

The Rosh Hashana Road Map

Oorah's "Road Map" guides are designed to help you "find your way around" the Yomim Tovim that mark the Jewish year. Our heritage is rich with traditions, rituals and special prayers that unite us with Jews throughout the centuries and throughout the world. But most importantly, they provide us with meaningful ways to become better connected to our own souls, our Torah, and of course, to G-d.

We hope you will find the information provided within these pages to be helpful and enlightening. Use it to enhance your experience of the Jewish holidays, and to give your family a sweet, authentic taste of the beautiful tradition that is every Jewish child's birthright!

For further information or clarification, feel free to contact us at

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CHAPTER ONE: THE FACTS: THE WHEN AND WHY OF ROSH HASHANA

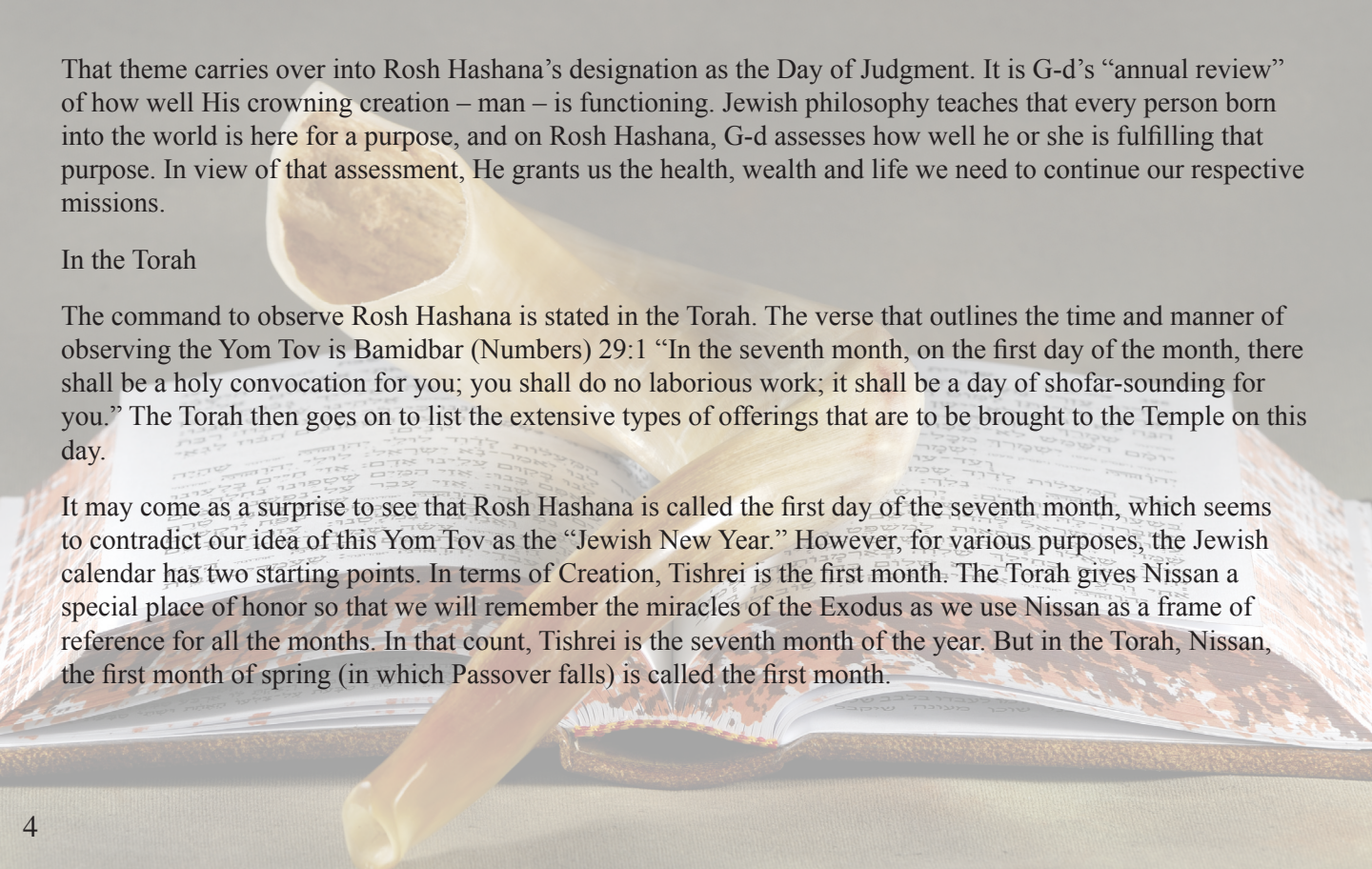
On the Calendar

Rosh Hashana, which literally means “the head of the year,” is celebrated on the first and second days of the month of Tishrei. Unlike other holidays that are observed for two days outside Israel and only one day within Israel, Rosh Hashana is observed for two days everywhere.

Rosh Hashana marks the “birthday of the world.” The first day of Tishrei is not, however, the first day of Creation. Rather, it is the day in which man was created, which corresponds to the sixth day of Creation. The stage was set for man during the preceding five days, which are the last days of the Hebrew month of Elul. But because man was the ultimate purpose of G-d’s work, the day he was brought into existence is considered the birthday of the world. Only man has been given the mission to exercise his free will and bring awareness of G-d’s presence.

The artist sets up a studio. For five days, he is busy buying his paints, setting up his lighting, choosing a canvas and laying the paints out on the palette. On the sixth day, when he finishes all this preparation, he begins to paint. It is then that the work of the previous five days comes to fruition. The painting is the object of his labors. It is the means by which the artist’s creative powers can be communicated to the rest of the world.

Likewise, Hashem spent five days creating all the support systems that would be necessary for his “masterpiece,” – man – to come into the world. Man is the object of creation, for only man is capable of recognizing and proclaiming the existence of his Creator.



