

Reimagining Rosh Hashanah

A Resource Guide



Prepared by Congregation Beth Adam and OurJewishCommunity.org with Support from The Jewish Foundation of Cincinnati

Preface

Judaism is all about questioning tradition and finding answers for yourself, so on the Jewish New Year it makes sense to ask as many questions as we can. Instead of New Year's Resolutions, Rosh Hashanah is a time for New Year's QUESTIONS. Every day, we are constantly reassessing our goals and where we are right this moment as well as where we would like to be tomorrow and the day after. As parents, you can help your children develop this skill and practice it, by both asking your children serious questions and encouraging them to ask you difficult questions as well.

What questions do I want to keep asking myself and my community in the coming year? What do I want to be thinking about? Striving towards? Who am I and who do I want to be? How can I get there? And how can I help those I care about get where they want to go?

These are big questions with big answers that can change over time. This is why we celebrate Rosh Hashanah every year, over and over again. To give ourselves the chance to reassess who we are and who we'd like to be.

Every Jewish Holiday can be celebrated in a wide variety of ways, and Rosh Hashanah is NO exception. This is why every section in this resource guide is designed to be used any way that makes sense to you.

No rules.

Just lots of fun and lots of questioning!

Wishing you a happy and sweet New Year,

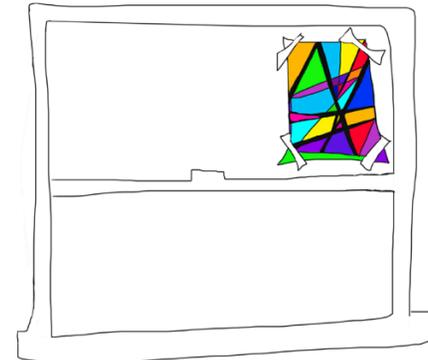
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Rosh Hashanah at a Glance (more in depth info to come!)

- Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year which usually falls in September or early October
- Traditionally celebrated as the mythic birthday of the world
- Begins the Days of Awe-*Yamim Ha'noraim* or High Holidays, which include Rosh Hashanah, ten days of reflection, and then Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement)
- Many congregations sell tickets or have assigned seating for High Holiday services, so if you are planning on going to services, check with the community beforehand. Rosh Hashanah services are typically the evening before the holiday (*erev*) as well as Rosh Hashanah morning. The morning service is generally much longer than the evening service and can run up to four hours at some communities, though most are between 1.5-3 hours. Many communities also emphasize the idea of divine judgement, during Rosh Hashanah services, using prayers such as the U'netaneh tokef¹ which talk about everyone's deeds being inscribed in the book of life. It is also typical to get extra dressed up for High Holiday services, though every community is different.
- Many congregations read the Binding of Isaac (Genesis 22: 1-19) during services for Rosh Hashanah. Other communities read the Creation story from Genesis 1. At Beth Adam and Our Jewish Community, we read a different Torah portion each year. We choose the Torah portion based on what issues and ideas we want to highlight in the coming year. (To learn more about Rabbi Barr's choice to stop reading the Binding of Isaac, click here: <http://www.ourjewishcommunity.org/?s=binding+of+isaac>)



¹ A liturgical poem written circa 1000 CE in Northern Europe, named after its first three words which translate to, "Let us cede power". The poem is most famous for its litany, "On Rosh Hashanah it is written, on Yom Kippur it is sealed.... Who shall live and who shall die. Who in their time and who not, in their time. Who by fire and who by water", etc.

In-Depth Info:

What IS Rosh Hashanah?

Rosh Hashanah literally means head of the year, but is usually translated as New Year. There are actually four different New Years mentioned in the Mishna (a Jewish legal text codified around 200 CE¹). There is the fiscal year, the agricultural year², the animal tithing year and the religious year. Nowadays Rosh Hashanah, the religious New Year, is by far the most important and popular of the four New Years, and is in fact, one of the few that still gets celebrated in a serious way.

Is Rosh Hashanah mentioned in the Torah or Bible?

No! Rosh Hashanah is not called Rosh Hashanah in the Bible, but the day we celebrate Rosh Hashanah, (the first of the Jewish month Tishrei), is referred to as a special new month or Yom Truah (Day of making noise) in Leviticus 23:23 and Numbers 29:1-6.

If Rosh Hashanah doesn't come from Torah, where does it come from?

The quick answer is, we don't really know. But, originally Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and

¹ Most western dates are divided between BC (before Christ) and AD (Ano Domina, or after Christ). Jewish historians tend to use BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) to designate the same periods of time.

² Tu B'Shvat is still celebrated as the New Year of the trees and generally falls in January or February. Look for our new resource guide on Tu B'Shvat coming soon!

Sukkot³ were one Autumn harvest holiday that eventually got split into three distinct holidays some time after the Babylonian exile (586 BCE). We know this because the holiday Rosh Hashanah, celebrated on the first of Tishrei, begins to be mentioned in Jewish writing from after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE⁴.

Why does Rosh Hashanah seem like such a big deal?

Traditionally, Rosh Hashanah is celebrated as the mythic "birthday of the world and creation of humanity". This means that according to the Jewish Calendar, the world is only Five Thousand seven hundred and seventy six years old-- a statement which science and logic obviously disprove as wrong. Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides, is the one generally held responsible for this calculation and its codification. In 1178 CE, he published the Mishneh Torah, a vast intellectual work that summarized most of rabbinic literature in simplified, easy to read Hebrew. Maimonides did not cite his work nor provide references, but his codification of the calendar, as well as many other aspects of Jewish Law, are still accepted as he wrote them in the 12th Century. While we might not recognize it, what Maimonides did was radical for

³ Sukkot is a Fall harvest festival that begins five days after Yom Kippur and is celebrated by constructing and decorating a three walled fort-like structure called a Sukkah.

