

THE YESHIVA PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM PRESENTS:
THE ROADMAP TO PRAYER PROJECT

The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson 44

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44

Selichos: Getting Close to Hashem Again

POSTSCRIPT: The General Theme of Selichos

After examining the *Selichos* that we recite each year starting in the month of *Elul*, it appears that there are basically two approaches to *Selichos*. One is a major component of the Sephardic tradition and another is a major component of the Ashkenazic tradition. Although the formats of these two basic versions follow a similar framework, there is a fine line that sets the two apart, which appears to have developed over the extended period of time the Jewish nation has been in exile and the particular experiences that two groups experienced.

We already have seen that the *Selichos* we say today is quite different from which was said a thousand years ago. What originally started out as selections of verses from *Tanach* (Scriptures) was eventually almost completely replaced with *Piyutim* (prayers in rhymes).

They are the selection of *Piyutim* that are recited in the middle section of the *Selichot/Selichos*. However, the opening sections and the closing sections of the *Selichos* prayers have not changed much from what the *Ge'onim* used to say. Nonetheless, it is evident that each community had the spirit of their *Selichos* fashioned according to the period of history and the events that occurred then or in its preceding history. For this reason, the Sephardic and Ashkenazic versions of *Selichos* bear a stark difference.

The Sephardic and Ashkenazic approaches to Selichos

Setting the Tone for the Season

It would be fair to say that in general, the mood of the Sephardic *Selichot* resembles the prayers of *Rosh Hashanah* that focus on *Hashem's* greatness and the tremendous opportunity for us to benefit from His closeness to us at this time. On the other

hand, the Ashkenazic version focuses more on our shortcomings *Vis a Vis* our woeful situation in Exile.

If we accept this premise, we will understand the many differences between the two principle ways of reciting *Selichot/Selichos*. They are as follows:

Sephardim Correspond to the 40 Days Moshe was on Sinai

Sephardim begin reciting *Selichot* from the beginning of the month of *Elul* until *Yom Kippur*, corresponding to the final set of 40 days that *Moshe Rabbeinu* spent atop Har Sinai, a the time *Hashem* showed His favor to the Jewish Nation by forgiving their sins and presenting them with a second set of *Luchos*. These days are considered to be Days of Divine Mercy and Acceptance (*Yemei Rachamim Ve'Ratzone*), setting the tone for the Jewish Nation to take advantage of this special time of year to get close to *Hashem* by repenting for any sins that were committed over the course of the year and by strengthening their commitment to *Hashem* and His Torah.

Resembling Rosh Hashana

For this reason the prayers are recited sitting down and in song that reminisces the prayers of *Rosh Hashanah* where the focus is on *Hashem* as He relates to us as our King. The *Selichot* are repeated every day and they do not include most of the *Piyutim* that make up the bulk of the Ashkenazic version which consist of *Piyutim* from the famous *Paytanim* (composers of prayers in poem).

Ashkenazim Correspond Selichos to Aseres Yemei Teshuvah and Fasting

On the other hand, Ashkenazic *Selichos* are recited mainly during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* and a little before *Rosh Hashanah* to complete the 10 days of fasting that are part of the custom of *Selichos* days.

Resembling Yom Kippur

The Ashkenazic *Selichos* are said standing and not in song. The *Piyutim* themselves are a collection of prayers that have been composed over generations that reflect the difficult times that Jews faced in European countries and some other communities. The main focus of each day's *Selichos* is about Jewish suffering at the hands of oppressing nations and our sins that brought these situations about. If we need a comparison, it is more like the mood of *Yom Kippur* that focuses more on our sins than on *Hashem's* reign as our King. In a sense it is a lot like the *Kinnos*

¹ The two Tablets containing the 10 Commandments

(Lamentations) that we recite on *Tisha B'Av* which talk about oppression, destruction and sin. It would be an anomaly to recite these prayers sitting down and in song like the *Selichot* of Sephardim. However, even though most of present day Ashkenazic *Selichos* begin closer to *Rosh Hashanah* and not from the beginning of *Elul*, there were those who started from the beginning of *Elul* as well. Indeed they quote² that the 40 day period from *Rosh Chodesh Elul* until *Yom Kippur* correspond to the days that *Moshe Rabbeinu* spent atop *Har Sinai* which were basically *Yemei Rachamim* (Days of Divine Mercy); still it is the attribute of strict justice that this custom is associated with, because of the upcoming *Rosh Hashanah* day of judgment. This theme is also mentioned in *Tanna D'bei Eliyahu Zuta* that when *Moshe Rabbeinu* went up in the final 40 days before *Yom Kippur*, the *Bnei Yisrael* fasted each day until nighttime and on the last day they fasted from evening to evening which corresponds with the day of *Yom Kippur*.