That theme carries over into Rosh Hashana's designation as the Day of Judgment. It is G-d's "annual review" of how well His crowning creation – man – is functioning. Jewish philosophy teaches that every person born into the world is here for a purpose, and on Rosh Hashana, G-d assesses how well he or she is fulfilling that purpose. In view of that assessment, He grants us the health, wealth and life we need to continue our respective missions.

In the Torah

The command to observe Rosh Hashana is stated in the Torah. The verse that outlines the time and manner of observing the Yom Tov is Bamidbar (Numbers) 29:1 "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, there shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall do no laborious work; it shall be a day of shofar-sounding for you." The Torah then goes on to list the extensive types of offerings that are to be brought to the Temple on this day.

It may come as a surprise to see that Rosh Hashana is called the first day of the seventh month, which seems to contradict our idea of this Yom Tov as the "Jewish New Year." However, for various purposes, the Jewish calendar has two starting points. In terms of Creation, Tishrei is the first month. The Torah gives Nissan a special place of honor so that we will remember the miracles of the Exodus as we use Nissan as a frame of reference for all the months. In that count, Tishrei is the seventh month of the year. But in the Torah, Nissan, the first month of spring (in which Passover falls) is called the first month.

Other Names and Meanings

As with many Jewish holidays, Rosh Hashana has other names, each of which encapsulates a theme of the Yom Tov:

Yom HaDin: Day of Judgment

Yom HaZikoron: Day of Remembrance

Yom Teruah: Day of Shofar Blowing

CHAPTER 2: ROSH HASHANA AT HOME

Lighting the Candles

This mitzvah is usually performed by the woman of the house, although a man can perform it for his household if his wife is not available or present. The custom is for at least two candles to be lit. If possible, the candles should be lit in the dining room, where their light will add to the festive atmosphere.

On the first night, the candles are lit 18 minutes before shkiah (sunset). If this is a Friday night, the woman lights the candles and then covers her eyes and recites the blessing over the candles. This blessing includes mention of Shabbat and Yom Tov. She then recites a second blessing, “Shehechyanu,” which thanks G-d for keeping her alive to see this day. One does not recite the blessing and then light the candles, as the blessing customarily ushers in the holiness of Shabbat. It would be too late then to light the candles.

Some women have the custom of lighting differently on Yom Tov when it is not Shabbat. They first recite the blessing and then light the candles.

