

THE YESHIVA PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM PRESENTS:
THE ROADMAP TO PRAYER PROJECT

The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson 40

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The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson

40

Selichos: Getting Close to Hashem Again

Selichos: It's Order

The *Selichos* prayers are arranged in a way that is similar to a standard *Tefilla* (prayer). *Likutei Maharich* suggests that the *Ashrei* prayer was chosen to preface *Selichos* since *Ashrei* is also the opening prayer of *Pesukei De'Zimra*¹. *Ashrei* here represents *Pesukei De'Zimra* while the *Selichos* themselves together with the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* represent *Shemoneh Esrei*, eighteen blessings. It is possible to say that we recite at least three *Selichos* titles each day (Ashkenaz) to correspond to the three times we daven *Shemoneh Esrei* daily. After this we recite the prayer of *Nefilas Apayim* (*Tachanun*) and then *Kaddish Tiskabel*, which is normally only recited after the conclusion of a *Shemoneh Esrei/Amidah* prayer.

Accordingly, one who recites *Selichos* individually should recite *Ashrei* even though *Kaddish* is not recited then.

Selichos: Its Components

The various styles used in the *Selichos* prayers are divided into a number of categories. Like other *Piyutim* and *Krovitz* stanzas, they have a unique style that they follow. We have the following kinds of *Selichos* prayers:

¹ *Likutei Maharich Selichos*

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| I. SHENIYAH | VII. TOCHACHA |
| II. SHLISHIYAH | VIII. CHATANU |
| III. SHALMONIS | IX. SHEMA YISRAEL |
| IV. PIZMON | X. PESICHA |
| V. SHIRSHUR | XI. TECHINA |
| VI. AKEIDA | |

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE VARIOUS TYPES OF SELICHOS

I. SHENIYAH

The word *Sheniyah* is from the root *Shnayim* (two). In this type of *Selicha*, the phrases rhyme in twosomes.

II. SHLISHIYAH

The word *Sblishiyah* is from the root *Sblosba* (three). In this type of *Selicha*, the phrases rhyme in threesomes.

III. SHALMONIS

This word comes from the word *Sbleimab* (complete), because it has a full four phrases rhyming in each stanza.

IV. PIZMON

A *Pizmon* is a selection that is said in a responsive manner between the *Chazzan* and the congregation. It has a refrain that is repeated after each stanza.

V. SHIRSHUR

Shirshur means a chain. The last word of one stanza is used as the first word for the next.

VI. AKEIDAH

This refers to the Binding of Isaac (*Akeidas Yitzchok*). This is a prayer that arouses the merit of *Yitzchok Avinu* who allowed himself to be brought as a sacrifice when G-d instructed his father *Avraham Avinu* to do so.

VII. TOCHACHA

This is a prayer that calls upon us to repent and return to following G-d's path in life.

VIII. CHATANU & SHEMA YISRAEL

In a *Chatanu Selicha*, we use the phrase *Chatanu, Tzureinu; Selach Lanu, Yotzreinu* (We have sinned - our Rock²; Forgive us - our Sculptor) as a refrain.

In a *Shema* stanza, we use the phrase *Shema Yisrael* as the opening to this *Selicha*.

IX. PESICHA & TECHINA

Pesicha is an opening *Selicha* that precedes the first mention of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*.

Techina is a *Selicha* that precedes the recital of *Tachanun* at the end of a daily *Selicha* recital.

The Sephardic Selichot

Before Beginning the Daily Selichot

According to Sephardic custom, the *Selichot* are recited daily, starting the second day of *Elul* through the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* (the 10 days of repentance from *Rosh Hashanah* through *Yom Kippur*) period.

Each day the exact same set of *Selichot* prayers are recited. During *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, some additional *Selichot* are inserted into the existing set of prayers.

The "Essence" of Sephardic Selichot

Singing and Chanting

Another beautiful feature of Sephardic *Selichot* is in the middle of the prayer, the community rises and there is a responsive reading of "*Shema Yisrael*" and "*Hashem, Hu HaElokim, Hashem Hu HaElokim*" (twice) with a special melody. Then, a *Piyut* is read that compares the ministering angels to *Bnei Yisrael*. The angels say "*Hashem Adonenu*", and *Bnei Yisrael* say "*Hashem Hu HaElokim*", etc. Then, we responsively recite "*Hashem Melech, Hashem Malach, Hashem Yimloch Le'olam Vaed*" with a moving melody, and have a similar *Piyut* to follow, in which the refrain is that *pasuk*³.

