

# TOWARD A MEANINGFUL YOM KIPPUR A SPIRITUAL GUIDE



How to Transform the Yom Kippur Service  
into an Unforgettable Personal Experience

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EXCLUSIVE FOR RABBIS

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Note: This guide includes a wide variety of material, more than you will probably use. But reading it for yourself will be very helpful to the entire process, and then you can choose and pick what you would like to use and when. It is vital to gauge your crowd and customize accordingly. Add or subtract as necessary – to fit the needs of your audience.

## 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.

- Prayer has sadly become a dry and lifeless activity. Today we will try to change that by demonstrating that prayer is the language of the heart and soul, and the five prayers of Yom Kippur are a journey into the five dimensions of the soul, that correspond to these five prayers (see pages 6-7).
- Before we get into that, announce the schedule and times for all 5 services.
- As the holiest day of the year we try to spend as much time as possible on Yom Kippur in a holy synagogue, praying, saying psalms and asking heaven to bless us for the coming year. Once a year we attempt to be as spiritual as we possibly can. Yet, at the same time we recognize the diversity of people's needs and interests. Accordingly, our Yom Kippur service, which is meant to serve the entire community, will be providing all the services and welcomes you to participate in any way you see fit. If you can and would like to spend most of the day in the synagogue, we welcome you to our complete services. If for any reason you cannot attend all the services, we strongly suggest that you participate in the Kol Nidrei evening service (time), Yizkor (time) (for those who have a deceased parent) and Neilah (time).

## How to Pray in a Meaningful and Personal Way

### **How we will conduct this prayer service:**

(This section can be used and dispersed wherever you see fit. However, it is a key component in helping your congregation feel comfortable with the prayer service)

- Emphasize that the entire service is about you, the individual: *Rachamono liba boyeh*, G-d desires the heart. You do not need to feel intimidated or overwhelmed or pressured to follow along with the cantor. Open your heart and speak to G-d from your heart. Don't be concerned to take a few extra moments to express yourself.
- Lift up the machzor and ask rhetorically: How long would it take someone to read this book from beginning to end? Even the fastest reader would need a day or two. And that's not even considering the fact that the language is in Hebrew, cryptic and dense. How in the world could anyone read these pages and understand what they are saying?

If you feel overwhelmed, rest assured: You are not alone. We all – even those most fluent in the prayers and have been reciting it all their lives – cannot expect to read the entire machzor with full intention. We rely on G-d to “fill in” for the parts we don't adequately express. We also have the chazan representing us and saying the parts we may have not fully recited. We need to know that prayer is about opening your heart – like a child to a parent – and just asking G-d for help and for all your needs.

- This service is geared to anyone looking to appreciate the personal relevance of the services. If you are unaffiliated and disenchanted from the monotony of conventional services, or if you are affiliated and traditional, our service is intended to bring the prayers alive and rejuvenate your experience, perhaps like never before. We will attempt to make these services dynamic, empowering and above all – relevant.

- The entire traditional service will be led by our chazan (cantor), however I will focus on the overall structure of the prayers and customs and highlight key prayers that you can focus on and personalize. In effect, everyone will be able to follow at his or her own unique pace, without feeling that they are left behind. Those that want to follow along with the chazan are free to do so, but I will continuously guide us along the milestone prayers and places of emphasis.

- At all times please keep in mind that the most important aspect of any prayer is your intention and spirit—your heart, your voice. Therefore, feel free to read the prayers in English or any language that comes easy to you. It is important to know what you are saying. Yet, be aware that there is a special power when praying in the original Hebrew. Hebrew is a holy and mystical tongue that carries special power. Even if you do not know Hebrew, you can choose one or two prayers that are easy to follow along, like the *Shema*. Don't worry if you can't keep up with the rest of

the congregation; you are there to speak with G-d, and G-d hears you at your own pace. G-d understands your heart and your sincerity. Above all, that is what you need to bring to the High Holidays.

