

LEADER'S GUIDE

MAHZOR
A Prayer Service for
Young Children
and Their Families

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BEHRMAN HOUSE, INC.

Introduction

"When you appear before Me in judgment on Rosh Hashanah—and after you have been discharged in peace [at the end of Yom Kippur], I account it to you as having been re-created as new persons."

—Jerusalem Talmud
(Rosh Hashanah 4:8)

In our tradition, the High Holy Days, and especially Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, are rituals of passage. The concepts and principles of the season speak to us in adult terms, but they are so basic that even very young people can understand them. The High Holy Days are a time to awaken our senses to the world around us, to reexamine ourselves, and judge our lives. We make a symbolic passage through the gate of repentance. In entering the gate, we shake loose the sins of the past and enter a new realm of freedom and opportunity. The sense of renewal is a gift available to young and old alike.

Of course, to explain this to young people, we use words they understand. This is not difficult on the High Holy Days because the child-parent metaphor is central to the celebration. Even as adults, we appeal for God's forgiveness as children appeal for the forgiveness of a parent.

So this Mahzor is more than a children's picture book. It is an authentic instrument of prayer and devotion. It is a family service. Its prayers speak to us on many levels.

For the sake of brevity—and because the High Holy Days share many prayers—most pages are used for both the service on Rosh Hashanah and the service on Yom Kippur. A very few pages have been marked "For Rosh Hashanah" or "For Yom Kippur," and these are to be used only on that specific occasion.

The Leader's Guide consists of notes to help you make the ritual more effective. You provide the place appropriate for prayer, the ark, and the Torah scroll. If possible, you will want to plan ahead with a musician or choir familiar with the High Holy Day liturgy.

The Leader's Guide also gives directions for staging the service, but you should conduct the service with your own personal flair. The Mahzor makes provision for this. With just a little planning, you can fit in many High Holy Day songs and stories. Though suggestions are scattered through the Leader's Guide, the final mix of song, story, sermon, Torah reading, and drama depend on you.

You will also find that the art work in the Mahzor provides frames of reference for even the very youngest congregant. You may wish to pause from time to time to comment on one or more the drawings. In the same way, repetition and cadence have been built into the tone and timbre of the words to provide clarity, warmth, and rhythm. Moreover, the Mahzor is designed to familiarize young people with traditional ritual in order to ease their passage from Family Service to the main sanctuary.

A final note: The Leader's Guide makes use of an "h" with a dot beneath it ("ḥ") to indicate the guttural Hebrew letter, ח, *het*, which has no exact English equivalent. This special character is pronounced like the opening sound of the familiar Yiddish word "*chutzpah*."

L'shanah tovah tikateivu!

Page 1

FOR ROSH HASHANAH

The Rosh Hashanah service begins on this page.

Plan a piece of quiet music to precede the service—to help families settle down in their seats and get in the mood to pray.

RITUAL

Before beginning the reading of the Mahzor, teach the Rosh Hashanah greeting, *Shanah Tovah*, “A Good Year.” Explain that this is a Jewish way of saying “Happy New Year.” Encourage congregants to begin the service by turning to wish the people all around them a *Shanah Tovah*. The service could then begin with a simple, well-known song, such as *L’Shanah Tovah Tikateivu*.

Ask everyone to turn to Page 1 to begin. Explain that the parts meant for everyone to read together are always in the roman (not italic) print. Remind parents to share the pictures with their children.

Then take time to introduce the two basic themes of the High Holy Day: (1) “Our rabbis told us that Rosh Hashanah is a very special time, the day on which the world began.” (2) “Since God created our world and everything that is in it, we set aside this special day of rest to look around and find many reasons for thanking God.” Finally, read the page.

Page 2

FOR YOM KIPPUR

The Yom Kippur service begins on this page.

RITUAL

Naturally, the tone of the service is different from that of Rosh Hashanah. And to set the tone properly, you may wish to begin by having the families listen to music rather than sing. Since most children do not attend the evening service, you might begin with: “On Yom Kippur, we look inside to see if there are any promises we made to God in the past year that we have not kept.

We ask God to forgive us for not keeping those promises by chanting a special prayer, the *Kol Nidre*. Listen to the wonderful melody that tells God how sad we are for not keeping all our promises.” The cantor and/or choir can then provide a brief version of the *Kol Nidre*.

On this page, the leader and congregation speak of two major themes of Yom Kippur—our need to search our own souls, and our need to ask the forgiveness of others before we can be prepared to ask forgiveness of God.

Introduce the service by explaining: “On Yom Kippur, we ask God to forgive us for mistakes we have made. But God cannot forgive us for times that we have hurt other people. Only the people we have hurt can forgive us for these sins. Turn to one another—parents turn to children, and children turn to parents—and say ‘Forgive me for any time that I may have hurt you in this past year.’” Pause to give people a chance to do this, then continue: “Now turn to one another—parents to children, and children to parents—and say ‘I forgive you.’” When everyone is again settled down, you can begin.