Tip! Once Yom Tov begins, one may not strike a match. Fire may be used on Yom Tov, but one may not create a new fire. Therefore, it is wise to leave a long-burning flame going (positioned safely) so that candles can be kindled on the second night. A small flame on a gas burner or a 24-hour candle will suffice for this purpose.

On the second night, candle lighting time is later. One must wait for the end of the first holiday to light candles for the second day of Rosh Hashana. One should wait after sundown the normal amount of time which one waits in order to perform work after Yom Tov.

The blessings recited over the candles are:

ברוך אתה אד-ני אלקינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו להדליק נר של (שבת ושל) יום טוב

Boruch Atah Ado-noy Elo-heinu Melech ha-olam, asher kidishanu b'mitzvosov vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel (Shabbat v'shel) Yom Tov.

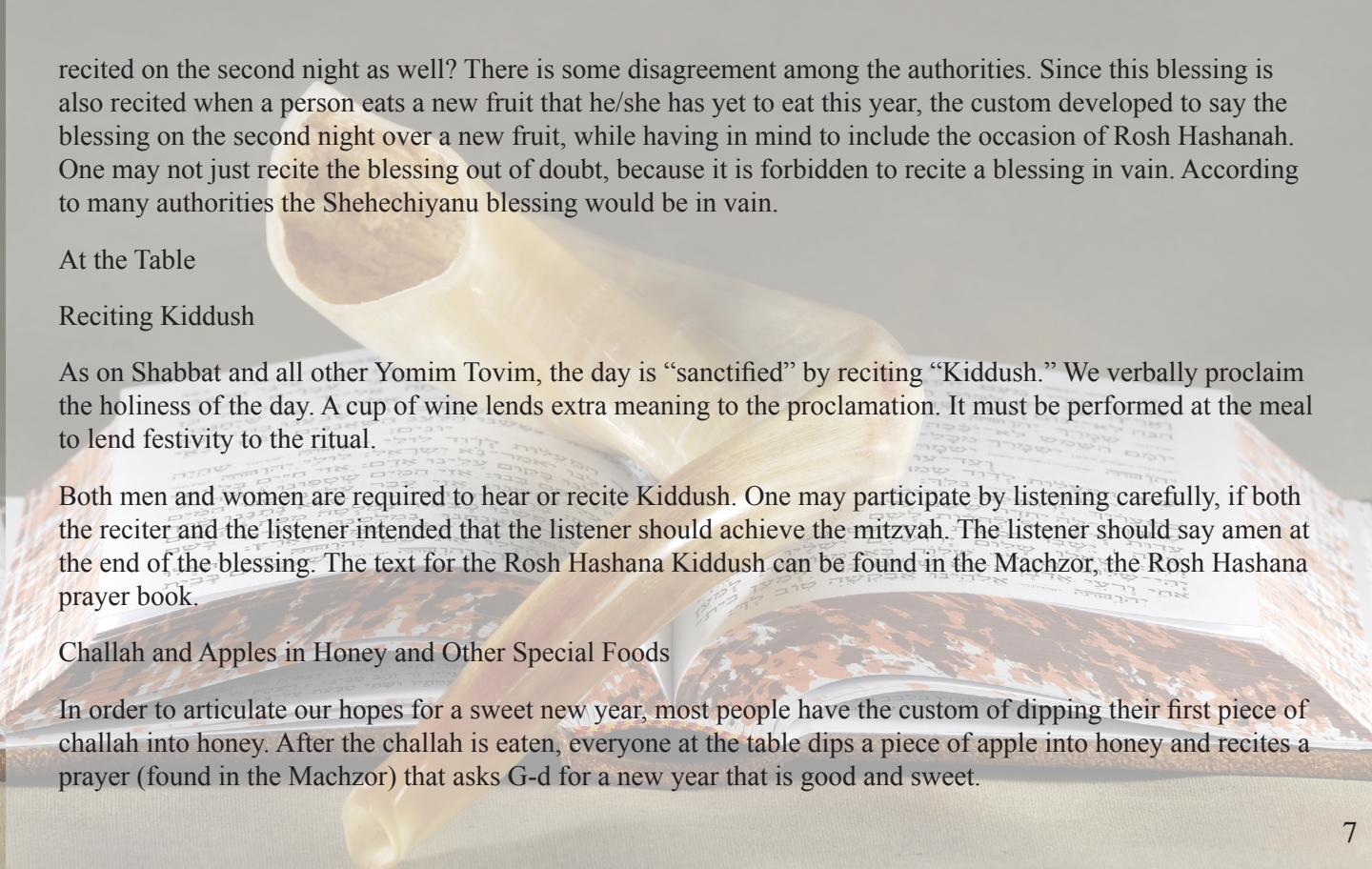
Blessed are you, Hashem, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to kindle the light of (Sabbath and) the Festival.