### Focus of Prayers

- What are the High Holidays? The entire High Holidays, days of awe, are about rebuilding after loss, renewal and sanctity, with the focus of Rosh Hashana on renewal and Yom Kippur on purity. Think of the holiday services as cryptic musical notes. Only when deciphered can you hear and feel its music. This is what our service will achieve, allowing you to hear the beautiful music of the holidays -- and how it resonates in your own spirit. Our services will teach you how these holy days, their prayers and traditions, can help you discover your real self and revisit your purest moment -- the moment of your birth, and how to integrate that in rebuilding and improving your life today.

- On Rosh Hashana we wish each other *Ketiva v'chatima tovah* “to be written and sealed for the good.” On Yom Kippur we amend that to *Gmar chatima tovah*, “the end of the sealing for the good.” Yom Kippur is the conclusion of Rosh Hashana and is sometimes called “the inner Rosh Hashana,”<sup>1</sup> because it concludes the judgment of the universe begun on Rosh Hashana. This is also why many of the prayers of the two holidays are similar, though their focus is different.

<sup>1</sup> Pri Etz Chaim Shaar Rosh Hashana ch. 1. Likkutei Torah Rosh Hashana 58a. 63c.

- On Rosh Hashana, the birthday of the human race, the focus is on our acceptance of G-d's sovereignty over our personal lives, over the entire universe and a united world. In this context, each prayer helps us come more in touch with our Divine mission on this earth—which is our purpose and calling—and the ability to make it a viable reality in our lives.

- On Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, the focus is on holiness (*kedusha*). In Temple times, this was the one and only day of the year when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies. Now that the Temple is destroyed, we endeavor to enter our personal “Holy of Holies” instead, and by coming in touch with the most intimate part of our own Divine soul to connect with G-d.

- Thus Yom Kippur is the day of the soul—when the soul is closest to its source in G-d. On Yom Kippur, more than on any other day, we have the ability to look at everything with the eyes of our soul, not with the eyes of the body.

- This also explains why Yom Kippur is the day of forgiveness. (On this day some 3,000 years ago, G-d finally answered Moses' prayers and agreed to forgive the Jews for the sin of the Golden Calf.) Because the soul is closest to its source, it feels its source and the source feels it; their essential connection is revealed and all barriers melt away.

- We also try to say as many psalms as possible throughout Yom Kippur. In addition, Chassidic Masters passed on a tradition to us,

originating from the Baal Shem Tov, to recite nine special Psalms on Yom Kippur: before *Kol Nidrei* (115-123), before retiring at night (124-132), after *Musaf* (133-141), and before *Neilah* (142-150).

### Yom Kippur Themes

- Sanctity
- Unity
- Hope
- Atonement
- Accountability
- Soul – your inner life

These themes are the recurrent undertone of all the prayers—the objective of Yom Kippur – and keeping them in mind all the time will help focus all your prayers.

Every day we recite three prayers—*Maariv* (the evening prayer), *Shacharit* (the morning prayer), *Mincha* (the afternoon prayer). On Shabbat and every other Jewish holiday we have a fourth – *Mussaf* (the additional prayer). But only on Yom Kippur is there a fifth—*Neilah*. This is because *Neilah* corresponds to the fifth and highest dimension of the soul – the Holy of Holies of the soul – which we access only on this one day at this one time. Yom Kippur in effect is a journey inward that culminates in the fifth and final prayer of the service – *Neilah* (the “Locking of the Gates”).

## ✠ The Five Prayers of Yom Kippur – Five Steps into Your Soul ✠

Soul Dimension	Meaning	Focus	Prayer	Time
Nefesh	“Spirit”	Biological Life	Maariv	Evening
Ruach	“Breath”	Emotional Life	Shacharit	Morning
Neshamah	“Soul”	Intellectual Life	Mincha	Afternoon
Chayah	“Life”	Transcendental Life	Musaf	Shabbat & Holidays
Yechidah	“Oneness”	Essence	Neilah	Yom Kippur Finale

### ✠ We will now begin the first of the five Yom Kippur prayers – the awesome Kol Nidrei.

- **Birchas habonim** (blessing the children):

It is a custom to bless our children before the onset of Yom Kippur. As such, I would like to now bless you all – as we are all children, and all in need of blessings. On Yom Kippur we celebrate the innocent essence of each of our souls – the “inner child” within each of us. So whether you were blessed by your parents as a child, or your parents neglected to bless you (or did not bless you enough) – allow me to extend to you the traditional priestly blessing. Please close your eyes and absorb:

Vayidaber Hashem el Moshe laymor: Daber el Aaron v’el bonov laymor: Ko sivrochu es b’nei Yisroel, emor lohem:

Yevorechecho Adonai v’yishmorecho.

