

# The Yom Kippur 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!

# Table of Contents

A golden scale of justice is centered in the background, set against a light blue sky with soft white clouds. The scale has two pans hanging from a central beam, and its base is ornate. The text of the table of contents is overlaid on the image.

## 1. The Facts: The When and Why of Yom Kippur

Calendar date

Mention in the Torah

Other Names for the Yom Tov

## 2. Be Prepared

Aseres Yemei Teshuva

Kapparos

Tips for an Easier Fast

Erev Yom Kippur Meal

## 3. Like the Angels

Eating and Drinking

Those Who Can't Fast

Wearing Leather Shoes

Anointing

Marital Relations

Washing

## 4. Yom Kippur in Synagogue

Kol Nidrei: Starting Fresh

Vidui: Confession and Teshuva

Special Readings

Musaf's Special Features

Neilah: A Clean Slate

## CHAPTER ONE: THE WHEN AND WHY OF YOM KIPPUR

Yom Kippur is the culmination of the period of time known as the “Ten Days of Repentance,” which start on Rosh Hashana. It arrives on the evening leading into the 10th of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, and is observed until after sundown the following evening. This year, Yom Kippur corresponds to Saturday, October 8, 2011. It starts at sundown on Friday, October 7, 2011.

Yom Kippur is the Jewish people’s Day of Atonement. In the times of the Holy Temple, it was observed with an arduous set of rituals performed throughout the day by the High Priest (Kohen Gadol). When it was all over, however, the sense of solemnity was replaced by a sense of tremendous joy as the Jewish people reveled in their renewed closeness to G-d and freedom from the taint of sin.

Yom Kippur concludes the period of judgment that begins on Rosh Hashana. On that day, G-d judges everyone in the world and writes decrees regarding their fate. On Yom Kippur, He seals these decrees. In G-d’s great benevolence, He gives everyone an opportunity to cleanse his sins through this day of atonement in advance of the final sealing of their fate.

The Sages warn, however, that the forgiveness obtained on Yom Kippur is not sufficient for sins committed against another person, unless one has made amends with that person. In other words, a person cannot steal his neighbor’s possession and then expect that Yom Kippur will wipe the slate clean. This will occur only if the person first sets the wrong right and obtains the victim’s forgiveness.

## Why This Day?

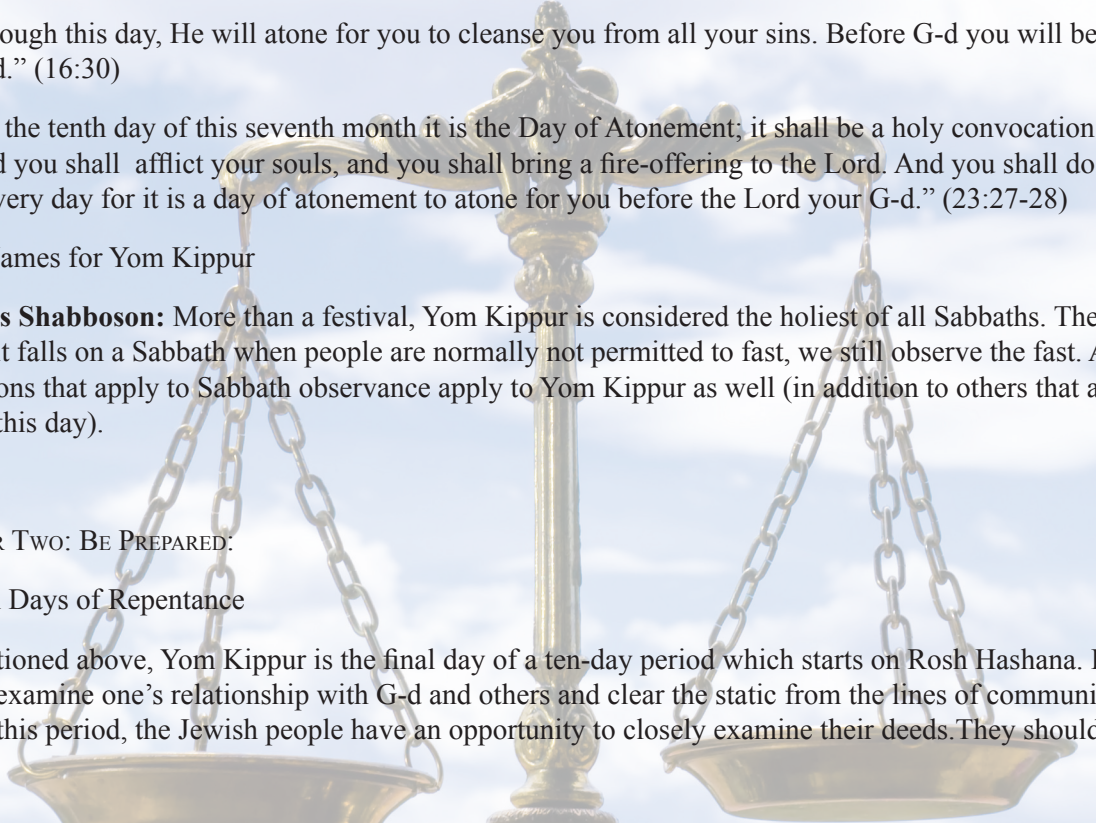
When G-d created the world, He not only created its physical characteristics, but He also created its time and seasons. The times of our holidays are imbued with special powers that are unique to that holiday. The tenth of Tishrei was imbued with the power to bring G-d's forgiveness.

The first time this power is alluded to is when Moses ascended Mount Sinai a second time in order to receive the Ten Commandments. The first tablets, received amid much fanfare and a stark display of G-d's awesome glory, did not endure. They were smashed when Moses descended from the mountain only to find the Jewish people engaged in worship of a Golden Calf, which they had crafted out of the gold they had carried out of Egypt.

This lapse by the Jewish people, so soon after witnessing G-d's miracles and hearing His voice during the giving of the Ten Commandments, brought great Divine wrath down upon the Jews. Moses ascended up the mountain again, and G-d proposed to wipe out the Jewish people and start anew with Moses. But Moses, as the people's loyal leader, pleaded with G-d to forgive them. At last, G-d declared, "I have forgiven them, according to your words." The day on which this forgiveness was granted was the 10th day of Tishrei, Yom Kippur.