Ask everyone to turn to Page 2 to begin the Yom Kippur service. Explain that the parts meant for everyone to read together are always in the roman (not italic) print. Remind parents to share the pictures with their children. Then read the page.

Page 3

Both services continue here.

The service continues with the *Shehecheyanu* prayer. Jewish law requires us to recite it on Rosh Hashanah, and on numerous happy occasions. Yom Kippur is a somber holiday, but not a sad one. It is not forbidden to recite this prayer on Yom Kippur (as it is, for example, at the first counting of the *Omer*, and on the last two nights of *Pesah*). Still, some leaders may wish to omit the use of this page on Yom Kippur.

RITUAL

Before reading the page, announce that we are about to say the *Shehecheyanu* prayer. (The

reason for announcing this is simple: Most adults who cannot read Hebrew know the *Sheheḥeyanu* by heart. They can join in as you read the Hebrew, if you tell them in advance what the Hebrew is.) Read the page, allowing the choir or cantor to repeat the *Sheheḥeyanu* in music. The traditional music is fine—or you may wish to use one of the newer melodies, such as the Ḥasidic-style melody of Tzvika Pik which is available in many collections of modern Israeli song.

Page 4

Both services continue here.

The two lines at the top of the page (read by the leader) explains that in this world we are like guests in God's house. This idea comes from the Midrash (Genesis Rabbah) and it makes a lovely introduction to the recitation of the *Barechu* prayer as the central liturgy begins.

RITUAL

Announce that we are on page 4. Ask everyone to rise for the *Barechu* prayer. (Again, telling people that this is the *Barechu* makes it possible for those who do not know Hebrew to join in without much difficulty.) Generally, in reciting the *Barechu*, you speak the first sentence of the Hebrew and then lead the congregation in reciting the second sentence.

In most synagogues the congregation rises for the *Barechu* and remains standing through the end of the *Sh'ma*. In this service, the *Sh'ma* is immediately followed by two selections from the *Amidah* (on page 6) and the congregation should remain standing until the conclusion of page 6.

The *Barechu* is generally repeated in song. The choir or musician may use any of a number of melodies which are popular. Probably the best choice here, as in all the standard sections of the liturgy, is to use the music your congregation sings in the main sanctuary.

Page 5

Both services continue here.

As you read the lines at the top of page 5, you may recognize that they come from the *V'Ahavta* section of the *Sh'ma* prayer, which asks us to say these words (the *Sh'ma*) "as you lie down and as you rise up," and to "teach them to your children."

RITUAL

Be sure to announce that we are on page 5, and about to say the *Sh'ma*. (It is important to keep announcing the page numbers, since many of the participants are children, turning their own pages.) After you lead the congregation in the *Sh'ma*, the prayer is repeated in song.

Page 6

Both services continue here.

The two selections on this page come from the *Tefillah*, "Prayer," one of our most ancient prayer compositions. The importance and antiquity of the *Tefillah* are attested in the Talmud. You state this as you read the first two lines of the English.

RITUAL

Before reading this page, explain that "This section of the prayer service is also called the *Amidah* or 'Standing Prayer' since the congregation generally stands during its recitation. The rabbis considered it so important that they called it the *Tefillah*, 'The Prayer.'"

The two Hebrew selections and their English translations are set up as a miniature responsive reading. You say the Hebrew and the congregation responds with the English. When the bottom of the page has been reached, motion for the congregation to be seated.

Because there are a number of lovely melodies for it, you may choose for the choir or cantor to repeat the *Sim Shalom* prayer (bottom of the page) in song. If you do, be sure to allow the congregation to be seated before the singing actually begins.

Page 7

FOR ROSH HASHANAH

The Rosh Hashanah service continues on this page.

RITUAL

You should explain the concept of "the Book of Life" before reading this page. "The Book of Psalms mentions a 'Book of Life' which God keeps. The Mishnah tells us that God writes the deeds of every human being in the Book of Life, and each year the Book is opened on Rosh Hashanah to see how we behaved in the past year. God listens to our prayers during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to see if we are sincere about doing better. Then on Yom Kippur, God seals the Book of Life—writing in it what will happen to every human being in the year to come."

Ask everyone to turn to page 7. You read the Hebrew, and the congregation responds with the English.

The prayer, *B'Rosh Hashanah*, has been set to many hauntingly beautiful melodies. You may wish to ask the cantor or choir to chant one of these melodies after the page has been read.

(Note: Later commentators have pointed out that the idea of a Book of Life should not be taken literally. As Ibn Ezra put it, God needs no accounting system to track human behavior. Nonetheless, the notion of a "Book of Life" is part of rabbinic tradition and has taken deep root in the popular Jewish imagination.)

