

GMAR CHATIMAH TOVAH. Today is 10 Tishrei, 5787, Yom Kippur. Corresponding to September 21, 2026

TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 711 Birnbaum Machzor) (p. 452 Artscroll Machzor)
[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED)
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1. KOL NIDRE. Just prior to singing the paragraph of Kol Nidre the Chazzan intones.... ".... we sanction prayer with the transgressors." This does not mean that we in some way imply that the sins of transgressors are automatically forgiven in some fashion with this statement. Only true penitence from any sinner can accomplish that. What is involved is a sense of history. According to KiTov in Sefer Hatoda'ah the statement came about in Spain and elsewhere during the times of the Inquisition. Many Jews were *forced* into accepting Christianity but secretly kept Judaism. As such, they attended a Yom Kippur service in secret and were emotionally embracing the Kol Nidre prayer. It spoke to them in a highly personal fashion because they wanted to nullify the vow of keeping Christianity. Hence the Chazzan wanted to include them in the assembly of prayer at Kol Nidre. When things are added to the text in a historical fashion many times we end up retaining these statements even when they are not applicable. It could be the situation in our day, in the 21st century, when we are intoning the same line but the case is completely different. Nevertheless we understand that many people who do not attend services on a regular basis, and are not consistently dedicated to the observance of Torah and mitzvot, surface and want to join in for the Kol Nidre Yom Kippur experience. Their sins and their penitence should be real and transformative, directing them to a greater sense of Torah observance and embrace of God's mandates in this world. With them we are whole. Prayer itself is compared to the incense offering in the Holy Temple. The necessary fragrances that comprised the incense included one or two that independently did not give off a pleasant aroma, but nevertheless were joined with the others in order to create the Ketoret which represented true, heartfelt prayer. (RED)

2. The Kol Nidre paragraph itself, when read literally, is not spiritually overwhelming, and yet, nevertheless, it is a springboard to the holiest day of the year. Vows are taken orally and are representative of many of the miscues that we perform in speech. When one analyzes all the *Al Cheit* that we recite ten times throughout the Yom Kippur experience, one notices that a great percentage are sins of speech. When Hashem created the human being it says that He breathed life within the human. The Targum and Rashi indicate that the power of speech is one of those things that is extremely important as a part of creation of man, and makes man a unique entity in the world. What we need to do is to use this power that is granted to us for good things. We should be more protective of the things that we say, guard our speech from evil, as it says in Psalms. We are imbued with sanctity, and speech very often is the manner in which we elevate ourselves to a life of Kedushah. The Kol Nidre therefore is a public statement about the use of speech. May we understand the message and embrace a positive conduct of discipline in the use of speech in our lives. (RED)

3. During the davening we recite the Shema; and the *Baruch Shem...* which we recite all year long in an undertone is said out loud. The Midrash tells us that when Moshe ascended

Mount Sinai, he heard the angels say this line of *Baruch Shem...* and brought it down to us. In the Midrash, Rav Ami compared it to the situation if a person stole a piece of jewelry from the king's palace. When he returned home he gave it to his wife and told her not wear it publicly. This seems very strange and is corrected in some way on Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur we are all pure and likened to angels. As angels we are able to say *Baruch Shem* out loud. The origin of the *Baruch Shem* is even mentioned by the Rambam when he discusses the laws of the Shema and tells of a different Midrash. When Yaakov was on his deathbed and all his twelve sons surrounded him for his final blessing to them, they all said to him initially *Shema Yisrael*, listen our Father, *Hashem Elokeinu*, *Hashem Echad*, we recognize God as our God. When Yaakov heard his sons profess faith in Hashem, he was the one who first stated *Baruch Shem*, blessed be God. When we incorporate the Rambam's Midrash with the Rav Ami statement we get a clearer picture of the meaning of *Baruch Shem*, and how we are using it on Yom Kippur to elevate ourselves as angels before Hashem, who performed the will of God without questioning it and without contradiction. (RED)

4. There are six aliyot to the Torah in the morning Torah reading and then three more in the afternoon. The morning's Torah reading is the detailed description of the rituals in the Holy Temple on this spectacular day, the only day of the year when the Kohen Gadol entered into the Holy of Holies. Here we see an exact description of what the Kohen Gadol did, and it is quite remarkable because it is all done secretly. In other words the people do not see the Kohen Gadol when he is in the Holy of Holies, but they know exactly what the Kohen Gadol is doing. This is important that we do not feel that the High Priest is doing something on his own. What he does is known to us and that is a good thing because he is representing us when he does it. The Kohen Gadol would go through all the rituals and confess with total contrition to the degree that the confession itself was like a sacrifice to God. His confession had the power to bring atonement to the entire nation of Israel. Again, we are seeing a remarkable demonstration of the power of speech. I realize that it is not merely a recitation of a formula, but a sincere declaration of remorse for the collective body of Israel. But nevertheless it is the oral declaration that is supposed to penetrate their inner feelings. This went from the religious leader of all of Israel down to every individual. When we experience the davening of Yom Kippur we follow the ritual again in Mussaf. The Chazzan represents the Kohen Gadol as he goes through the *Amitz Ko'ach* in the Mussaf, which gives the detail of the rituals that we read in the morning in the Torah as part of the Mussaf service. So again we are seeing and experience the best we can today without sacrifices, the meaningful idea of confession and atonement. Hopefully we gain a successful Yom Kippur, even with the rendition that we have in our day. (RED)