### Mention in the Torah

The day we celebrate as Yom Kippur is mentioned twice in the Torah, both times in the book of Leviticus (Vayikra):



“For through this day, He will atone for you to cleanse you from all your sins. Before G-d you will be cleansed.” (16:30)

“But on the tenth day of this seventh month it is the Day of Atonement; it shall be a holy convocation unto you, and you shall afflict your souls, and you shall bring a fire-offering to the Lord. And you shall do no work on this very day for it is a day of atonement to atone for you before the Lord your G-d.” (23:27-28)

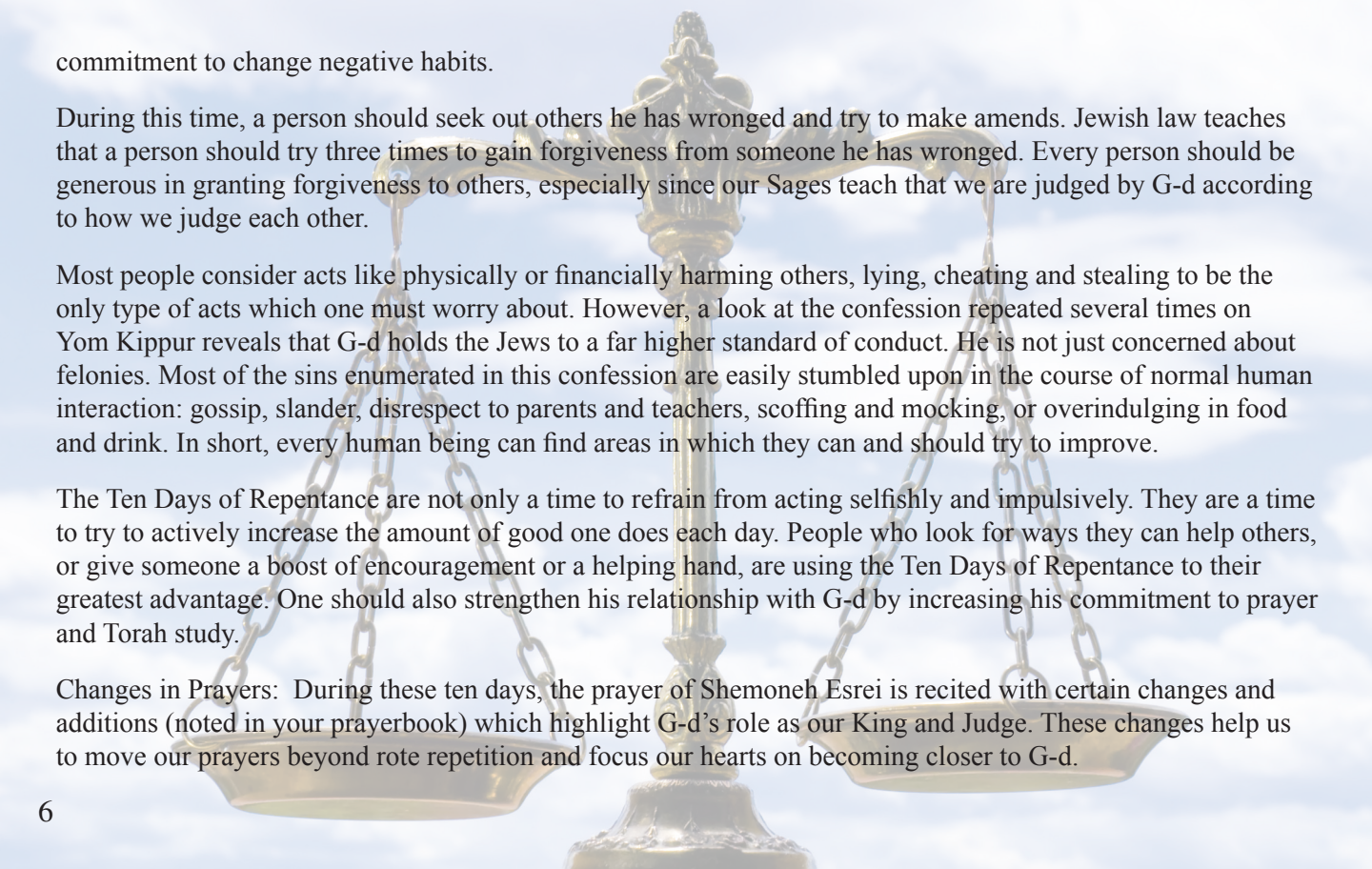
Other Names for Yom Kippur

**Shabbos Shabboson:** More than a festival, Yom Kippur is considered the holiest of all Sabbaths. Therefore, even if it falls on a Sabbath when people are normally not permitted to fast, we still observe the fast. All the restrictions that apply to Sabbath observance apply to Yom Kippur as well (in addition to others that apply only to this day).

CHAPTER TWO: BE PREPARED:

The Ten Days of Repentance

As mentioned above, Yom Kippur is the final day of a ten-day period which starts on Rosh Hashana. It is a time to examine one's relationship with G-d and others and clear the static from the lines of communication. During this period, the Jewish people have an opportunity to closely examine their deeds. They should make a



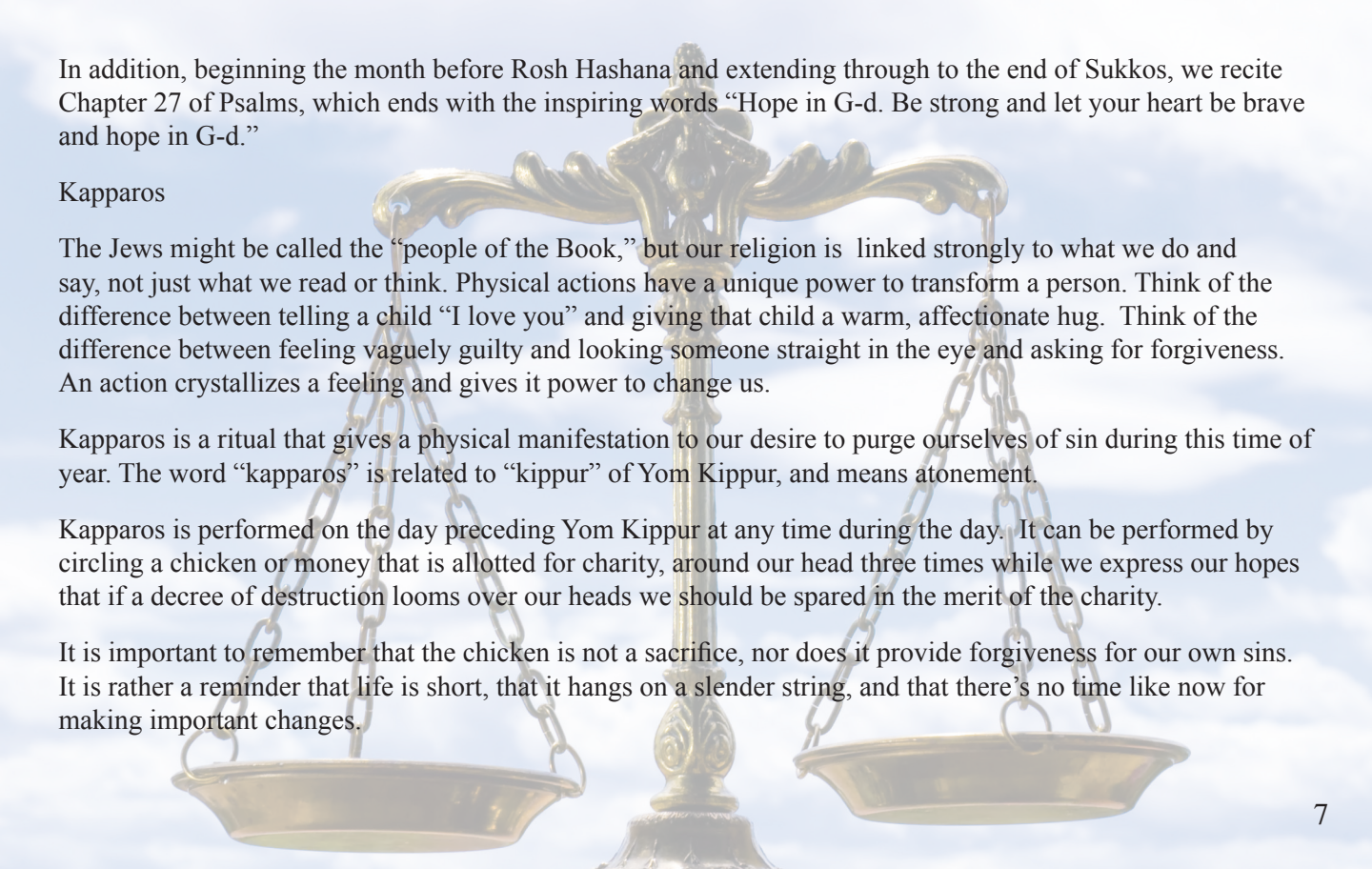
commitment to change negative habits.