Page 8

FOR YOM KIPPUR

The Yom Kippur service continues on this page.

Just for your information, the *Al Het* prayer is one of the central passages of the Yom Kippur liturgy. This Mahzor replaces the traditional list of sins with simple ideas that young people and their parents can share, but the purpose of the prayer remains the same.

RITUAL

Ask the congregation to turn to page 8. You may also wish for them to stand, since this prayer is normally a part of the *Tefillah* on Yom Kippur.

Before the congregations stands, take a moment to explain and demonstrate how the *Al Het* prayer is traditionally said: "In ancient days, our people believed that our hearts (not our brains) were the center of our thinking. While we say the *Al Het* prayer, it is traditional to make your right hand into a fist and tap it to your chest above your heart as you say each line." Now say the prayer with the congregation, and then ask everyone to be seated. (The prayer may now be repeated in song.)

Page 9

Both services continue here.

Here the themes of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur converge. On both holidays, we pray for forgiveness, and seek the strength to do better. This short responsive reading paves the way for the *Avinu Malkeinu* prayer which follows on the next page.

RITUAL

Pause here. Ask the young members of the congregation: "What does it mean to ask for forgiveness? What are some of the ways we all might do better next year?" Take some answers from the group. You can also "add in" a few suggestions along the way: "We should feed the hungry by bringing in food for the food collection." "We should help Jews who have escaped Soviet Russia to adjust to America." "We should bring money for the *Keren Ami* fund regularly." And so on.

Announce that we are on page 9, and read the page with the group.

Page 10

Both services continue here.

The ancient Hebrew prayer *Avinu Malkeinu* is introduced here both for its beloved musical qualities and for its deep-felt metaphor in which we all—children and adults alike—see ourselves as children of the One God. The composer of the prayer was, of course, unconscious of the sexism in the image he painted, but the English introduction sets this in a more modern context.

RITUAL

(Remember: This prayer is generally omitted if the holiday falls on Shabbat.) Ask the congregation to rise for the *Avinu Malkeinu* prayer on page 10. Open the ark before the prayer, and close the ark when the prayer is complete. Ask the congregation to be seated, then allow the cantor or choir to repeat the prayer in song.

Page 11

Both services continue here.

The Torah service begins here.

RITUAL

Ask the congregation to turn to page 11 and rise. A song may be sung while the Torah is removed from the ark. When the Torah has been placed on the reading table, you may choose to read the appropriate Torah portion in whole or in part.

You can do many special things to make the Torah reading a more dramatic part of the ritual. For example, you can place the reading table in the center of the congregation instead of at the front. You can invite all the children up to the Torah to see it up close. You can invite the children to join you in blessing the Torah reading, or you can ask the whole congregation to recite the blessings together (sharing the honor of the *Aliyah* with everyone).

A story/sermon follows the Torah reading. The following stories are popular, or you may have a favorite of your own.

A STORY/SERMON FOR ROSH HASHANAH

Long ago, before there was a [insert your synagogue's name], before there was a [insert your city], even before there was a United States, there was a time when the morning began in a very special way. The stars used to sing to announce that night was ending and morning was beginning.

Of course, stars only sing when they are tickled, and the problem is that there is no way to tickle them any more. In those days, however, there was a wonderful goat. And he had a wonderful horn in the middle of his forehead—a horn so long that it reached into the heavens. Every night, the goat would wait and wait until just before the sun came up. Then he would raise his head, and his wonderful horn would tickle the stars. And the stars would sing.

But one day, the goat saw a very sad little girl sitting by a tree. She was so sad that the goat tried to tickle her with his horn. But the little girl just went right on crying. "What is wrong?" the goat asked, and the little girl said, "My father had wonderful little box made of elephant horn, and I picked it up. Then it fell from my hand and it was broken. And now my father is sad, and I am very sad."

The goat was sad, too. Then he had an idea. "Take a little bit from the tip of my horn," he said. "Then make a new box for your father." At this, the girl brightened and smiled. She used a sharp rock to cut just a little of the goat's wonderful horn and then she took the piece to her father, and he made it into a new box.

Now, when the neighbors saw the father's new box, they were very jealous. "It is so beautiful," they said. And they all wanted a box just like it. So they all went to the goat, one by one, and each one asked for just the tiniest piece of the goat's horn to make a box. And the goat was so kind that he could not refuse. And he watched as one neighbor after another cut a little, little bit away from his horn. And when all the cutting was over, everyone in town had a wonderful little box made of goat's horn.

But that night, when the goat raised his head to tickle the stars, his horn was so short that he could not even reach halfway to heaven. And the

stars did not sing. Not that night and not ever again.

Sometimes when we ask for things and our parents say "No" we think that they are being unfair. But, now you can remember the story of the goat that made the stars sing. And remember this: If everyone got everything they wanted, we might soon find that our world was much worse after all.