A SELICHA COMMON TO BOTH VERSIONS

Im Afeis Rova Hakein

Im Afeis Rova Hakein - Even if it has disappeared; the one bird-nest offering

This *Selicha* is one of the standard pieces used in the daily Sephardic *Selichot* while it is the centerpiece *Selicha* in the Ashkenazic version for *Tzom Gedaliah*³, the first of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*⁴ *Selichos*.

This *Selicha* is rich in literary style, meaning and emotion. On the surface, it speaks of *Avraham Avinu* taking his one and only beloved son *Yitzchok*, to be slaughtered atop *Har HaMoriah*, the present day location of the *Beis Hamikdash*. This unique *Akeida* prayer was composed by *Rav Ephraim bar Rav Yitzchok Ashkenazi*. It describes the tale how father and son walked together to fulfill the will of their Creator, where *Yitzchok* was to be slaughtered as a *Korban* (Offering) on an altar for *Hashem's* honor.

² *Sefer Kolbo Simon 65; Menoras Hamaor Perek 2, Tefillas Tikkun Ha'ashmores*

³ *Tzom Gedaliah* - The day after *Rosh Hashana* is a universal fast-day

⁴ The Days of Repentance starting with the first day of *Rosh Hashana* and concluding with *Yom Kippur* which falls out on the Tenth Day of the Jewish month of *Tishrei*

Standing Firm for one's Belief

The verses of this *Piyut* describe how this phenomenon was happening again in the community of Regensburg, where the Crusaders were forcing the Jews to convert to their religion. Rather than do this, the community let themselves be killed and in certain instances, they even took the lives of their own children lest they be forcibly torn away from them and brought up as non-Jews. In a very poignant writing style, the author cries out to G-d to see the present-day *Akeida* that were being performed by the members of this community. This prayer is very rich in its textual style as it carries many levels of interpretation and meaning that elicit *Hashem's* mercy upon His downtrodden nation. No wonder that this piece is central both in the Sephardic and Ashkenazic *Selichot/Selichos*. We will bring a few sample verses from this *Selicha* to illustrate the point.

Im Afeis Rova Hakein -

E ven if it has disappeared, the one bird-nest offering

E ven if it has disappeared, the one bird-nest offering;
if the tent where He dwelled has been emptied, let us not despair -
for it is for this that "We have an ancient father".

Give him special consideration and let us recall his righteousness before
You;
when You said to him "Please take your dear son"
and squeeze his blood against the wall.

He hurried to the lad to consecrate him, though "His soul was bound to his
soul";
he encircled him with wood and fire as his G-dly crown upon his head.

T he singular one was agile as a deer;
he responded and said: "Father, here we have brought the fire and the wood"
but we have no gift to offer.

... He bound his hands and his feet and directed his sword over him;
he was diligent to place him upon the wood
and the fire upon the altar was ignited.

He willingly stretched out his neck, and his father approached him to
slaughter him for the sake of his Master;
and behold "Hashem stood over him".

... Those who call to You come to bow in prayer,
in time of distress hasten to recall the Binding;
and may You recall Your sheep in mercy,
“The focus of Your sheep is toward the Binding”.

Awaken Your might to rouse those who sleep deeply;
for Your sake redeem the stunned, terrified ones,
to ask for Your pardon we arise early today.

Commemorating the Akeida of Yitzchok – The Binding of Isaac
In an article in the journal *Sefer Rafael*, Rabbi Nachman Levine⁶ remarks that the author *Rav Ephraim ben Yitzchok ben Avraham* wrote this as a commemoration of *Akeidas Yitzchok* (the Binding of Isaac⁷) at a time in history when the people of his own city Regensburg, Germany; experienced a similar test at the hands of the Crusaders⁸. The *Piyut* is written in rhymes with intimations from Medrashic⁹ sources and Torah verses. The stanzas speak of the Torah episode of *Akeidas Yitzchok* (the Binding of Isaac) while at the same time alluding to the plight of the people in Regensburg and their personal sacrifice to the Holy One Blessed Be He. In the opening stanza the *Paytan* (composer of prayers in rhyme) states that although we cannot even offer the smallest possible sacrifice, the bird-nest offering, since the *Beis Hamikdash* is in ruins; we can still bring ourselves as personal sacrifices in their stead.

Offering a Sacrifice:

The term *Rova Hakein* refers to the small price of a *Rova*¹⁰ that it cost to purchase a nest of two birds for an offering which was the least one can spend for an animal offering. Allegorically, *Rova Hakein* can be translated to mean to rest upon the nest¹¹. The verse would then be referring to the *Shechina - Divine Presence that no longer rests upon the nest* (the *Beis Hamikdash* is referred to as the nest). “We have an ancient

⁵ Mossad Rav Kook, Jerusalem 5756

⁶ Native of Oak Park Michigan, Educator and a frequent contributor to many Torah journals

⁷ The story of the *Akeidah*

⁸ In the year 1137 CE and again in 1146-7 CE

⁹ Homiletical writings of the Sages

¹⁰ *Rova* “a quarter” *Shekel* coin, the price of a nesting pair of birds. Two pairs are purchased for *Rivasayim* (two *Rovas*) *Kerisos* 8a

¹¹ This translation is used in the *Orot* Sephardic *Selichot* page 101

father” can be understood as a reference to *Avraham Avinu* (the Patriarch Abraham) who willingly took his son *Yitzchok* (Isaac) to the *Akeida* (Binding) to be slaughtered as a sacrifice offering to G-d.

