

# Ashamnu

A helpful, practical *vidui* guide to enrich your Yom Kippur

The epicenter of Yom Kippur is the *vidui*, the confession. While *vidui* is not recited even once on Rosh Hashanah, the full version of *vidui* is recited nine times over the course of the Yom Kippur services: after the Mincha Amidah just before Yom Kippur, twice during each of the following services – Ma'ariv of Yom Kippur night, and Shacharit, Mussaf and Mincha of Yom Kippur day – once at the end of the silent Amidah, and once during the *chazzan's* repetition. There is an additional shorter version of the *vidui* – just the *Ashamnu, Bagadnu...* recited in the silent Amidah of Neilah.

The *vidui* includes the *Ashamnu*, an alphabetical acrostic of different sins we have committed. It is said in the first-person plural, because while each individual may not have committed these specific sins, as a community we surely have, and our fates are intertwined on this day.

The prescribed list of *Ashamnu* can seem unfamiliar or remote. Below is a translation<sup>1</sup> and elucidation<sup>2</sup> that may be helpful to you in your prayers and help make your Yom Kippur more meaningful.

1 Based on the Koren Yom Kippur Mahzor. 2 Based on Rabbi Daniel Fine's "A Relatable Translation of the Viduy Confession."

**אֲשַׁמְנִי** **ASHAMNU** – *We have been guilty.* ◊ We have exposed ourselves to things that ruin our sensitivities to spiritual growth. ◊ We struggle to find time for the people and things that matter most in life, yet we freely waste time on meaningless things.

**בִּגְדָנוּ** **BAGADNU** – *We have acted treacherously.* ◊ We fail to notice the good in others. Instead, we reflect our inner frustrations on them. ◊ We do not listen to people properly. Instead, we impose our interpretations of what the other person means.

**גַּזְלָנוּ** **GAZALNU** – *We have robbed.* ◊ We make organizational decisions based on our own personal conveniences. ◊ We brush off others' deceitful actions as funny instead of confronting them.

**דִּבְרָנוּ דוֹפֵי** **DIBARNU DOFI** – *We have spoken slander.* ◊ We say things about people we would never say to their faces. ◊ Our children hear 'no' or words of negativity and criticism from us far more than they hear 'yes' or words of encouragement and praise.

**הֵעֵוִינוּ** **HE'EVINU** – *We have acted perversely.* ◊ We have prioritized short-term wants and current values over Divine wisdom and *mitzvot*. ◊ We think and talk about ourselves far too much. ◊ We encourage others to spend time doing meaningless things.

**וְהִרְשָׁנוּ** **VE'HIRSHANU** – *We have acted wickedly.* ◊ We prefer not to get involved rather than to stand up for what is right. ◊ Do we emit positive energy and optimism or negative energy and pessimism?

**זָדָנוּ** **ZADNU** – *We have acted presumptuously.* ◊ We begin projects that are exciting at first, but we do not have the commitment to complete them – then we rationalize and justify abandoning them. ◊ We have shied away from making difficult and courageous moral decisions by claiming there are grey areas.

**חָמָסְנוּ** **CHAMASNU** – *We have been violent.* ◊ We have used other people for our projects or favors without properly appreciating them or paying them back. ◊ We make more of an effort with certain people because of

their social status. ♦ We point out to others what we feel they are incapable of achieving, without building them up to achieve in areas in which they can excel.

**טופלנו שיקר TAFALNU SHEKER** – We have exaggerated, misrepresented or lied about events. ♦ We have believed others' distorted views of the world. ♦ We have accepted rumors or gossip too quickly and passed them on to others. ♦ We have judged people too quickly without trying to understand them.

**יעצנו רע YA'ATZNU RA** – We have given bad advice. ♦ We have been too quick to give advice without thinking it through properly. ♦ We do not offer impartial advice, especially when we have a conflict of interest. ♦ We have put others in a position where they cannot say 'no' to our requests.

**כיזבנו KIZAVNU** – We have deceived. ♦ We have promised things just to appease others. ♦ We have used words that are misleading. ♦ We have followed the crowd, irrespective of whether what they are doing is right for us.

**לצנו LATZNU** – We have scorned. ♦ We have made fun of meaningful things in order to shy away from them. ♦ We have thoughtlessly put others down. ♦ We have tolerated a society in which trampling over others is the way to get ahead.

**מרדנו MARADNU** – We have rebelled. ♦ We have viewed *mitzvot* as cultural feel-good activities instead of Divine commands to get close to G-d. ♦ We have been flippant with our relationship with G-d.

**ניאצנו NIATZNU** – We have provoked. ♦ We have devoted lots of time to our bodies but not enough to our souls. ♦ We have not taken up opportunities to study Torah.

**סררנו SARARNU** – We have turned away. ♦ We have tried to wriggle out of responsibilities in life. ♦ We have been cliquey and kept to our own social circle instead of branching out and reaching out to others.

**עווינו AVINU** – We have committed iniquity. ♦ We assume that our way of thinking is right. ♦ We do not disassociate ourselves with people who post, discuss or share vulgar things.

**פשענו PASHANU** – We have transgressed. ♦ We have cherry-picked bits of Judaism, we have half-observed parts of Judaism we fancy. ♦ We do not think long enough about our values.

**צררנו TZARARNU** – We have persecuted. ♦ We don't feel each other's pain enough, preferring to focus on our own lives. ♦ We have not spent enough time pondering the repercussions of decisions we make and their knock-on effects on others.

**קישינו עורף KISHINU OREF** – We have been obstinate. ♦ We have seen daily life as a series of coincidences instead of seeing G-d's hand. ♦ We remain in our comfort zone, deflecting attempts to grow beyond.

**רשענו RASHANU** – We have acted wickedly. ♦ We do not see ourselves as having a mission to spread goodness in the world. ♦ We have brushed off our mistakes instead of learning from them.

**שׁיחתנו SHICHATNU** – We have corrupted. ♦ We have been arrogant at times. ♦ We have let our idealism slip away. ♦ We have not self-analyzed.

**תיעבנו TIAVNU** – We have acted abominably. ♦ We got angry when things didn't go our way. ♦ We have not realized what impacts our characters.

**תעינו TAINU** – We have strayed. ♦ We lost sight of our goals and we do not accept when we are criticized. ♦ We limit religion to particular days and places.

**תעתענו TITANU** – We have led others astray. ♦ We do not call out to G-d for spiritual help. ♦ We do not feel lacking when we ignore our relationship with G-d.