Yo’er Adonai ponov elecho v’chunekoh.

Yo’er Adonai ponov elecho v’yosem lecho sholom.

V’somu es Shemi al Bnei Yisroel v’Ani avorochem.

- **Appeal.** Whether you make an appeal or not, it is important that it fit in to the overall personal and warm spirit you want to create in this service. Too often the appeal feeds right into the stereotype of the “bureaucratic” and mechanical nature of Synagogues today. One way to ensure that your appeal does not undermine the spiritual nature of your service is by addressing this issue head on. A line you can use to diffuse the issue is the one stated by a famous yeshiva fundraiser, The Ponovezer Rav, Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman:

At a fundraising dinner for his yeshiva, he once began: “Until now all the speakers spoke about Torah, Torah, Torah, but they meant money, money, money. I will talk to you about money, but I mean Torah, Torah, Torah.”





### 3. 1ST PRAYER: EVENING SERVICE – KOL NIDREI/MAARIV, BIOLOGICAL LIFE

Emphasize how the evening service corresponds to the first step in the Yom Kippur journey into the soul: Sanctifying the lowest level of soul—*nefesh* (“spirit”)—our biological life.

#### Kol Nidrei

All Torah scrolls are taken out of the ark. Two people clutching Torah scrolls stand one on each side of the cantor, as Aaron and Hur stood on either side of Moses and held up his hands to support him, when he prayed to G-d for victory over the war with the Amalakites. (Exodus 17:2)

The *Kol Nidrei* is a prayer absolving all vows; it is recited because the first step to entering the world of the soul is to be free of the bounds of the material world. The lowest level of the soul—the *nefesh* level—is the survival level; to get beyond this requires that we free ourselves of all biological life demands and traps since the survival mode creates all types of “vows,” habits and patterns that bind us; we must be free from them to truly grow.

*Kol Nidrei* is repeated three times, each time louder and stronger; the repetitions correspond to the three soul garments: thought, speech, action.

> Here are suggested key prayer “stops” you can highlight, focus on and personalize.

(Please customize these – add or subtract – to fit the needs of your audience. It is vital to gauge your crowd and customize accordingly).

- *Borchu* (“Bless G-d”)—an invocation to prayer
- The *Shema*

This is the same Shema we recite all year long, with one key difference. The statement following “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our G-d, the Lord is One”—*Baruch shem* (“Blessed is the Name”)—is generally read quietly. Only on Yom Kippur is it read aloud. We are taught that Moses originally heard this prayer from the angels when he was on Mt. Sinai and brought it back down with him. He told the Israelites to say it quietly, because it was “stolen” from heaven. Thus we say it quietly all year round. But on Yom Kippur we are spiritually raised to the level of angels and we say the verse out loud and in public.<sup>2</sup>

- The *Amidah*

This is the same as the evening service of Rosh Hashana except for the addition of the *Vidui* (“Confession”), which is recited twice in the evening service—once within the silent *Amidah* (which is not repeated) and once after the *Amidah*.

#### Vidui—“Confession”

This is meant to be an intimate moment when we acknowledge our iniquities before G-d who

<sup>2</sup> Tur, shulchan aruch and shulchan aruch harav 619:9 in the name of the Midrash (Devorim Rabba 2:36).



knows “the mysteries of the universe and the hidden secrets of every human being.” The first essential step in *teshuvah* is acknowledgement of the wrongdoing—the exact antithesis of denial. Repentance cannot be just a fleeting thought like other thoughts that come and go in a person’s mind. By acknowledging our sins in words, our repentance becomes much more real and helps us reach the complete understanding that our sins are wrong and cannot be rationalized away.