5. As mentioned above Yom Kippur has six aliyot. Ezra was the one who was instructive in terms of our public Torah reading practices. The weekday Torah reading calls for three men to be called to the Torah. Rosh Chodesh and Chol HaMoed have four people being called up. Regular Yom Tov has five aliyot, Yom Kippur has six, and Shabbat seven. If we would use the number of aliyot as the barometer of sanctity, this would indicate that Shabbat is the holier day in the course of the year. Nevertheless, we herald Yom Kippur as such because of the

other practices and observances of this holy day. Adding to the aliyot is legal but we do so only on Shabbat because on all the other days of Torah reading the custom is not to add aliyot, even though it is legal to do so. I like the fact that our custom is such because we then can analyze and see the prescribed difference between the various days of public Torah reading. (RED)

6. One of the strange oddities of this service is the two identical goats that were brought to the Kohen Gadol. By a lottery one goat was designated to be sacrificed at the Altar in the Holy Temple; the other goat was sent out to experience a cruel death in the desert. This is the source of the expression *scapegoat* and would beg for an interpretation that I will be glad to hear from any of you when you offer it to me privately. I find the twin goat ritual to be a perfect reflection of the Torah reading for Rosh HaShanah. On the first day of Rosh HaShanah we read of the expulsion of Yishmael into the desert, very much the performance of the scapegoat ritual. On the second day of Rosh HaShanah we read of the (aborted) sacrifice of Yitzchak, which would be the other goat ritual of being offered on the Altar of the Holy Temple. What we are seeing is a direct link between the Torah readings of Rosh HaShanah to that of Yom Kippur. My only problem with this interpretation, which is an original one, is the fact that I did not find it anywhere else. This worries me. It seems to be a beautiful interpretation linking the Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur public readings, and yet the fact that no-one mentions it raises the doubts in my mind of its veracity. (RED)

7. YIKZOR. Looking in the Shulchan Aruch the Rama mentions the recitation of Yizkor as an Ashkenazic custom, and he only mentions it for Yom Kippur. The Yizkor custom was instituted just for Yom Kippur because the deceased also require atonement, just as the living people do. What we do is pray, and we pledge charitable gifts in Yizkor. The concept is that we perform a mitzvah and share the benefits, the reward of the mitzvah, with the deceased. Our loved ones who have passed away are not in the *world of mitzvahs* as we are, hence they cannot improve their status in the world to come without our assistance. This is the underpinning of the custom that we have when we greet someone who is observing a *yahrzeit* by saying to them that the Neshama, the soul of the deceased, should have an aliyah, to have ascension in the world in which they are living now. Hence a reminder to all who are saying Yizkor today: It is important that we redeem and pay the pledges to Tzedakah that we are reciting during the rendition of Yizkor.

8. The Haftorah for Minchah is the four chapters that comprise the Book of Yonah. It is a unique story. Two of the paragraphs are strictly narrative. Two are more spiritual, giving us meaning to the events of the narrative. The important lesson of this story is that one cannot run from Hashem. Yonah attempts to avoid the mission that Hashem has sent him on to Nineveh to proclaim that the inhabitants of Nineveh should repent to Hashem and avoid annihilation. The incident of being swallowed by the large fish is a matter of much imagination on all parts, but the ultimate message is that one cannot run from Hashem. The second message that I find to be most important is one of inspiring us to do Teshuvah. The non-Jewish people of Nineveh rallied immediately, following their king, in a massive and forceful display of penitence in order to avoid the evil

decree. This should be an inspiration to all of us, the chosen people, to be inspired today and dedicate ourselves to a greater sense of Teshuvah and fulfillment of God's decrees.

QUESTIONS FOR YOM KIPPUR 5787

I. THE HOLIDAY

1. Why was the 10th of Tishrei chosen as the Day of Atonement?
2. What are the 5 prohibitions of Yom Kippur?
3. Does a sick man, who is allowed to eat on Yom Kippur, make Kiddush?
4. What are the Amidah services recited on Yom Kippur?
5. Why do Ashkenazim wear a Kittel on Yom Kippur?
6. Why do we stand for Neilah?
7. Why do we blow Shofar at the end of Yom Kippur?

II. THE TORAH READING

8. What light was in the Holy of Holies?
9. What did the Kohen Gadol bring with him into the Holy of Holies?
10. What happened to the two he-goats on Yom Kippur?
11. What important oral declaration did the Kohen Gadol make during the rituals of the day?

II. RELATIONSHIPS

- a) Aharon - Elazar
- b) Aharon - Pinchas
- c) Aharon - Chur

ANSWERS FOR YOM KIPPUR 5787

1. It was the day when Moshe came down from Mt. Sinai with the Second Tablets and when Hashem officially forgave Bnei Yisrael for the sin of the Golden Calf.
2. Eating and Drinking, Washing and Bathing, Anointing with oil, Wearing Leather Shoes, and Having Marital Relations.
3. He does not recite Kiddush, but does say Ya'aleh V'Yavo if he bensch.
4. Ma'ariv, Shacharit, Mussaf, Minchah, and Neilah.
5. The Kittel symbolizes purity, and reminds us of our mortality.
6. Standing during Neilah brings a deep sense of reverence as the Gates of Heaven close.
7. The Shofar blast at the end marks the end of Yom Kippur, and is a reminder of the Shofar blast of the year of Yovel.
8. There was no light in the Holy of Holies. It was dark unless the Almighty provided some light.
9. He brought an incense offering.
10. One goat was sent to his death in the desert. The other goat was offered as a sacrifice in the Temple.
11. He made a proper and sincere confession of sins for all.

- a) Father Aharon
- b) Grandfather Aharon
- c) Uncle Aharon

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 of her mother, Sylvia Sabinson z"l