

JEWISH GRANDPARENTS NETWORK

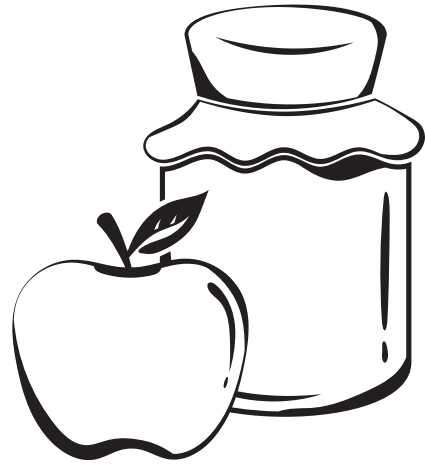
High Holidays Discovery Kit

**For Grandparents
and Their Families**

By Jonathan Shmidt Chapman



Welcome to your High Holidays Discovery Kit. This interactive guide is designed especially for grandparents and grandchildren (ages 3–8) to use together — either in person or at a distance. The kit offers ideas and activities to bring the Jewish High Holidays to life through play, imagination, and hands-on discovery.



You can do all of the activities in order or choose those that are most appropriate for your family and for the ages of your grandchildren.

The High Holidays Discovery Kit is divided into three sections, each focused on a theme of the holiday:

- 1 Exploring the Jewish New Year:** Learn about the meaning behind the Jewish New Year and the background and rituals associated with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, also called the “Days of Awe.”
- 2 Teshuvah:** Explore the practice of *teshuvah* (Hebrew for “return”) through age-appropriate activities that make space for reflection, accountability, and self-improvement.
- 3 Tikkun Olam:** Engage in the work of *tikkun olam* (“repairing the world”) through activities that offer ways to take action and make change in ourselves and our world.

Did you and your grandchild enjoy this kit together? We’d love to hear about your experience! Send your stories, pictures, and feedback to info@jewishgrandparentsnetwork.org.

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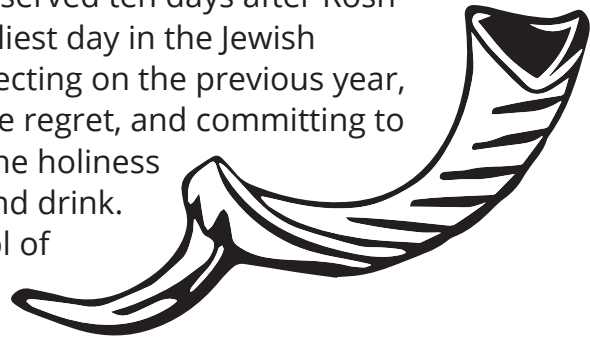
1 Exploring the Jewish New Year

Overview of the High Holidays

Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the Jewish New Year. Celebrated on the first and second days of the month of *Tishrei* in the Jewish calendar, Rosh Hashanah traditionally commemorates the creation of the world. Leviticus 23:24 refers to Rosh Hashanah as a day that is to be observed with “loud blasts.” Each year, we listen to the blowing of the shofar, an instrument created from a ram’s horn, that calls our attention to this time of reflection.

It is customary to eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize the hope we have for a sweet new year ahead.

Yom Kippur (“Day of Atonement”), observed ten days after Rosh Hashanah, is considered to be the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. This day is set aside for reflecting on the previous year, seeking forgiveness for any actions we regret, and committing to self-improvement. In observance of the holiness of the day, many people do not eat and drink. Some wear white clothing as a symbol of spiritual purity and a reminder of our mortality.



Grandparents can prepare for the High Holidays by considering these questions:

- How has my life changed since this time last year? What has surprised me, challenged me, and pushed me to grow?
- What new skill, hobby, or passion can I make time to pursue in the coming year?
- In what new ways do I hope to connect with my grandchildren in the coming year? What can I teach them, and what do I hope they teach me?

Help grandchildren get ready for the High Holidays by choosing from these questions:

- What big events, trips, or experiences do you remember most from this past year? What made them special?
- What can you do on your own that you used to need help with, like getting dressed by yourself? What skills or new experiences do you hope to explore this year?
- What happened this year that you feel grateful for?