An Ancient Father:

The terminology of “*We have an ancient father*” is taken from a verse in the Torah. There it was stated by *Yehudah* (Judah) in reference to *Yaakov Avinu* (the Patriarch Jacob). He used this terminology when pleading with *Yosef* (Joseph) their brother the Egyptian viceroy, not to imprison their youngest brother *Benyamin* (Benjamin). *Yehudah* (Judah) argued that the imprisonment of *Benyamin* (Benjamin) would adversely affect their “*Old father*” who *loves him*¹² so much and *his soul is bound up with his soul*¹³.

These very same words are used here in the third stanza of this *Selicha*, alluding to a very close tie between father and son where there seems to be a danger although in the end it turns out otherwise, similar to the *Akeida* (Binding) where in the end *Yitzchok* (Isaac) was not slaughtered.

Exhibiting Great Inner Strength

Indeed, this comparison shows *Avraham Avinu's* great inner strength to carry out *Hashem's* will despite the strong emotional tie that he had with his son *Yitzchok*; his one and only son born to him at a late age just as *Yaakov* was so bound up in his love for his son *Benyamin*, the only son he had left¹⁴ from his beloved wife *Rachelle* and who was also born to him at a late age (*Yeled Zekunim*¹⁵ - a child of (his) old age).

At the same time, *Av Zakein* at this point of the *Piyut* can also be alluding to G-d, that we refer to as *Avinu She'bashamayim* (our Father in Heaven) who is the sole power we can rely upon to save us from troubles. *Al Mi Yesh Lanu Lehisha'ein, Al Avinu She'bashamayim*¹⁶ (Who is there to rely on? Only our Father in Heaven).

¹² *Bereishis* 44:20

¹³ *Ibid.* 44:30

¹⁴ For at that point, *Yaakov Avinu* was under the impression that *Yosef* had been killed by a wild animal (*Bereishis* 37:33)

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 44:20

¹⁶ *Sotah Daf* 49b

It is possible that all these interpretations are included in the meaning of the verse *Av Zakein* - Ancient Father. So too, the community of Regensburg was also praying to *Hashem* at a time that we feel helpless that even when we have nothing, no *Beis Hamikdash*, not even the meager bird-offering *Korban*, we still have our Father in Heaven that we can rely on.

Chronicles of the Crusades

In the year 1095 the Church, aroused by the Muslim encroachments in Palestine, proclaimed a crusade against the Saracens to recover Jerusalem. The following year, in the spring of 1096, bands of zealous crusaders led by monks and soldiers set out for the Holy Land. Many of the crusaders were runaway serfs, adventurers, and criminals. As they passed through Germany on their way to Jerusalem this motley crew killed thousands of "infidel" Jews in the larger cities such as Speyer, Worms, Mayence (Mainz), and Cologne.

In May, 1096 a band of crusaders led by Emicho, a German noble, forced its way into the city of Mayence and finally into the archiepiscopal palace where the Jews had taken refuge. The slaughter and suicide of the Jews in this palace with all the attendant horror and hysteria are graphically described in the following two selections taken from a Hebrew historical account by Solomon bar Samson.

I. Martyrdom and Massacre in Mayence (Mainz)

It was on the third of Sivan... at noon (Tuesday, May 27, 1096 CE), that Emicho the wicked, the enemy of the Jews, came with his whole army against the city gate, and the citizens opened it up for him. Emicho a German noble led a band of plundering German and French crusaders. Then the enemies of Hashem said to each other: "Look! They have opened up the gate for us. Now let us seek revenge".

The children of the holy covenant who were there, martyrs who feared the Most High, although they saw the great multitude, an army numerous as the sand on the shore of the sea, still clung to their Creator. Then young and old donned their armor and girded on their weapons and at their head was Rabbi Kalonymus ben Meshullam, the chief Rabbi of the community. Yet because of the many troubles and the fasts which they had observed they had no strength to stand up against the enemy. (They had fasted to avert the impending evils). Then

gangs and bands came sweeping through like a flood until Mayence was filled from end to end.

The foe Emicho proclaimed in the hearing of the community that the enemy be driven from the city and be put to flight. Panic was great in the town. Each Jew in the inner court of the bishop girded on his weapons, and all moved towards the palace gate to fight the crusaders and the citizens. They fought each other up to the very gate, but the sins of the Jews brought it about that the enemy overcame them and took the gate.