During this time, a person should seek out others he has wronged and try to make amends. Jewish law teaches that a person should try three times to gain forgiveness from someone he has wronged. Every person should be generous in granting forgiveness to others, especially since our Sages teach that we are judged by G-d according to how we judge each other.

Most people consider acts like physically or financially harming others, lying, cheating and stealing to be the only type of acts which one must worry about. However, a look at the confession repeated several times on Yom Kippur reveals that G-d holds the Jews to a far higher standard of conduct. He is not just concerned about felonies. Most of the sins enumerated in this confession are easily stumbled upon in the course of normal human interaction: gossip, slander, disrespect to parents and teachers, scoffing and mocking, or overindulging in food and drink. In short, every human being can find areas in which they can and should try to improve.

The Ten Days of Repentance are not only a time to refrain from acting selfishly and impulsively. They are a time to try to actively increase the amount of good one does each day. People who look for ways they can help others, or give someone a boost of encouragement or a helping hand, are using the Ten Days of Repentance to their greatest advantage. One should also strengthen his relationship with G-d by increasing his commitment to prayer and Torah study.

Changes in Prayers: During these ten days, the prayer of Shemoneh Esrei is recited with certain changes and additions (noted in your prayerbook) which highlight G-d's role as our King and Judge. These changes help us to move our prayers beyond rote repetition and focus our hearts on becoming closer to G-d.



In addition, beginning the month before Rosh Hashana and extending through to the end of Sukkos, we recite Chapter 27 of Psalms, which ends with the inspiring words “Hope in G-d. Be strong and let your heart be brave and hope in G-d.”

## Kapparos

The Jews might be called the “people of the Book,” but our religion is linked strongly to what we do and say, not just what we read or think. Physical actions have a unique power to transform a person. Think of the difference between telling a child “I love you” and giving that child a warm, affectionate hug. Think of the difference between feeling vaguely guilty and looking someone straight in the eye and asking for forgiveness. An action crystallizes a feeling and gives it power to change us.

Kapparos is a ritual that gives a physical manifestation to our desire to purge ourselves of sin during this time of year. The word “kapparos” is related to “kippur” of Yom Kippur, and means atonement.

Kapparos is performed on the day preceding Yom Kippur at any time during the day. It can be performed by circling a chicken or money that is allotted for charity, around our head three times while we express our hopes that if a decree of destruction looms over our heads we should be spared in the merit of the charity.

It is important to remember that the chicken is not a sacrifice, nor does it provide forgiveness for our own sins. It is rather a reminder that life is short, that it hangs on a slender string, and that there’s no time like now for making important changes.

## Mikvah

Another purifying ritual observed on the day of Erev Yom Kippur is immersion in a ritual bath -- a mikvah. One can be found in proximity to every Orthodox neighborhood.

This immersion has nothing to do with bathing for the sake of physical cleanliness. In fact, a person must be already physically clean before immersing. The mikvah is a specially constructed pool that contains water that was not contained in a vessel. Once the pool has been established, ordinary water can be added if it is done properly. This immersion counteracts the forces of spiritual impurity, and helps prepare a person for the holy day ahead.

## Tips for an Easier Fast

The rest of Erev Yom Kippur is dedicated to praying an extended Mincha (afternoon) prayer and eating in preparation for the fast. Here are some hints that can make the fast easier, preventing the headaches, dizziness and other symptoms that could interfere with this crucial day of prayer.

- Stay well hydrated **THE DAY BEFORE** the evening of Yom Kippur, as well as on the evening of Yom Kippur itself. Make sure to drink throughout the day before Yom Kippur so that your body will retain the water. A few last-minute gulps won't help.
- If you are hooked on coffee, wean yourself off of it starting the week before the fast. Cut down the amount you drink by a little each day, or just gradually mix more and more decaf in over the course of a few days.



This will prevent a pounding headache on Yom Kippur afternoon.

- Many people report that Powerade, drunk throughout the day before Yom Kippur, keeps up your energy during the fast.
- Avoid spicy, greasy, salty or dehydrating foods in your pre-fast meal.

### Pre-Fast Meals

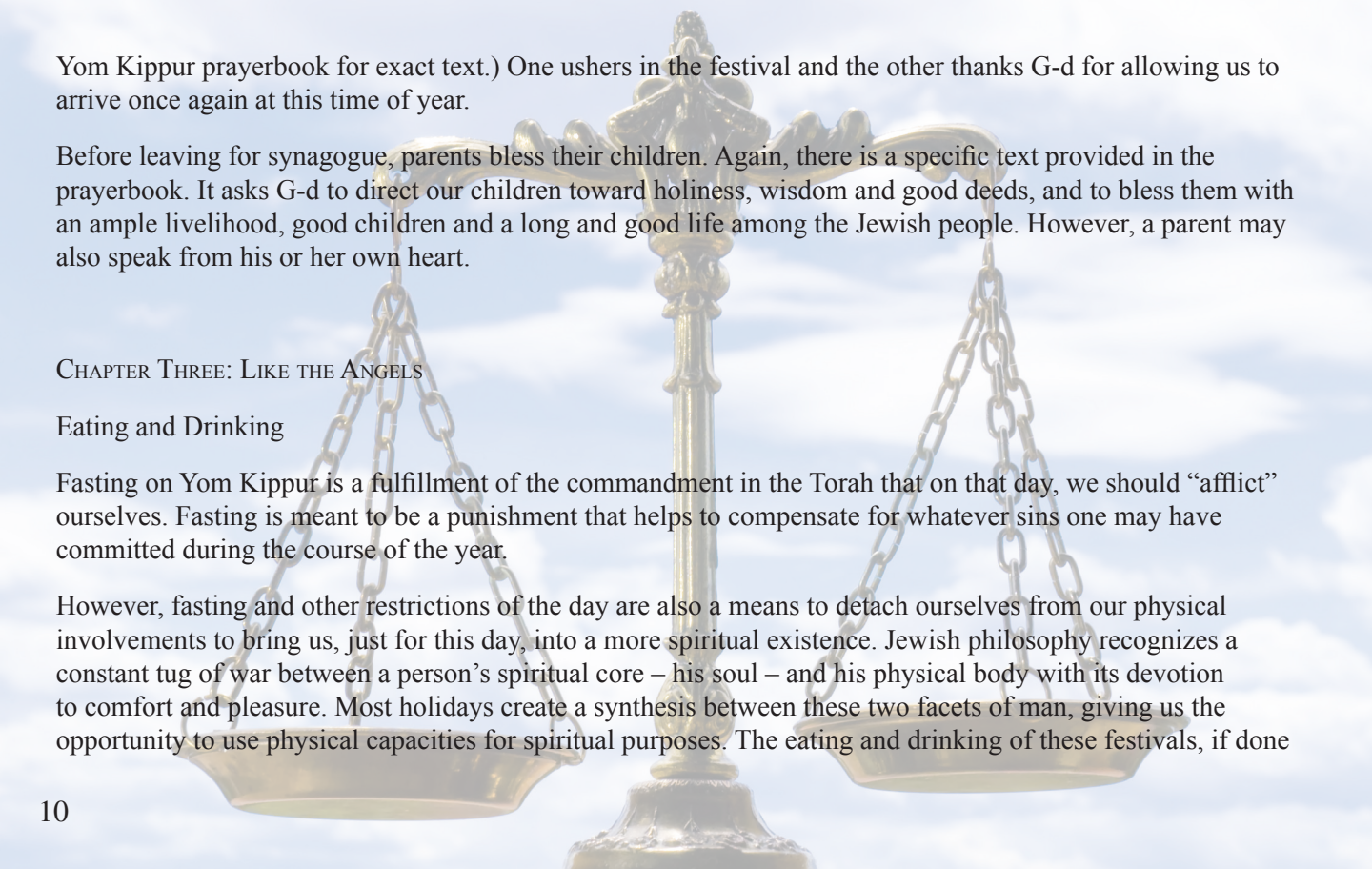
The Sages taught that a person's pre-Yom Kippur meal is a mitzvah on par with fasting. It reflects our joy over the opportunity to find forgiveness and come closer to G-d on Yom Kippur. It is also, on a practical note, a means to ensure a more productive fast.

