

Ten Things to Know About the Yom Kippur Machzor

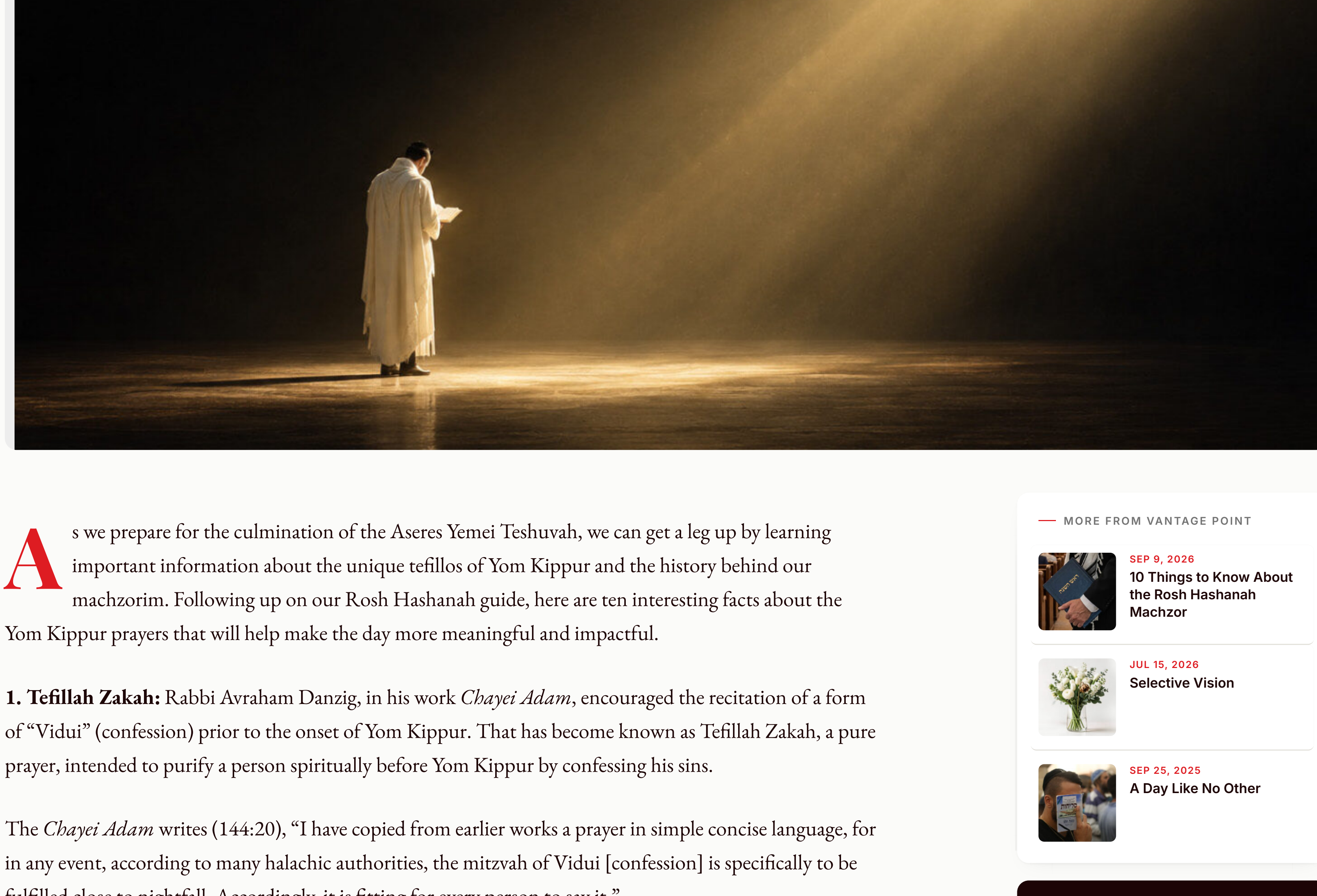
Ten interesting facts about the Yom Kippur prayers that will help make the day more meaningful and impactful

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As we prepare for the culmination of the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, we can get a leg up by learning important information about the unique tefillos of Yom Kippur and the history behind our machzorim. Following up on our Rosh Hashanah guide, here are ten interesting facts about the Yom Kippur prayers that will help make the day more meaningful and impactful.

