

10 Things to Know About the Rosh Hashanah Machzor

“It is proper for every person before Rosh Hashanah to prepare himself by reviewing the tefillos and the piyutim”

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As we prepare for the most consequential davening of the year, it behooves us to know important information about the unique tefillos we'll be reciting and the historic machzorim we'll be using. Here are ten interesting facts about the prayers for Rosh Hashanah that will help make your day more meaningful and impactful.

1. **The Machzor:** The word machzor, which means “cycle,” always referred to the book used for the tefillos for the entire annual cycle — daily, Shabbos, Yom Tov, and Yamim Noraim. For example, the classic *Machzor Vitry* and *Machzor Roma* of the medieval period referred to the books those communities used that included the tefillos, halachos, and minhagim for the cycle of the year and the cycle of life.

It was only with the invention of the printing press in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, and more prominently in the 18th and 19th centuries, when a distinction was made between what we refer to as the siddur, which was used for weekday and Shabbos davening, and the machzor, which was used for Yamim Noraim and Yamim Tovim davening. (See introduction to *Heidenbeim Machzor*, “*Hapiyutim V'hapaytanim*.”)

2. Preparing the Machzor: The *Match Ephraim* (581:58) writes, “It is proper for every person before Rosh Hashanah to prepare himself by reviewing the tefillos and the *piyutim*. He should study the meaning of the words so they will be familiar and fluent on his lips on Rosh Hashanah. He should also, before Rosh Hashanah, teach his young children and the members of his household the tefillos so that he will not have to interrupt his davening on Rosh Hashanah to show them the proper place.”

It is critical to consider reviewing the machzor in advance of Rosh Hashanah as “proper understanding of the machzor will prevent them from chirping like birds that merely twitter and chirp without understanding. Then their prayers would ascend before the awesome G-d of all deeds” (*Vavei Ha'amudim, Amud Ha'avodah* 10: 26).

3. Piyutim and Niggunim: The Rema (619:1) rules that “one should not veer from the custom of the city, even in regard to the piyutim or niggunim that are recited there.” The basis of this important *psak*, which serves as critical rule for every shul and *shaliach tzibbur*, is the following story.

The Maharil (*Hilchos Tefillas Shacharis d'Yom Kippur* 11) relates that he served as the *shaliach tzibbur* for the Yamim Noraim in the town of Regensburg. He led Mussaf and wanted to include a piyut by Rabbeinu Ephraim to honor the great author who was buried in Regensburg. The leaders of the congregation told the Maharil that their custom was not to include this piyut, but the Maharil could not be dissuaded, since Rabbeinu Ephraim was buried just a short distance away. Sometime later, the Maharil's daughter died on Yom Kippur. The Maharil felt that her death occurred because he had deviated from the custom of the city.

4. Adon Olam: The *Match Moshe* (*Amud Ha'avodah, Beis Haknesses, Brachos u'Pesukei D'zimra* 31) writes, “One who recites Adon Olam with proper *kavanah*, Rav Yehudah Hachassid, Rav Hai Gaon, and Rav Sherira Gaon are guarantors that his prayers will be heard, the *satán* will not challenge his prayers, and there will be no obstacle to his prayers on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.”

Thus, we learn of the importance of beginning the tefillos of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with Adon Olam: To serve as a conduit for our tefillos to be accepted. The *Match Moshe* adds that since we begin with Adon Olam, we also conclude with Adon Olam, showing that we are prepared to start davening all over again. This is to prevent the *satán* from acting as a prosecutor, charging that the people are done with their tefillos and are ready to move on. (*Match Moshe, Amud Ha'avodah* 216)

5. HaMelech The *Aruch Hashulchan* (584:1) explains that the chazzan begins the tefillos on the morning of Rosh Hashanah with the piyut of Adon Olam, which focuses on Hashem as King, and concludes Pesukei D'zimra just before the words *HaMelech Hayosheiv*, The King Who sits. Thus, the opening section of the tefillos of Rosh Hashanah open and close with the chazzan emphasizing Hashem as King.

At that point, the second chazzan begins Shacharis from his place, by chanting the word Hamelech in a loud voice. Hence, the chazzan explicitly imparts to the *tzibbur* that the King is the focus of the day and the center of the tefillos of Rosh Hashanah. The Avudraham (*Seder Tefillas Rosh Hashanah*) elucidates that this is exactly the reason that the word *uv'chein* (“And so too”) was chosen to be prominently mentioned three times in each of the Amidah of Rosh Hashanah; to remind us of the *pasuk* in Megillas Esther (4:16), “*Uv'chein avo el hamelech* — And so too shall I come to the king,” to call to our attention that the Day of Judgment has come, and we stand before the King of Kings.

6. The recitation of Zachreinu, Mi chamocha, U'kesov, B'sefer in Chazaras Hashatz: There are three opinions as to what the *tzibbur* should do regarding these four additions to the chazzan's repetition of the Amidah. One, the *tzibbur* does not recite any of the additions and only the chazzan recites them. Two, the *tzibbur* recites all four additions. These two opinions debate what the nature of the repetition of Amidah is; if the chazzan is fulfilling the obligation of the *tzibbur*, then there is no reason for the *tzibbur* to recite these additions; but if these additions are like Modim, which, due to its importance, must be recited by the *tzibbur*, then these additions should also be recited by them.