The hand of Hashem was heavy against His people. All the Gentiles were gathered together against the Jews in the courtyard to blot out their name, and the strength of our people weakened when they saw the wicked Edomites overpowering them. The bishop's men, who had promised to help them, were the very first to flee, thus delivering the Jews into the hands of the enemy. They were indeed a poor support; even the bishop himself fled from his church for it was thought to kill him also because he had spoken good things of the Jews.... (Archbishop Ruthard had been paid to remain and defend the Jews. He was later accused of having received some of the plunder taken from them.)

When the children of the covenant saw that the Heavenly decree of death had been issued and that the enemy had conquered them and had entered the courtyard, then all of them—old men and young, virgins and children, servants and maids—cried out together to their Father in heaven and, weeping for themselves and for their lives, accepted as just the sentence of G-d. One to another they said: "Let us be strong and let us bear the yoke of the holy religion, for only in this world can the enemy kill us - and the easiest of the four deaths is by the sword. But we, our souls in paradise, shall continue to live eternally, in the great shining reflection (of the Divine glory)."¹⁷

With a whole heart and with a willing soul they then spoke: "After all it is not right to criticize the acts of G-d - blessed be He and blessed be His Name - who has given to us His Torah and a command to put ourselves to death, to kill ourselves for the unity of His holy name. Happy are we

¹⁷ In Jewish law the four death penalties were: stoning, burning by pouring molten lead down the throat, slitting the throat and strangulation. See Sanhedrin 52b that the most lenient of the four is slitting the throat.

if we do His will. Happy is anyone who is killed or slaughtered, who dies for the unity of His name so that he is ready to enter the World to Come, to dwell in the heavenly camp with the righteous-with Rabbi Akiva and his companions, the pillars of the universe, who were killed for His names sake. (The Romans martyred Akiva during the Bar Kochva revolt, about 135 CE). Not only this; but he exchanges the world of darkness for the world of light, the world of trouble for the world of joy, and the world that passes away for the world that lasts for all eternity." Then all of them, every man, cried out with a loud voice: "Now we must delay no longer for the enemy is already upon us. Let us hasten and offer ourselves as a sacrifice to Hashem. Let him who has a knife examine it that it not be nicked, and let him come and slaughter us for the sanctification of the Only One, the Everlasting and then let him cut his own throat or plunge the knife into his own body." (A nick in the slaughterer's knife would make it ritually unfit.)

As soon as the enemy came into the courtyard they found some of the very pious there with our brilliant master, Isaac ben Moses. He stretched out his neck, and his head they cut off first. The others, wrapped by their fringed prayer garments, sat by themselves in the courtyard, eager to do the will of their Creator. They did not care to flee into the chamber to save themselves for this temporal life, but out of love they received upon themselves the sentence of G-d. The enemy showered stones and arrows upon them, but they did not care to flee, and (Esther 9:5) "with the stroke of the sword, and with slaughter, and destruction" the foe killed all of those whom they found there. When those in the chambers saw the deed of these righteous ones, how the enemy had already come upon them, they then cried out, all of them: "There is nothing better than for us to offer our lives as a sacrifice." (The outnumbered Jews had no chance to win: Emicho is reported to have had about 12,000 men).

The women there girded their loins with strength and slew their sons and their daughters and then themselves. Many men, too, plucked up courage and killed their wives, their sons, their infants. The tender and delicate mother slaughtered the babe she had played with, all of them; men and women arose and slaughtered one another. The maidens and the young brides and grooms looked out of the windows and in a loud voice cried: "Look and see, O our G-d, what we do for the sanctification of Thy great name in order not to exchange you for a hanged and crucified one...."

Thus were the precious children of Zion, the Jews of Mayence, tried with ten trials like Abraham, our father, and like Chanania, Mishael, and Azariah (who were thrown into a fiery furnace, Daniel 3:21). They tied their sons as Abraham tied Isaac his son, and they received upon themselves with a willing soul the yoke of the fear of G-d, the King of the Kings of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, rather than deny and exchange the religion of our King (Yeshaya 14: 19) “an abhorred offshoot” they stretched out their necks to the slaughter and delivered their pure souls to their Father in heaven. Righteous and pious women bared their throats to each other, offering to be sacrificed for the unity of the Name. A father turning to his son or brother, a brother to his sister, a woman to her son or daughter neighbor to a neighbor or a friend, a groom to a bride, would kill and would be killed, and blood touched blood. The blood of the men mingled with their wives’; the blood of the fathers with their children’s; the blood of brothers with their sister’s; the blood of the teachers with their disciples’; the blood of the grooms with their bride’s; the blood of the leaders with the cantor’s; the blood of the judges with their scribe’s; and the blood of infants and sucklings with their mother’s. For the unity of the honored and awe-inspiring Name were they killed and slaughtered.

