



The Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education
Seidman Educational Resource Center

Family Activities for Tu BiShevat

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Young children are just “naturally” more open than adults to the wonders of creation, and not just because they are that much closer to the ground! They truly take the time to smell the flowers, watch the ants, examine a rock. The newness of their experiences makes it seem as if the world itself was just made, and they respond with interest and excitement. We can provide many “tree happenings” that can play on this interest in the natural world to make Tu BiShevat meaningful for young family members. Below are just a few suggestions – your fertile imaginations can come up with many more!

1. Sit near a window with a view of trees and ask your child what he or she sees. Point out the trees if they are not mentioned. Have your child look at the branches and talk about what they look like (straight, bent, tangled, etc.). Try to help your child see beauty in the bare branches and the tree shapes you can see when no leaves are in the way. Then imagine together what grows on tree – leaves, flowers, fruits – and then look at the winter trees again. We can enjoy the trees in any season!
2. Go on a “tree-sure” hunt. Walk through the house with your child and look for things that come from trees. She or he may be surprised to learn that wood and papers are tree products. The chair she or he sits in, the pencil used for drawing, are all products of trees. Even the books we read were once growing in a forest! Have lots of fruit to discover and talk about as your exploring adventure ends in the kitchen or dining room fruit bowl.
3. Have your own Tu BiShevat seder! Go together to the grocery store and find all the fruits you can that come from trees. You can also buy nuts, but they are not recommended for young children to eat. The DO make a great table decoration! You can also take a trip down the cookie aisle and get treats that have nuts and fruits baked into them. Figure out a way to eat them using the ideas of the kabbalists – grouping together those with peels that need to be removed, those with pits, and those that can be eaten entirely. Instead, you may wish to put together those which grow in Israel, such as oranges, grapefruits, pomegranates, figs, grapes, olives, and dates. Rather than reading Biblical verse, you may wish to show pictures of the trees growing in Israel. You might want to end the eating part of your seder with the cookie treats, talking about what fruits and nuts they contain. Finally, a good tree story makes a good finish! Check out the Tu BiShevat bibliography at <http://www.ajae.org/content/educationalResources/bibliographies/tubishvat.shtml>.

(Over, please)

4. No Tu BiShevat is complete without the purchase of at least one tree in Israel. The Land has been severely deforested after centuries of misuse, and is in critical need of your help. Participate with your child in the great Mitzvah of tree-planting. In order to make this experience more concrete for your youngster, you may wish to plant a tree in your own year at the same time – or at least as soon as you can actually dig a hole and successfully transplant a sapling!
5. Use Tu BiShevat as a time to renew your commitment to conservation and protection of the earth. Have a family talk about using resources carefully, such as not leaving the water running unnecessarily (plants may need that water) or not using paper plates very often (because they use up trees). Again, on a more concrete level, you and your child can take a trip around your yard to see how the plants and the soil are doing. Some trees and plants may need more mulch, which your child can help you put out.
6. Think together about how trees help us on holidays through the year, not just on Tu BiShevat. On Rosh Hashanah, we eat something that grew on a tree. On Sukkot, cover the Sukkah with sekhakh, we hang fruits from the Sukkah, use the etrog and wave the lulav - parts of trees - in the air! On Hanukkah, many of us eat latkes with applesauce. Purim brings us hamentaschen filled with cherries, apples and plums. On Pesach, we eat haroset made from apples and nuts from our friends, the trees. On Shavuot, we talk about the Torah, the TREE of Life, something we can learn about and hang onto forever!

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