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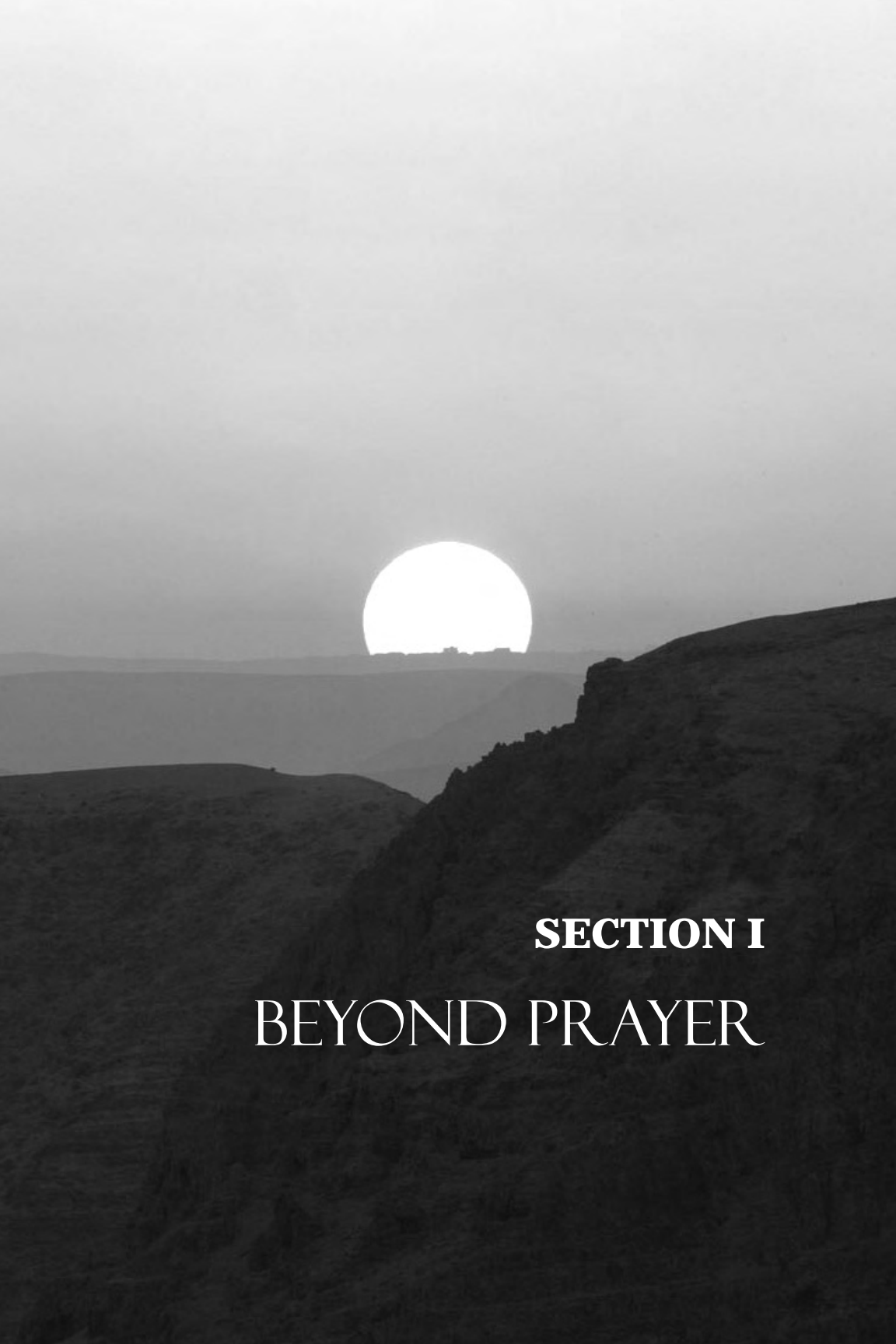
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**SECTION I**  
**BEYOND PRAYER**



# PART I

## THE KINGDOM

### WELCOME TO THE KINGDOM

If Rosh Hashanah could be summed up in one word, that word would be “king.” In Hebrew, the word for “king” is *melech*. The purpose of Rosh Hashanah is that we as Jews recognize and embrace God’s sovereignty—that we recognize God as *the King par excellence*. But what does this actually mean? For most of us, the notion of a king invokes images of medieval castles or the British royal family, and those images aren’t very helpful when it comes to seeking inspiration for Rosh Hashanah. So what is a Jew supposed to do?