The ears of him who hears these things will tingle, for whoever heard anything like this? Inquire now and look about, was there ever such an abundant sacrifice as this since the days of the primeval Adam? Were there ever eleven hundred offerings on one day, each one of them like the sacrifice of Isaac, the son of Abraham?

For the sake of Isaac who was ready to be sacrificed on Mount Moriah, the world shook, as it is said (Isaiah 33:7): “Behold their valiant ones cried out outside; (the angels of peace weep bitterly)” and (Jeremiah 4.28) “the heavens grow dark.” Yet see what these martyrs did! Why did the heavens not grow dark and the stars not withdraw their brightness? Why did not the moon and the sun grow dark in their heavens when on one day, on the third of Sivan, on a Tuesday eleven hundred souls were killed and slaughtered, among them many infants and sucklings who had not transgressed nor sinned, many poor, innocent souls?

Will Thou, despite this, still restrain Thyself, O Lord? For thy sake it was that these numberless souls were killed. Avenge quickly the blood of Thy servants which was spilt in our days and in our sight. Amen. (Chronicles of Solomon bar Samson)

II. Rachele and Her Children

Now I shall recount and tell of the most unusual deeds that were done on that day (May 27, 1096) by these righteous ones.... Who has ever seen anything like this? Who has ever heard of a deed like that which was performed by this righteous and pious woman, the young Rachele, the daughter of Rabbi Isaac ben Asher, the wife of Rabbi Judah? For she said to her friends: "I have four children. Do not spare even them, lest the Enemy come, take them alive, and bring them up in their falsely. Through them, too, sanctify the name of the Holy G-d."

So one of her companions came and picked up a knife to slaughter her son. But when the mother of the children saw the knife, she let out a loud and bitter lament and she beat her face and breast, crying: "Where are Thy mercies, O G-d?" In the bitterness of her soul she said to her friend: "Do not slay Isaac in the presence of his brother Aaron lest Aaron see his brother's death and run away." The woman then took the lad Isaac, who was small and very pretty, and she slaughtered him while the mother spread out her sleeves to receive the blood, catching it in her garment instead of a basin. When the child Aaron saw that his brother Isaac was slain, he screamed again and again: "Mother, mother, do not butcher me," and ran and hid under a chest.

She had two daughters also who still lived at home, Bella and Matrona, beautiful young girls, the children of her husband Rabbi Judah. The girls took the knife and sharpened it themselves that it should not be nicked. Then the woman bared their necks and sacrificed them to Hashem G-d of Hosts who has commanded us not to change His pure religion but to be perfect with Him, as it is written (Deuteronomy 18:13): "Perfect shall you be with Hashem your G-d."

When this righteous woman had made an end of sacrificing her three children to their Creator, she then raised her voice and called out to her son Aaron: "Aaron, where are you? You also I will not spare nor will I have any mercy." Then she dragged him out by his foot from under the chest where he had hidden himself, and she sacrificed him before G-d, the high and exalted. She put her children next to her body, two on each side, covering them with her two sleeves, and there they lay struggling in the agony of death. When the enemy seized the room they found her sitting and wailing over them "Show us the money that is under your sleeves," they said to her. But when it was the slaughtered children they saw, they struck her and killed her, upon her children, and

her spirit flew away and her soul found peace at last. To her applied the Biblical verse (Hosea 10:14): “The mother was dashed in pieces with her children.” . . .

When the father saw the death of his four beautiful, lovely children, he cried aloud, weeping and wailing, and threw him upon the sword in his hand so that his bowels came out, and wallowed in blood on the road together with the dying who were convulsed, rolling in their life's blood. The enemy killed all that who were left in the room and then stripped them naked; (Lamentations 1: 11) “See, O Lord, and behold, how abject I have become.” Then the crusaders began to give thanks in the name of “the hanged one” because they had done what they wanted with all those in the room of the bishop so that not a soul escaped. (The crusaders now held a thanksgiving service in the archbishop's palace where the massacre took place.) (Chronicles of Solomon bar Samson)

III. Righteous Gentiles (Speyer)

On the eighth of Iyar, (1096 CE) on the Sabbath, the measure of justice began to fall upon us. The errant ones and the burghers first plotted against the holy men, the sages of the Most High, in Speyer, and planned to seize all of them together in the synagogue. Foretold of this evil plan, the sages arose on Sabbath morning, prayed quickly and departed from the synagogue. When the enemy realized that that their plot failed, they rose up against them and slew eleven of them. This began the persecution fulfilling the Biblical verse: “And at my sanctuary shall you begin”.

When Bishop John heard of this, he came with a large army and wholeheartedly aided the Jewish community. The bishop then took some of the burghers and cut off their hands, for he was a righteous man amongst the Gentiles and the Omnipresent used him as means for our benefit and rescue.