We are not permitted to get drunk at this meal, so that we will not undertake this extremely serious day with anything less than our full focus and concentration. Also, as mentioned above, a person should steer away from very heavy or spicy foods. Many people eat two pre-fast meals – one earlier in the day and one closer to candle-lighting time.

The meal should be finished about a half-hour before candle-lighting to provide enough time to recite the Grace After Meals and arrive at shul on time.

### Candle-lighting and Blessing the Children

As on Shabbos, the woman of the house lights candles in honor of the holiday. Two blessings are said (see your



Yom Kippur prayerbook for exact text.) One ushers in the festival and the other thanks G-d for allowing us to arrive once again at this time of year.

Before leaving for synagogue, parents bless their children. Again, there is a specific text provided in the prayerbook. It asks G-d to direct our children toward holiness, wisdom and good deeds, and to bless them with an ample livelihood, good children and a long and good life among the Jewish people. However, a parent may also speak from his or her own heart.

### CHAPTER THREE: LIKE THE ANGELS

#### Eating and Drinking

Fasting on Yom Kippur is a fulfillment of the commandment in the Torah that on that day, we should “afflict” ourselves. Fasting is meant to be a punishment that helps to compensate for whatever sins one may have committed during the course of the year.

However, fasting and other restrictions of the day are also a means to detach ourselves from our physical involvements to bring us, just for this day, into a more spiritual existence. Jewish philosophy recognizes a constant tug of war between a person’s spiritual core – his soul – and his physical body with its devotion to comfort and pleasure. Most holidays create a synthesis between these two facets of man, giving us the opportunity to use physical capacities for spiritual purposes. The eating and drinking of these festivals, if done

properly, nourishes the soul as well.

But on Yom Kippur, G-d enables us to reach a level closer to that of the heavenly beings who need and desire nothing physical. There are several restrictions on Yom Kippur that permit us to approach this level:

**Fasting:** No eating or drinking from candle-lighting time until after sundown the next day.

**Leather Shoes:** One is not allowed to wear leather shoes. At the synagogue, you will probably notice the unusual sight of people dressed in holiday clothing wearing canvas sneakers or slippers.

**Anointing:** This refers to applying oils, creams or ointments.

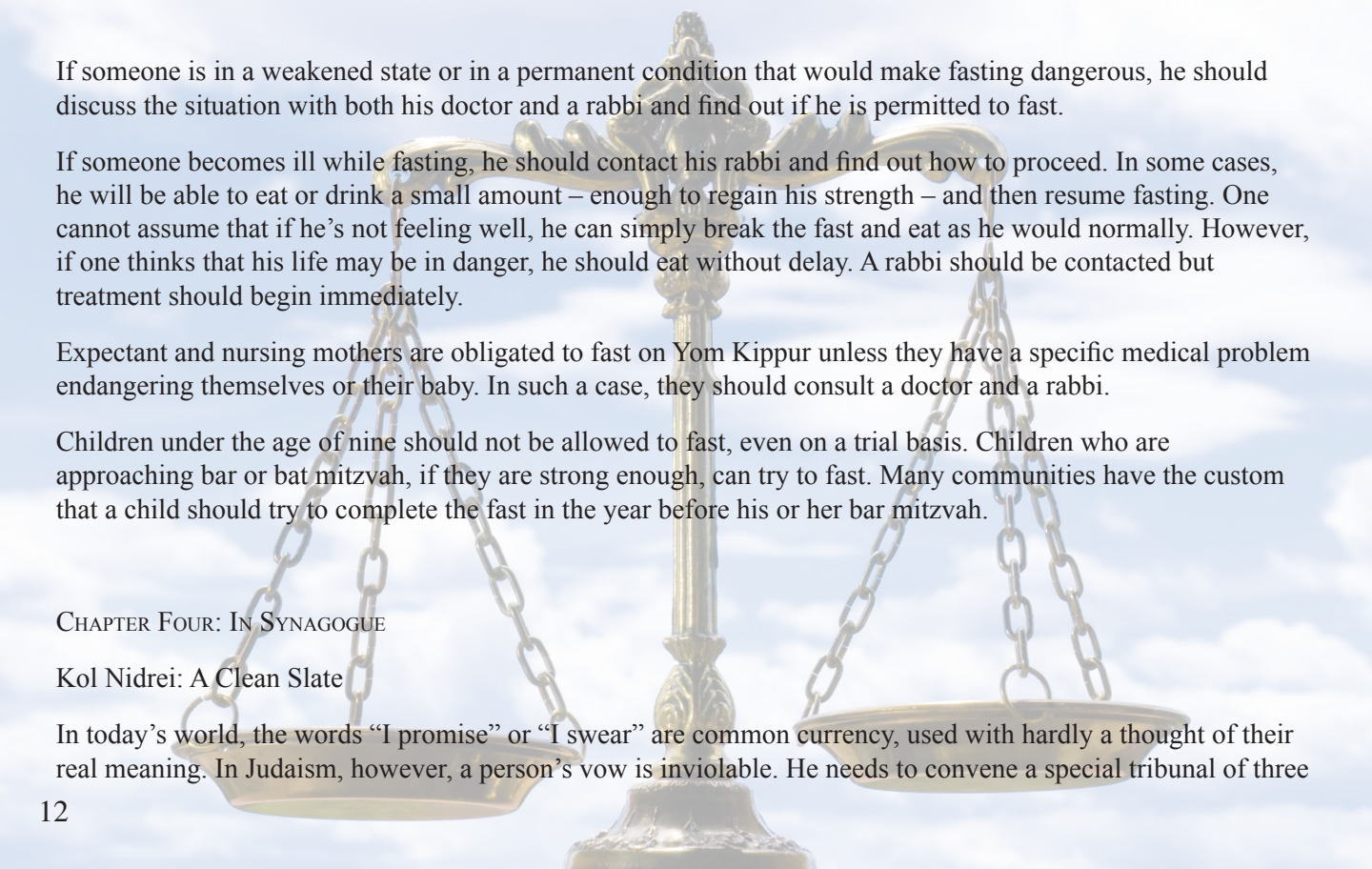
**Marital relations** are prohibited on Yom Kippur.