⁴ Hayyim Schauss- *The Jewish Festivals: History and Observances*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations. 1974. Pages 112 - 118



the age he lived in. In fact there were those who burned his books because they were considered so threatening and heretical. So what was once considered beyond the pale eventually became mainstream. This reminds us that Judaism is an ever-evolving experience. What may seem new and different today, may well be accepted and taken for granted tomorrow.

Why do some people celebrate Rosh Hashanah for two days?

Many Jewish holidays have an optional second day of celebration outside of the State of Israel because of the historic difficulty calculating dates correctly. Rosh Hashanah, however is the **ONLY** holiday that is celebrated for a second day both inside and outside Israel. This is because it was considered SO important by the rabbis of the Talmud (Jewish text codified 6th century) that they referred to Rosh Hashanah as Yoma Arichta—one long day. This is a day that gives birth to another day and what is longer than one day of celebration? Two days! There are many theories about why Rosh Hashanah was designated as one long day, though many have to do with the inner and outer reflection that Rosh Hashanah requires. It is not just enough to fix the world without fixing ourselves, nor is it enough to fix ourselves without fixing the world—we need to do both. Another, more practical theory, is that Rosh Hashanah is the only one of the major holidays to fall at the beginning of the month. A Jewish month begins

with the sighting of the barest sliver of the new moon, so even within Israel, Jews had to wait to be told that Rosh Hashanah had officially begun, so they celebrated for two days, “just in case”.

Why does Rosh Hashanah fall on a different day every year?

The Jewish Calendar is based on a combination of both lunar and solar calendars. This is why the times of holidays vary from year to year, but always remains in the same general season. (for more in depth information about the Jewish Calendar [click here!](#))

Why should I care?

What is Rosh Hashanah for me? Nowadays, we all have multiple aspects that form who we are. Jewish identity is just one component . Celebrating Rosh Hashanah is an opportunity for us to connect and affirm that identity as well as a good excuse to search out communities that give voice to your kind of Judaism. Rosh Hashanah is an opportunity to re-examine where we are and where we want to be. It can be a good excuse to get together with family and friends and celebrate everything that makes us who we each are. Every Rosh Hashanah can remind us to think about what matters most to us. Who are we now? And who do we want to be?

Jewish Calendar:

- The Jewish Calendar is based on a combination of both lunar and solar calendars. This is why the times of holidays vary from year to year, but always remains in the same general season.
- The months start and end with the New Moon, but the lunar year is eleven days shorter than the solar year. In order to correct for this discrepancy, there is an extra month of Adar every second or third year, much the same way February 29th only comes once every four years.
- The Calendar reflects the development of our people from a nomadic population that traveled the desert at night by the light of the moon, to an agricultural population that needed the sun for planting and harvesting.
- Rosh Hashanah falls on the 1st of Tishrei, the 7th month of the Jewish Calendar, not the first month as you would expect for the beginning of the new year. Why? There are no clear and definitive answers, but there are a few possibilities:
 - ~ Simple cultural appropriation: The Babylonian year began in the spring, so over time the Jewish Calendar began to reflect that. In fact most of the names of Jewish months are in fact Babylonian months that Judaism appropriated after the

return from exile in Babylon, during the 2nd Temple Period (right around the year 0).

~ 7 was considered a lucky and holy number—the seventh day of the week is Shabbat and is the holiest day, the 7th year is a sabbatical year when fields lay fallow, etc.

~ Judaism, just like every other religion, has threads of magic and superstition woven into the larger framework of most of its traditions and celebrations





Rosh Hashanah Terminology and Symbols:

Shofar: ram's horn—blown each weekday during Elul and the more notably on Rosh Hashanah and at the conclusion of Yom Kippur services. The blast of the Shofar is supposed to wake us up out of the torpor of the every day. It's like an alarm clock that tries to force us to pay attention.

Elul: a month preceding the New Year—traditionally a time of reflection in preparation for the Holidays

Tishrei: the month in which Rosh Hashanah falls: "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion: You shall not work at your occupations. You shall observe it as a day when the Shofar is sounded" (Numbers 29:1)

Shanah Tovah: a traditional Rosh Hashanah greeting which means, "Happy New Year!" It is used much the same way Shabbat Shalom is used (one person says Shanah Tovah to the other and the other says the same thing back)

Apples and Honey: Apples represent the roundness of the year, and honey, its sweetness. We eat apples dipped in honey to highlight the deliciousness of the holiday.

Round Challah: Instead of baking and eating the traditional Sabbath Challah (a braided loaf of bread), on Rosh Hashanah it is traditional to make a round Challah to symbolize and celebrate the new year.



Rosh Hashanah Themes:

Creation vs Discovery: Traditionally, Rosh Hashanah is celebrated as the anniversary of the creation of the world. But even within the biblical story of creation, not everything in the universe is created, some of it is discovered. A mythical God creates light from darkness, but does not create darkness, so where did the darkness come from? Where did God come from? Even in the most mythic and fantastical of creation stories, there is a tension between what is created and what is discovered. And the truth is, most of what we encounter we both discover and help to create at the same time.