Rabbi Moshe the Parnass (community advocate), son of Yekutiel, stood in the breach. He endangered himself for his fellow Jews. As a result of his efforts, all of those who had been forcibly converted and survived in King Henry's domain were enabled to return home. Through King Henry and Bishop John's aid, the remnant of the Speyer community was able to take refuge in the fortified cities of the king.

Hashem had mercy upon them for the sake of His Great Name and the bishop concealed them until the enemies of Hashem had passed. (Anonymous Mainz Chronicle)

Oh G-d, investigate this for they have been pushed toward horror, infants and sucklings were offered to be slaughtered. They dedicated themselves to be brought as a sacrifice to the altar of G-d. G-d of hosts, please return and take revenge from Esau, for he has taunted me by saying there is nothing more hopeless than myself, for G-d has forsaken me. They have refused to believe in another G-d for his service is worthless. They have clung rather to their Creator and for Him they have armed themselves [with strength]. (Prayer composed by Rashi)

Aneinu

The *Kolbo*¹⁸ writes that there are 63 words that make up the prayer *Aneinu* (answer us *Hashem*), corresponding to the 63 letters in the verse where the Torah describes *Yaakov Avinu* fear of his impending encounter with his brother *Eisav* (Esau)¹⁹. The *Ben Ish Chai*²⁰ was asked that if one counts the number of words in this *tefilla* (prayer) one will only find 61 words. The *Ben Ish Chai* in his *sefer* (book) of *Responso* called *Torah Lishma* writes the following answer:

Although there are only 61 words, it is counted as 63 since the Tetragrammaton appears twice; once in the middle and a second time at its end. Each one is counted as two, since one is required to have in mind both the name of Hashem how its pronounced²¹ (Adnus - Master) as well as how its written (Havayah - G-d's four-letter ineffable name, which means He exists, always existed and will continue forever to exist) making each one like two words, thereby completing the word count to 63.

Tachanun

Tachanun is recited towards the end of the daily *Selichos*. According to Sephardic custom the portion of *Tehillim* that's recited is *Le'Dovid Eilecha Hashem Nafshi Essa*²².

¹⁸ **Kolbo - R'Aharon Ben Yaakov HaKohen of Lunel - Born:** Narbonne, France, 1280. **Died:** Majorca, Spain, 1330. Halachic codifier, exiled from France to Spain in 1307. Author of **Orchot Chaim/Paths of Life**, a compilation of the opinions of earlier authorities on the laws of prayer, Shabbat, marriage, divorce, and kashrut etc., following and order similar to the Tur. Author of **Kol Bo/"Everything in it"**, an abridged version of the *Orchot Chaim*.

¹⁹ Bereishis 32:8 בראשית פרק לב: ח - ויירא יעקב מאד ויצר לו ויחץ את העם אשר אתו ואת הצאן ואת הבקר והגמלים לשני מחנות

²⁰ *Ben Ish Chai* – R' Yosef Chaim ben Eliyahu. **Born:** Baghdad, c. 1833. **Died:** 1909. Talmudist, Halachist, Kabbalist, and a gifted public speaker. One of the foremost Sefardic Rabbis of the 19th Century. He became the *de facto* Rav of Baghdad in 1858 upon the death of his father. Author of **Rav Pealim**, a compendium of *Responso*, and **Ben Ish Chai**, based on his lectures on which he would link the weekly Torah portion to topics in Halacha, and many other works on Halacha, Kabbala, etc.

²¹ See Roadmap to Prayer Lesson 9

²² *Tehillim* 25

Just as it is recited without *Nefillas Apayim* (putting one's face down against the arm) during the rest of the year, so too now during *Selichot*. According to Ashkenazic custom the chapter of *Rachum Ve'chanun*²³ is recited instead and it is recited with *Nefillas Apayim* (putting one's face down against the arm)²⁴.

Variations in the Sephardic Selichot

Although the Sephardic version of *Selichot* is the same every day, the following *Piyutim* are inserted right after *Tachanun* according to the days of the week.

On Sunday - Hashem Shava'at Amcha Hakshiva, Va'assei Imanu Os Le'tova (Hashem, listen to the cry of Your people and perform a sign for the good)

On Monday - Hashem Yachid, Libos Kol Bnei Adam Choker (Hashem who is unique, the hearts of all people does He scrutinize)

On Tuesday - Hashem, Dalu Einay La'marom, Batzar Li Ekra Hashem (Hashem, my eyes are raised to the heavens, in my distress I call out to Hashem)

On Wednesday - Hashem, Im Gadol Avoni Mi'neso Ve'hiskalti Asso, Al Tavo Bemishpat Es Avdecha (Hashem, even if my sin is too great to bear and I have acted foolishly, do not mete out strict justice to Your servants)

On Thursday - Hashem, She'ei Nodeid Mi'kino (Hashem, turn to the one who has wandered from his nest)

On Friday - Hashem, Elokim Moshiv Yechidim, She'ei La'omdim Be'veis Hashem Ba'laylos (Hashem, G-d Who settles individuals²⁵, turn to those who stand in the house of Hashem during the nights).

