

1. INTRODUCTION

Key ingredients and goals

To ensure that your congregants – newcomers or established attendees – will have a meaningful and lasting experience, it is critical that the service not be at any time mechanical, hollow or monotonous. You don't want just to compartmentalize and deliver one rousing sermon. Instead you want the entire service to be an all encompassing experience. To achieve that, every aspect of the service – from beginning to end – will be imbued with the following vital elements:

- Relevance
- Trust
- Warm, personal and intimate
- Stereotype breaking
- Disarming

Simplify, decompose and decomplex the prayer service

- **Explain** its elegant and poetic structure
- **Highlight key prayers** and emphasize the sections and milestones within the service.
- **Choose one or more prayers** to focus on. “Better to say a few prayers patiently than to say many hastily” (Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Laws of Yom HaKippurim 600:2).
- **Select prayers** to be read collectively in English. Option: Choose congregants to lead these sections.

- **Maximize the use of songs** and melodies. Prepare beforehand certain songs, coordinated with the chazan.

- **Honor select congregants** to open and close the ark, and participate in any other way.

- **Wherever possible try to add** interactive elements that engage the congregants.

Preparatory work

- **Put yourself in the right frame of mind** and inspirational mood. Recognize that you have the special and humble privilege to ensure that the awesome power of Yom Kippur will transform the lives of your constituents.

- **Confidence:** Feel confident in the power and relevance of Yom Kippur and its service to address people's concerns and issues – personal, social, global.

- **Place yourself in the shoes** of your constituents, and indentify with their issues and expectations: Men and women attending services on Yom Kippur are looking for inspiration, hope and meaning. They want something that will give them strength, answers and direction to deal with their respective challenges. No two people are alike; you want to ensure that you cover the spectrum of different issues people may be experiencing.

- **You may never know who is attending** the services and what they may be going through. Your one word, one gesture – the mood of the Synagogue – can make an entire difference in a person's life.

- **See yourself as a guide** and teacher – helping people navigate through the intricacy and intensity of the Yom Kippur services.
- **Always make sure that no one is lost** in the service. Reassure people that they can follow their own pace, and focus on one prayer or need that they have.
- **Coordinate beforehand** with the chazan (cantor), to ensure a smooth and seamless flow between the prayers and your guiding words.
- **Plan ahead** where in the service you will insert any of the insights and thoughts you wish to share, and ensure that they serve as anchors to support the flow of the entire service experience.
- **At the same time, always be ready** to improvise and add something spontaneously, if the need should arise. In other words, don't be stuck with your plan or intended words if you see that it is not coming across as you planned or if you see that people are getting restless or bored.
- **Some examples:**
 - > Shorten the length of your talks.
 - > Always have some story or anecdote ready when needed.
 - > Add more explanation or introduction to the prayers.
- **Excellent idea:** Schedule (if possible) a discussion/q&a session following the Kol Nidrei service and the Musaf service. This has proven hugely successful, welcoming

people to interact and bring their questions, even skeptical ones, to the table. This has the power to diffuse many stereotypes about Yom Kippur, and introduce a breath of fresh air and personal touch.

2. OPENING

Setting the Tone

(Keep this as short or long as fits your needs; people may not be expecting this introduction, but it is vital to set the mood)

Welcome

- Warmly welcome everyone and introduce them to the Yom Kippur “experience,” informing them of your goal to turn the holiest day of the year into a personally transformative experience.
- If you are beginning before candle lighting time, and are offering candle lighting and Yizkor memorial candles – share the significance of the eternal flame as symbol of the soul (the flame of G-d is the human soul), and direct people where they can light the candles.

Layout the Journey

- Explain that Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, is actually a journey – an exhilarating odyssey into your own soul.

- The *Musaf* service (as on Shabbat and all other holidays) consists only of the *Amidah* prayer. First we say the silent *Amidah* which is the same as *Musaf* of Rosh Hashana—with the variation that we now refer to the Yom Kippur day and its offerings—concluding with *Vidui*, this time focusing on the inadequacies in the *Chaya* level of the soul. This is followed by the cantor’s repetition of the *Amidah*, again with special focus on the *Chaya* level.

