



MISHKAN HANEFESH:
TEN ESSENTIAL THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE
NEW *MACHZOR*

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The creation of a new prayerbook for the Days of Awe presents a challenge as well as an opportunity. The opportunity is great worship and transformed worshippers. The challenge is how to use the book in all its complexity without it being too complicated. To help the new adopter of the *machzor*, here are some important things to know:

- 1) **Multiple Options and a Variety of Style:** The book continues *Mishkan T'filah's* approach of what is sometimes known as “integrated theology.” This means that the majority of the book features the “two-page” spread design wherein the right side reflects a more faithful rendering of the standard prayers, and the left side a more creative theological approach. Some sections of the service (or in the case of *Yizkor* or *Avodah*, the entire service) are linear and have no two-page spreads.
- 2) **Translations:** The right side translations are “faithful” but not literal, recognizing there is no way to literally render a word from Hebrew into English. The best one can do is a translation that reflects both a sense of the Hebrew and the nuance of English. Since liturgical language is poetic language based heavily on metaphor, this kind of approach is far more effective than a straight, literal translation would be. Here is more on the [translation approach](#).
- 3) **Preparation:** The *machzor* is not created to be used “as is.” In other words, like *Mishkan T'filah*, the worship leader(s) should plan on preparing a particular set of choices concerning the two-page spread as well as other features, described below. It should also be understood that no prayerbook can ever be more than a sacred tool in the facilitation of a worship experience, even as no textbook guarantees a wonderful lesson. Worship leaders must make judicious choices.

- 4) **Design:** The readings on the left side pages are often marked by a gray screen, or “wash.” These pages are alternative readings or “countertexts,” that is, texts that offer a different perspective on the text or even argue with it, and provide additional choices of material to consider. There are also study or meditation pages, which are blue pages with a black border. These are generally meant to be read individually.
- 5) **The Individual Experience:** Worshipers are encouraged to explore *Mishkan HaNefesh* on their own. Unlike prayerbooks from earlier eras of Jewish history, it is not assumed that everyone always will be on the same page of *Mishkan HaNefesh* at the same time. The *machzor* was created with the underlying principle that worshipers might find their own way through it. They could find themselves interested in a particular commentary, intrigued by a particular study text, or drawn to a particular meditation.
- 6) **Chatimot:** In some places, *Mishkan HaNefesh* retains the practice in *Mishkan T’filah* of allowing the signature Hebrew blessing (*chatimah*) at the end of the page be a sign to turn the page, hence allowing for fewer page announcements from the bimah. Some left side pages contain alternative or creative *chatimot*.
- 7) **Torah Readings:** *Mishkan HaNefesh* offers additional Torah readings for Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, explained [here](#).
- 8) **Order of Yom Kippur Afternoon Services:** The Yom Kippur afternoon services, encompassing *Avodah*, *Yizkor*, and *Minchah*, need not be prayed in the order found in *Mishkan HaNefesh*; indeed many congregations may choose to employ only certain elements in any given year. Worship leaders may also choose to supplement a service with a teaching or panel discussion.
- 9) **Innovations:** *Mishkan HaNefesh* contains several significant innovations:

- a. The three sections of the shofar service for Rosh HaShanah morning are found in different parts of the service. This helps the worshiper focus more time and energy on each theme of the shofar service.
 - b. As mentioned above, there are additional [Torah reading options](#).
 - c. The Yom Kippur volume contains a newly conceived *Avodah* service, based on fifteen steps of ascent and holiness.
 - d. The Yom Kippur volume offers a *Minchah* service with a special theme of Jewish ethical/spiritual values (*midot*).
 - e. The *Yizkor* service reflects a theme of seven lights of mourning and remembrance.
 - f. The *N'ilah* service reflects a general theme of God's outstretched hand (*Atah notein yad*).
- 10) **Responsive Readings:** Responsive readings are not indicated with italics as in the style of Reform prayerbooks, but the worship leader is invited to suggest certain readings be read responsively, if so wished. Some readings have indented paragraphs that may be of help for those wishing to ask the congregation to read responsively.