

ROSH HASHANAH IS MORE THAN APPLES AND HONEY: A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AND TEACHING THE ROSH HASHANAH SERVICES

Cherie Koller-Fox

SESSION SUMMARY

The *Machzor* is long and we can get lost in it; however, no matter whether you are Orthodox or Reform or anything in between, the structure and content of the service is surprisingly pretty much the same. The order may be changed, things are certainly shortened, but the service is the service. In this session, participants looked at the most important prayer — *Aleinu* — and at the major additions to the service — whether they are phrases, poems or whole sections. They examined some difficult prayers as well. With this knowledge and great handouts, you will be able to adapt this to any age group you teach.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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In this session, I explained the structure of the service for Rosh HaShanah. The first handouts explain the structure of a Sabbath service so that the participants could understand that the longer high holiday service is based on that model with additions especially for Rosh HaShanah. I have enclosed a multi-colored chart along with the explanation of each component which explain these additions. Just focusing on the additions, helped us to understand the reason that each addition was made. This led to the seminal question: Where is the Rosh Hashanah service taking us and why were these particular additions made?

The first point that I want to draw your attention to on the chart is that there are six distinct parts of the service (in yellow) and each part ends with one form of the Kaddish or another (Hatzi Kaddish, Kaddish Shalem, Kaddish de-Rabbanan) These are marked in blue. The types of additions to the service include: Small additions of a sentence or two (purple), piyyutim (red), and major sections (green).

The small sections marked in purple pepper the text, reminding the congregants why this day is important. They are also possibly meant to remind God what is important to us. The oft repeated phrases, Zochreinu Le'chayim and B'sefer Chayim refer to the acknowledgement that we have come to pray for our fragile lives and to ask God to remember us to life and to write us in the book of life.

In red, we see the piyyutim. Piyyutim are poems or what is referred to today as readings. They were meant then, as now, to make the service more meaningful. They are not liturgy, but they are included because they clearly and in moving language emphasize the themes of the day. Very often, though, when people talk about the difficulty they have with liturgy, they often mention piyyutim. That is why it is so important to emphasize that these are not liturgy. Unetane Tokef is one of those piyyutim. It is not necessary to believe all the images in this poem, but rather to view them as metaphors for the day and to discuss and analyze them as you would a poem. If you do not like this or other piyyutim, you are welcome to skip them or pick some modern reading that will make your service more meaningful. In other words, these are optional readings, but they have been loved by people through the ages which is what has kept them in the service. If the language of Avinu Malkeinu seems sexist to you, understand that it is a piyyut that is very old and meant to convey the idea that God is both the judge and a compassionate parent. You are welcome to change the words to those that suit your modern sensitivities or leave it out altogether.

Obviously there are Torah readings specifically chosen for RH but discussing these is beyond the scope of this workshop. (See Goldie Milgram)

So that leaves us to the major additions to the service and my observation that the liturgists are taking us on a journey. But where are we going and why? I believe that the major clues are before us in the liturgy. The emphasis on "HaMelech Ha-Yoshev Al Kise Ram v'nisa"—the King who sits on a High and Exulted throne-- (found right before Shochan Ad) is the first of these clues. Rosh HaShanah is a New Year's festival. According to Theodor H. Gaster, "Judaism regards New Year's Day not merely as an anniversary of creation but also, and more importantly, as a renewal of it. The world is reborn from year to year."¹ Along the same lines, Gaster mentions that the covenant between Israel and the Jewish

¹ Theodore Gaster. *Festivals of the Jewish Year*: Morrow Quill Paperbacks. New York, 1978 pg. 109

people is also renewed on this day. The image of Ha-Melech, leads me to believe that on Rosh HaShanah, we return as a whole people to the presence of our creator and covenantal partner sitting on the throne in the image of a King.

In an attempt to equalize God language, I will often refer to Gd as ruler during the year, on Rosh Hashanah I retain the word King because I think it is so central to the meaning of the day.