To embrace God as King means to understand, integrate, and commit to the ideas and ideals that are at the core of the Jewish understanding of reality. So, in order to access the extraordinary potential inherent in Rosh Hashanah, we must first explore those core Jewish ideas and ideals. Then, with that understanding in hand, we will be able to unlock the door that leads, ultimately, to the King’s inner chamber.

We will begin with the essential elements of the Jewish paradigm for life and then proceed to the details and see how they relate specifically to Rosh Hashanah.

Let's begin.

In a nutshell, Judaism begins with the seminal idea that God created everything that exists out of absolute nothingness and that creation has a purpose: for us to achieve the greatest meaning and pleasure possible. Anyone will tell you that if there really is a God, a “king of the universe,” then being in His presence would be life’s ultimate experience. This realization is at the heart of how Judaism views life: that the meaning of existence comes from being deeply connected to the sovereign source of all existence, God Himself. The way we achieve our purpose is to develop a relationship with God, and since God didn’t want to leave us in the dark when it comes to developing that relationship, He gave us a manual. That manual is the Torah. The Torah is a guide for transforming every square inch of our potentially mundane lives into opportunities for connecting to God. The Torah is a detailed manual for how to infuse meaning, kindness, beauty, morality, goodness, and spirituality into every moment of our lives. In the Jewish view, every dimension of life is brimming with ultimate potential—there isn’t a moment that we *can’t* be in the King’s Presence.

When God gave the Torah to the Jewish people, He told us that it would transform us into a “kingdom of *kohanim* (spiritual role models) and a *kadosh* (holy) nation.” Within the nation of Israel, *all* the “subjects” in the kingdom are members of the royal family. The life of every Jew, and the collective life of the Jewish people, is meant to reflect the light of godliness into the world. God is our King, we have the privilege of being His emissaries, and Jewish life is the path to fulfilling that grandest and most ennobling of all human endeavors. And now, it is time for Rosh Hashanah.

## WELCOME TO ROSH HASHANAH—AND LIFE

Rosh Hashanah takes place at the intersection of life and prayer at the dawning moments of a new year. As we will see, woven into the fabric of Rosh Hashanah are many of the keys to reinvigorating our lives in a powerful, meaningful, and even transformational way.

In the next xx pages we are going to consider some important questions—questions like, What do we know about God? what is the fundamental nature of man? and what is life all about anyway? Then, while we are at it, we will grapple with the essence of prayer, the meaning of the shofar, the definition of spirituality, and how all of these converge to present us with the potentially life-defining moment known as Rosh Hashanah.

## BUT FIRST, A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Throughout *Beyond Survival*, you will encounter stories that appear in gray boxes. These stories are not part of the flow of the book, so if you want to skip them you can. However, if you do ignore the stories, you do so at your own peril. You see, while the book can be understood without them, they do capture a critical theme: life. Let me explain.

Throughout our prayers on Rosh Hashanah, again and again, we ask God for life: we ask to be “remembered for life” and we ask to be “inscribed in the Book of Life.” When we greet one another on Rosh Hashanah we say, “May you be inscribed and sealed for life, goodness, and peace.” On Rosh Hashanah God exercises His royal power of judgment and decides who will remain in the kingdom and who will not. Judgment is a very serious concept, but in a way, it is also liberating. You see, judgment implies care, concern, and love. If God didn’t love us

and care about each and every one of our lives, He wouldn't pay attention and bother with judgment—but He does care.

Our prayers for life are meant to be understood at face value—we want to live—but they also have a deeper meaning. Consider this: I once met a Holocaust survivor who said, “I would choose to go through all those years in Auschwitz again rather than spend one day of my life as a Nazi.” That is an incredible statement, and what it means, I believe, is this: one can be alive, strong, and healthy physically yet be “dead” at the same time. A life lived in the boots of a Nazi, or under the flag of Al-Qaida or Hizbullah, is a life utterly drained of all meaning. Some choices and some actions infuse life with “life,” and others drain life of everything God intended it for.

The summit of the Rosh Hashanah prayer service is the sounding of the shofar (more on that later). The Hebrew word *shofar* means “to polish or beautify.” The shofar is a call to beauty—a call to morality, kindness, compassion, and sanctity. At only one place in the entire Torah are we explicitly presented with a choice: “Look closely—I have placed before you today life and good, and death and evil . . . life and death I have placed before you, blessing and curse: *Choose* life, so that you and your children will [truly] live” (Deuteronomy 30:15–19).

