



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY, TREE!

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*The Jewish holiday of Tu B'Shevat, also known as the Birthday of the Trees, celebrates the critical role that trees play in life. In this story, a little girl presents her favorite climbing tree with a special birthday gift.*

## JEWISH CONCEPTS

Trees and the environment have particular importance in Jewish thought. From the very beginning of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) we are taught to respect all things that grow, as Adam is placed in the Garden of Eden to “keep it and watch over it.” (Genesis 2:15) The value of *bal tashchit*, which translates from the Hebrew as “do not destroy,” has become the Jewish ecology mantra. Put into action, this concept means we are all partners in preserving the beauty and sustainability of our world.

In this book Joni and Nate make a single tree happy on its birthday. Traditionally, Jews eat the fruit of a tree only after it is three years old. The 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat, called *Tu B'Shevat*, became the trees' birthday to help people determine when to first harvest their fruit. This holiday is gaining significance today as the Jewish Earth Day.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN READING

- What are the various ways Joni and Nate try to make the tree happy on its birthday?
- How would you celebrate a tree's birthday?
- Why do you think Joni loves this tree so much?

## USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

This book suggests many ways to take care of the Earth. Your family may choose to add one or several new conservation ideas to those you have already put into action. Need help remembering to stick to your goals? Fun and helpful family crafts might include making a reminder sign for the dashboard of your car so that your reusable bags find their way into the market with you, or a turn-off-the-faucet sign for your bathroom.

Early in the Torah we read that every plant with seeds is ours for eating. The next time your family eats fruits or vegetables, set aside the seeds to examine. With your little ones' participation, make a comparison chart of the foods you eat and their seeds or pits. Try sprouting some of these seeds – who knows what you might grow!