The second important addition and clue is the U'vechan Prayer²—these are three paragraphs included in the Kedusha prayer. The Kedusha image is of the court of Gd and the angels singing Gds praises along with humanity. I believe the U'vchen paragraphs are also set in the court of Gd. The three paragraphs of U'vechen begin with a statement of universality. Gd is the ruler of all creation and one day all creation will realize that. The second paragraph is particular to the Jewish people—asking for dignity for Israel. Dignity here refers to the fact that diaspora has left us without our land and city of Jerusalem and we pray that one day soon these be returned to us. Then, the Jewish people will be rewarded because of all peoples we are the ones who both understand and acknowledge that Gd is the Creator of all. The third paragraph, is the critical one. It prophesizes that good and faithful people of all faiths will one day acknowledge that there is only one law and only one Creator. They will not become Jewish but rather, because Gd's law is just, it will replace oppression and wickedness so that one day, governments of oppression will pass from the earth because all people's will recognize the authority of Gd's law.

My image of this is that on Rosh HaShanah, Jews circle back to acknowledge the kingship of Gd and hope that all other peoples will as well; but year after year, as we envision ourselves standing before the throne of the King, other peoples do not in fact join us. We hope that one day they will and that will usher in a messianic age.

The themes of Malchuyot, Zichronot and Shofarot mirror these themes. Malchuyot centers on the Aleinu prayer that has come to be said at every Jewish service but originated in the Malchuyot service. Its themes are identical to U'vechen: we kneel before the King of Kings and acknowledge that there is only One Gd of all humanity. We hope for a time when people will stop letting other kings rule the earth and then the world will be perfected (tikkun olam) and then all humanity will acknowledge Gd. In that day, all the wicked of the earth will turn toward Gd. We ask God to bring that day. If you read these prayers side by side, you will also see these themes repeating.³

Zichronot is about remembering the times that Gd listened to our people and saved those who were in trouble. It asserts the believe that Gd will remember us and come back some day and assert Gd's rule.

The Shofarot sections recalls that the Shofar sound from the mountain is how Gd communicated his presence to us on Sinai. Each year, we answer Gds call with our Shofar sound hoping to hear God sounding it back to us. Alas that day has not yet come, and we return to our lives and live with evil and oppression until the hope of the new year to come.