Ultimately, every significant choice we make is a choice between life and death. On Rosh Hashanah we not only pray to be inscribed for a year of life, we also strive to commit ourselves to living the kind of life that fills our existence with goodness, spirituality, love, and true human beauty—with life.

The stories you will encounter throughout this book are about people who made the choice to fill their lives with life. Enjoy the stories, and may we, the Jewish people, and all humankind be blessed and inscribed with a sweet year of life—a year of choosing life.

# **PART II**

## CREATION

Stop for a moment and look outside and listen. The world that surrounds us at every moment is stunning in its beauty; it is a melody, breathtaking and wondrous. Do you see? Can you hear? Allow yourself to take a moment and drink deep of the splendor and harmony that surrounds you. Can you see the ripples of perfection? Can you hear the echoes?

And yet . . .

We all know that this very same world is also a desperately dark and foreboding place. When will more towers come crashing to the ground? When and where will evil strike? Will it vanquish us all? will it put an end to the beauty?

Life and death.

Beauty and brutality.

Light and ashen darkness.

Imagine for a moment that the future and well-being of the entire universe were in your hands. Imagine that the fate of mankind was yours, and yours alone, to shape.

Welcome to the reality called Rosh Hashanah.

Rosh Hashanah is about the universe—and each and every one of us. It’s about the future of mankind—and each and every one of us. Most of all, it is about the remarkable potential in each of us to make, quite literally, a world of difference.

### MEET BRAD

**(I)** *Josh, age six, had recently been diagnosed with a malignant tumor that had severely diminished his vision and hearing. Josh attended Camp Simcha, where Brad was a music instructor. “Josh appeared dazed during our music sessions. I couldn’t bear the pain of watching him in his isolated state, so I reached out to touch his hand, giving him a way to enjoy the beat the music. That moment was the beginning of a friendship that has lasted a decade.”*

**(II)** *“One evening, it was my turn to check the bunks. Chaim from Haifa was crying: he had awoken from a nightmare. I went over to his bedside and clutched his hand. ‘Stay with me,’ he pleaded. In a calm voice, I said ‘Al Tidag (Don’t worry) Ani Po (I am here).’ Chaim lied there holding my hand until he fell asleep. Only then did I leave to check another bunk.”*

**(III)** *Jonathan Pollard, a Jew who spied for Israel, is serving a life sentence for a crime that usually warrants two to four years in prison. Brad has traveled to Washington three times to discuss Jonathan’s plight with the staffers of seven Senators.*

*He has written articles and been interviewed on the radio. "It is simply not an option for me to allow the suffering of a Jew to go unanswered."*

**(IV)** *Three years after Hurricane Katrina, Brad spent a long weekend volunteering in New Orleans. "We spent hours in the scorching sun painting Janet's house. When it was time to leave, she waived goodbye as if she was sending off her dearest friends. Not only did we paint Janet's home, I think we also painted her heart."*

*Brad Kaufman is a law student at the University of Maryland*

CHOOSE LIFE

## A JOURNEY BACK IN TIME

Let's travel back in time to the dawn of history, to the very first Rosh Hahsanah. The way Judaism sees it, the world was created in seven days.\* The pinnacle of creation, however, took place on the sixth day, with the fashioning of the first person. That sixth day was Rosh Hashanah. Though history began six days earlier and much was created before man, it was only with the appearance of the first person that the meaning and purpose of history began to unfold. Until the formation of man, the stage

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\*For a scientific analysis of the Torah's understanding of time and how it relates to current physics, see Dr. Andrew Goldfinger, *Thinking About Creation*, Ch. 23-25 and Dr. Gerald L. Schroeder, *Genesis and the Big Bang*, Ch. 27

אֲדַנִּי שְׁפַתִּי תִפְתָּח וּפִי יִגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ.

» אָבוֹת - FOREFATHERS «

*(When you say the word Blessed, bend your knees; for You, bow at the waist; for A-donai, straighten up and continue your prayer while standing.)*

כִּרְוַךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם,  
דֵּ אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב, הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגְּבוּר וְהַנּוֹרָא, אֵל  
עֲלִיּוֹן, גּוֹמֵל חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים, וְקַנְיָה הַפֶּלֶל, וְזוֹכֵר חֲסָדֵי אָבוֹת,  
וּמְבִיא גּוֹאֵל לְבָנָי בְּנֵיהֶם, לְמַעַן שְׂמוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה.

זְכַרְנוּ לְחַיִּים, מְלֶךְ חַפֵּץ בְּחַיִּים, וְכַתְּבֵנוּ בְּסֵפֶר הַחַיִּים, לְמַעַן  
אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים.