A STORY/SERMON FOR YOM KIPPUR

Let me tell you about the Lie. The Lie was just lying around one day when he heard that God was planning a great flood and Noah was building an ark to save the creatures of the world. Somehow, the world had gone wrong—it was a false place where everyone used lies instead of truth.

Now Noah sent word to everyone and everything, "Only pairs can come on the ark." Cattle came two by two, flamingos and zebras came in pairs, elephants and birds came in couples; and along with the animals came others. Truth and Justice came hand in hand. Love and Friendship came as a pair. Noah and his wife greeted them all and watched as they came into the ark.

Suddenly, Noah noticed a shadowy figure trying to sneak aboard the ark between the giraffes and the hyenas. "Hold on," he called, "Let me see who you are." What did he see? Noah saw a beautiful lady dressed in a splendid gown.

But Noah was not born yesterday. He could tell a clever disguise when he saw one. Reaching up with his hand, he tore the mask from the Lie's face. The face beneath the mask was so wretched and ugly that Noah could barely look at it.

"Be gone," Noah said. "You are the Lie and you must not be saved. The rule is that only couples can come aboard the ark, and—in the whole world—I do not think you will find anyone or even any *thing* foolish enough to become your partner!"

The Lie snarled and turned back. Now he wasted not a moment. He cajoled and coaxed and promised and pleaded, and tried to convince every creature to give up its rightful mate and marry him instead. But the Lie was such a terrible beggar that no one would take him.

No one that is, but one. As the Lie came to the edge of a forest, he saw an evil creature sneaking among the bushes, laughing and lighting forest fires! "This one will surely be my partner," the Lie said to himself. "Stop," he said. "I am your friend!"

"Friend?" she cackled. "Who claims to be my friend?"

"It is I, the Lie. But who are you?" Yet the Lie had only to look into her empty eye sockets to know who this was—he had found Wickedness herself!

"I love you," he lied. "Together we can be saved on Noah's ark. I will give you anything if you will marry me." Wickedness already knew what she wanted. "I will marry you," she said. "But, in return, you must promise to give me all that is gained by lying—now and forever."

What choice did the Lie have? The sky was already filled with clouds; it was growing darker and darker. So the Lie agreed.

In the last moment before Noah closed the ark, the Lie and Wickedness scurried aboard hand-in-hand. And now you know why the world after the flood was not one hundred percent better than it was before. And you know this, too: To this very day, wherever people tell the Lie, Wickedness grows stronger.

OTHER STORIES/SERMONS

You will find many more stories suitable for short sermons in the two collections, *Stories from Our Living Past* and *Lessons from Our Living Past*. In *When a Jew Prays*, you will find an index to stories about prayer, many of which are also appropriate for the High Holy Days. These three books are published by Behrman House, Inc.

Page 12

FOR ROSH HASHANAH

The Rosh Hashanah service continues on this page.

RITUAL

Ask everyone to turn to page 12 for the blowing of the Shofar. After reading the prayers, you announce each phrase of the *shofar* before the note is blown. Take your time, the blowing of the Shofar is one of the most dramatic moments in the service, and a moment that everyone loves.

In some congregations, the blowing of the Shofar is accompanied by music provided by the choir or cantor. This enhances the mood of the moment, and may be something you wish to consider doing in your service.

Page 13

Both services continue here.

The Torah service ends with the return of the Torah to the ark, and the recitation and singing of *Etz Hayyim*, followed by the *Aleinu* prayer.

RITUAL

Ask the congregation to turn to page 13 and rise to return the Torah to the ark. Read down to the phrase: "Those who follow its teachings are happy." Pause while the cantor or choir sings the *Etz Hayyim* prayer. Then read and sing the *Aleinu* prayer which is on the bottom half of the page. After completing the *Aleinu*, motion for everyone to be seated.

Page 14

Both services continue here.

The closing hymn is *Ayn Kayloheinu*, "There is no other like God." Here, as before, only the first verse is given in the Mahzor, but the entire prayer may be sung by the group.

RITUAL

If there are any closing announcements (for example, on Rosh Hashanah you will want to announce the time for the Yom Kippur family service), you should make them before the closing hymn. Then ask everyone to turn to page 14. After you have read the English at the top of the page, the hymn is sung.

Page 15

Both services conclude here.

With the closing prayer on this page, the congregation briefly restates the major theme of the High Holy Days.

RITUAL

After the final page is read, you may wish to offer a closing benediction, or a few final words. It is always appropriate to close with the Hebrew: "*Baruch atah b'vo-echa, baruch atah b'tsei-techa*. You have been blessed in your coming in. May you go forth to new strength and blessing." The service can end with everyone singing *L'Shanah Tovah Tikateivu*.