



## THE TREES OF THE DANCING GOATS

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*During a scarlet fever epidemic in Michigan, the members of a Jewish family help make Christmas special for their very sick neighbors.*

According to Jewish tradition, the world rests on three pillars: Torah (study), *avodah* (literally, “service” or “work”) and *gemilut chasadim* (acts of loving-kindness). The help given by Trisha and her family to their sick neighbors were certainly examples of *gemilut chasadim*, loving-kindness, given at a time when it was especially needed. Their actions could be considered particularly special since, though not stated, these Jews themselves would likely have received little such kindness from the community where they formerly lived. *The Trees of the Dancing Goats* provides a great opportunity to remember how important unexpected acts of generosity can be.

### KAVOD—RESPECT

The importance of showing respect goes back as far as The Ten Commandments, which states that *kavod* (Hebrew for respect) is owed to one’s parents. Of course, all people deserve respect, including those who think, look, act or believe differently. In *The Trees of the Dancing Goats*, the actions of Trisha and her family when they cared for their sick neighbors, provided food and helped them to enjoy a holiday that was so different from their own, certainly demonstrated an expression of *kavod* and friendship, and an example of community at its best.

### USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

All around the world, holiday traditions are passed down from generation to generation; doing so helps maintain what is important and familiar in a culture, keeps memories alive, and honors loved ones who practiced these customs. There are many fascinating and varied *Hanukkah* customs: in Yemen, for example, children are given a coin on each day of *Hanukkah* with which they buy sugar and a red powder to make into a special drink.

Through the Internet, books in your local synagogue or public library, or in conversation with relatives and friends, explore other ways in which people have celebrated *Hanukkah* through the centuries. This might lead your family to some new *Hanukkah* celebration.

Donating a wrapped toy to make a holiday special for a sick or lonely child, choosing an organization to receive your family’s saved coins, and inviting a lonely neighbor to attend a school performance are all acts that children can participate in fully and that can support a truly memorable holiday season.

\* The transliterated word *Hanukkah* can be spelled in many different ways—including *Chanukkah*, *Channukah*, *Chanuka*, etc. Pj