Kaddish Tei'anu Vetei'atru (Sephardic)

*Kaf HaChaim*²⁶ mentions that the *Shofar* is sounded right before *Tei'anu Vetei'atru*. *Tashrat*, *Tashat* and *Tarat*²⁷ sounds are sounded. This is in addition to the *Tashrat* that

²³ *Tehillim* 6

²⁴ See Roadmap to Prayer Lesson 22

²⁵ I.e. Gathers Jewish people from exile

²⁶ 581:13 - R' Yaakov Chaim Sofer – Born: Baghdad, 1870 - Died: Jerusalem, Israel, 1939 Initially of Baghdad, he moved to Israel by the turn of the century to study in the Beth El Yeshiva for Kabbalah studies. Author of the *Kaf HaChaim*, a multi-volume commentary on *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* and parts of *Yoreh De'ah*.

²⁷ *Tashrat* - תשר"ת *Tekia*, *Shevarim Teruah* and *Tekia*. *Tashat* - תש"ת *Tekia*, *Shevarim*, *Tekiah*. *Tarat* - תר"ת *Tekia*, *Teruah* and *Tekia*

is sounded at each time the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* are recited. On *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, the *Shofar* is not sounded at either place.

Tei'anu Vetei'atru - May you be answered and your prayers be accepted

Berachamim min Hashamayim - with compassion from Heaven;

Tekubal Tza'akaschem, Tishama Tefilaschem Be'ratzone - may your cry be accepted, may your prayer be heard with favor

Ve'yei'aneh Kol Atiraschem - and may it be answered; the voice of your supplications

Vikayeim bachem mikra shekasuv - and may He fulfill in you the verse that is written

Hashem Elokei Avoseichem yoseif aleichem kachem elef pa'amim - *Hashem*, G-d of your forefathers; may He increase your like, a thousand-fold

Viye'vareich eschem kasher dibber la'chem - and may He bless you as He has spoken concerning you

This is inserted during *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*

(Vi'yivtavchem HaKeil besefer chayim tovim - and may G-d inscribe you in the Book of Good Life)

Ve'chein Yehi ratzone ve'nomar Amen - and so may it be His will; and let us say, *Amen*

The above prayer is inserted in the *Kaddish Tiskabal* at the end of the first half of *Kaddish*, right before *Tiskabal*. This prayer requests specifically that our *Selichot* prayers should be well received by *Hashem*, the Holy One, Blessed be He.

One more Kaddish

In the Sephardic version of *Selichot*, *Shir Hamaalot Mimamakim Keraticha Hashem*²⁸ is recited followed by *Kaddish Yehei Shelama*.²⁹

²⁸ *Tehillim* 130

²⁹ Same as a Mourners *Kaddish* except that mourners do not join in on this *Kaddish*

The House of My Prayer: I will bring them to My Holy Mountain

An exposé by the Dubno Maggid

The *Navi Yeshaya* (the Prophet Isaiah) proclaims in the name of G-d, “*I will bring them to My holy mountain and I will grant them happiness in the house of My prayer, their burnt-offerings and their sacrifice-offerings will be readily accepted upon my altar, for my House will be called a House of Prayer for all the nations*”³⁰.

The *Medrash* comments that the *pasuk* (verse) states that G-d says “*in the house of My prayer*” and not just to the House of Prayer; teaching us that G-d Himself also prays.

What is G-d's prayer? Why does G-d need to pray?

The *Medrash* answers the first question that G-d's prayer is that “May it be My will that My attribute of Compassion should suppress My attribute of Anger.

The second question still remains a mystery. What is the point of G-d expressing such a prayer? Also, what battle of emotions or reactions is there by G-d that He has to overcome a conflict between compassion and anger? G-d's not a human being that has emotions pulling at Him from all directions!