1. Tefillah Zakah: Rabbi Avraham Danzig, in his work *Chayei Adam*, encouraged the recitation of a form of “Vidui” (confession) prior to the onset of Yom Kippur. That has become known as Tefillah Zakah, a pure prayer, intended to purify a person spiritually before Yom Kippur by confessing his sins.

The *Chayei Adam* writes (144:20), “I have copied from earlier works a prayer in simple concise language, for in any event, according to many halachic authorities, the mitzvah of Vidui [confession] is specifically to be fulfilled close to nightfall. Accordingly, it is fitting for every person to say it.”

Tefillah Zakah is included in almost every Ashkenazi machzor published over the last two centuries, and one is encouraged to recite Tefillah Zakah to enter the holiest day in a state of repentance (*Mishnah Berurah* 607:1 and *Aruch Hashulchan* 607:2). Sephardim recite *Lecha Keili Teshukati*, My Longing Is Yours, a deeply moving piyut authored by Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, which also contains Vidui, and is also intended bring one into Yom Kippur in a state of purity (*Pri Chadash*, *Orach Chayim* 607:1).

2. Kol Nidrei: The haunting tune of Kol Nidrei, chanted by the chazzan and congregation, formally announces the arrival of the holy day of Yom Kippur. The melodies used on Yom Kippur are an important means of uplifting the tefillos of the day. The *Mateb Ephraim* refers to singing Kol Nidrei in the “known and acquired tune” (619:11). It has been suggested that the source of the evocative melody of Kol Nidrei dates to the Anusim and was composed by Rav Yitzchak Mi’Masina of Spain. The Anusim only came to shul annually on Yom Kippur to annul the vows they had made under duress that transgressed the Torah (*Otzar Kol Minhager Yesburun* — *Yom Kippur* 5 page 74).

This tune should never be changed. The focus of Kol Nidrei is to commemorate the Anusim and their actions, and to annul our personal vows — what we could have and should have done — but didn’t over the past year. But this year we will do better.

3. Baruch Sheim: In *Derech Hashem*, the Ramchal sums up the essence of Yom Kippur as follows (4:8): The Master of the Universe prepared one special day for Israel on which repentance is especially readily accepted, and sins are particularly close to being erased. On this day, a unique divine light shines forth that possesses the power to accomplish all of this. However, to receive this light, Israel must observe what they were commanded concerning this day, especially the practice of self-affliction [inui]. Through this self-affliction, a person becomes greatly detached from physicality and is elevated, to some degree, to the level of the ministering angels.

There are multiple aspects of the day that express our angelic reality, including immersing in the mikveh the day before, not wearing leather shoes, wearing white clothing, donning a *kittel*, standing for a significant portion of the tefillos, and reciting aloud *Baruch Sheim kevod malchuso l’olam va’ed*.

The Tur explains (606 and 619) that the rest of the year, we make the declaration of *Baruch Sheim kevod* in an undertone, since it is like a precious treasure not originally given to us. But on Yom Kippur we recite it aloud, because on that day we are like angels. Saying *Baruch Sheim kevod* out loud is one of the most unique aspects of the tefillos of Yom Kippur, and doing so with this understanding can elevate and transform our tefillah.

4. Anim Zemiros (Shir Hakavod): The *Levush* (133) writes that Anim Zemiros should only be recited on Shabbos and Yom Tov, and not daily. The reason is that it is considered praise of G-d similar to Hallel, and our Sages teach that one who recites Hallel daily is compared to a blasphemer. It’s not appropriate for subjects to praise even a mortal king daily; mentioning him regularly lessens the distinction between the king and his subjects, and their awe of him dissipates.

However, the Maharil writes that even reciting Anim Zemiros on Shabbos is too much, and it should be sung only on the holiest day of the year — on Yom Kippur evening, after davening. Then it can be said slowly, carefully, and with great intention, praising the King of Kings (Maharil, *Hilchos Leil Yom Kippur* 13). The Gra was said to have recited Shir Hakavod on the mornings of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, prior to Pesukei D’zimra (*Maaseh Rav* 208 and 216).