ברוך אתה אד-ני אלקינו מלך העולם, שהחיינו, וקיימנו, והיגינו לזמן הזה

Boruch Atah Adonoy, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, she-hechyanu, v'kiyimanu, v'higianu laz'man hazeh.

Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive and has sustained us, and has brought us to this season.

Question: Since “Shehechyanu” is a blessing that thanks G-d for reaching certain milestones, should it be

A glass of honey is being poured into another glass. The background is a scroll of text, likely a prayer book or Machzor, with Hebrew text visible. The scene is set against a light, textured background.

recited on the second night as well? There is some disagreement among the authorities. Since this blessing is also recited when a person eats a new fruit that he/she has yet to eat this year, the custom developed to say the blessing on the second night over a new fruit, while having in mind to include the occasion of Rosh Hashanah. One may not just recite the blessing out of doubt, because it is forbidden to recite a blessing in vain. According to many authorities the Shehechyanu blessing would be in vain.

At the Table

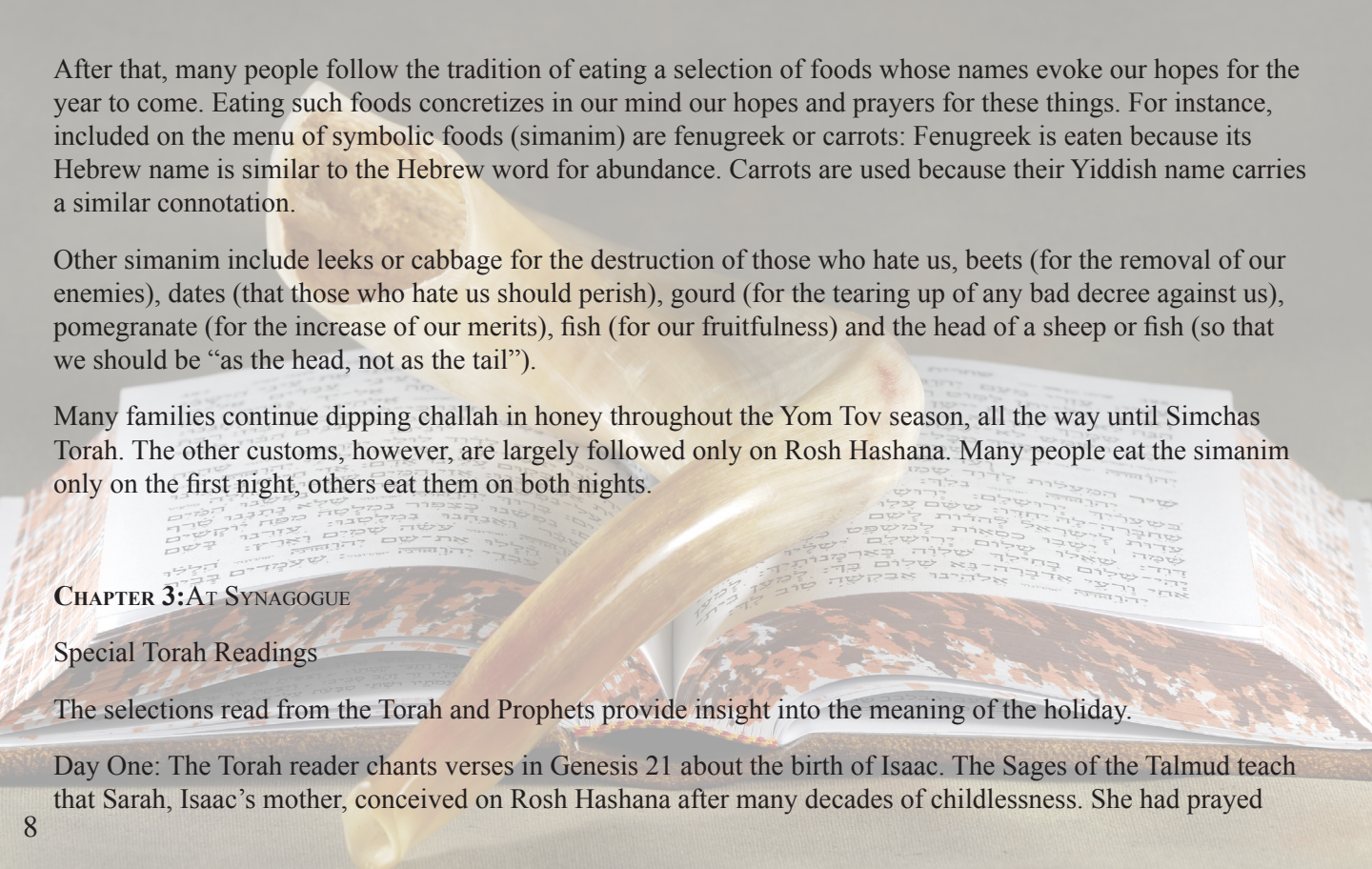
Reciting Kiddush

As on Shabbat and all other Yomim Tovim, the day is “sanctified” by reciting “Kiddush.” We verbally proclaim the holiness of the day. A cup of wine lends extra meaning to the proclamation. It must be performed at the meal to lend festivity to the ritual.

Both men and women are required to hear or recite Kiddush. One may participate by listening carefully, if both the reciter and the listener intended that the listener should achieve the mitzvah. The listener should say amen at the end of the blessing. The text for the Rosh Hashana Kiddush can be found in the Machzor, the Rosh Hashana prayer book.

Challah and Apples in Honey and Other Special Foods

In order to articulate our hopes for a sweet new year, most people have the custom of dipping their first piece of challah into honey. After the challah is eaten, everyone at the table dips a piece of apple into honey and recites a prayer (found in the Machzor) that asks G-d for a new year that is good and sweet.