**Washing:** One may not refresh oneself with water. However, if one's hands are dirty he may wash them.

Ritual washing (such as netilas yadayim in the morning) is performed, but one only washes ones fingers, not the palms.

### Those Who Cannot Fast

The Torah teaches that G-d's mitzvos are not meant to endanger our lives: "And he shall live by them, but not die by them." It also commands us to "take exceeding care of your lives." In view of those words, the Sages ruled that a person whose life would be endangered by fasting must eat.



If someone is in a weakened state or in a permanent condition that would make fasting dangerous, he should discuss the situation with both his doctor and a rabbi and find out if he is permitted to fast.

If someone becomes ill while fasting, he should contact his rabbi and find out how to proceed. In some cases, he will be able to eat or drink a small amount – enough to regain his strength – and then resume fasting. One cannot assume that if he's not feeling well, he can simply break the fast and eat as he would normally. However, if one thinks that his life may be in danger, he should eat without delay. A rabbi should be contacted but treatment should begin immediately.

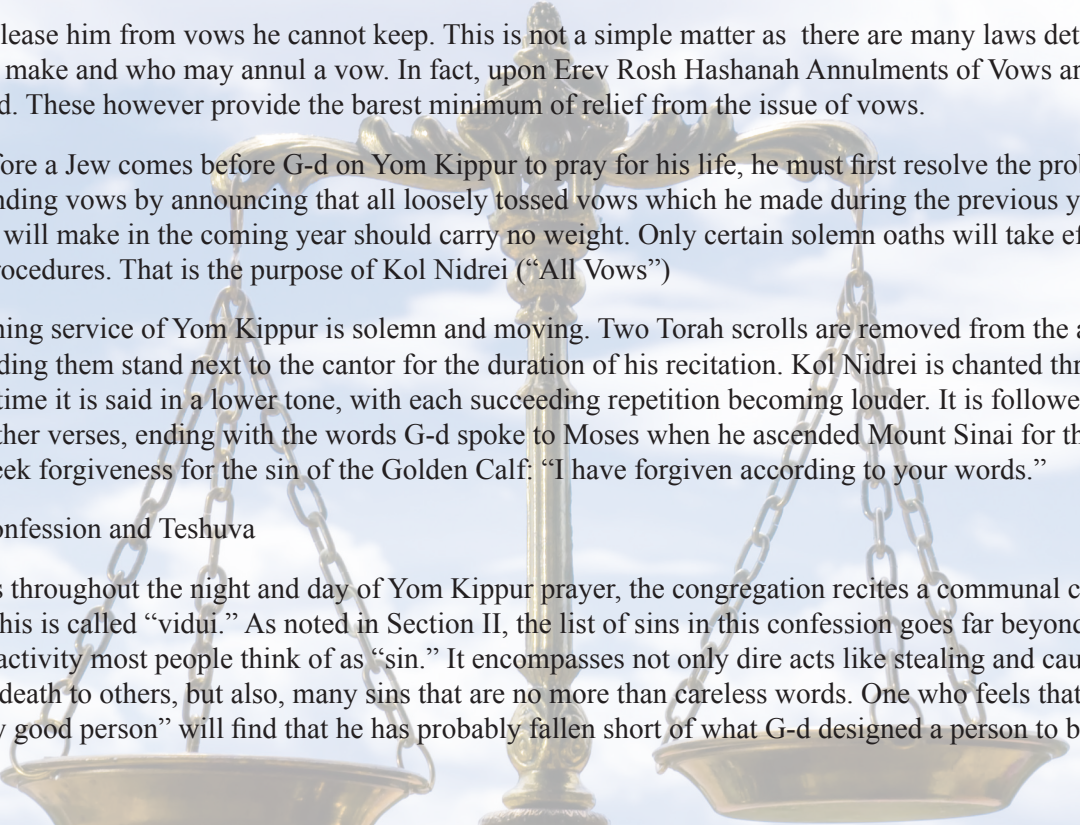
Expectant and nursing mothers are obligated to fast on Yom Kippur unless they have a specific medical problem endangering themselves or their baby. In such a case, they should consult a doctor and a rabbi.

Children under the age of nine should not be allowed to fast, even on a trial basis. Children who are approaching bar or bat mitzvah, if they are strong enough, can try to fast. Many communities have the custom that a child should try to complete the fast in the year before his or her bar mitzvah.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: IN SYNAGOGUE

##### Kol Nidrei: A Clean Slate

In today's world, the words "I promise" or "I swear" are common currency, used with hardly a thought of their real meaning. In Judaism, however, a person's vow is inviolable. He needs to convene a special tribunal of three