5. Selichos: The Tur, citing Rav Natronai Gaon, explains that Selichos should be recited throughout the tefillos of Yom Kippur. While this custom is noted by subsequent Rishonim, it is not as commonly practiced in many communities. Why not? The *Aruch Hashulchan* addresses this question and writes (620:1)

What I find puzzling is that we do not mention [Selichos] even once. There are customs that have no real source, and people are very careful to observe them, while in this matter, which comes from the Geonim and involves the recitation of the Thirteen Attributes, we are not careful.

This all resulted from the lengthy melodies [of the prayer services] so that no time remained to recite the Selichos. And the recitation of the Thirteen Attributes cannot be done without reciting the Selichos. The great Geonim already cried out against the chazzanim for allowing this to happen, but we do not have the power to protest, and may G-d forgive.

We must recognize the power of a niggun and the delicate balance between adopting choice tunes and not losing out on the essence of the Yom Kippur davening.

6. Mima’amakim: The Mekubalim made many critical and significant additions to the siddur and the machzor, one of which was the recitation of Tehillim 130, *Mima’amakim*, after Yishtabach of Shacharis during the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah. Rav Chaim Vital states in the sefer *Pri Eitz Chaim* (*Shaar Hazemirus* 6): “It is good to recite *Mima’amakim* during the Ten Days of Repentance, between Yishtabach and *Yotzer Ohr*, because the mystical secret of *Mima’amakim*, which means depth, corresponds to the attribute of Gevurah.”

The *Magen Avraham*, who often cites the Kabbalistic insights and rulings of the Arizal, quotes this opinion as well, but questions it because of the interruption it creates between Yishtabach and *Yotzer Ohr* (Magen Avraham 54:2 and Pri Megadim ad loc). However, the *Ketzeh Hamateh* (584:16) writes that “a doubt of the *Magen Avraham* should not override the certainty of the Arizal,” and rules that *Mima’amakim* should absolutely be recited.

The *Mateb Ephraim* and *Aruch Hashulchan pasken* that *Mima’amakim* should be recited, while the *Mishnah Berurah* codifies the opinion of the *Magen Avraham* (*Mateb Ephraim* 619:37, *Aruch Hashulchan* 54:2, *Mishnah Berurah* 54:4). A variant custom among some Ashkenazi communities is to instead recite *Mima’amakim* after Shemoneh Esreh, thereby fulfilling the Kabbalistic reason for its institution but avoiding a halachic interruption between Yishtabach and *Yotzer Ohr* (*Iyunei Halachos* 1:11, page 183, footnote 8, of Rabbi Dovid Rabinowitz, citing this custom in the name of Rav Yosef Kahaneman, rosh yeshivah of Ponevezh.)

7. Yizkor: The *Shulchan Aruch* and the Rema (621:6) write that “it is customary to pledge charitable donations on Yom Kippur on behalf of the deceased, and to mention their souls, because the deceased also have atonement on Yom Kippur.” The Torah calls this day Yom Hakippurim, in the plural, to teach that this day has a double *kapparah*: an atonement both for the living and for the deceased.

Thus, Yom Hakippurim was chosen as the day to serve as a merit for the deceased with Yizkor. There are two more reasons provided for Yizkor being recited specifically on Yom Kippur. One, the *Sefer Rokeach* (217) explains that the final *pasuk* in *parshas Tetzaveh* says, “Aharon shall bring atonement upon its horns once a year,” referring to the *avodah* of the Kohein Gadol on Yom Kippur. This *pasuk* is juxtaposed with one in *parshas Ki Sisa* that states, “every man shall give an atonement for his soul,” a reference to giving tzedakah. This correlation teaches us the importance of pledging tzedakah in the merit of the deceased on Yom Kippur. Two, the *Kol Bo* (70) writes that reciting Yizkor humbles and breaks the heart of man and inspires one to do teshuvah.

From here we learn that the living can redeem and atone for the sins of the deceased by giving tzedakah and performing mitzvos. By commemorating the deceased through mitzvos, the living demonstrates that his actions are due to his ancestors’ legacy; which raises their souls on high (Rabbeinu Bechaye, Devarim 21:8).