² See handout, translation © Everett Fox

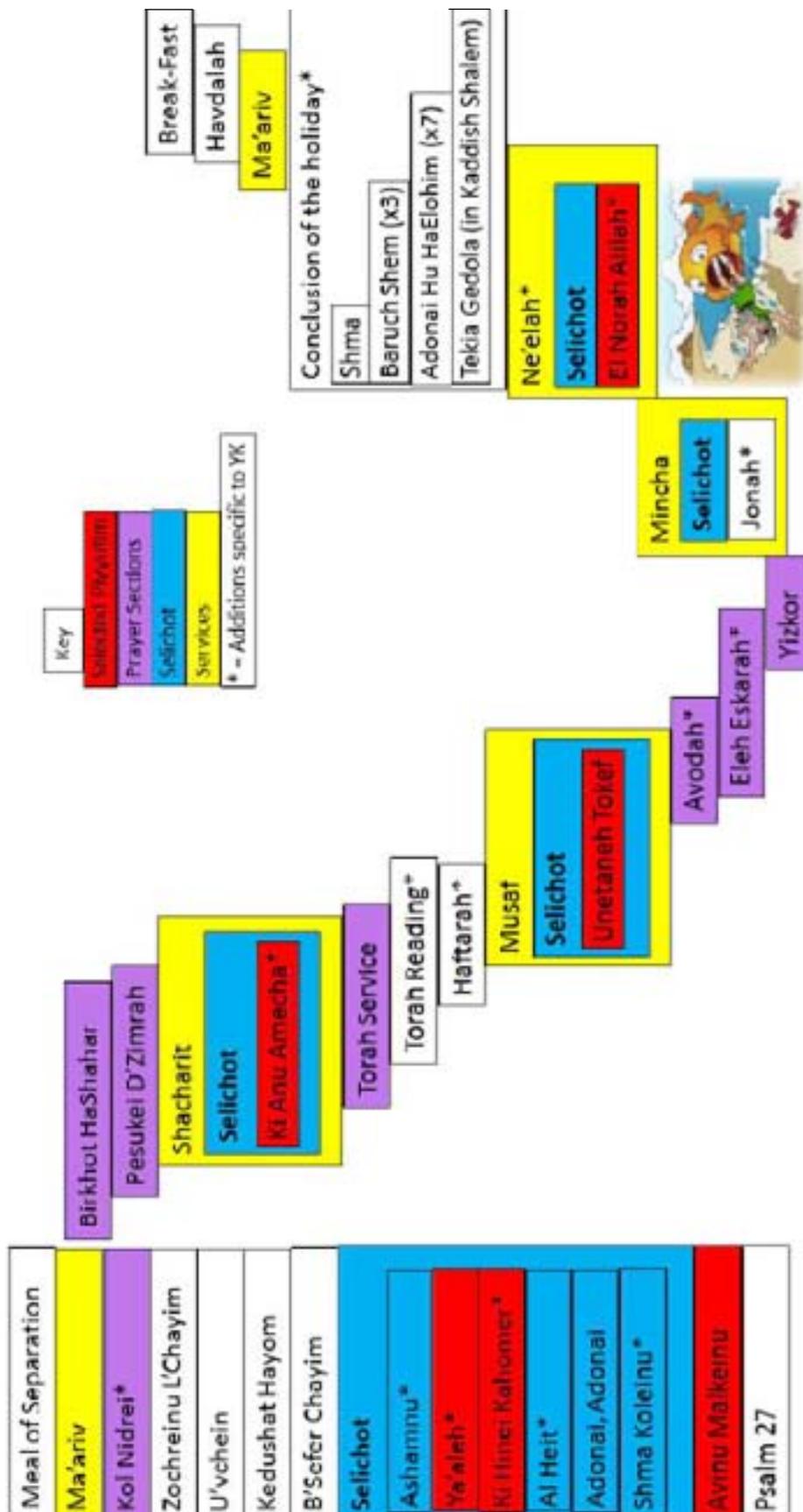
³ See handout. Aleinu translation©Everett Fox

These are the ideas that sanctify the day of Rosh HaShanah. We are on a journey to Gd's holy mountain and throne in the hopes that all peoples will be there and all oppression will end.

I have suggested an activity based on Godly play for children where these themes are acted out with puppets and little characters that you can manipulate.⁴ The script is included in the packet of materials along with suggested questions for elementary grades that can be adapted to younger children, teens and adult learners.⁵

⁴ See handout ©Cherie Koller-Fox

⁵ See handout



THIS IS THE NORMAL STRUCTURE OF A SABBATH SERVICE

BIRKOT HA-SCHACHAR—Morning Blessings—blessing about gratitude for getting up in the morning, putting on your Tallit/Tefillin and a short study passage

No additions

PESUKEI DE-ZIMRA—Verses of Song—psalms to ready yourself for prayer

No additions

SHACHARIT—Morning service—includes Blessings before and After the Shma and the Amida—the standing prayer of blessings

HaMeLECH

TORAH SERVICE—The Torah and Haftarat are read. **We bless the country we live in, Israel and pray for peace.**

MUSAF—Another Amida and additional Blessings

CONCLUDING PRAYERS AND SONGS beginning with Alenu and ending with Adon Olam

- **Only mourners Kaddish** is used in most reform prayer books but it does double the word Le-ah-leh (far beyond)

The High Holiday Services are so long and it is easy to get lost in the service. So here is an outline of a regular Shabbat Service with the Additions for Rosh HaShana:

Piyyutim are RED: they are liturgical poetry sung, chanted or read

***The Kaddish is BLUE:** is an indicator that we've ended a section of the service.

*** Added sections are GREEN:** these are whole sections added to the service because of the holiday.

Small changes are in PURPLE

Major Rosh HaShana Additions:

The evening (Ma'ariv) service has no additions for Rosh HaShana.