Identity: Rosh Hashanah marks the transition from one year to the next, so it is a natural time to stop and assess who we are and who we would like to be. Traditionally, Rosh Hashanah and the month leading up to it, are a time to work on our relationships with ourselves and those we love.

Jewish Identity: For many Jews, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the only times they go to religious services with other Jews. This can make the high holidays feel especially important in reaffirming Jewish identity and connection. And it can also make it hard when the traditional liturgy doesn't seem to resonate with all that we are and what we believe. At Beth Adam, we respect this choice and recognize that the way we express our Judaism today is not the same way our biblical ancestors did; nor even our great grandparents. We live in a different world than they did, and

our Judaism reflects that. In order to make our celebration of Rosh Hashanah, and in fact every Jewish Holiday, meaningful, we need to give expression to who we are and the values we hold.

Questions: Rosh Hashanah marks the transition point between calendar years and is traditionally a time to take stock of where we are and where we would like to be. It is a time to ask ourselves what we want and where we are responsible.

Community: Judaism places a large emphasis on the importance of community and communal celebration and support. Rosh Hashanah is a time for us to work on both ourselves and our communities. What kinds of things do we want our communities to be doing in the coming year? How can we help them? What do we need from our communities in the coming year?

Celebration: Most Jewish holidays are known for their bittersweetness, but at its essence, Rosh Hashanah is just sweet, sweet, sweet. We celebrate the world and all of its wonderfulness, the human intellect and all of its potential, and the human heart and all of its growth. This can feel bittersweet because of the enormity what we are thinking about, but at its core Rosh Hashanah is a celebration of who we are and how we can make the world a better place.

Discussion Generating Activities:

Sometimes it can feel uncomfortable to start big conversations with family and friends. Try using these activities to help get you started

1. Who are you? Draw a picture or make a collage of yourself, with all the things around you that make you, you. Then show the picture to a friend or family member and explain it and ask them about theirs.
2. Make a list of the top ten things you would like to learn about this year. Trade your list with another member of your family and find out why they want to learn what they want to learn. Are there any ways you can help them learn throughout the year?
3. Make a list of things that don't make sense about the world and/or in your life and then compare it with another member of your family. Do the same things make sense to you both? If not, can you find common ground? Or work through some of the confusion together?
4. Draw a picture of your perfect world using words and pictures. What is different about the world you created than the one you live in? What could you do to make the world you live in more like the perfect world in your picture?
5. Go on a journey of exploration and rescue a forgotten toy from the depths of your closet. Does the toy feel different than you remember it? How so? Make up a story about what your toy was doing while on "vacation" from you and tell it to someone in your family. Did your toy learn anything valuable on their journey?





Discussion Questions

1. Does it feel like a New Year? How does the Jewish New year feel the same as the secular? How is it different?
2. Is Rosh Hashanah important to you? Why? Is it more important than other holidays? If so, what makes it more important? If not, why is it less important?
3. Do you believe it's important to alter your daily routine for the holidays? Ie. Miss work, school etc.
4. Is a holiday still special if you don't alter your daily routine? How can you make it special whether or not you take the day off from work or school?
5. What is the most pressing problem in the world you live in? What can you do in the coming year to help alleviate that problem?
6. What is the best thing about the world you live in? What can you do in the coming year to safe guard the "good stuff"?
7. How do you feel about how your family is interacting with each other? Are there things that you would like to be different in the coming year? Are there things you want to continue? What can you do to make your home life better?
8. If you are choosing to go to services for Rosh Hashanah, why are you going? If you aren't going to services, what made you choose not to go?
9. What are you hopeful for the coming year? What are you afraid of? Is there anything you can do that would help the fear dissipate?



Art Activities:

1. Make your own shofar:
 - a. Materials: cardboard tubing from toilet paper or paper towel roll, duct tape, paint, glitter, markers or anything you already have to decorate your shofar).
 - b. Directions: tape two cardboard tubes together to make a long shofar, twist one end to make it smaller for a mouth piece, decorate as you see fit! (note: remember that rams' horns come in all shapes and sizes, so that means that shofars also come in ALL shapes and sizes)
 - c. Questions to think about: How does it feel to blow the Shofar? How is it different when someone blows it at you? Note. Unlike a shofar made from a ram's horn, you will have to use your voice to make your cardboard shofar make noise!
2. Apple stamps:
 - a. Materials: apple, knife, toothpicks, paint (tempra, acrylic, washable paint), plastic plate for paint, paper or something you want to decorate (T-shirt, canvas bag, bedspread, curtains, etc.)
 - b. Directions: cut an apple in half and carve a design into the apple using a toothpick or plastic knife, then dip your new stamp in paint and carefully press it on your paper or workspace. Hold the apple and press for a few seconds, then release and repeat. Experiment using different amounts of paint and different kinds of pressure for different decorative results!
 - c. Questions to think about: What does it change when you decorate something? Does it matter if something is beautiful or not? What makes something more beautiful? Less?
3. Make your own stained glass window:
 - a. Materials: tracing paper, plastic cup or ruler (small object to trace), black pen, and colored pencils, tape to stick it to the window
 - b. Directions: Trace the outline of a cup or a ruler using the black pen, as many times as you like, all over your sheet of tracing paper. Then color in the shapes you created with colored pencils. Once you're done, tape your new stained glass window somewhere it'll get plenty of light.
 - c. Questions to think about: Is the world outside your new stained glass window different



than it was through your old window? Just because you can see through something, is it automatically a window?

