



## GERSHON'S MONSTER

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*Instead of dealing with his mistakes, Gershon the baker sweeps them into the cellar. In this retelling of a Hasidic legend, Gershon eventually discovers a better way of living.*

**G**ershon's *Monster* is a retelling of a classic *Hasidic Rosh Hashanah* tale. *Hasidism* is a movement that began in the 18th century, stemming from Jewish mysticism. According to *Hasidism*, God is everywhere, and the purpose of living is to recognize the beauty, joy, and holiness in everyone and everything.

### CELEBRATING ROSH HASHANAH

The holiday of *Rosh Hashanah* (literally, “head of the year”) is celebrated for the first two days of the Jewish month of *Tishrei* (some observe for just one day.) This holiday offers a chance to reflect on the past year as well as to hope and plan for the year to come.

Many Jews celebrate *Rosh Hashanah* by attending services at synagogue and sharing festive meals. The holiday dinner often includes symbolic foods such as apples and honey in hopes of a sweet New Year, and a round *challah* representing renewal and the cycle of life.

The author's note at the end of this book describes two key *Rosh Hashanah* concepts: *tashlich* (casting off) and *teshuvah* (repentance). These concepts focus on making amends for shortcomings of the past year. As Gershon learns, these concepts are important during the New Year when repent for our transgressions, instead of trying to forget them, or hide them away.

### USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

While some of the dark content of this award-winning book may seem unsettling to parents, children attest to loving it. The final message of *Gershon's Monster* is one of hope and optimism. Within Judaism there is an understanding that all people have frailties and, simultaneously, all people have the ability to change.

*Rosh Hashanah* offers an opportunity for your family to reflect on the past year. What challenges have been faced? What growth has taken place? What exciting things are there to anticipate in the coming year: new friends, a new school, or a new sister or brother?

This is also an appropriate time to ask, “What do we hope to do differently in the new year?” Encourage children to think of what they hope to accomplish, but also about behaviors that could be improved, such as remembering to put dirty clothes in the laundry basket or having more patience with a sibling. Share an area in which you hope to improve. In modeling for our children, we give the message that we all have strengths and flaws, and that striving to be better is a lifelong journey we all take together.

Family *Rosh Hashanah* activities could include baking round *challah*. Try adding raisins or chocolate chips for a really sweet new year. Don't forget a hand-made card wishing a someone special a *Shanah Tovah*—Happy New Year! Pj