The normal daytime Shabbat/Holiday Service has 6 sections. Here they are:

BIRCHOT HA-SHACHAR—Morning Blessings—blessing about gratitude for getting up in the morning, putting on your Tallit/Tefillin and a short study passage

Kaddish De-Rabbanan—A special Kaddish said after Study

PESUKEI-DEZIMRA—Verses of Song—psalms to ready yourself for prayer

AT THE END OF THE SERVICE THE WORD MELECH IS ENLARGED AND EMPHASIZED BECAUSE THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IS THE MAJOR THEME OF RH. ALSO THIS IS THE CANTOR'S CUE TO LEAD THE SERVICE.

Hatzi Kaddish—short Kaddish

SHACHARIT—Morning service—includes Blessings before and After the Shma and the Amida—the standing prayer of blessings

THE MIDDLE 13 PETITIONARY BLESSINGS ARE OMITTED FOR ROSH HASHANAH

BECAUSE ASKING FOR THINGS FOR OURSELVES OR THE COMMUNITY IS

CONSIDERED INAPPROPRIATE BECAUSE RH IS A TASTE OF THE WORLD TO COME.

El Na Adonai Melech U-vachen Lecha V-ye—tuv kol L-avdecha
Zochreinu Le-chaim

Ha-MELECH Ha-kadosh is substituted for Ha-El Hakadosh

U-VACHEN PARAGRAPHS

Sanctifying the day: ATA BACHARTA, through the blessing, MIKADESH YISRAEL
VE-YOM HA-ZICARON.

Be-Safer Chaim—May we and the entire house of Israel be remembered and
recorded in the book of Life, blessing, sustenance and peace.

Avinu Malkeinu (Our Father our King)

Full Kaddish

TORAH READING—Taking the Torah out, Torah and Haftorah readings. Prayers
for Country, Israel, Peace, Kohanic Blessing,

SPECIAL TORAH READINGS FOR THE FIRST AND SECOND DAY

Adonai, Adonai/Va-ani Tefillati

SHOFAR SERVICE

Hatzi Kaddish

MUSAF—Another Amida and additional Blessings, Priestly blessing and Sim
Shalom

U-NETANA TOKEF

U-VACHEN PARAGRAPHS

MALCHUYOT

ZICHRONOT

SHOFOROT

Be-Safer Chayim

Ha-Yom Te'amtzenu

Extra shofar sounds

Full Kaddish

CONCLUDING PRAYERS AND SONGS beginning with Alenu and including **Mourner's Kaddish** and Adon Olam

THIS IS THE NORMAL STRUCTURE OF A SABBATH SERVICE

BIRKOT HA-SCHACHAR—Morning Blessings—blessing about gratitude for getting up in the morning, putting on your Tallit/Tefillin and a short study passage

PESUKEI DE-ZIMRA—Verses of Song—psalms to ready yourself for prayer

SHACHARIT—Morning service—includes Blessings before and After the Shma and the Amida—the standing prayer of blessings

TORAH SERVICE—The Torah and Haftarot are read. We bless the country we live in, Israel and pray for peace.

MUSAF—Another Amida and additional Blessings

CONCLUDING PRAYERS AND SONGS beginning with Alenu and ending with Adon Olam

This workshop will focus on the special additions to the service:

HA-MELECH: One word that is enlarged and emphasized

AVEINU MALKEINU: A piyyut, attributed to Rabbi Akiva and added to over the years.

U-NETANA TOKEF: A piyyut written in by Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn who died in 1200.