On Yom Kippur we say two types of *Vidui*—short and long, while gently beating the chest. The short is called *Ashamnu*—“We are guilty”—and is recited ten times during Yom Kippur, two times in each of the five services: *Maariv*, *Shacharit*, *Musaf*, *Mincha*, *Neilah*. The long is called *Al Chayt*—“For the sin”—and is recited eight times, two times in each of the four services, but not in *Neilah* as at the fifth level of soul—*yechidah*, “oneness” with G-d—no sin is possible.

Both the short and long *Vidui* alphabetically list all types of sins. *Ashamnu*, the short one, goes through the entire alphabet listing 24 types or categories of sin. *Al Chayt*, the long one, includes a double alphabetical listing (each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet is listed twice, making for 44 kinds of sin). *Al Chayt* is broken down into four sections; in between each section we say: “For all these, G-d of Pardon, pardon us, wipe away our sins, atone for us.” Pardon (*selach*) is the weakest of the three—it is for the sins that we committed without even personal benefit, therefore only pardon is pos-

sible. Wipe away (*mechal*) is stronger—for intentional sins done for personal benefit. Atone (*kapper*) is the strongest—for unintentional sins, which can be entirely atoned for.

Sins in general have to be understood not as mere transgressions but as disconnections. The Hebrew word for “commandment”—*mitzvah*—comes from the root meaning “connection.” The Hebrew word for “sin”—*aveirah*—comes from the root meaning “disconnection” or “displacement.” When we sin we actually displace and disconnect ourselves from our own true self. A sin is therefore not committed just against G-d, it is committed against the self. *Teshuvah*—which requires *Vidui*—confession or acknowledgement—is the process of realigning and returning to our real self, our Divine soul.

In the Yom Kippur service sins are expressed in the plural not only to save individuals from embarrassment but so that the congregation as a whole might attain true atonement. We cannot confess only for ourselves, rather we have to beg forgiveness for all Jews who sin. As the great 16th century Kabbalist, the Ari, said, “Confession is written in the plural, ‘We have sinned’ because all Israel is considered like one body and every person is a limb of that body. So we confess to all the sins of all the parts of our body.”

The *Al Chayt* is a list of categories of sins that are the most common. Many relate to our misuse of speech and having the wrong type of thoughts or attitude. Some have to do with more concrete *mitzvot* like keeping Shabbat or

keeping Kosher. All relate to different aspects of our lives. Of course, we should not feel limited to confess only the list of sins printed in the prayer book, we should mention in the *Vidui* any specific sins which we may have committed.

**✚ Ya'aleh** – perhaps say/sing this together in English

**✚ Ki Hineh** – perhaps say/sing this together in English

### **✚ Penitential Prayers**

Exclusive to Yom Kippur is an entire selection of penitential prayers which are recited in each of the five prayers (after the silent *Amidah* in the evening service, and in the cantor's repetition in the other services). In the evening service the Ark is opened anew for each hymn, indicating opening a new dimension of the soul.

**✚ Each hymn is followed by reciting the Thirteen Attributes of Compassion** (which were revealed to Moses atop Mt. Sinai before he descended on Yom Kippur). In total the Ark is opened five times corresponding to the five levels of soul.

The penitential prayer (in each of the five prayers) consists of these special hymns:

- **Zachor Rachamecho**—Remember Your mercies [In Musaf this is replaced with *Aleh Ezkerah*, the Ten Martyrs]

- **Zachor Lanu**—“Remember for us the covenant of the Patriarchs”—Biblical quotations promising forgiveness
- **Shema Kolenu**—“Hear our voice”—heart-rending petitions to G-d imploring that He not reject us
- **Ki Anu Amecha** —“For we are Your people” (you may want to sing this with your congregation in English)
- **Ashamnu** – The short *Vidui*
- **Al Chayt** – The long *Vidui* (not said in *Neilah*)
- **V'David Avedecha**—“And David Your servant”
- Due to it being Shabbat, we don't say *Avinu Malkeinu*
- Conclusion
- Announce the schedule for tomorrow
- Now we will have a discussion/q&a session. I invite you all to join and welcome all your questions, comments and challenges.

## **4. 2ND PRAYER: MORNING SERVICE – SHACHRIT – RUACH, EMOTIONAL LIFE**

Emphasize how the morning service corresponds to the second step in the Yom Kippur journey into the soul: Sanctifying the second level of soul—*ruach* (“breath”)—our emotional life. These prayers of the morning service are seen through the lens of *ruach*. Although all

prayer is about emoting with G-d, the root of it all begins in the morning service of Yom Kippur, which reveals the *ruach* dimension of your soul.