After that, many people follow the tradition of eating a selection of foods whose names evoke our hopes for the year to come. Eating such foods concretizes in our mind our hopes and prayers for these things. For instance, included on the menu of symbolic foods (simanim) are fenugreek or carrots: Fenugreek is eaten because its Hebrew name is similar to the Hebrew word for abundance. Carrots are used because their Yiddish name carries a similar connotation.

Other simanim include leeks or cabbage for the destruction of those who hate us, beets (for the removal of our enemies), dates (that those who hate us should perish), gourd (for the tearing up of any bad decree against us), pomegranate (for the increase of our merits), fish (for our fruitfulness) and the head of a sheep or fish (so that we should be “as the head, not as the tail”).

Many families continue dipping challah in honey throughout the Yom Tov season, all the way until Simchas Torah. The other customs, however, are largely followed only on Rosh Hashana. Many people eat the simanim only on the first night, others eat them on both nights.

CHAPTER 3: AT SYNAGOGUE

Special Torah Readings

The selections read from the Torah and Prophets provide insight into the meaning of the holiday.

Day One: The Torah reader chants verses in Genesis 21 about the birth of Isaac. The Sages of the Talmud teach that Sarah, Isaac’s mother, conceived on Rosh Hashana after many decades of childlessness. She had prayed

fervently throughout her life for a son, and at last, Hashem answered her prayer. The story reminds us of the power of our own prayers, and is meant to inspire us to turn our hearts completely to G-d.

The Haftorah on this day tells of Hannah, who also prayed from the bottom of her heart for a child and was at last answered.

Day Two: The Torah reading comes from Genesis 22, and recounts Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac to G-d. The episode demonstrates Abraham's wholehearted devotion to G-d, in that he was willing – in compliance with G-d's will -- to part with his beloved son. The ram which G-d instructed Abraham to sacrifice in his son's place is symbolized by the ram's horn – the shofar – blown on Rosh Hashana. Abraham's unbending devotion created a bond between G-d and his children which was so strong that it maintains the Jewish people until this day.

The Haftorah of this day contains many passages ensuring G-d's promise to sustain and redeem the Jewish people.