Here are some activities to help you explore the Days of Awe:

Paper Towel Tube Shofar

Playfully learn about the sounds of the shofar together.

Materials:

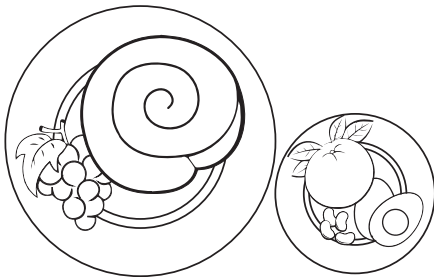
Cardboard tube for each person



Instructions:

1. Share that the three different sounds of the shofar are called *t'kiyah*, *shevarim*, and *teruah*. *T'kiyah* is one long blast, *shevarim* is three consecutive blasts, and *teruah* is nine quick blasts.
2. Use a cardboard tube as a shofar and blow each of these sounds through the tube. Take turns: grandparent says a shofar sound and grandchild blows that number of blasts; then switch.
3. Now, explore the three sounds with movement. Try using the shofar blast sequence (1, 3, and 9) as a memory game using steps, jumps, or spins. Once you remember the Hebrew names of the number of blasts, try calling out the name and see if your grandchild can make the corresponding movements. (You call out "*teruah* jumps" and your grandchild can take nine jumps; call out "*shevarim* spins" and your grandchild can spin three times.)

Visit [My Jewish Learning](https://www.myjewishlearning.com) to hear the sounds of the shofar.



Round Food Feast

On Rosh Hashanah many people eat round foods — often apples and round challah — to represent the cycle of the year and life's continuity. To explore this idea, design a Round Food Feast together.

Instructions:

1. Together, talk about a variety of round (oval is fine too!) foods, for example, oranges, grapes, eggs, and jelly beans.
2. Plan snack time that features foods from your list. Serve your food on round plates!
3. Invite family members to share your snack.



Grandparents and grandchildren separated by distance can each prepare their snack (the child may need help from a grown-up at home). Surprise each other on FaceTime or Zoom with your choices, and showcase them through the screen. Then, enjoy eating during a video chat.

The In-Between Interview

The ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are known as the Ten Days of *Teshuvah* (repentance or returning), as well as the Days of Awe. Over these days, we reflect on the past year and think about ways we can grow in the year ahead.

Here's a great way for grandparents and grandchildren to learn more about each other during the Days of Awe: create a reflection journal.

Materials:

One shared journal or notebook or a shared digital journal such as [BublUp](#).

Instructions:

1. Each day between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, ask each other a question (see sample questions below or make up your own).
2. Together, create and decorate a journal or notebook by writing or drawing your answers to the questions.
3. Keep the journal in a safe place, and review your answers a year from now — next Rosh Hashanah — to see how you have each changed and stayed the same.

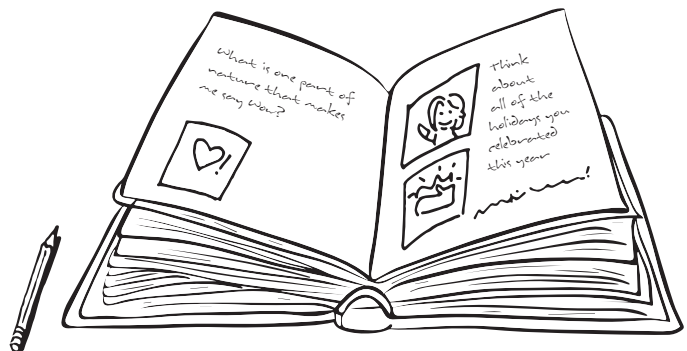
Sample questions to ask each other:

Ages 3–5

- I saw you can now do _____. What else would you like to be able to do by yourself? (for grandkid)
- When you are having a bad day, what do you do?
- What do you love doing with me? What would you like to do with me in the next year?

Ages 5–8

- What is one part of nature that makes you say “Wow”? Can you tell me more about why you said that?
- Tell about a time that someone did something kind to you this year.
- What is something you’d like to know about me?
- If you had a superpower to change one thing about the world, what would it be?



2 ***Teshuvah***: Reflection, Accountability, and Self-Improvement

The Jewish New Year is a time to reflect on our actions of the previous year and dedicate ourselves to doing better in the coming year.