Rather, the *Medrash* means to relate the following message. At present, we know that at present, our own shortcomings are so great that we don't even deserve to have a *Beis Hamikdash*. This sentiment is expressed in the *Selicha, Im Afeis Rova Hakein*. Yet, even when the *Beis Hamikdash* stood, we weren't perfect. We utilized the *Beis Hamikdash* then mainly for sacrifices of atonement to bring us closer to *Hashem* and to help us gain favor in *Hashem's* eyes. Still, even with our dedicated service to G-d in the *Beis Hamikdash* we still needed *Hashem* to overlook our mediocre performance and grant us compassion instead of anger, since our commitment to G-d was deficient. This is the meaning of *Hashem's* personal prayer to suppress His Anger in the face of Mercy. This is because we weren't fully deserving of *Hashem's* attribute of mercy. If this was the level of *Bnei Yisrael* then, then the level of the nations of the world who see us as an example of striving for perfection, were surely on a lower spiritual level and mostly immoral people. When the *Bnei Yisrael* will lift themselves up spiritually and reach perfection as the case will be in the future in Messianic times, the nations of the world will surely be affected by seeing our behavior and in turn they will elevate themselves to more spiritual

³⁰ *Yeshaya* 56:7

levels as well. Thus, the focus of our service in the *Beis Hamikdash* will shift from mainly seeking G-d's atonement for our sins and become more focused on giving praise and glorification to *Hashem*. At that time the Nations of the world will come to the House of G-d to gain His forgiveness for their shortcomings and for their sins and utilize the *Beis Hamikdash* for that purpose.

Accordingly, we understand the above-mentioned *pasuk* (verse) as follows. *Hashem* calls the *Beis Hamikdash* a place of His prayers because He has to overlook the flaws of our imperfect service to Him, raise our spiritual level to a point of perfection which in turn will affect the nations of the world around us in a positive way. They will now be focused on attaining forgiveness from *Hashem* for their immoral ways and they will stream to the *Beis Hamikdash* to bring sacrifices to find atonement for their sinful past. Since the *Bnei Yisrael* at that point in time will have neared perfection in their service of G-d, their use of the *Beis Hamikdash* will be primarily to give praise to *Hashem*, leaving the use of the *Beis Hamikdash* mostly free for the nations to seek forgiveness.

May we merit gaining *Hashem's* favor and forgiveness through our sincere *Selichot/Selichos* prayers. May we live to see the fulfillment of the above prophecy, *Amen*.

Questions:

- 1) List a number of differences between the Sephardic and Ashkenazic *Selichot/Selichos*.
- 2) In what noticeable way does our present-day *Selichos* differ from that of the *Ge'onim* of a thousand years ago?
- 3) Which *Selicha* is common to both Sephardim and Ashkenazim?
- 4) What historical event is this common *Selicha* referring to?
- 5) Where is the term - *Yesh Lanu Av Zakein* (we have an ancient father) - taken from?
- 6) Who is it referring to in this *Selicha*?
- 7) Why does the *Kolbo* count 63 words in the *Aneinu* prayer when it actually only has 61?
- 8) What basic differences are there between the Sephardic and Ashkenazic *Tachanun*?
- 9) What prominent addition do Sephardim add to *Kaddish Tiskabal*?
- 10) What additional *Kaddish* do Sephardim have in their version of *Selichot*?
- 11) What new function will the *Beis Hamikdash* have when *Mashiach* will come and the *Bnei Yisrael* will reach a level of perfection?

Answers:

- 1) Sephardim recite *Selichot* during the entire month of *Elul*. They also recite it sitting down and in melodious tune. On the other hand, Ashkenazim recite it during *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* and a few days before Rosh Hashanah. They recite it while standing and recite it without singing.
- 2) During the period of the *Ge'onim*, *Selichos* consisted mostly of selections of Torah verses related to the theme of *Teshuvah* and *Hashem's* acceptance of our *Teshuvah*.
- 3) *Im Afeis Rova Hakein* - Even if it has disappeared; the one bird-nest offering.
- 4) It is referring to the martyrdom and massacres of the Jews during the time of the Crusades of Emicho in 1096 CE.
- 5) It comes from the episode in the Torah where *Yehudah* (Judah) pleads with his brother *Yosef* (Joseph), viceroy of Egypt not to imprison *Binyamin* (Benjamin) their brother because of the adverse effect it would have on their *Old Father* - *Yaakov*.
- 6) It is referring to Avraham Avinu who is mentioned later in the *Selicha*. It can also be alluding to *Hashem* who is our *Old Father* up in Heaven (*Avinu She'bashamayim*).
- 7) The *Ben Ish Chai* explains that since one should have 2 meanings in mind when pronouncing the Name of *Hashem* (Tetragrammaton), each time it is mentioned it is like 2 words. Therefore, the 2 times it is mentioned in the *Aneinu* prayer is like 4 words.
- 8) Sephardim recite *Le'Dovid Eilecha Hashem Nafshi Essa* without *Nefillas Apayim* (putting one's face down against the arm). Ashkenazic recite the chapter of *Rachum Ve'chanun* instead, with *Nefillas Apayim*.
- 9) *Tei'anu Vetei'atru* and also the sounding of the *Shofar* at this point.
- 10) *Kaddish Yehei Shelama* is added after reciting *Shir Hamaalot*.
- 11) The *Beis Hamikdash* will serve a new important function for the nations of the world who will bring sacrifices of atonement for their sins that they committed during their lifetime.