The morning service of Yom Kippur is essentially the same as for Rosh Hashana. The major differences occur in the cantor's repetition of the *Amidah*.

> Here are suggested key prayer “stops” you can highlight, focus on and personalize. (Please customize these – add or subtract – to fit the needs of your audience. It is vital to gauge your crowd and customize accordingly).

**✚** **Following the preliminary prayers,** *Borchu*, *Shema*, the silent *Amidah* (which includes *Vidui*), comes the cantor's repetition of the *Amidah*. With the Ark open, the cantor invokes a special formula requesting permission to enrich the service with hymns. This is followed by the alphabetical poem (composed by Rabbi Kalonymus, in the 10th century) *Eimechanasati*—“I am awestricken as I offer supplication.”

**✚** Then the Ark is closed and the hymn *Imatzto Osoir*—“You have established the tenth [of *Tishrei*] to atone” is recited. (More *piyutim* are said here by different congregations.) When the Ark is next opened, the special prayers of Yom Kippur begin, followed by *Kedusha*.

**✚** Similar to the evening service, the final part of the *Amidah* consists of the special Pen-

itential Prayers, which conclude with the *Vidui* (“Confession”), followed by several additional prayers.

**✚** Due to it being Shabbat, we don't say Avinu Malkeinu.

**✚** Torah Reading

- On the morning of Yom Kippur, two Torah Scrolls are removed from the Ark. In the first scroll we read (with the same special song of Rosh Hashana) the chapter in Leviticus (16:1-34) that discusses the instructions to Moses and Aaron concerning the procedure for the priestly service on Yom Kippur, which would enable them to achieve atonement for Israel. The Torah portion then details the laws of Yom Kippur.
- The *Maftir* is read from a second Torah scroll and is from Numbers (29:7-11), which relates the sacrificial service for Yom Kippur.
- Following *Maftir*, the *Haftarah* is read. The *Haftarah* is from Isaiah (57:14-58:14), which begins *Solu, Solu* “Make a path, make a path, clear the way remove any obstacle from the path of My people.” Isaiah continues saying in the name of G-d: “I am with the broken hearted and humble of spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, to revive the heart of the crushed.” After giving them hope, the prophet then urges the Jewish people to return to G-d through good deeds, kindness and sincere *teshuvah*. Fasting alone, Isaiah says, is not enough without the spirit of devotion and return. It requires an emotional and spiritual vitality.

In this *Haftarah* we clearly see the focus on the *ruach* dimension of the soul—its emotional spirit, not just its biological one. As G-d says through Isaiah: “I will not contend forever, nor will I always be wrathful, for the spirit (*ruach*) in which I wrapped [the body] is from Me, and I have created the souls.”

### Yizkor

This is a special prayer for the souls of the departed which is said only on Yom Kippur and the festivals. (Those blessed with living parents are asked to walk out of the synagogue during this service.)

*Yizkor* (meaning literally “remember”) celebrates our most powerful resource—the power of eternity, the power to remember those that came before us.

On the holiest day of the year, we perform one of the holiest things we can do as children: to remember our deceased parents. On Yom Kippur also departed souls have atonement. (The name of the day in Hebrew is *Yom Kippurim* in the plural, atonement both for those alive and those deceased.) And this atonement is achieved through their children on earth, who commit to charity for the sake of their parents. Giving money (the epitome of materialism) has the power to atone and redeem the soul above.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, it has the power to create a physical channel and “home” (a living memorial) for the departed soul.<sup>4</sup>

The *Yizkor* prayer is one of the most intimate and moving prayers in Jewish liturgy. A child, no matter how old or young, speaks to his or her father and/or mother in personal terms, calling them by name and invoking their memory before G-d.

This short but potent prayer is said with the Torah scrolls raised (held by two people) on the *bimah*.

Even if you cannot make it to the other services, *Yizkor* is a prayer that you should not miss. It is an enormous blessing and opportunity to connect to eternity—and it provides many blessings in return.