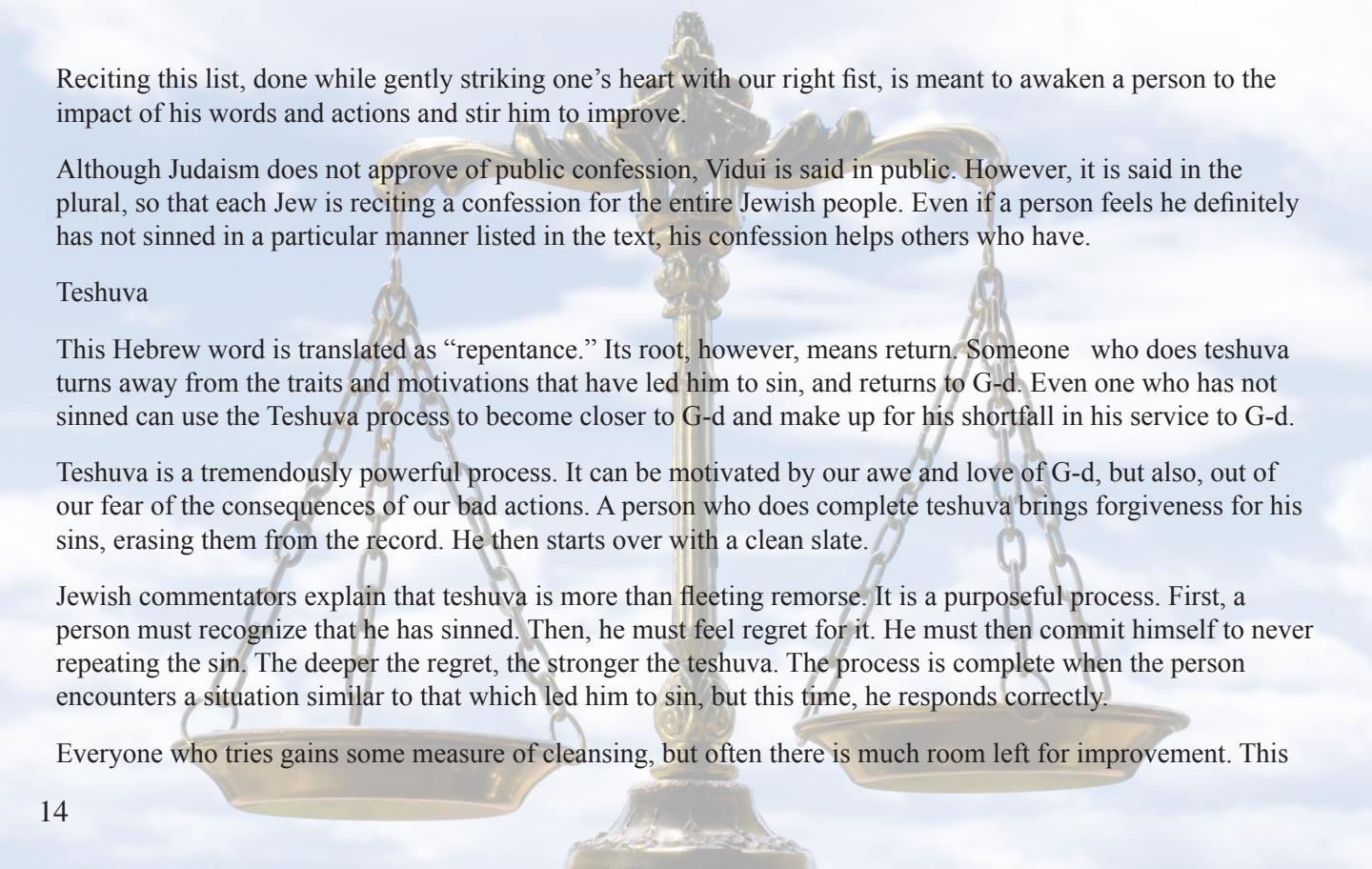
men to release him from vows he cannot keep. This is not a simple matter as there are many laws detailing who may make and who may annul a vow. In fact, upon Erev Rosh Hashanah Annulments of Vows are performed. These however provide the barest minimum of relief from the issue of vows.

Thus, before a Jew comes before G-d on Yom Kippur to pray for his life, he must first resolve the problem of outstanding vows by announcing that all loosely tossed vows which he made during the previous year and which he will make in the coming year should carry no weight. Only certain solemn oaths will take effects by certain procedures. That is the purpose of Kol Nidrei (“All Vows”)

This opening service of Yom Kippur is solemn and moving. Two Torah scrolls are removed from the ark, and those holding them stand next to the cantor for the duration of his recitation. Kol Nidrei is chanted three times. The first time it is said in a lower tone, with each succeeding repetition becoming louder. It is followed by several other verses, ending with the words G-d spoke to Moses when he ascended Mount Sinai for the second time to seek forgiveness for the sin of the Golden Calf: “I have forgiven according to your words.”

Vidui: Confession and Teshuva

Ten times throughout the night and day of Yom Kippur prayer, the congregation recites a communal confession of sins. This is called “vidui.” As noted in Section II, the list of sins in this confession goes far beyond the realm of activity most people think of as “sin.” It encompasses not only dire acts like stealing and causing injury or death to others, but also, many sins that are no more than careless words. One who feels that he is a “basically good person” will find that he has probably fallen short of what G-d designed a person to be.



Reciting this list, done while gently striking one's heart with our right fist, is meant to awaken a person to the impact of his words and actions and stir him to improve.

Although Judaism does not approve of public confession, Vidui is said in public. However, it is said in the plural, so that each Jew is reciting a confession for the entire Jewish people. Even if a person feels he definitely has not sinned in a particular manner listed in the text, his confession helps others who have.

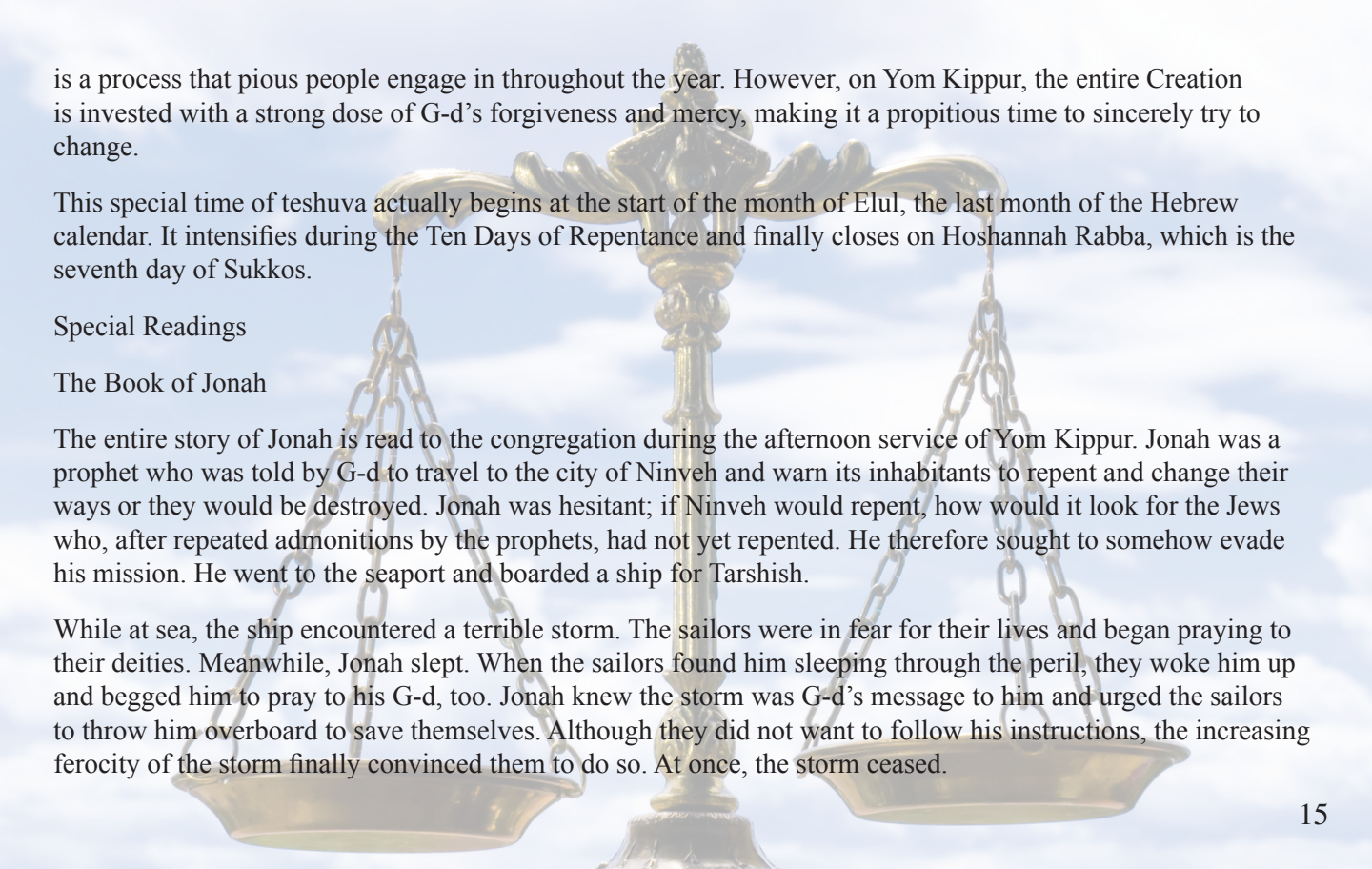
### Teshuva

This Hebrew word is translated as “repentance.” Its root, however, means return. Someone who does teshuva turns away from the traits and motivations that have led him to sin, and returns to G-d. Even one who has not sinned can use the Teshuva process to become closer to G-d and make up for his shortfall in his service to G-d.