Shofar Blowing

The shofar is an instrument that dates back to Biblical times. It is made of a ram's horn and it emits a sharp, clear sound. In the course of the Rosh Hashana services, the shofar emits 100 blasts. One should not speak while the shofar is being blown. Ideally, one should not speak at all between the blessings upon the shofar blowing and the end of the service. There are several distinct sounds which are blown;

Tekiah – a long, straight blast

Shevorim – a series of three shorter blasts

Teruah – a series of at least nine very short blasts

There is a prescribed order in which these different blasts are sounded.

The sound of the shofar carries many meanings, including:

- A call to repentance: Since Rosh Hashana initiates the Ten Days of Repentance leading to Yom Kippur, it is a time of solemn self-assessment. The pattern of broken sounds mimics the sound of crying. It stimulates us to feel regret for our mistakes and resolve to improve ourselves.
- Coronation of the King: Recognizing G-d's sovereignty over all of Creation is one of the central themes of Rosh Hashana. The shofar in this context recalls the trumpets sounded at the coronation of the King, and places the Jewish people in the role of G-d's loyal subjects.
- Reminder: Although it is not possible for G-d to forget, He sometimes chooses to allow certain memories to lie dormant, waiting for us to evoke them. The sounding of the ram's horn "reminds" Him of the binding of Isaac and activates the merit of our Forefathers in favor of us, their children.
- Revelation: Shofar blasts accompanied the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai and they will usher in the coming of Moshiach.

The Musaf Prayer

The Musaf Prayer, the additional prayer recited after the morning prayer, Torah reading and shofar blowing, is

divided into three distinct sections, each of which reflects the central themes of the Yom Tov. Each section is also marked by further blasts of the shofar.

1) Malchiyot - Kingship

A person who emerges from Rosh Hashana convinced in the deepest recesses of his heart that Hashem is the King, that G-d rules the universe and everything that happens is an expression of Hashem's will is a person ready to approach the Ten Days of Repentance and Yom Kippur. From the firm belief in G-d's Kingship, all other aspects of Judaism flow.

In the first part of Musaf, we affirm to ourselves that we are G-d's subjects. Even though G-d's rule is absolute, He is not a despot. His rule is entirely just and incorruptible, and like a good, wise king, G-d protects His people and provides them with all they need.

2) Zichronot - Remembrances

As mentioned previously, one cannot attribute forgetfulness to G-d. However, an entire section of Musaf is devoted to mentioning where various merits were evoked in the hope that we too will have our merits evoked. Some of the specific remembrances this section includes are:

- Noach's faith. While the world ridiculed and taunted him, Noach spent 120 years building an ark and trying to impart its message to those around him. G-d saved him from the Flood and allowed him to enter the healing world after the Flood was over.
- For the sake of the Jewish people as a whole, we recall Israel's willingness to follow G-d into the

wilderness after leaving Egypt. The prophet Yirmiyahu compares this to the devotion of a young bride.

- To arouse G-d's mercy, we recall Avraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Yitzchak. Avraham suppressed his love for his son and Yitzchak suppressed his will to live, all to fulfill G-d's command. In response, we pray that G-d will suppress his Attribute of Justice and temper it with mercy in His dealings with us.