>Here is where you may want to deliver your sermon.

## 5. 3RD PRAYER: MUSAF – CHAYA, TRANSCENDENT LIFE

Emphasize how the additional *musaf* service corresponds to the fourth step<sup>5</sup> in the Yom Kippur journey into the soul: the fourth level of soul—*Chaya* (“life”)—which relates to our transcendental life. All the prayers of this service (and even those that were said last night and this morning) are now seen through the lens of *Chaya*.

<sup>3</sup> Tanchuma Haazinu 1. Maharil, Ramo and Shulchan Aruch HaRav Orach Chaim 621:14. See Maaver Yovok, Sifsei rannonot ch. 23. Yoreh Deah 249 citing the Rokeach.

<sup>4</sup> See Sefer HaSichot 5749 p. 233.

<sup>5</sup> Due to the sanctity of Yom Kippur we have the power to jump straight to the fourth level, bypassing the third level, which we shall return to in the afternoon mincha service.

- 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;

the birth of Abraham and the introduction of a new light into the universe; the birth of Abraham's descendants, the Twelve Tribes; the selection of Levi for the priesthood; and finally the birth of Aaron, who would be consecrated to serve G-d, and would become the instrument of atonement for the entire human race.

- The recitation continues with the events of Yom Kippur, detailing the special service to achieve atonement. This prayer is thus the story of history, the story of our lives, the story of our fall and rise, of loss and hope, of death and rebirth.
- It is quite moving to read the account of the entire service. The awesome way that the High Priest prepared himself (and was escorted by his assistants) to the sacred Yom Kippur service. How he immersed himself in the sacred waters. How he prepared himself for seven days before Yom Kippur. The lessons for us, how we must sanctify our lives, are endless. The High Priest's service was both physically and mentally exhausting as it required both physical dexterity (while fasting and having no sleep) and total mental concentration.
- The main highlight of the service is, of course, the entry of the High Priest all dressed in white into the Holy of Holies, preceded by his pronouncing aloud the four-let-

ter Holy Name of G-d, the Tetragrammaton.<sup>6</sup> This only happened once a year, on the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur. No one was ever allowed to enter the Holy of Holies nor pronounce the Holy Name.

- The High Priest pronounced the Holy Name ten times on Yom Kippur—three times at each of his three confessions and one time when he drew lots as to which goat would become the sin-offering. Each time he pronounced the Holy Name, everyone who heard it would respond with *Baruch Shem* (“Blessed is the Name”) as we relate the prayer:

“And the priests and the people standing in the Courtyard, when they would hear the glorious, awesome Name, the Ineffable one, emanating from the High Priest's mouth, in holiness and purity, they would kneel and prostrate themselves, give thanks and say, ‘Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom for all eternity.’”

We recite the above paragraph four times, for each of the times that the High Priest pronounced the name, and we prostrate ourselves three times (not when he threw the lots), as they did in the time of the Temple.

On the holiest day of the year, in the holiest place on earth, the holiest man on the planet, uttered the holiest word in the universe. We

<sup>6</sup> The primary service in the Holy of Holies was the incense offering. “And he shall take a censer-full of burning coals from the altar, and the fill of his hands of finely-ground ketoret; and he shall bring [these] inside the curtain. And he shall place the ketoret upon the fire before G-d; and the cloud of the incense shall envelop the covering of the [Ark of] Testimony” (Leviticus 16:12-13). The incense (ketorot) reflects the most sublime service of *yechida* – one that affects the fragrance of the entire environment.



recreate this most sacred experience every Yom Kippur at this point in the prayer service. And this is the ultimate *Chaya* experience, not just the biological dimension of life, not just the emotional spectrum, not just the intellect, but the entire psyche of the spirit is involved—all the faculties are immersed in the all encompassing experience of entering the Holy of Holies.

- When the High Priest emerged from the Holy of Holies unharmed, having successfully achieved atonement for the people, he offered a moving prayer for them. First he wished them a year filled with all the blessings of G-d and later he would prepare a celebration to thank the Almighty for allowing him to complete his monumental task.
- After telling the story of the High Priest's service, we conclude: "And so, as You have listened to the prayer of the High Priests in the Sanctuary, so may you hear the prayer of our lips and deliver us."
- We continue with a prayer that invokes G-d to bless us in the year to come with all the blessings included in all the letters of the alphabet.
- We then go on to describe the majesty radiating from the High Priest as he came out of the Holy of Holies: "Like the resplendent canopy spread over the vaults of heaven... Like the lightning that flashes from the effulgence of the angels... was the appearance of the High Priest."