U-VACHEN AND ALEINU: A revolutionary vision of a just messianic future

BLESSING OF THE DAY: 4 paragraph summary of the ideas of the holidays ending by asking God to sanctify the people Israel and the Day of Remembrance

SHOFAR SERVICE: A service that encompasses the blessings and the sounds of the shofar blast and the Ashrei prayer.

MALCHUYOT, ZICHRONOT, SHOFOROT: Malchuyot--the idea of God as King focused around the prayer Aleinu which was originally written to be in this section; Zichronot—the idea that God will remember the people Israel now as he has done in the past; and Shoforot—that takes us back to Sinai when God revealed himself to the Jewish people through the Shofar sound and a reminder that Rosh HaShana is a day of judgement where we ask for God’s compassion.

B’SAFER CHAYIM: May we and the entire House of Israel be remembered and recorded in the Book of Life, blessing, sustenance and peace. The idea of the Book of Life goes back to the Bible where we read that God keeps a record of the deeds of humankind. In Psalm 69:28-29 “ Let them have no share of your beneficence, may they be erased from the book of Life, and not be inscribed with the righteous” (See Exodus 32:33 Isaiah4:3 and Ps.56.9 as other examples)

(Conservative piyyut) Ha-YOM: Today you strengthen us.

Today you bless us...

Today you lovingly accept our prayers.

Today You sustain us with the power of your justice.

(Reform piyyut) Veye-etayu: All the world shall come to serve you,

And bless your glorious name,

And your righteousness triumphant,

the islands shall proclaim

If you will look at the first three paragraphs on page 250 in the Hebrew, I want to draw your attention to the fact that each of these paragraphs begins with the same Hebrew word—*u've'chen*.

This is a loaded word that occurs just two times in the Bible, once in Ecclesiastes* and once in the book of Esther.** Both situations involved life and death situations. In the case of Esther, she is having to go before the King to plead for her life and the life of her people. Going to the King without being summons is against the law and she knows she could die trying. So she asks that all the people fast for three days before she goes before the King.

By repeating this same word three times, the prayer is evoking the image of our going before the King to beg for our lives and the lives of our people.

These three paragraphs mimic the three parts of the Musaf service that we are about to encounter: The themes of Kingship, Remembrance and Redemption. What is interesting here is to see that the image moves from a universal view of the world to a particularistic one and back again.

Let's take a close look at this prayer. Notice the emphasis in the first paragraph on "all mankind". Here we are acknowledging that God's Kingship is over all his creation—both Jews and non-Jews. The writer here is drawing a picture of a time when all people will come together to do God's will with a full heart. You'll have to take my word here since the English doesn't translate all the words here.

Now the prayer turns to the particular. It asks that honor be given to your people. Who do they mean by God's people: those who revere God, those who seek God and those who yearn for God. In order words the ones who Remember God. The thought becomes even more specific to Jews when it mentions that joy will come to our land of Israel, our city of Jerusalem and our Messiah, from the line of David.

Finally, the prayer comes full circle and makes its point and with it the main point of the Rosh HaShanah holiday which is not only a universal thought but a political one as well. Redemption will come and the shofar will blow on the day that two things happen: the first one is that arrogance will be removed from the earth—by that they mean earthly kings and dictators—flesh and blood people who think they are in charge. Second, that evil will disappear like smoke and never be seen again and finally, that oppressive governments will be removed from power.

So the picture that emerges goes back to the time of Esther. No more Hamans, no more evil, no more oppressive governments. At the base of it, that is the political message of Rosh HaShanah. Ancient Jews clearly understood that God could not be present in a world that was impure and unjust. This message is repeated again and again in the Torah and lived out during the time of the Temple.