8. Seder Avodah: The essence of Yom Kippur when the Beis Hamikdash stood was the Seder Avodah, the service of the Kohein Gadol in the Holy of Holies. Through the korbanos the Kohein Gadol offered and the confession that he articulated, the atonement of the Jewish nation was secured. The highly anticipated conclusion of the Yom Kippur service was the red string tied to the entrance of the Beis Hamikdash turning white — the sign that Hashem had accepted the Kohein’s service.

Ever since the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, we are sorely missing this core aspect of Yom Kippur. However, the Sages did not want the Seder Avodah to be forgotten, so they included piyutim and prayers as part of Mussaf of Yom Kippur that describe the service of the Kohein Gadol in detail. These piyutim are recited by the chazzan and congregation, parts in unison and parts responsively, to relive this special experience and merit the same atonement.

The Seder Avodah in the machzor is based upon the accounts in the Mishnah, Gemara, and Rishonim. It is hard for most to appreciate the Seder Avodah without an understanding of these sources. Thus, this can make the most critical element of the Yom Kippur davening foreign and unfamiliar. Over 300 years ago the *Me’am Lo’ez* (*Acharei Mos*) recognized this problem, and set out to explain and elucidate the Avodah. In his words:

It will be of great benefit to you on Yom Kippur if you keep this book before you and understand the entire order of the service while the *sheliach tzibbur* is reciting it. For when a person understands what he is saying, his heart is stirred, and he does not become drowsy at that time — as many people do, falling asleep during this part of the davening. They do not realize that the principal significance of this holy day is at the time when the *sheliach tzibbur* recites the order of the Temple Service.

9. Krias HaTorah at Minchah: There is an interesting dichotomy to the Torah reading at Minchah on Yom Kippur. Rabi Akiva Eiger (*Teshuvos* 24) writes about a certain case that articulates this duality:

A person was lying bedridden, seriously ill and in danger of death, and the doctor instructed him to eat on Yom Kippur. They were davening in his room, and they called him up to the Torah. I was not uncertain about this and instructed him to go up for the Torah, because, simply understood, the Torah reading on Yom Kippur marks the sanctity of the day, just like it does on other Yamim Tovim and on Shabbos. Therefore, even someone who is not fasting can receive an aliyah.

However, they also wanted to call him up for the Torah reading at Minchah, and regarding this I was uncertain: Is the Torah reading at Minchah on Yom Kippur due to the fast, except that on other fast days we read *Vayechad*, (from *parshas Ki Sisa*) whereas on Yom Kippur we read the section dealing with forbidden relationships (from *parshas Kedoshim*), and therefore someone who is not fasting may not receive an *aliyah*? Or is this reading also part of the sanctity of the day, so that there is a Torah reading at Minchah just as there is on Shabbos, in which case even someone who is not fasting may receive an aliyah? This requires further examination for practical halachic ruling. [See *Marcheshes* 1:14 and *Minchas Elazar* 2:74 who attempt to reconcile this question.]

10. Ne’ilah: The Maharam Schiff (*Bava Kamma* 119b, *siyum*) writes:

The ultimate culmination of the year is the Yamim Tovim; the ultimate of all the festivals is Yom Kippur; and the climax of Yom Kippur is Ne’ilah. During Ne’ilah, we daven to be saved from the wrongdoing committed by our hands (robbery). The reason for this can perhaps be explained based on what is written: “The end of all flesh has come before Me” (Bereishis 6:13). Their judgment was sealed only because of robbery.

How do we understand that a central theme of Neilah — the climax of Yom Kippur and the entire year — is our asking Hashem to save us from sins involving stealing and wrongfully taking from others? How many people have really committed such a sin?

The answer is that the tefillah is really asking Hashem to forgive us for our theft from ourselves and from Hashem. When we do not live up to our own potential, we have effectively stolen that which Hashem has given us — our life. We are borrowing and using the body Hashem has given us inappropriately. That is the highest form of robbery, and that is what we must focus on rectifying as Yom Kippur ebbs away. (*Shai L’Torah*, Ne’ilah, citing Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik)

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