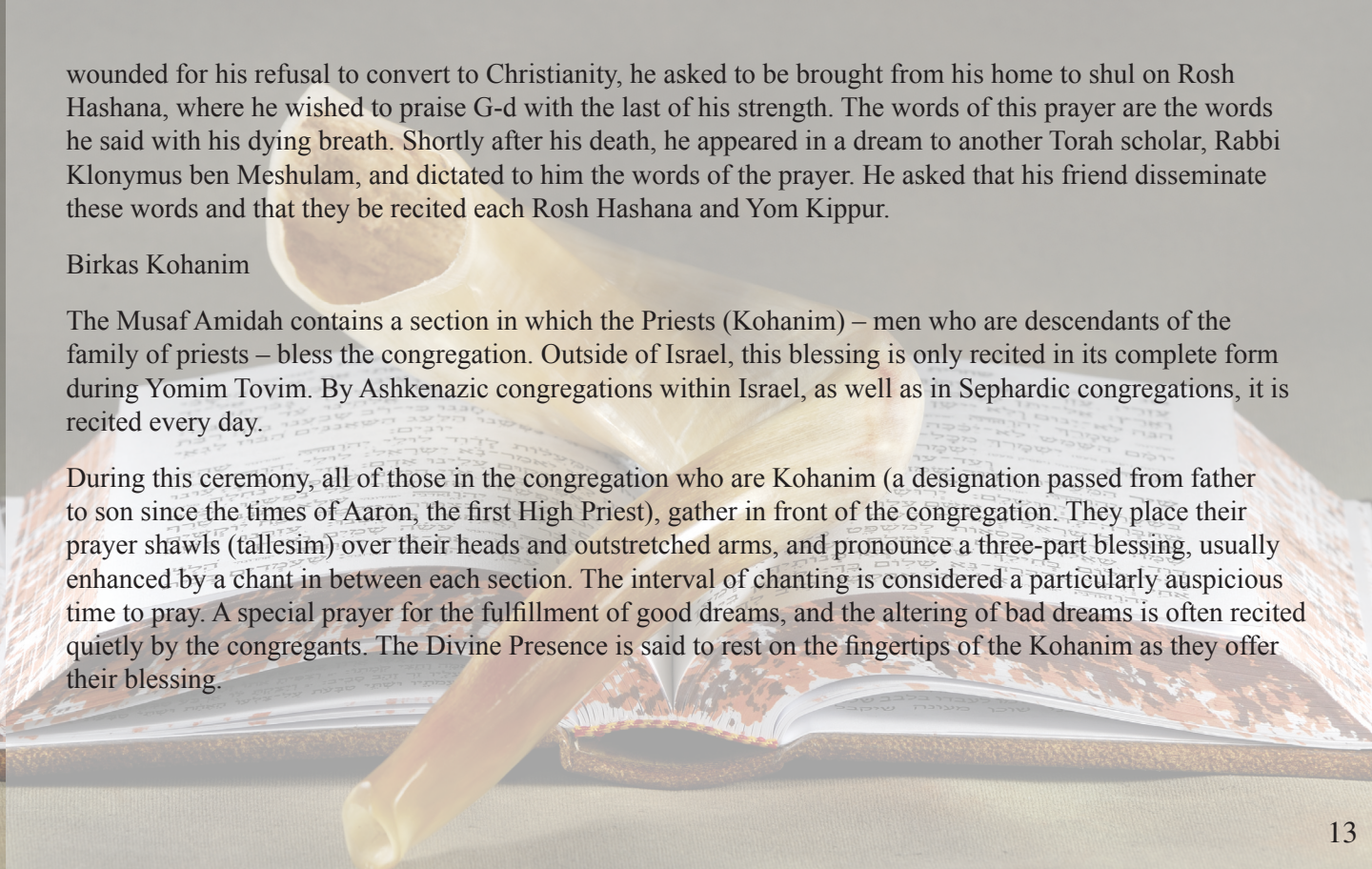
3) Shofarot - Sounding the Shofar

Although the shofar has been sounding throughout the shofar service and Mussaf, it is in this section that we recall the awe of hearing its blasts on Mount Sinai. The text describes how the “whole world trembled” at G-d's presence. These verses ignite hope for the future, when the blasts of the shofar will accompany the victory of the Jewish people over those who wish to destroy us, our return to our Land, the rebuilding of the Holy Temple and the coronation of Messiah (Moshiach). They describe various shofar blasts, past and future which herald revelation of G-d's glory.

Unesaneh Tokef

This moving prayer is recited during Musaf, only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It encapsulates the solemn business at hand, the determination of each person's fate in the year to come. The words paint an image of G-d as a shepherd who closely examines each of His sheep as it passes under His staff and decides what to do with each one. But ultimately, the prayer's message is one of hope, not fear. It concludes by urging that “Teshuvah (repentance), tefilla (prayer) and tzedakah (charity) reverses a harsh decree.”