Therefore, it is our job to be an avant guard for humanity. We should be a people who live an exemplary life. We should practice love, righteousness, responsibility, justice, and dignity. We are not to wait until oppression disappears, we are to work to rid the world of oppression. Our version of a messianic era is one in which there is no evil and no oppression. A time in which the wicked are transformed. Saving just Israel is not what our goal should be, no. Our goal must be to rid the world of oppressive governments so that people will be able to understand that the rule of truth and justice will prevail.

Remember the Passover story. We had to rid ourselves of Pharaoh before we could find God and hear God and understand God in the desert. In Egypt we were under Pharaoh's thumb. God could not rule, could not exist in this kind of world.

Oppression and evil are to God as Kryptonite is to Superman.

*The passage in Kohelet (Ecclesiastes)

Kohelet is trying to give advice as to what constitutes a wise person. He says: I counsel you: Obey the king's command, and that in the manner of an oath of God. Do not hasten to leave his presence, do not persist in an evil thing;... since a king's word is law, who would dare say to him," What are you doing?"..Man is...powerless over the day of death. U-ve-chen, I have seen the wicked buried (peacefully) and with children who come after them, while those who had done right were gone from the holy place and forgotten in the city. (they had no children). This too is futility because a sinner does what is wrong a hundred times and God is patient with him... The wicked will not long endure because he does not fear God.

** Esther 4:16 Then Esther said to Mordechai: Go assemble all the Jews that are to be found in Shushan and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. And I, with my maids, will fast also. Thus (u-v-chen) will I come to the king though it is unlawful; and if I perish, I perish.

Teachable moments:

Kingship of God over all creation (this also implies that we should obey God like we made a sacred oath to GOD.

Memory. We ask God to remember that we are his chosen people and that we show up here every year and wait for him. We ask him to remember to come.

Redemption: One day, the world will be a place without oppressive Governments because all will know that God is King.

In the meantime, we have to gather every year. We have to fast. We have to repent and do Teshuva which includes the work of Tikkun Ha-Olam.

Malchuyot+ God is One and the King of all creation

Zichronot=God remembers and is faithful to the Covenants: one with Noah, one with Abraham, and one with Moses.

Shofrot+ will herald a new and better world. Some see this connected to a personal Messiah and some to a messianic sacred time.

The Rosh HaShanah Journey of the Jewish People

Once upon a time, God formed the human, of dust from the soil, he blew into his nostrils the breath of life and the human being became a living being. God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the human whom he had formed. Soon after God realized that his human was lonely and he created a woman. This was a time when God was very close to human beings. We call this event creation. Adam and Eve were not Jewish. The midrash tells us that God did not want any people to be able to say my ancestors are better than yours, so he made all of us descend from one common pair of ancestors.

Once upon a time, the Jewish people all gathered together at Mt. Sinai. They had come from slavery to the place that Moses had talked to God in the burning bush. Together they heard the Shofar blast and agreed to do all that God asked of them. That is called revelation. It is when God communicates to human beings. At Sinai, God gave the Jewish people, the Torah.

Every Rosh HaShana the whole Jewish people gather together. They are not all in the same place but still they know the same words that are pleasing to God. When God communicated to them on Mount Sinai, what they actually heard was the Shofar sound. Every year, all Jewish communities around the world blow a shofar 100 times to remind God that we are still here and that we are waiting for him to speak with us again. The Shofar sound is first made in a small Jewish community in the Palau Islands in the Western Pacific and over the course of the day travels around the world with the sun until the Jews at Temple Emanu-El in Hawaii blow the final Tekiah Gedola.

Did you know that on Rosh HaShanah, Jews can travel backwards in time and find themselves at Mount Sinai again? What is that? Of course, you can go. You don't need a ticket. Come with me and my friends on this magical journey and you can see for yourself what happens at Mount Sinai on Rosh HaShanah.

Of course, we have to prepare for such an amazing trip! When we first get up in the morning before Rosh HaShanah, we have to be sure that we are healthy. We thank God that we are able to make the trip. To prepare our mind for the trip, we study something from the Torah. And once we are out of bed, we begin to sing. We can't be sleepy or grumpy when we go to Mount Sinai. We have to be spiritually awake or we might not know how to travel backwards in time.