Teshuva is a tremendously powerful process. It can be motivated by our awe and love of G-d, but also, out of our fear of the consequences of our bad actions. A person who does complete teshuva brings forgiveness for his sins, erasing them from the record. He then starts over with a clean slate.

Jewish commentators explain that teshuva is more than fleeting remorse. It is a purposeful process. First, a person must recognize that he has sinned. Then, he must feel regret for it. He must then commit himself to never repeating the sin. The deeper the regret, the stronger the teshuva. The process is complete when the person encounters a situation similar to that which led him to sin, but this time, he responds correctly.

Everyone who tries gains some measure of cleansing, but often there is much room left for improvement. This



is a process that pious people engage in throughout the year. However, on Yom Kippur, the entire Creation is invested with a strong dose of G-d's forgiveness and mercy, making it a propitious time to sincerely try to change.

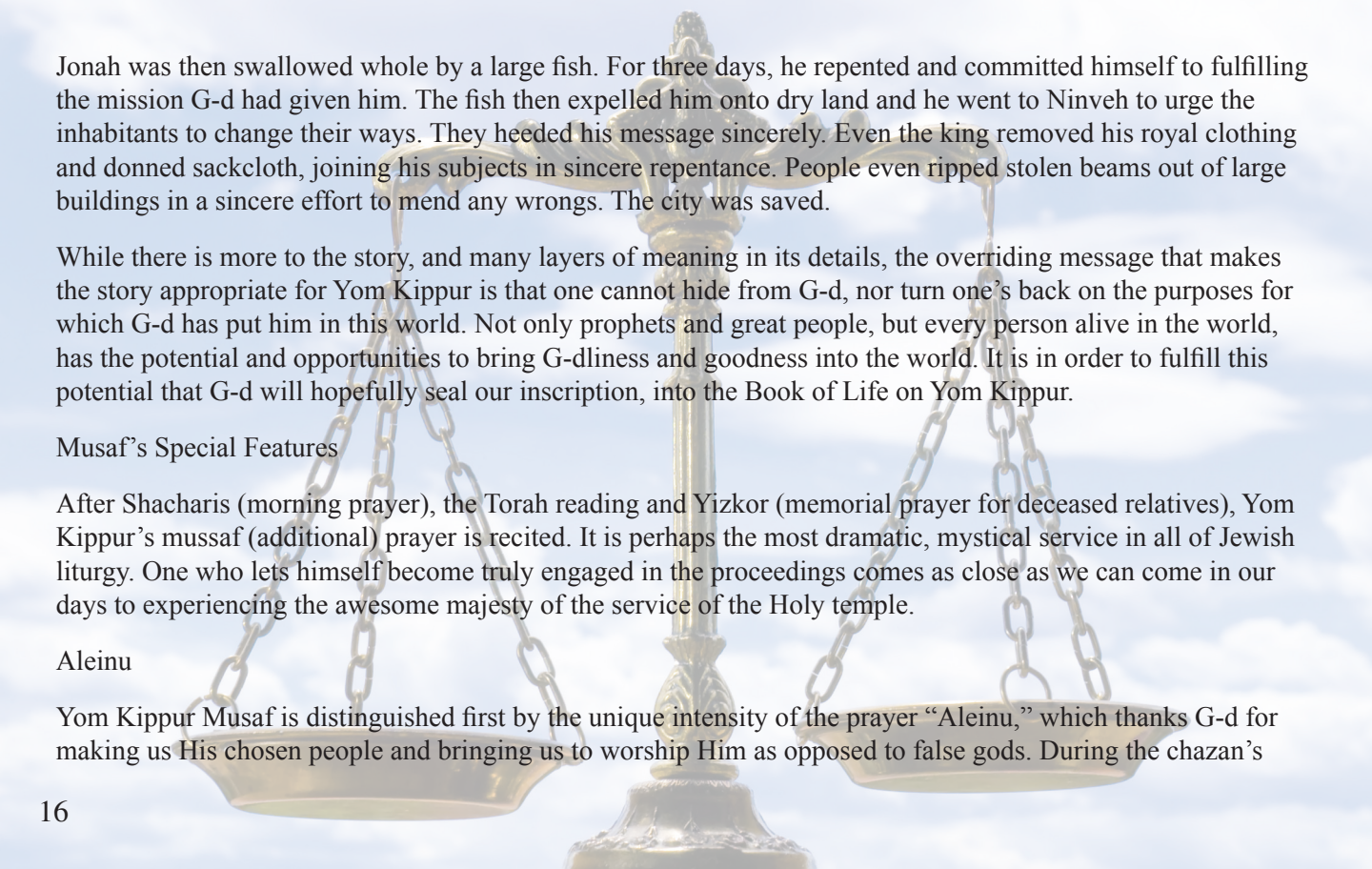
This special time of teshuva actually begins at the start of the month of Elul, the last month of the Hebrew calendar. It intensifies during the Ten Days of Repentance and finally closes on Hoshannah Rabba, which is the seventh day of Sukkos.

### Special Readings

#### The Book of Jonah

The entire story of Jonah is read to the congregation during the afternoon service of Yom Kippur. Jonah was a prophet who was told by G-d to travel to the city of Ninveh and warn its inhabitants to repent and change their ways or they would be destroyed. Jonah was hesitant; if Ninveh would repent, how would it look for the Jews who, after repeated admonitions by the prophets, had not yet repented. He therefore sought to somehow evade his mission. He went to the seaport and boarded a ship for Tarshish.

While at sea, the ship encountered a terrible storm. The sailors were in fear for their lives and began praying to their deities. Meanwhile, Jonah slept. When the sailors found him sleeping through the peril, they woke him up and begged him to pray to his G-d, too. Jonah knew the storm was G-d's message to him and urged the sailors to throw him overboard to save themselves. Although they did not want to follow his instructions, the increasing ferocity of the storm finally convinced them to do so. At once, the storm ceased.



Jonah was then swallowed whole by a large fish. For three days, he repented and committed himself to fulfilling the mission G-d had given him. The fish then expelled him onto dry land and he went to Ninveh to urge the inhabitants to change their ways. They heeded his message sincerely. Even the king removed his royal clothing and donned sackcloth, joining his subjects in sincere repentance. People even ripped stolen beams out of large buildings in a sincere effort to mend any wrongs. The city was saved.