4. Make a paper people community
 - a. Materials: construction paper, scissors, pencil or pen
 - b. Directions: cut a long thin piece of paper. Then fold the piece of paper up like an accordion until it looks like one thick square. Now draw the outline of a person on your square, making sure the head touches the top of the paper and the feet the bottom. Now carefully cut out your person, making sure to leave the folds intact at the hands (and feet for extra support) so that you can unfold the paper, and presto, a paper people community. Feel free to color or decorate each person in the chain.
 - c. Questions to think about: How would your life be different if you were part of a paper people chain? Would you like that? What would be the biggest benefit? Challenge?
5. Get Silly and create a new Rosh Hashanah family tradition!





Science-y Activities:

Rosh Hashanah is a celebration of the human intellect and our endless capacity for both discovery and creation. And guess what? THAT's what SCIENCE IS TOO!!!! We all have a creator and a discoverer inside us, and science can help us tap into both.

1. Get in touch with the creator within you by building an exploding volcano (baking soda experiment)
 - Materials: 1/2 cup water
 - 1/4 cup vinegar
 - 1/4 cup dish detergent
 - Red or orange food coloring
 - 2 tablespoons baking soda
 - Tissue
 - a. Build your volcano. In the center, use a container to hold the liquid. Depending on how big you are making your volcano, you can use an old water bottle, a soda bottle with the top cut off, or even a simple glass jar. Then add everything to your container EXCEPT the baking soda which you will wrap in a tissue. When you are ready for an eruption, wrap the baking soda in a tissue and drop into the volcano. The baking soda will react with the vinegar and cause the eruption.

<http://www.instructables.com/id/How-to-Make-a-Model-Volcano-Erupt/>

2. Magic Mud:
 - a. Ingredients: Cornstarch, cold water, food coloring
 - b. Directions: Stir together approximately: 3 or 4 parts cornstarch and 1 part cold water, adding several drops of food coloring for color.
 - c. Something to think about: Magic Mud is one of the few things that is both a liquid and a solid at once, and yet doesn't seem to be fully one or the other. Can you think of anything else that is two things at once?



3. Silly Putty:

1. Materials: 1/2 cup white glue, 1/2 cup water, food coloring if desired, 2 tbsp Borax, 1/4 cup water

2. Directions: Mix together 1/2 cup of glue with 1/2 cup water. Add in food coloring here if you want. In a separate container, combine 2 tbsp Borax with 1/4 water. Make sure it is thoroughly mixed. Combine both mixes. Add more Borax if putty isn't gooey enough. Keep stirring it until almost all the liquid has been incorporated into the blob of putty

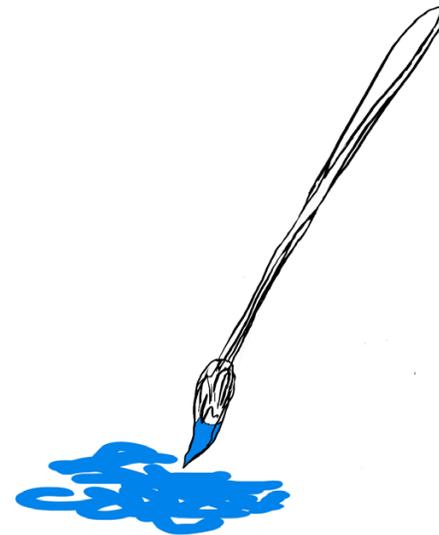
<http://www.instructables.com/id/Silly-Putty/>

3. Something to think about: Have fun stretching and shaping the silly putty. How is it different when it's stretched thin? All balled up? Does it bounce? Break? Do people have anything in common with silly putty? When do you feel stretched thin in all directions? Or balled up and solid? What helps you find balance between the two extremes?