- Following this, we describe, by contrast, the great tragedy of the destruction of the Temple. Yet we ask: "May the remembrance of these things bring us pardon?" Though, without a Temple we cannot now recreate the actual Yom Kippur service, we thank G-d for helping us atone and we implore G-d to recognize the deep void we experience.

### **✠ Aleh Ezkiro ("These I will remember")**

The service goes on now describing the troubles that have befallen us ever since the destruction of the Temple, ending with the heart-rending story of "Ten Rabbinic Martyrs" which begins: *Aleh Ezkiro*—"These I will remember."

In one of the most moving accounts, we recount the story of the cruel Roman emperor who decreed that the ten greatest Jewish leaders of the time should be brutally put to death. Rabbi Yishmael, the high priest, purifies himself and with reverence pronounces G-d's ineffable Name and ascends to the heavenly heights to inquire if this decree comes from G-d.

He ascends and inquires of the angel clothed in white, who answers him: "Take it upon yourselves, righteous, beloved Sages, for I have heard from behind the Curtain that this decree has been imposed upon you."

The prayer continues with a graphic description of the savage executions of the Ten great Martyrs: Rabbi Yishmael, Rabban Shimeon ben

Gamliel, Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Chananya ben Tradyon, Rabbi Chutzpis, Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua, Rabbi Chanina ben Chachinai, Rabbi Yeshevav the Scribe, Rabbi Yehudah ben Dama, Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava.

The angels cry out in bitter grief: Is this the Torah and such its reward?! A voice from heaven responds: This is my decree; submit to it.

The angels resonating cry echoes through history – through all the deaths and persecutions we have endured. Their cry reverberates in our Yom Kippur prayers – prayers that continue to be said with tears that soak the very fibers of existence itself. Cries that have pierced the heavens, waiting for a response.

Yes, we have submitted to your decree. But we demand more. We appeal to you to end the pain, to end the bloodshed, to end all suffering.

On the holiest day of the year, in midst of the prayer of transcendence (*Chaya*), immediately following the account of the pinnacle of all life experience – entering the Holy of Holies – we do not forget that we live in a world of pain. And we demand a response.

No denial. No escape. Even at the height of our spiritual elevation, we remember our losses, and we implore of G-d to amend for them.

This is ultimate transcendence.

- Conclusion

*Musaf* concludes with the special Penitential Prayers (as in the morning service), *Vidui*, and the Priestly Blessing which takes on new mean-

ing after the recounting of the Temple service on Yom Kippur and the High Priest's blessing on that day.

- Announce the schedule for the final two prayers.
- Now we will have a discussion/q&a session. I invite you all to join and welcome all your questions, comments and challenges.

## 6. 4TH PRAYER: AFTERNOON SERVICE – MINCHA – NESHAMA, INTELLECTUAL LIFE

Emphasize how the afternoon service (*Mincha*) corresponds to the third step in the Yom Kippur journey into the soul: the third level of soul—*Neshama* (“soul”)—which relates to our intellectual life. Following the transcendental dimension of the soul in *Musaf*, we now integrate it with our minds in *Mincha*. This prepares us to then be able to enter the ultimate prayer – *Neilah*, the highest level of the soul, *yechidah*.

- Following the brief preliminary prayers, comes the Torah reading from Leviticus (18:1-30). It deals with forbidden sexual relationships, because it is such a great and common temptation. This teaches us that even at the loftiest place of Yom Kippur, we must always be vigilant on the most basic levels. The cornerstone of morality is self-control over animal sensuality.