*(When you say the word Blessed, bend your knees; for You, bow at the waist; for A-donai, straighten up and continue your prayer while standing.)*

מְלֶךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמְגַן. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מְגַן אַבְרָהָם.

⇒ REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE, EVEN IN PRAYER

**Adonai, my Master, open my lips so that my mouth will tell of Your praise.**

⇒ THE AMIDAH BEGINS ...

⇒ AVOT - FOREFATHERS ⇐

*(When you say the word Blessed, bend your knees; for You, bow at the waist; for A-donai, straighten up and continue your prayer while standing.)*

**B**lessed are You, Adonai, our God and God of our forefathers; God of Avraham, (Abraham) God of Yitzchak, (Isaac) and God of Yacov (Jacob):

*The (God Who is the only true, ultimate) Power, the Great, the Mighty, and the Awesome—God Most High, Who bestows good, loving kindness and owns everything, and remembers the kind actions of the Forefathers, and brings a redeemer to their children’s children, for the sake of His Name, out of love.*

⇒ REMEMBER US FOR LIFE

**Remember us for life, King Who desires life, and inscribe us into the Book of Life—for Your sake—Living God .**

*(When you say the word Blessed, bend your knees; for You, bow at the waist; for A-donai, straighten up and continue your prayer while standing.)*

**King, Helper and Savior and Shield. Blessed are You Adonai, Shield of Avraham, (Abraham).**

➔ *Amidah continues on page 35*

## THE BIG PICTURE

**I**n 1775, Daniel Boone led a small expedition into uncharted territory. The path they blazed eventually became known as the Wilderness Trail. Within fifty years, over 200,000 people traveled along that route to Kentucky.

In 1738 bce, Abraham, founding father of the Jewish nation, blazed a trail in an uncharted spiritual wilderness. In time, Abraham's son and grandson, Isaac and Jacob, would blaze trails of their own. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob imprinted spiritual markers on the soul of the people that would eventually follow in their footsteps. We are that people. Each of us is seeking a life of meaning, depth and connection to God. As Jews, we are not lonely wanderers, and our search does not need to take place in the dark. Our forefathers lit the way, and those lights still shine in our souls.

Like our predecessors, for each of us, there is a trail to blaze. A trail of goodness and kindness, a trail of integrity and strength of character, and a trail of sanctity and closeness to God. As we begin our prayer, it is with the awareness that we are doubly blessed. From our forefathers, we have inherited remarkable spiritual capabilities, and at the same time, God has given us each a unique opportunity to express and actualize our soul's potential.

## INSIGHTS

**בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'** - **Blessed are You.** These words are the essence of prayer and reflecting on them can transform your life. When we pray, we are speaking to God. When we say "You," we are talking directly to our Creator. Is that not truly awesome? Think about it. Can there be anything more awe-inspiring than being able to stand in the Presence of God and to speak to Him, pour out your heart to Him, confide in Him?

The Amidah begins precisely where Jewish life begins, with the conviction that we can have a direct, personal and intimate relationship with God. To achieve that connection, all we need to do is open our hearts, and speak.

**בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'** - **Blessed are You.** Obviously, we can't give God any blessings. The Hebrew word for "blessed," *baruch*, is related to the word *breicha*, which means a "free-flowing spring of water." God is the

ever-flowing Source of all existence, life, and blessing. With the words “Blessed are You,” we are recognizing the reality of standing in the Presence of *all* blessing.

God gives blessing. We receive. In fact, receiving is all we can do. Our relationship to God is akin to the relationship between a great master and a humble disciple. The more clearly we grasp the reality that the master has everything to offer, and we have everything to gain, the more we will be able to receive.

**אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ יְאֹ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ - Our God and God of our fathers.** Sometimes life overwhelms us, and we feel like there just isn't any gas left in the tank. As Jews, we each have a reserve tank that was filled by our forefathers. Deep in our souls,

we have the ability to tap into that reserve of spiritual energy and to draw strength and inspiration where there seems to be none.