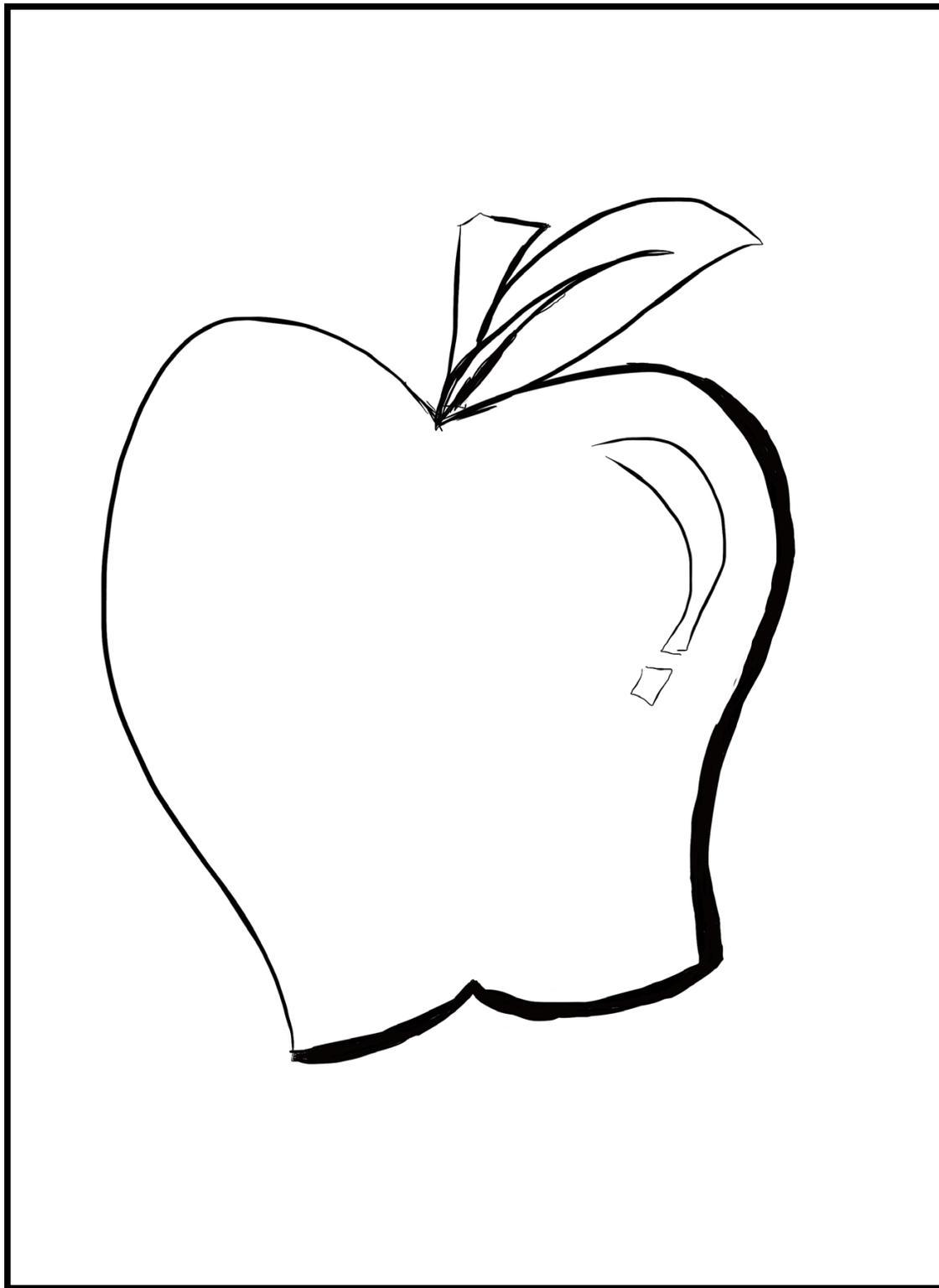


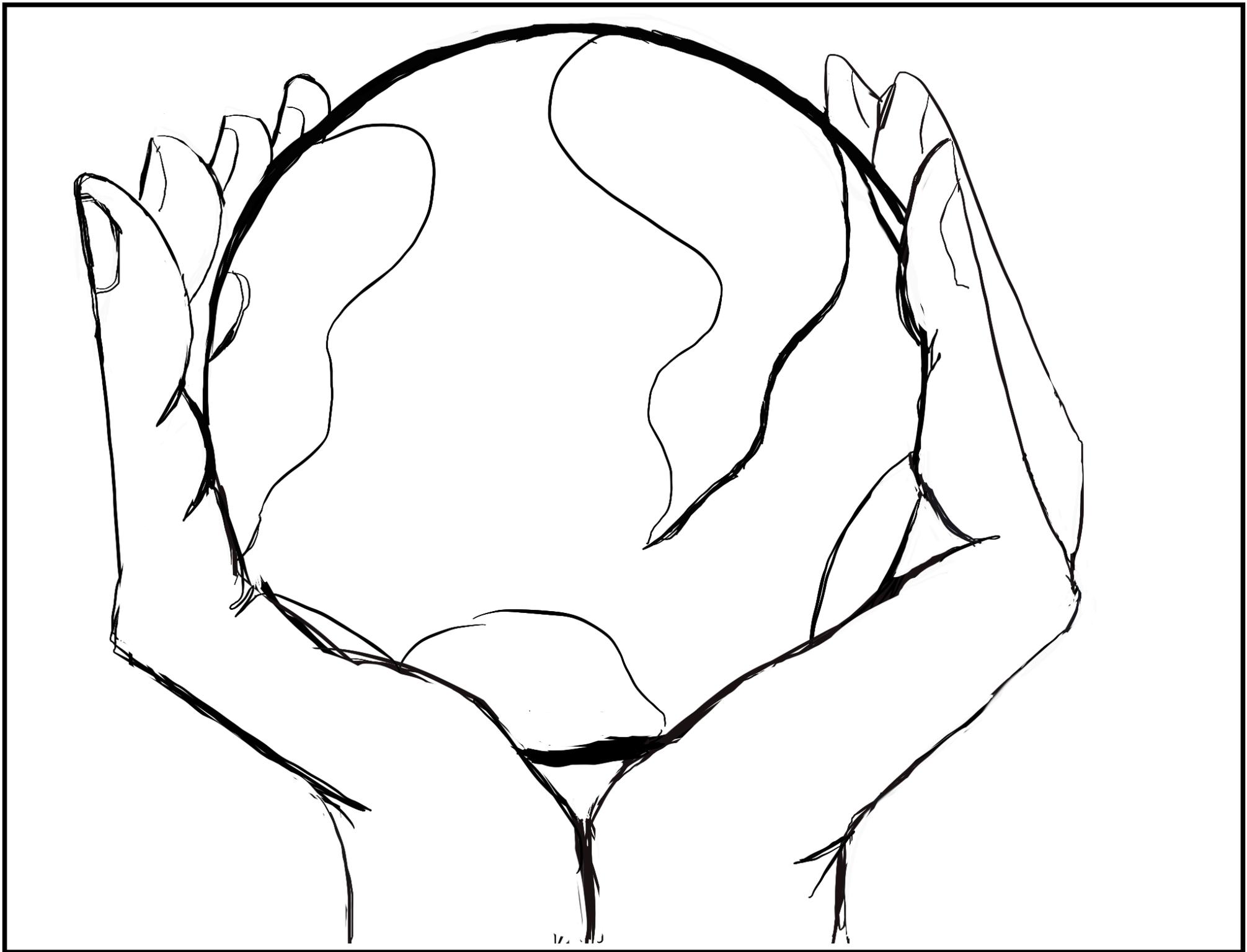
Games:

1. Coloring book pages: Just color and have fun
 - a. Find as many question marks as you can. Hint. Not all questions or question marks look the same, and some coloring pages have more than others, but every page has at least one question mark waiting for you to find it !
 - b. Can you create more question marks?
 - c. Can you ask a question to go with each of the question marks you found or created?
2. Mazes: Just have fun
 - a. Have you ever found yourself in a difficult situation that you didn't know how to get out of? How did you find your way out?
 - b. Are there certain kinds of questions or behaviors that help bad situations become more manageable?
 - c. Who can you go to for help when you feel lost?



Color Me

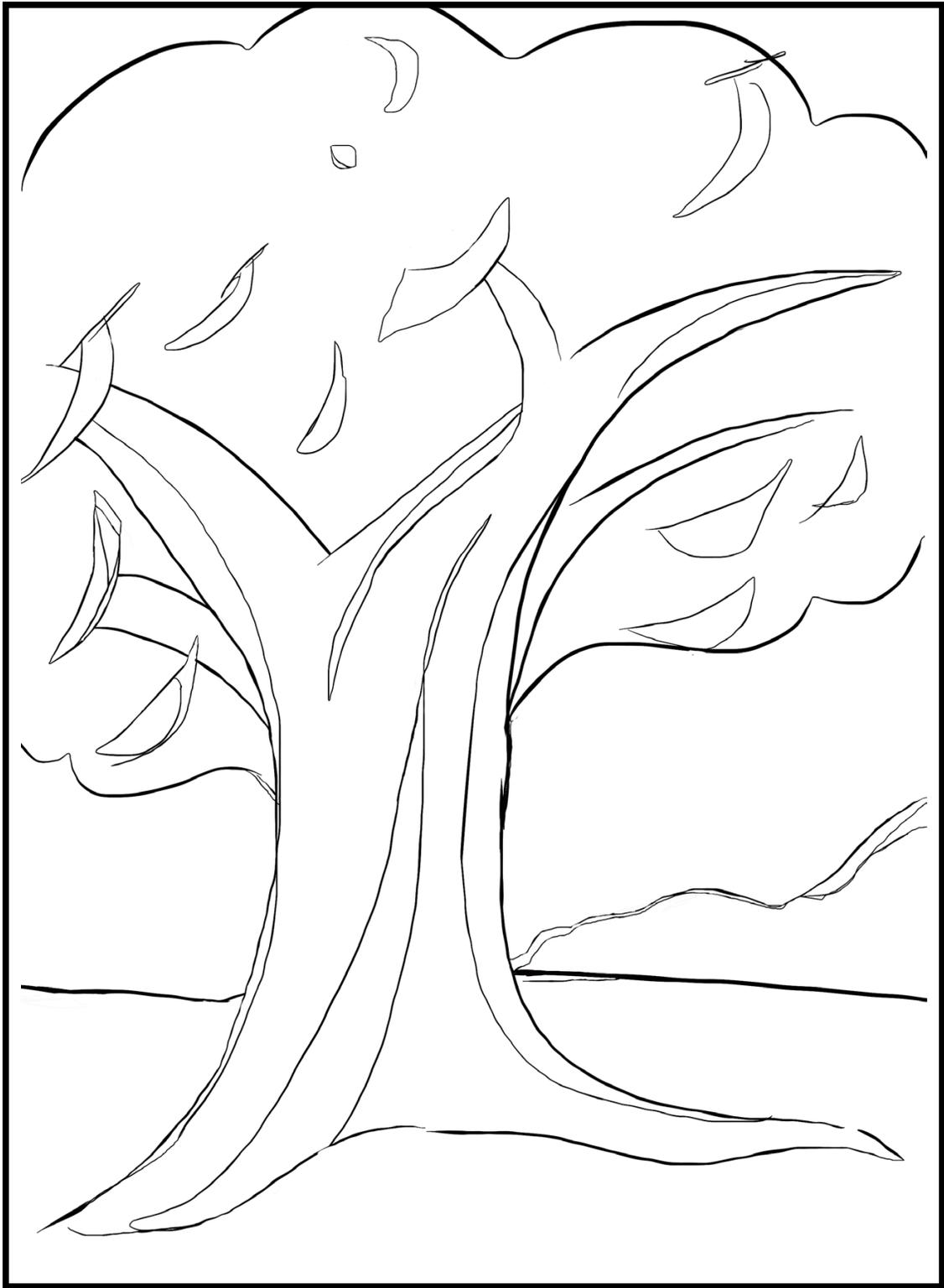




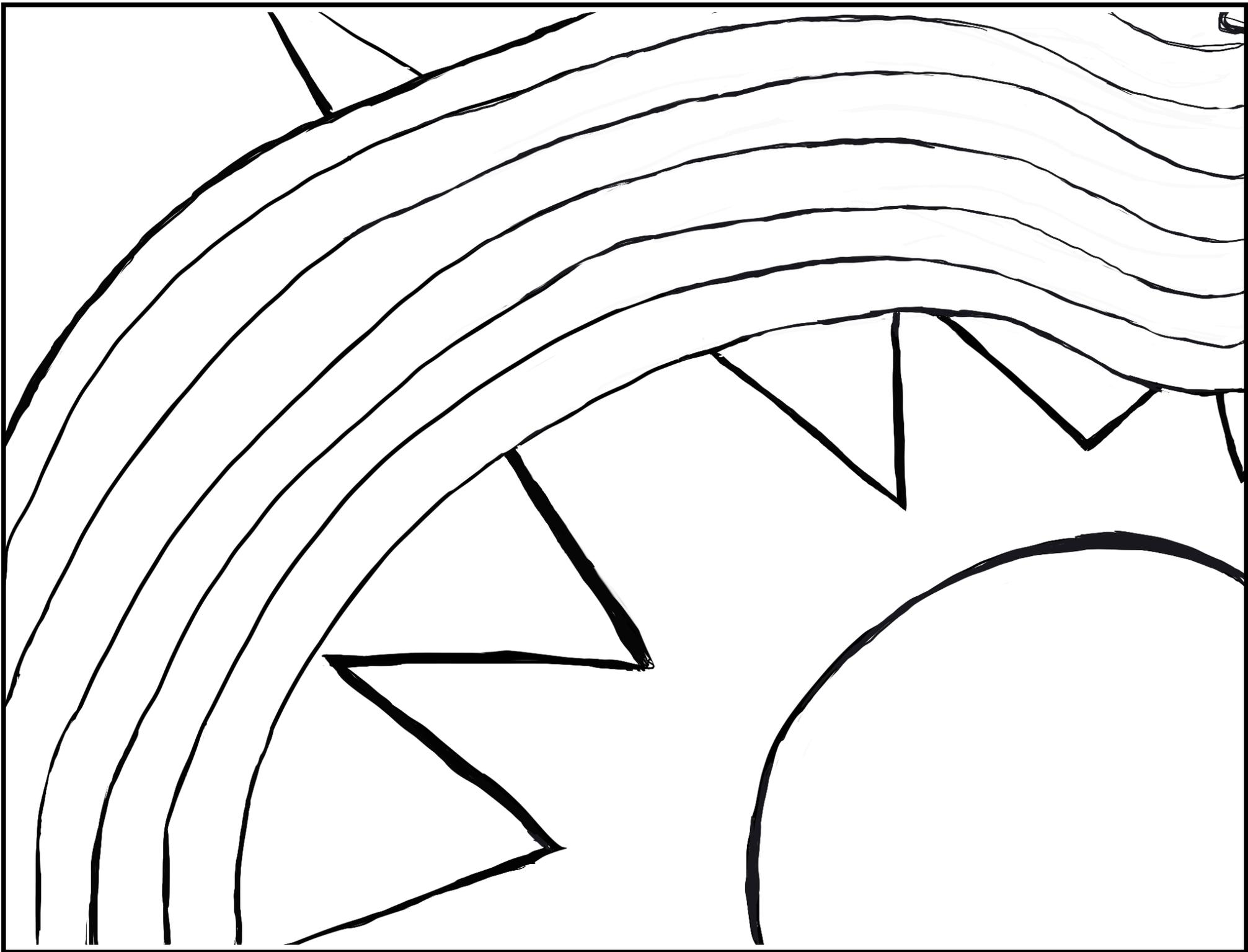




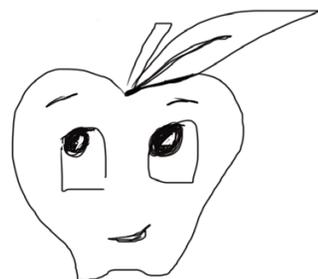
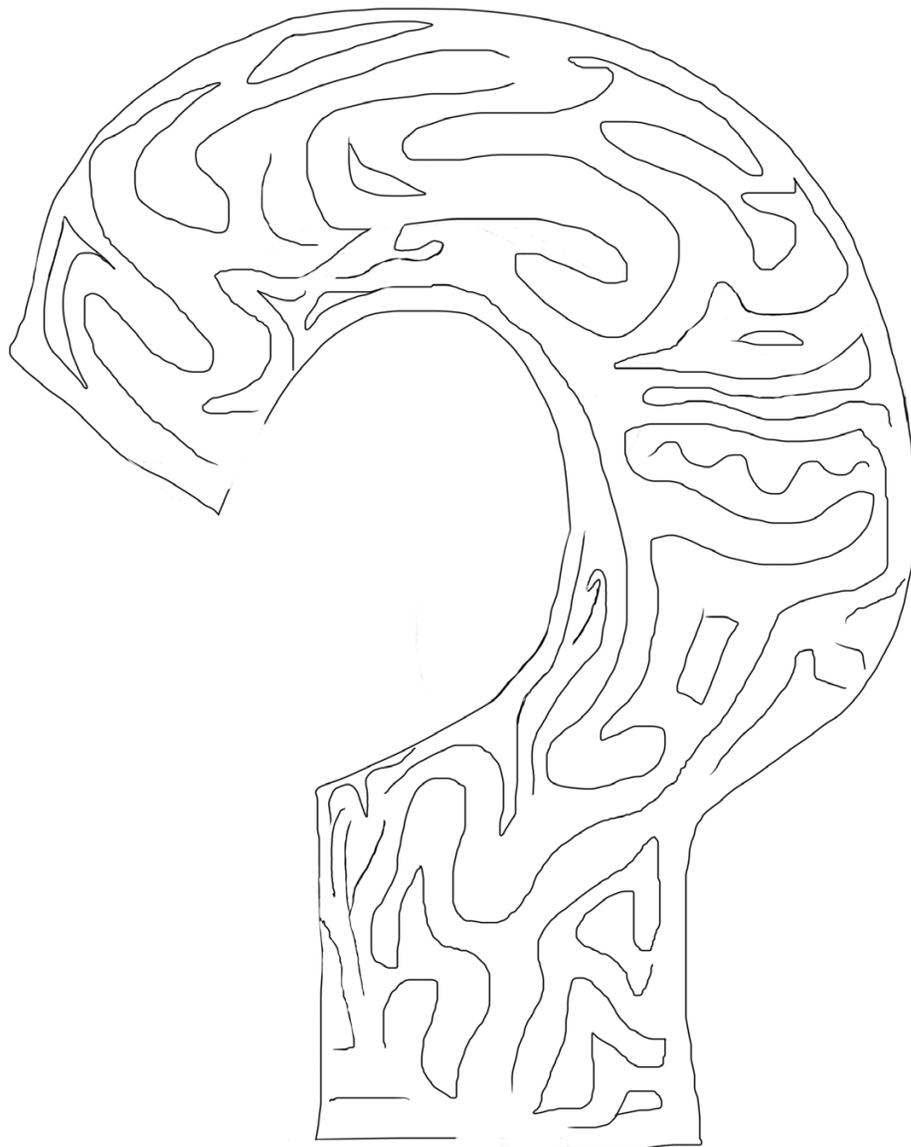
SHOFAR