Unesaneh Tokef was written about a thousand years ago by Rabbi Amnon of Mainz. Tortured and gravely



wounded for his refusal to convert to Christianity, he asked to be brought from his home to shul on Rosh Hashana, where he wished to praise G-d with the last of his strength. The words of this prayer are the words he said with his dying breath. Shortly after his death, he appeared in a dream to another Torah scholar, Rabbi Klonymus ben Meshulam, and dictated to him the words of the prayer. He asked that his friend disseminate these words and that they be recited each Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

Birkas Kohanim

The Musaf Amidah contains a section in which the Priests (Kohanim) – men who are descendants of the family of priests – bless the congregation. Outside of Israel, this blessing is only recited in its complete form during Yomim Tovim. By Ashkenazic congregations within Israel, as well as in Sephardic congregations, it is recited every day.

During this ceremony, all of those in the congregation who are Kohanim (a designation passed from father to son since the times of Aaron, the first High Priest), gather in front of the congregation. They place their prayer shawls (talleim) over their heads and outstretched arms, and pronounce a three-part blessing, usually enhanced by a chant in between each section. The interval of chanting is considered a particularly auspicious time to pray. A special prayer for the fulfillment of good dreams, and the altering of bad dreams is often recited quietly by the congregants. The Divine Presence is said to rest on the fingertips of the Kohanim as they offer their blessing.

CHAPTER FOUR:SPECIAL CUSTOMS

Greeting Others

There are many variations of the traditional Rosh Hashana greeting. One of the most common is “K’siva v’chasima tova,” which is a blessing that good things should be written down and sealed (in the Book of Life) for the person.

Another greeting, common among those with European backgrounds, is “a gut yor,” which is Yiddish for “a good year.”

Children often learn in school the greeting “Shana tova u’mesuka,” meaning “a good, sweet year” in Hebrew.

Tashlich

This ceremony is a symbolic “casting away” of sins, which most people perform before Mincha on the first day of Rosh Hashana. If the first day is Shabbos, it is done on the second day. However, it can be performed any time until Hoshana Raba, which is the seventh day of Sukkos.

Tashlich is done at the edge of a body of water. It can be a small pond or the shore of the ocean, or anything in between. Water that contains fish is preferred, but not mandatory. Some people have the custom of throwing bread crumbs into the water to symbolize throwing away their sins, however there are many rabbis who oppose this custom on the grounds that it crosses the boundaries of some activities that are prohibited on Yom Tov. For example, one may not feed wild creatures on Yom Tov; a rabbinical decree which safeguards the Torah

prohibition of trapping on Yom Tov.

Obviously, if one does Tashlich after Yom Tov, there is no problem with using bread.

The Machzor contains the text of the words to recite. They speak of G-d's forgiveness and state that, "He will be merciful to us, and He will conquer our iniquities, and He will cast them into the depths of the seas..."

Remaining Awake

For many people, one of the features that distinguishes Shabbat and Yom Tov from the frantic work-week is the opportunity to take a leisurely afternoon nap. However, on Rosh Hashana, the custom is to forego this pleasure in favor of starting the year off in a state of alertness and spiritual striving.

CHAPTER FIVE: A ROSH HASHANA TALE

A parable from Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov:

A King had an only son to whom he was deeply devoted. However, as the son grew older, the King realized that the prince needed to experience life outside the palace. The King gave his son an ample endowment of gold and sent him into the world to acquire different fields of knowledge and discover other cultures.

Unfortunately, away from his father's eye, the son rapidly spent his fortune. He found himself penniless and unable to afford passage home, but he was determined to return. He worked and struggled for many years in foreign lands, until finally, he was able to make the journey.

By the time he arrived in the courtyard of his father's palace, the prince had nearly forgotten the language of the land. The guards, faced with an inarticulate, strangely dressed man, had no idea who he was. In despair, the prince began to cry out in a loud voice. The King heard and instantly recognized the voice of his son. He ran out to the courtyard and brought his son inside, hugging and kissing him and welcoming him home.

The parable is explained as follows: The King is G-d. The prince is the Jewish people, who are called "Children of G-d." The King sends a soul down to this world in order to fulfill its purpose. However, the soul becomes very busy and distracted by the physical world, even forgetting its own "language." Still, it longs to reconnect with its Father, and so it utters a simple cry. This is the blowing of the shofar, a cry from deep within the soul. The sound of it awakens G-d's unwavering love for His children and elicits His forgiveness.

We hope this booklet enhances your Rosh Hashana. 'K'siva v'chasima tova!'