- Another message we learn from this is, that no matter what level you stand on, even if you have reached a deep spiritual transcendence, you have to always continue your soul searching. “Sin” (*chet*) comes from the root “*chesaron*,” deficiency. A sin is not always literal; it can refer to an inadequacy on your part, that relative to your particular lofty level is considered deficient. When we reach great heights, then suddenly new, subtle deficiencies can emerge that we were unaware of earlier.
- Then the *Haftarah* is read, consisting of the entire Book of Jonah. We conclude the *Haftarah* with the Thirteen Attributes of Compassion; this is taken from the Book of Micah (7:18-20), rather than from the Book of Exodus (34:6-7), indicating that today we relate to these Thirteen Attributes from the higher soul levels, which gives us a deeper perspective than that which was revealed to Moses.<sup>7</sup>
- The Book of Jonah is read on Yom Kippur because it discusses the power of *teshuvah* and how one cannot escape from G-d (as Jonah tried to do).<sup>8</sup> The repentance of the people

of Ninveh serves as an inspiration to us to repent, and shows us that repentance can overturn a Divine decree.<sup>9</sup>

- The story of Jonah is the story of the soul’s descent into this universe. Water symbolizes the dimension of *Chayah* and *Yechidab*—the unconscious dimension of the soul (water) descends into the conscious world (land) of *Nefesh Ruach Neshama*. It tries to deny its mission until the universe itself forces it to embrace its calling. Thrown into water—its unconscious source—and into the belly of the whale (fish connected to its source)—it reconnects and regains its sense of purpose. It then goes and calls the world to *teshuvah*, and reveals the highest levels of the Thirteen Attributes of Compassion.
- The *Amidah*—with *Vidui*
- The repetition of the *Amidah*—with Penitential Prayers and *Vidui*. Due to it being Shabbat, we don’t say *Avinu Malkeinu*
- Conclusion



<sup>7</sup> See Idra Rabba – Zohar III 138a. Likkutei Torah Re’eh 34b.

<sup>8</sup> Shulchan Aruch HaRav 622:4.

<sup>9</sup> Siddur Shaloh.

## 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-

tury sage writes: **“When the *Shema* is recited aloud and with heartfelt intention, every Jew should have in mind giving up his soul for the sanctification of G-d’s name. This intention will be considered as if he had indeed actually withstood the test to sanctify G-d’s name.”**

> There is no higher experience for the Jew – as when he acknowledges the oneness of G-d and his readiness to give his entire life to G-d. This is the moment when the spark and the flame come closest all year round. This is the most powerful moment of the year. This is the moment that you are the closest that you can come to the essence of everything, to G-d.

- We recite the *Shema*—“Hear O’ Israel, the Lord is Our G-d, the Lord is One” and then three times repeat aloud the *Baruch Shem* (“Blessed be the Name”).
- Finally we shout out seven times *Hashem Hu HaElokim*—“The Lord He is G-d.”
- Kaddish is recited, and in middle of kaddish, before *tikabel*, comes the finale: Sounding the shofar, and exclaiming in a loud voice “Next Year in Jerusalem!”
- Some have the custom to first sing a victory march.
- *Neilah* ends and the Ark is closed.

> **The significance of this sequence:**

*Shema* is said once, declaring G-d’s absolute Unity – *Yechidah* (*Atzilut*).

*Boruch Shem* three times signifies our effort to infuse the unity of *yechidah* into the three dimensions of existence, *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshama* (the three worlds of *Beriyah*, *Yetzirah*, *Asiyah*).

Seven times *Hashem Hu HaElokim* is a further infusion of the unity into the seven (emotional) faculties of each level of soul (the seven levels in each world). These seven also elevate us through the seven heavens as the Divine presence on Yom Kippur “returns” upward with the conclusion of the day.

We then integrate and conclude this *yechidah* experience of unity with the saying of Kaddish, in which we sing a victory march, demonstrating our triumph against all adversary, followed by the blast of the Shofar, which is the level of the Shofar Godol (the Great Shofar) that will be heard with the coming of Moshiach, as we declare: Next Year in Jerusalem!

May it happen now, and then we will inevitably be in Jerusalem by next year...

## AFTER NEILAH

*Neilah* is followed by the standard evening service (*Maariv*), the prayer separating the holy from the mundane (*Havdalah*) and the blessing of the moon, which is coming close to full at this time (*Kiddush Levana*).

## Gut Yom Tov!

Go home and celebrate with a festive meal!