Traditionally, the act of *teshuvah* (literally, “returning” in Hebrew) is a practice of repentance that involves three steps:

1. Naming something we regret and wish we had done differently.
2. Apologizing from the heart for our actions.
3. Committing to making a change.

The concept of authentically [saying “I’m sorry”](#) can be difficult for young children, who are only beginning to understand the way their actions impact others. Children are naturally caring — we need only support their innate compassion. Help your grandchild realize what has happened and take responsibility (“Maybe you didn’t mean to hit your sister with the bag, but she got hurt”), and then encourage them to consider how to make it right.

Grandparents, consider sharing a mistake you’ve made this year and invite your grandchild to offer you advice. *For example:* My friend was upset because I neglected to invite them to a dinner I hosted. They told me it hurt their feelings. How do you think I felt when I found out I made that mistake? What do you think I can do to make it right?

In this way, you help your grandchild see that everyone makes mistakes sometimes — grown-ups too — and we can learn and grow from those experiences.

Assure your grandchild that you are always there if they want to talk about their feelings if they made a mistake. The Jewish New Year is a time to think about the ways we can be our best selves in the year ahead.

Activities to explore the concept of *Teshuvah*:

Tashlich (literally, “cast away” in Hebrew) is a ritual done on the first day of Rosh Hashanah at a body of moving water, in which we traditionally throw bread crumbs to represent sending our mistakes away.

Here are alternative *tashlich* rituals to do with your grandchild using stones at a pond, lake, or the ocean — or in a sink or bathtub.

Skipping Stone *Tashlich*

1. Collect pebbles or stones, and pretend each one is something you did this year that you’d like to change. Imagine that these actions are “weighing you down” like a heavy stone. Think about a few things you’ve done that the stones might represent and share with each other.
2. When you are ready, throw the stones into the water and watch the ripples that expand outward.
3. Discuss how these ripples represent the ways that our actions ripple out into the world, impacting the people around us.

Adapt the following questions depending on the age of the child:

- What did you notice about the water when we threw in our “mistake” stones?
- What do the ripples represent to you?
- How do your actions ripple out and impact others?
- What is one action you can take this year to make positive changes in your family and your community?



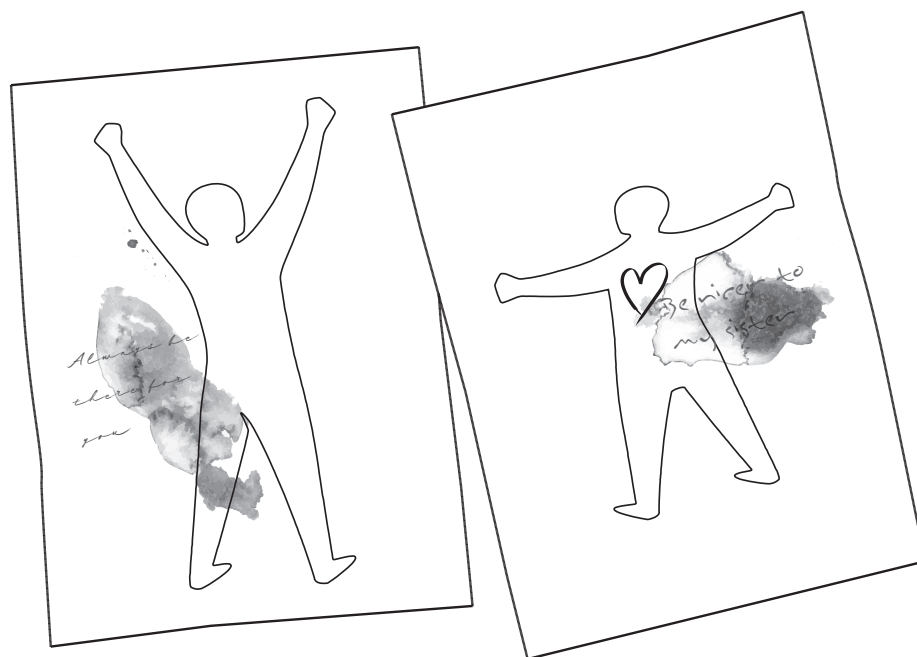
Paper Towel *Tashlich*

Materials:

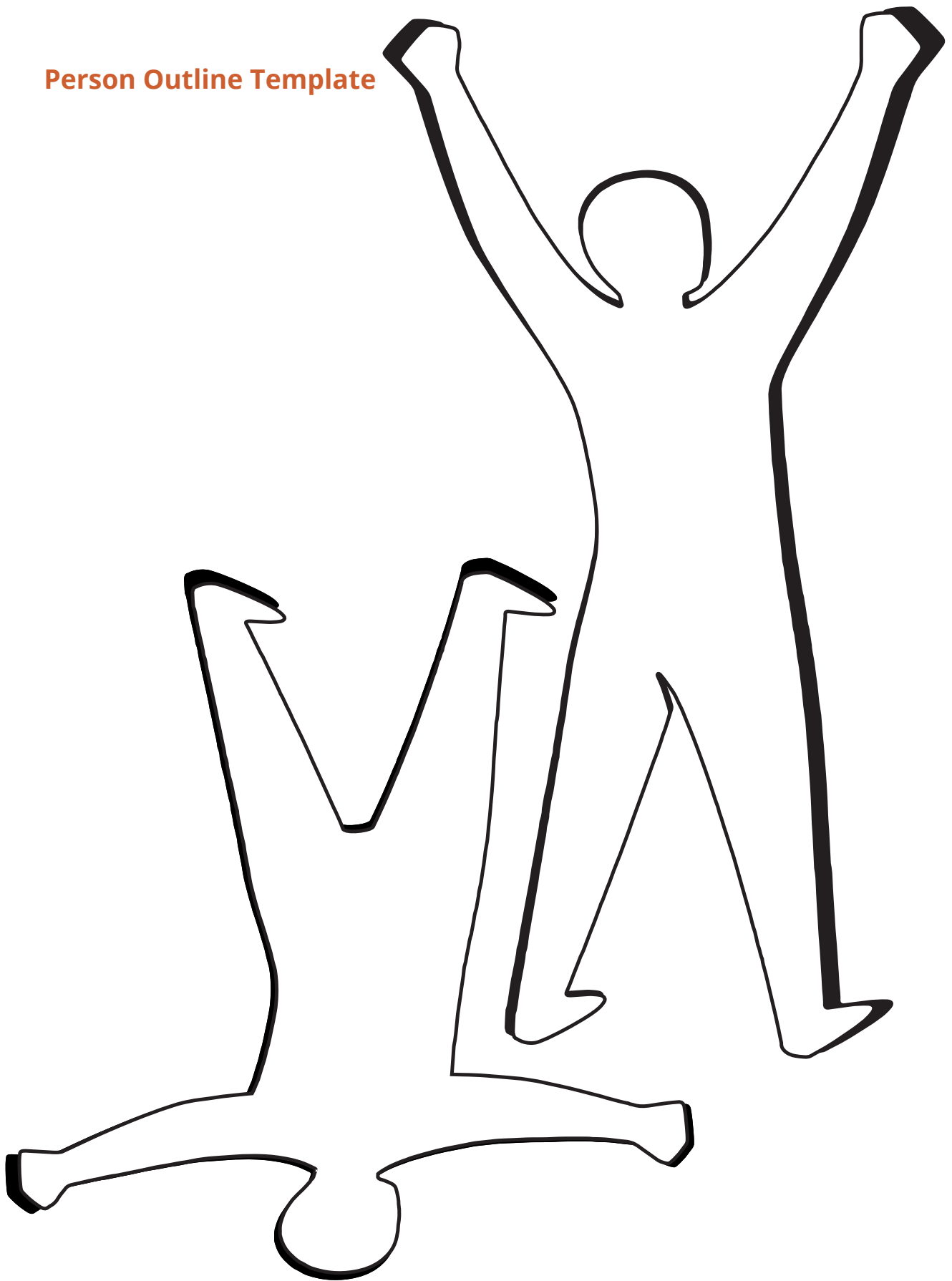
- Person Outline Template (see page 9)
- Paper towel sheets
- Permanent black marker
- Washable colored markers
- Bowl of water

Instructions:

1. Draw the outline of a person onto a sheet of paper towel with the permanent marker by placing the outline template provided on the next page under the paper towel and tracing the shape. Repeat this step, so you have a sheet for each of you. Explain that these figures represent each of you.
2. Together, think about mistakes you've made recently or things you have done that you would like to change, for example, not picking up the litter you saw on the beach. Write or draw these ideas inside or around the figure using washable markers.
3. Submerge the paper towel in the bowl of water for 30 seconds.
4. Watch as the actions you've written fade away, while the outline of the person remains. Ask your *grandchild*: What happened to our paper towel? What did you notice? What do you think it means? Discuss how this represents the act of *tashlich*, wiping our slates clean and starting the new year with a commitment to be kinder and more thoughtful.