#### REFLECTION

*As a Jew, you are never alone. If you are in synagogue with other Jews, then whether you feel it or not, you are deeply connected. Beyond that, you are linked to Jews throughout all of history. You are a descendent of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. Our souls are all shoots from the same root; the same family, and history: we all share the same destiny. We share a transcendent bond with one another and with our Creator—the Creator of the universe.*

» גְבוּרוֹת - POWERS «

אַתָּה גְבוּר לְעוֹלָם אֲדֹנָי, מְחַיֶּה מֵתִים אַתָּה, רַב לְהוֹשִׁיעַ.  
- מְכַלְכֵּל חַיִּים בְּחֶסֶד, מְחַיֶּה מֵתִים בְּרַחֲמִים רַבִּים, סוֹמֵךְ  
נוֹפְלִים, וְרוֹפֵא חוֹלִים, וּמַתִּיר אֲסוּרִים, וּמְקַיֵּם אַמוּנָתוֹ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל  
עַפְרָה, מִי כְמוֹךָ בְּעַל גְבוּרוֹת וּמִי דוֹמֶה לָךְ, מְלֶךְ מַמְיֵת וּמְחַיֶּה  
וּמְצַמִּיחַ יְשׁוּעָה.

מִי כְמוֹךָ אֵב הַרְחָמִים, זוֹכֵר יְצוּרָיו לְחַיִּים בְּרַחֲמִים.

וְנֶאֱמַן אַתָּה לְהַחְיֹת מֵתִים. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מְחַיֶּה הַמֵּתִים.



❖ GEVUROT - POWERS ❖

**Y**ou are eternally Powerful, my Master,  
You are the Reviver of the dead, completely able to save us.  
[The one Who] Sustains the living with loving-kindness,  
Reviver of the dead with [Your] greatly abundant mercy.  
[The one Who] Supports those who have fallen, Who is the  
Healer of the sick,  
Who frees the imprisoned, and upholds His faithfulness to those  
asleep in the dust.  
Who is like You, Master of (all) powers, and who resembles You,  
a King Who causes death and restores life, and causes salvation  
to sprout.

❖ WHO IS LIKE YOU?

Who is like You, merciful Father, Who mercifully remembers  
His creations—for life.

And You are (completely) faithful to revive the dead.



THE BIG PICTURE

**D**o you remember that spring morning, after a night of rain, when suddenly the bare trees were budding again? Do you recall the morning when colorful blossoms appeared out of nowhere on the bushes, and when those first flowers began to open? Do you remember the first sound of the birds returning from their winter homes? Can you still the fragrant air—the smell of life?

Life is the greatest gift there is.

A mother who has seen her child's life saved by a lifeguard, or by a doctor, knows: life is the greatest gift there is. A son who has watched as his father's last days ebbed away, or who has seen a parent suddenly snatched away by a terrorist, knows: life is the greatest gift there is. Someone who has watched a friend take back his life from the clutches of alcoholism knows: life is the greatest gift there is. A woman who has given birth, and a father who has witnessed that birth, knows clearly: Life is the greatest gift there is.

God has given us all a truly priceless gift: the gift of life.

Nowhere is God's power more evident than in the gift of life.

INSIGHTS

**סומך נופלים, ורופא חולים** - **Supports the fallen, heals the sick ...** The gift of life is not always easy. The gift of life also includes sickness and failure. It includes times when we feel lost and trapped. God sends disappointment, sickness, obstacles and challenges—that is the reality. God both gives and takes life, this too is the reality—a powerful reality.

Oursages taught, "The achievement of pleasure and sense of accomplishment in life are commensurate with the effort and the struggle."

I have a twenty-three year old friend who went through a rough bout of chemotherapy. I ran into him in the grocery store one day. "Cancer is the best thing that ever happened to me," he said, "Now I finally appreciate the beauty of life." To be honest, I have a hard time grasping what he said, but he not only means it, he lives it.

**בעל גבורות** - **Master of all powers ...** A blade of grass doesn't sway in the wind unless God enables it to sway. A cat doesn't dart across the street unless God enables it to run. Often there seem to be many

forces at work in the world, yet beneath the surface there is only One. One omnipotent power that is the life force of all powers.

REFLECTION

*Every minute your heart beats about 72 times. In that same minute, you take 15 breaths. In an hour, that's about 4,000 heartbeats and 900 breaths. If you were born on Rosh Hashanah in 1977, then your heart has already beat approximately 1,165,981,104 times. In that same time, you took 242,912,730 breaths, give or take a couple hundred thousand.*

*Let's take a moment to feel the gift of life within us. Read the next paragraph and then give it a try.*

*Close your eyes and take a few slow, deep breaths. Breathe at a calm, comfortable rate. Focus on your breathing, and on your heartbeat. With each breath, feel the gift of life. Every fiber in your body, and every cell, is filled with life. You are so alive. Prepare to open your eyes, but first, prepare to embrace life. Now open your eyes—to the gift of life.*