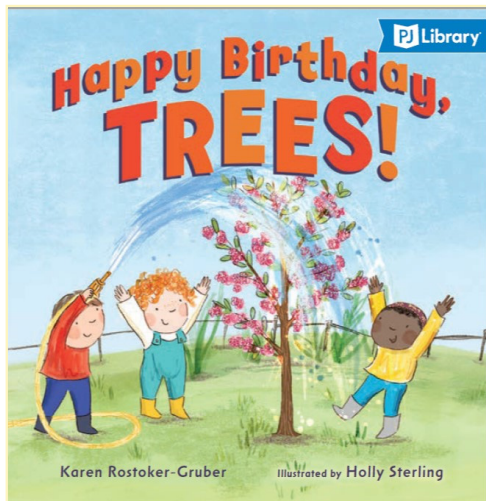


Happy Birthday, Trees!

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Why celebrate trees?

How Does Our Garden Grow?

We humans are asked to be partners with God in preserving the beauty and sustainability of our world. There are many quotes in the Bible about caring for the earth, beginning with the first chapters of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) -- God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden to "till it and tend it" (Genesis 2:15). Judaism teaches that taking good care of the earth isn't just about weeding and watering today, but planning (and planting!) for tomorrow. Caring for the planet is another way of caring for future generations. In the words of a famous passage from the Talmud (the core collection of rabbinic writings), "Just as my ancestors planted trees for me, I plant trees for my children and grandchildren."

HANDS ON!

Sprout an Avocado Tree

Want to grow your very own tree for Tu B'Shevat -- or anytime? The next time you eat an avocado, save the pit for sprouting.

Supplies:

Avocado pit

Toothpicks

Glass of water

Wash your avocado pit. Carefully stick three toothpicks in it and suspend the broad end of the pit into the glass of water so that it's mostly submerged.

Place the glass in a warm spot, but not in direct sunlight. Over time, the water level will lower. Add more water as needed to keep the pit wet.

In the next 2 to 6 weeks, you'll notice roots and stem beginning to sprout. When the stem is 6 to 7 inches long, cut it back several inches. When the roots thicken and the stem grows new leaves, transplant it into a pot of soil, leaving the top half of the pit exposed -- or, if you live in a warm enough climate, you can plant it outdoors. Place it in a sunny spot, water it regularly, and don't forget to celebrate its birthday!

Saying a Special Thanks

When Joni planted her new tree, she said a prayer. The book doesn't tell us which one. Maybe she said a traditional blessing over a tree: "Thank you that there is such beauty in the world." Maybe she said the Shehecheyanu, a blessing thanking God for bringing us to a special moment. Or maybe she just made up her own! To learn more, visit pjlibrary.org/happybirthdaytree.

A Tree Like Me

A central Jewish concept is bal tashchit, Hebrew for "do not destroy." The Bible prohibits uprooting fruit trees, even in times of battle, and some commentators add that when a tree is chopped down its cries are heard throughout the world. Joni seems to understand the needs and sensitivities of trees, and treats them the ways she would treat a person: she offers her tree gifts that people can enjoy, too, such as water, sunshine, friends, and of course, cupcakes. When Joni and Nate check to see if the tree is happy, the kids are using their Jewish imagination. As the Bible says, "Let the sea resound...let the fields be jubilant...let all the trees of the forest shout for joy" (Psalms 96).

Language Barriers

Trees can do many things, but one thing they can't do is talk. Joni doesn't let this stop her from trying to figure out what her tree really wants! Sometimes communication isn't straightforward, whether it's with a tree, a pet, a baby, or two people misunderstanding each other. Joni shows us that when there's a (significant!) language barrier, if we try hard enough, communication is possible.

TALK IT OVER WITH YOUR KIDS

WHAT good things about trees can you name?

HOW do Joni and Nate try to make the tree happy on its birthday? Did they succeed?

HOW would you celebrate a tree's birthday?