Person Outline Template



Jonah and the Giant Fish

On Yom Kippur, we recount the biblical story of "Jonah and the Giant Fish," a tale that teaches us about compassion and forgiveness.

Bring the adapted story below to life with your grandchild as a way to explore these themes through imaginative play. Read or tell your grandchild the story whether you are together in person or at a distance. Your grandchild may like to draw the story as you tell it or afterward.

This is also a great way to involve the child's parent, as storyteller or narrator.

One day, long ago, a man named Jonah heard a voice in his head. The voice said, "Jonah, you need to deliver a message of love to the people of the city of Nineveh. They are not treating each other nicely, and you must tell them to care for each other. They need you."

Jonah didn't want to deliver this message. He lived in a town called Gath-Hepher, where the people were very nice to each other. Why should he deliver this message?

"The people of Nineveh are not my problem!" he shouted. But the voice kept telling Jonah that he had to help. Jonah decided to run away by boarding a fishing boat headed out to sea, hoping he could get away from the voice and its message.

Just when Jonah thought he had escaped, he felt a drop of rain fall on his head. The rain became a downpour, and the downpour became a powerful storm shaking the boat from side to side. Suddenly, the waves knocked Jonah off of the boat and into the water. As he tried to swim to safety, he was swallowed up by the biggest fish in the entire sea ... Gulp!

In the belly of the fish, Jonah realized that he had made a mistake. He needed to care about the people of Nineveh and try to help them. "I'm sorry for ignoring the message of love," he said. As soon as he said he was sorry, the giant fish spit Jonah out on dry land. Jonah traveled to the city of Nineveh right away and delivered the message of love. It worked! The people of Nineveh realized they should change the way they treat each other. Jonah learned that his actions had the power to make a difference in the world.

Questions to ask about the story:

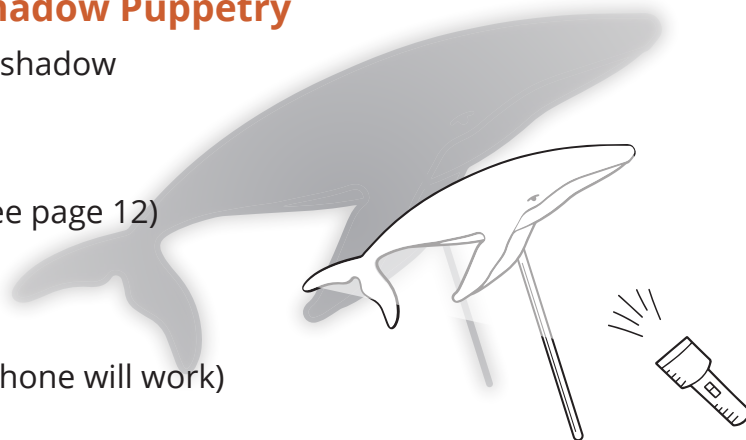
- Why was it important for Jonah to deliver the message?
- What can we learn from this story about the power our actions have in the world?

Jonah and the Giant Fish Shadow Puppetry

Bring the Jonah story to life using shadow puppetry and your imagination.