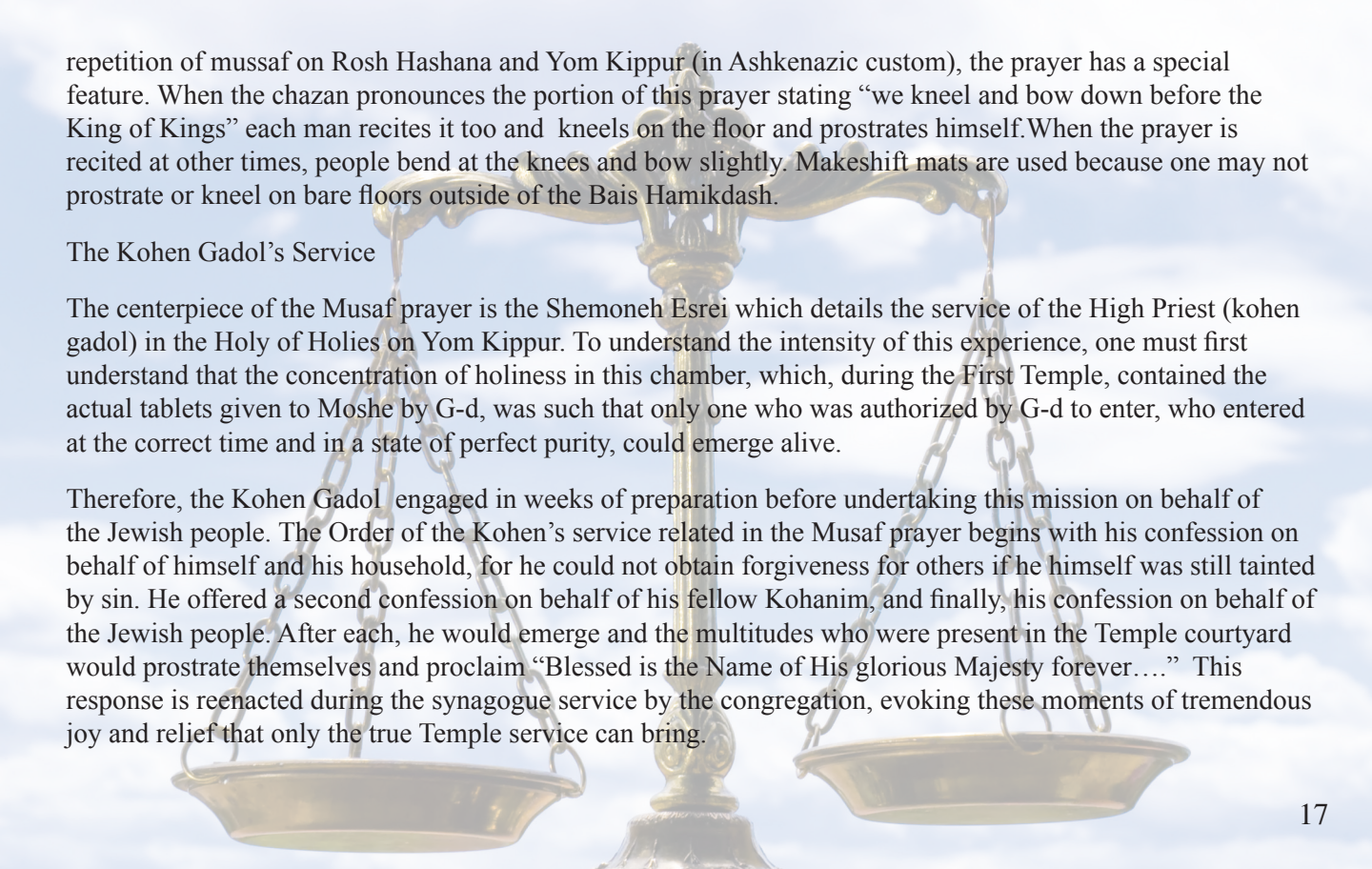
While there is more to the story, and many layers of meaning in its details, the overriding message that makes the story appropriate for Yom Kippur is that one cannot hide from G-d, nor turn one's back on the purposes for which G-d has put him in this world. Not only prophets and great people, but every person alive in the world, has the potential and opportunities to bring G-dliness and goodness into the world. It is in order to fulfill this potential that G-d will hopefully seal our inscription, into the Book of Life on Yom Kippur.

### Musaf's Special Features

After Shacharis (morning prayer), the Torah reading and Yizkor (memorial prayer for deceased relatives), Yom Kippur's mussaf (additional) prayer is recited. It is perhaps the most dramatic, mystical service in all of Jewish liturgy. One who lets himself become truly engaged in the proceedings comes as close as we can come in our days to experiencing the awesome majesty of the service of the Holy temple.

### Aleinu

Yom Kippur Musaf is distinguished first by the unique intensity of the prayer "Aleinu," which thanks G-d for making us His chosen people and bringing us to worship Him as opposed to false gods. During the chazan's




repetition of mussaf on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur (in Ashkenazic custom), the prayer has a special feature. When the chazan pronounces the portion of this prayer stating “we kneel and bow down before the King of Kings” each man recites it too and kneels on the floor and prostrates himself. When the prayer is recited at other times, people bend at the knees and bow slightly. Makeshift mats are used because one may not prostrate or kneel on bare floors outside of the Bais Hamikdash.

### The Kohen Gadol’s Service

The centerpiece of the Musaf prayer is the Shemoneh Esrei which details the service of the High Priest (kohen gadol) in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. To understand the intensity of this experience, one must first understand that the concentration of holiness in this chamber, which, during the First Temple, contained the actual tablets given to Moshe by G-d, was such that only one who was authorized by G-d to enter, who entered at the correct time and in a state of perfect purity, could emerge alive.

Therefore, the Kohen Gadol engaged in weeks of preparation before undertaking this mission on behalf of the Jewish people. The Order of the Kohen’s service related in the Musaf prayer begins with his confession on behalf of himself and his household, for he could not obtain forgiveness for others if he himself was still tainted by sin. He offered a second confession on behalf of his fellow Kohanim, and finally, his confession on behalf of the Jewish people. After each, he would emerge and the multitudes who were present in the Temple courtyard would prostrate themselves and proclaim “Blessed is the Name of His glorious Majesty forever...” This response is reenacted during the synagogue service by the congregation, evoking these moments of tremendous joy and relief that only the true Temple service can bring.

A golden scale of justice is centered in the background, set against a light blue sky with soft white clouds. The scale has two pans hanging from a central pillar, with chains connecting them. The pans are empty and appear to be in a state of balance.

The Kohen Gadol's day was an arduous one that required many changes of his elaborate ritual clothing and immersions in a ritual bath in between each confession as well as the preparation of several sacrifices. His body and mind had to remain utterly focused and pure in order to effectively perform his holy duties.

### The “Scapegoat”

Also on this day, the Kohen presided over the ceremony of the “scapegoat” involving two identical goats, one of which would symbolically bear the sins of the Jewish people. Jewish commentators point out that the goats had to be identical in appearance and value teaching that good and evil can look alike on the outside. It takes discernment to know which is which and to know which to reject.

### Ne'ilah

Unlike other holidays, Yom Kippur has five, rather than four prayer services. The additional service, Neilah, is the closing of the Yom Tov. It is usually recited with a particular intensity in light of the fact that it is our last chance to gain the forgiveness we seek.

Have a meaningful fast!