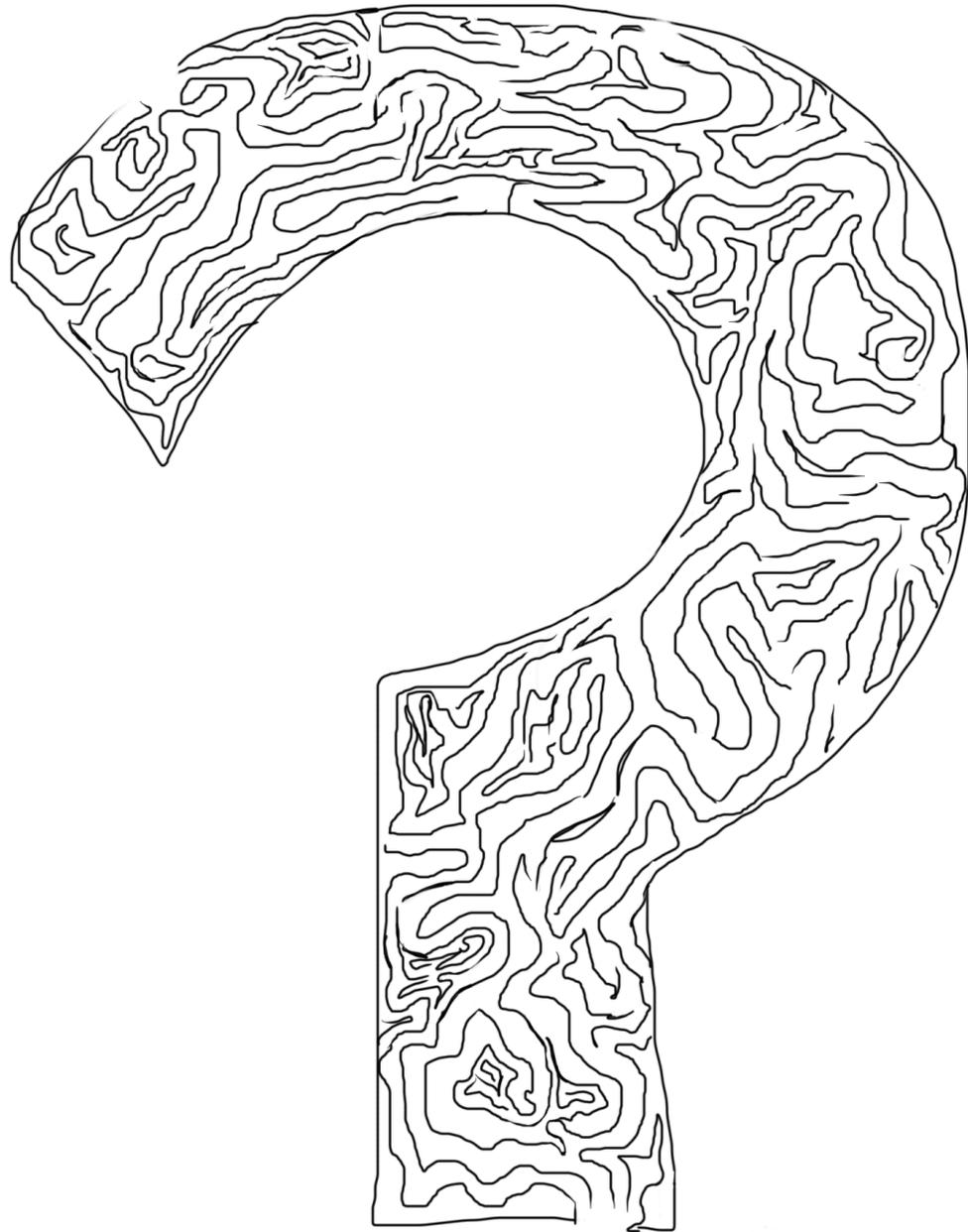






Maze Fun





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