Materials:

- Shadow Puppets Template (see page 12)
- Black construction paper
- Scissors, tape
- Popsicle sticks or straws
- LED flashlight (the light on a phone will work)



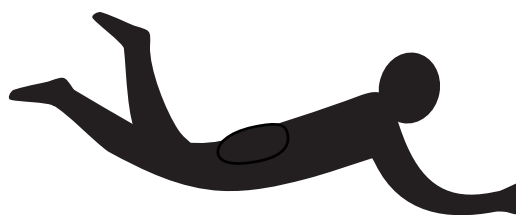
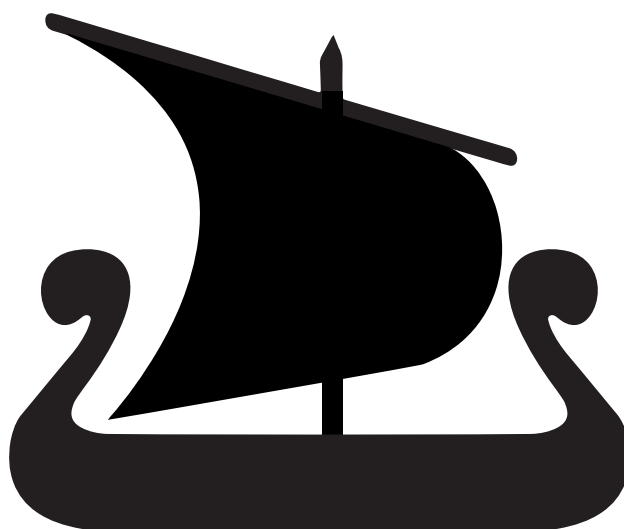
Instructions:

1. Print out a copy of the shadow puppets on page 12 and cut out the shapes. Then trace the shapes onto black construction paper and cut them out.
2. Attach the black construction paper shapes with tape to popsicle sticks or straws.
3. Find a white wall in your home and turn down the lights in the room. Shine an LED flashlight behind the shadow puppet, casting a shadow against a white wall. Experiment with moving the puppet closer and further away from the light to change the size of the shadow.
4. Now bring parts of the story to life using the puppets:
 - a. Jonah boards the boat and heads out to sea.
 - b. The storm knocks Jonah out of the boat and into the sea.
 - c. The giant fish swallows Jonah.
 - d. Jonah says "I'm sorry" and the fish spits him out.
5. Experiment with adding sound effects and music to help bring the story to life. Try playing the sound of a crashing ocean or use different pieces of music to underscore the drama of your show.
6. Decide who will play each shadow character. If you choose, the grandparent can read the story aloud again while you enact it with the puppets. Or perhaps a sibling would like to be the narrator.
7. Once you have practiced, invite other family members or friends to watch your puppet show.



For grandparents at a distance, use FaceTime or Zoom in creative ways. See how the puppets get bigger when you go closer to the camera, and smaller when you move them away. You can also play with having the fish jump from one Zoom box to the other by having one person move their puppet out of the frame just as the other moves into frame!

Shadow Puppets Template



3 **Tikkun Olam: Actions to Change Ourselves and Our World**

The High Holidays can provide the impetus for us to get involved in social action projects in the year ahead. How can you and your grandchildren find ways to impact your community positively this year?

Activities to explore the concept of *tikkun olam*:

Kindness Ripples Out

How can an act of kindness ripple out into the world? Create a visual representation of how your actions have an effect on the people around you. See the activity on page 14.

Instructions:

1. Talk with your grandchild about acts of kindness they can do in the coming year (offer a cold drink to a delivery person, play with a child who is feeling left out, help a school friend pick a book from the class library).
2. With your grandchild, choose one kindness and together complete the activity on the next page. Write or draw the action in the middle, then add how this can impact your grandchild, their family and friends, and possibly the community and even the world.
3. Post the paper somewhere visible to remember this is something you want to do. Talk to each other about times you do the acts and what resulted.

Make the World Better Together

Below are other ideas to help bring about positive change in your community.

- **Share with others:** Choose a toy to lend to a friend, or surprise them by offering it to them to take home forever. Make an activity out of going through gently used books and toys, and donate them to a local shelter.
- **Show gratitude to helpers:** Create a thank-you picture or card and deliver it to a librarian, firehouse, or police station. You can visit these places together, and your grandchild can see how a thoughtful gesture can brighten someone else's day. Offer a snack or drink to your postal carrier or Amazon, UPS, or Instacart deliverer. You can even set out a basket of snacks and drinks and they can choose what they want.
- **Take care of the planet:** Take a recycling bag and collect litter at a local park, playground, or the beach. What might other people do when they see you? Talk about how we are all citizens of planet earth.

Kindness Ripples Out

ME

MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

MY COMMUNITY

MY WORLD