I know you are curious about why we are going. We going to Mount Sinai hoping to see the King of Kings there. We all know about the time right after we came out of slavery in Egypt when the King was there and spoke to us through the Shofar sound. We are all hoping the King will speak to us today. The first time we were there, it was only the Jewish people at the mountain, but this time we hope that all of God's creations will be there. After all, even though all peoples call their King by different names and worship the King in different ways, we believe there is only One King for all of us. We call him Adonai.

To be able to travel to Mount Sinai, we have to see the presence of God in the world around us. How can we find God if we don't know what we are looking for? Can you see the miracles in the beauty of nature? Do you see the sunrise and the shadows cast by the light around us? Does it remind you of the creation of the universe! If we sit quietly we can feel God's love for us. God must have loved us so much to give us the Torah. If you can see the beauty of creation and feel God's love, when you open your eyes,

you will find yourself at Mt. Sinai. It's not hard to get there. Some people go every day and some only on Rosh HaShanah.

The first thing we notice is that most of the people there are Jews. That is a disappointment, but we can hope the other nations will come with us at the next new year.

Gathered around the mountain, we sing the Shma just as our ancestors did the first time we were here. In this new world, time stands still. It is holy time and it happens in a second of the world's time. Here there is no time but holy time. This day is all Rosh HaShanah. It is very quiet and there are more stars than I have ever seen before. It feels like a holy moment. Each person stands and prays-- praising God and thanking God for everything we have been given. We recite the words that make the day holy and the words that say why we came there to Sinai today. Quietly, we ask to be written in the Book of Life.

When the light comes, we unwrap the Torah scrolls and read the words inside. We pray for peace. Then, comes the moment we have been waiting for. All over the world, Jews will blow the Shofar but will God answer from the mountain? The Shofar blast begins and it is the echo of the blasts heard round the world. The sound lasts the moon appears again. This is the sound of the Jewish people calling out for the One True King to answer..

While we can hear the sound, we stand to pray. We beg God to hear our voice. We call out to the other nations of the world and invite them to join us in worshipping the One King but once again no one comes. We will have to wait for the Messiah to help bring that about. "Will all the people of the world be Jewish then, "you ask? Of course not, we laugh. We will all be ONE.

Can you feel the presence of the King? Yes! Great. We all bow down to the ground. We know that it is our responsibility to praise the Ruler of the Earth. I am thinking about about the many times that God has remembered me and my family in our lives back home.

When the Shofar sounds stop, we blow a few more blasts and end on a Tekiah Gedola!—the longest blast of all. This time we blow the Shofar to wake us up and to ask God to please write us in the book of Life. But God does not answer our Shofar sound with the Shofar sound that will bring a totally peaceful world. Soon, then, we must go back to our normal time and our normal place and promise to come to Mount Sinai again next year. Maybe next year will be the day of Redemption! On that day, all people will come together in peace. There will be no more violence, no more hatred, no more evil and no more governments that stop people from being free. On that day, we will all here the Shofar sound coming from the mountain.

We stop for a moment to remember our ancestors who gathered at Sinai before us with a Kaddish prayer and when we sing " Adon Olam". Adonai Li Ve-Lo Ira, we know that God is with us wherever we are and we have nothing to fear.

At that moment, we each return to our own homes to live our lives in the here and now and to dream about the future when all peoples will gather at Sinai in Peace.

These are the ideas that sanctify the day of Rosh HaShanah. We are on a journey to Gd's holy mountain and throne in the hopes that all peoples will be there and all oppression will end.

I have suggested an activity based on Godly play for children where these themes are acted out with puppets and little characters that you can manipulate.⁴ The script is included in the packet of materials along with suggested questions for elementary grades that can be adapted to younger children, teens and adult learners.⁵

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