- *U’nesaneh Tokef*—(Composed by Rabbi Amnon of Mainz in Germany , about 1000 years ago) this heartrending prayer, which is one of the most powerful in our liturgy, describes how the fate of all creatures is determined on Rosh Hashana. It is recorded on this day and sealed on Yom Kippur, concluding that repentance, prayer and charity avert the severity of the decree:

“On this day... You will remember all that was forgotten. You will open the Book of Memory, it will read itself, and everyone's signature is in it... and all mankind will pass before You like a flock of sheep. Like a shepherd inspecting his flock, making his sheep pass under his staff, so shall You run by, count, calculate, and consider the soul of all the living; You will apportion the fixed needs of all Your creatures, and inscribe their verdict. On Rosh Hashana it will be inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it will be sealed: How many shall pass on, and how many shall be born; who will live and who will die; who will die at his predestined time and who before his time; who by water and who

by fire, who by sword, who by beast, who by famine, who by thirst, who by storm, who by plague, who by strangulation, and who by stoning; who will rest and who will wander, who will live in harmony and who will be harried; who will enjoy tranquility and who will suffer; who will be impoverished and who will be enriched; who will be degraded and who will be exalted. But repentance (*teshuvah*), and prayer (*tefilah*), and charity (*tzedaka*) avert the severity/evil of the decree.”

- Before saying *Aleinu* the Ark is opened. At the words “that He does not assign us” the Ark is closed. When we say “but when we bend the knee” it is reopened and the cantor and congregation kneel and prostrate themselves (even on Shabbat).

- The special part of Yom Kippur *Musaf*—during the cantor’s repetition—is the recreation of the service of the High Priest in the Holy temple. This was a transcendental (*Chaya*) experience, which we recreate today by relating the story and meditating upon the service of the High Priest.

The Avodah—“Service of the High Priest in the Temple”

- The story actually begins at the dawn of history as the opening hymn testifies. This hymn recounts (in alphabetical order): the creation of the universe and the human being; the fall of man and his return; the story of Noah and the covenant not to destroy the world again;

7. 5TH AND FINAL SUNDOWN PRAYER – NEILAH, YECHIDA, ONENESS

Emphasize how the last and final service of Yom Kippur (*Neilah*) corresponds to the highest point in the Yom Kippur journey into the deepest part of the soul: *yechidah* (“oneness”)—which relates to our essence and our union with G-d. This is the highest point of the year—and of Yom Kippur—when the soul comes in touch with its source in G-d.

All days of the year we’re able to access the three dimensions of our soul; on Shabbat we access the fourth, *chayah*, but only on Yom Kippur can we access the fifth, *yechidah*—oneness with G-d.

This is because during *Neilah*, before the gates are locked, everything is open and we are able to reach even *yechidah*, which is the most intimate, vulnerable, gentle part of the soul of the human being, unshielded by the defenses of the other levels. We reach it at the precise moment when *Neilah* is said, and when, at its conclusion, we declare *Shema Israel...* “Hear O Israel, G-d is our Lord, G-d is One.”

- The service begins as the sun begins to set over the hills. This is the last chance, so to speak. The Ark remains open during the entire service, signifying that now all the doors are open.

The Pinnacle and High Point

At his point invest all your strength and energy to lift your congregation to the highest possible peak. With enthusiasm and vigor emphasize how all the doors in heaven are now thrown open – allowing each of us the unprecedented opportunity to have all our requests and prayers answered!

- *Neilah* (meaning literally “locking”) refers to the closing of the gates of the Holy Temple at the end of the day and the closing of the gates of prayer as Yom Kippur is ending. In *Neilah*, the word *ketiva* (inscribed) is replaced with *chatima* (sealed), because in the *Neilah* prayer G-d seals our fate for the coming year.

- The *Neilah* service contains stirring pleas that our prayers be accepted by G-d before

Yom Kippur ends. The heavenly judgment inscribed on Rosh Hashana is now sealed during *Neilah*. The cantor chants the service in a special melody designed to stir the emotions and bring the congregation to greater devotion.

- Following the preliminary prayers (as in *Mincha*), we recite the silent *Amidah*—with *Vidui* (short *Ashamnu* confession only).

- This is followed by the repetition of the *Amidah*—with Penitential Prayers, *Vidui* (short *Ashamnu* confession only), and *Avinu Malkeinu*.

Conclusion

The highest point of *Neilah* is its conclusion.

We declare our absolute faith in G-d and our absolute commitment to everything G-d stands for. As the Shaloh, the great medieval 16th cen-