However, there is a third custom that is the hardest to understand: The *tzibbur* does not recite the first two additions in the opening of Amidah, but does recite the latter two additions at the end of Amidah. There are two explanations for this custom. One, in the first three brachos, we are like a servant doing the job of the master, and therefore we don't make extra requests. But by the end of the Amidah, we are like a servant who is asking to receive his reward, and so we articulate the final two addendums. A second explanation is that in the first two additions we say “*chayim*,” life, but in the latter two additions we say “*chayim tovim*,” a good life. When we are requesting a “good life,” we ask that aloud. (*Bnei Yissaschar, Tishrei, Maamar Yom Hakiseh* 2:23; and *Sefer Taamei Haminhagim U'mekorei Hadinim, Iyanei Rosh Hashanah* 703.)

7. Avinu Malkeinu: The source of this classic tefillah is found in the Gemara (*Taanis* 25b), which states that when Rabi Eliezer served as *shaliach tzibbur* on a fast day, he recited 24 brachos but was not answered. Rabi Akiva then served as *shaliach tzibbur* after him and said: “Avinu Malkeinu [our Father, our King], we have no king other than You. Avinu Malkeinu, for Your sake, have mercy on us.” And rain immediately fell.

The *Kol Bo* (*Hilchos Rosh Hashanah* 64 and *Seder Tefillah*) explains that when that generation saw that they had been answered through the recitation of Avinu Malkeinu, they added further words of supplication and entreaty to it, and they established it as part of the prayers for the Ten Days of Repentance. Thus, the impact of Rabi Akiva's Avinu Malkeinu was the catalyst for the institution of this powerful tefillah. Although we *paskan* that Avinu Malkeinu may be recited without a minyan, there are those who posit that it should be recited only with a minyan, as the source of this tefillah is Rabi Akiva, who led the tefillah with a minyan. (*Shevus Yaakov* 3:42 and *Likutei Maharich, Shacharis D'Rosh Hashanah*.)

8. Shofar Blowing During the Silent Amidah One of the fundamental differences between Nusach Ashkenaz and Nusach Sefard on Rosh Hashanah is that Nusach Ashkenaz does not blow shofar during the silent Amidah while Nusach Sefard does. Rav Moshe Sternbuch (*Responsa Teshuvos V'hanhagos* 2:275) cites a fascinating letter found in manuscript form in the writing of Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer. Rav Meltzer responds to a question from a shul that had a mix of Sephardim and Ashkenazim and asked what they should do regarding blowing shofar in the silent Amidah.

He writes, “I find the argument of the chassidim stronger than that of the *misnagdim*, even though I am not among the chassidim. This is because the foundation of the practice (to blow shofar in the silent Amidah) is found as early as the Rishonim. Therefore, for the chassidim, who have already become accustomed to this practice, the absence of these shofar blasts deprives them of the mitzvah and the spiritual awakening they experience during prayer. For *misnagdim*, by contrast, it is merely an addition.

“As for the argument that this (blowing shofar in the silent Amidah) causes confusion during tefillah, because nowadays we daven from siddurim, this is not an argument at all. Especially since everyone, even the *misnagdim*, can pause briefly after each of the blessings of Malchuyos, Zichronos, and Shofaros. If they rest for a moment or a few moments, they will not become confused in their prayer; on the contrary, it may give them greater strength and concentration in their davening. Therefore, it seems to me that the Ashkenazim should yield, and the custom should remain as it was originally, until the coming of the Mashiach speedily in our days, when everyone will follow a single custom.”

9. Aleinu: The *Siddur Otzar Tefillos* (*Iyun tefillah* on Aleinu) suggests that although Aleinu is found at the tail end of the daily tefillos, it is one of the most important and prominent tefillos of Rosh Hashanah, found toward the beginning in the Malchuyos section of Amidah. This distinction indicates that Aleinu was first instituted as part of Mussaf for Rosh Hashanah and only later added as a conclusion to the daily tefillos of Shacharis, Minchah, and Maariv. Indeed, in the siddurim of several Rishonim, including Rav Saadia Gaon and Avudraham, Aleinu is only found in the tefillos of the Yamim Noraim and not in the daily davening.

10. Tashlich: The custom of Tashlich, instituted by the Rishonim of Ashkenaz in the mid-14th to the mid-15th centuries, was codified by the Rema and found strong support across the communities of both Ashkenaz and Sepharad (Maharil, *Minhagim, Rosh Hashanah* 9; Rema, *Orach Chayim* 583:2). However, two towering Ashkenazi *gedolim*, the Vilna Gaon and *Aruch Hashulchan*, strongly opposed the tefillah of Tashlich. Interestingly, neither the Gra nor the *Aruch Hashulchan* explain explicitly their reasons opposing this tefillah (*Maaseh Rav* 209, *Tosefos Maaseh Rav* 60; *Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chayim* 583:4). It seems that separate halachic concerns — like carrying outside the eruv where the body of water was situated; feeding the fish, which is prohibited on Yom Tov; or the potential for sin in casual mingling — were among the reasons for opposition to Tashlich.

The *Aruch Hashulchan* does write that many Torah scholars and authorities refrained from the practice “for reasons known to them,” and he ultimately concluded that avoiding the custom altogether “is proper” because of the lack of classical foundation for the minhag. Even with the opposition of the Gra and the *Aruch Hashulchan*, the minhag of Tashlich continued to gain support and became a common custom in Ashkenaz and Sepharad.

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