

Must-Know Yom Kippur Words and Phrases

Al Chet (also Al Het)— Pronounced ahl-CHAIT. Literally “for the sin.” This is the name of [a prayer](#) recited multiple times during the Yom Kippur service.

Avinu Malkeinu — Pronounced ah-VEE-new mahl-KAY-new. Literally “Our Father, Our King,” this prayer is recited after the [Amidah](#) (the main prayer, said while standing) and before the Torah service. It is recited throughout the [Ten Days of Repentance](#), from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur.

Gmar Hatimah Tovah — Pronounced guh-MAHR khah-tee-MAH toe-VAH. Literally “A good signing/sealing.” This is a traditional greeting during Yom Kippur, referring to the belief that on Rosh Hashanah our fates are written, or inscribed, [in the Book of Life](#), and on Yom Kippur we are sealed in it.

Kittel — Pronounced KITT-uhl. A Yiddish word for robe or coat. Here it refers to a white robe that men and some women wear during Yom Kippur services. White represents the purity we hope to achieve through our prayers.

Kol Nidrei — Pronounced KOHL NIH-dray. Literally “all vows,” this is the name for the prayer recited at the outset of Yom Kippur.

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Mahzor (also machzor) — Pronounced MAHKH-zohr. Literally “cycle,” the mahzor is the special prayer book for the High Holidays, containing all the High Holiday liturgy. (The prayer book used during the rest of the year is called a [siddur](#), which literally means “order.”)

Neilah — Pronounced nuh-EE-lah. Literally “locking,” this is the name for the final service on Yom Kippur, during which we make a final plea to God to accept our prayers and seal us in the book of life for the year to come.

Teshuvah — Pronounced tuh-SHOO-vah. Literally “return,” this word is often translated as “repentance,” one of the most significant themes and spiritual components of the High Holidays.

Tzom Kal — Pronounced tzome kahl. Literally means “easy fast.” The English equivalent, “Have an easy fast,” is also not uncommon.

Viddui — Pronounced VEE-doy. Literally “confession,” this is a prayer recited just before Yom Kippur and repeated many times during the holiday. During the Viddui, we gently beat ourselves on the chest for each transgression listed. This action serves as a symbolic punishment for our hearts, which are ultimately responsible for leading us to sins of greed, lust and anger.

Yamim Noraim — Pronounced yah-MEEM noe-rah-EEM. Literally “Days of Awe,” this term refers to the 10 days from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur.

Yizkor — Pronounced YIZZ-kohr. Literally “May God remember,” Yizkor is a prayer service in memory of the dead, which is held on Yom Kippur and on the last day of each of the three festivals, Passover, Shavuot, and Shemini Atzeret.

Yom Tov — Pronounced YOHM tohv. Literally “good day,” this is a generic term used to refer to major Jewish holidays.