² Our steadfast and faithful G-d

³ Letter from Rabbi J. Maroof to author, Rav of Beit Eliyahu Synagogue, Magen David Sephardic Congregation of Rockville, Maryland

In some Sephardic communities, the introduction of the *Selichot* begins with a selection of *Tebillim* 17, 32, 51, 65, 85, 102, 27, 103, and 104. Then *Ashrei* and *Chatzi-Kaddish* (Half- *Kaddish*) are recited. It is also common to recite *Tikkun Chatzot* before reciting *Selichot*. The *Shaarei Teshuvah* in *Orach Chaim Simon* 581 mentions that if reciting *Tikkun Chatzot* conflicts with the opportunity of reciting *Selichot* with a *Minyan*, *Tikkun Chatzot* takes precedence. This *Halacha* is very pertinent to Sephardim, since in Sephardic communities it is common for people to recite *Tikkun Chatzot*. However, in Ashkenazic communities, the general public does not commonly say *Tikkun Chatzot*. The reason why in Ashkenazic communities it is less commonly said is perhaps because of what is written in the *sefer* (Torah book) *Reishis Chochma*. He writes that *Tikkun Chatzot* should only be recited by pious individuals.

Yashen Al Teradam

The first *Selicha* prayer begins with *Yashen Al Teradam* (Slumberer, do not sleep soundly now). Then the refrain *Mah Lecha Nirdam, Kum Kera El Elokecha* (Why do you sleep soundly? Arise and call to Your G-d) is recited after each individual stanza. The *Selicha* urges us to get motivated to and call out to *Hashem* to seek His forgiveness. This particular refrain is from the Book of Jonah, where Jonah (*Yonah Hanavi*) was sound asleep while the ship that he was on was in distress being tossed around the waters in a storm. All the people on the ship were terrified that the ship would capsize and sink, began all praying to their gods to save them, but to no avail. They came upon *Yonah* who was sound asleep and the only one not praying for their safe return to port. Witnessing *Yonah* sound asleep on the ship deck, they turned to him, *Mah Lecha Nirdam, Kum Kera El Elokecha* (Why do you sleep soundly? Arise and call to Your G-d)

The famous philosopher and composer of *Piyutim*, *Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi*, authored this *Piyut*. His name *Yehudah* is formed by the acrostic of the opening letters of the first 5 lines of the *Piyut*. Each stanza⁵ ends with a verse from Scripture ending with the word *Elokecha* (your G-d).

⁴ Rihl – R' Yehuda Ben Shmuel HaLevi - Born: Toledo, Spain, 1075. Died: Jerusalem, Israel, c. 1141. Religious philosopher and poet, a physician by trade. A student of the Rif and Ibn Migash in Lucena. Author of **Kuzari**, a book on Jewish religion and philosophy using the conversion to Judaism of the Khasars as well as both secular and religious poetry. An ardent lover of Zion, "**Ode to Zion**" is one of his most famous poems, he set out for Israel around 1135 where, legend has it, he was killed near the Kotel by an Arab horseman. Some of his poetry has been incorporated in the liturgy. A friend of R' Avraham and R' Moshe Ibn Ezra.

⁵ Except for the second stanza which some do not attribute to Rabbi Yehudah Halevy (*Selichot Kol Yehudah*)

Ben Adam

The next *Piyut* begins with *Ben Adam* (Son of man!), *Mah Lecha Nirdam, Kum Kera Betachananim* (Why do you sleep soundly? Arise and call out in supplication!). Its author is unknown to us. In some versions of the Sephardic *Selichot* this *Piyut* is actually the first *Selicha* prayer. This paragraph ends with the words, *Lecha Hashem Hatzedaka Velanu Boshes Hapanim* (To You G-d is righteousness, but we are shame-faced).

The next paragraph ends again with the words *Lecha Hashem Hatzedaka Velanu Boshes Hapanim* (To You G-d is righteousness, but we are shame-faced). The next paragraph then begins using those same words.

All these paragraphs form a basic introduction to *Selichot* much like the prayer of *Lecha Hashem Hatzedaka* that Ashkenazim recite for their opening *Selicha* prayers.

Thus we see from the opening prayers of *Selichot* according to the Sephardic version, that the emphasis is on motivating us to use this opportune time of year - the 40 day period of *Moshe Rabbeinu's* third ascent to *Har Sinai* which achieved atonement and a new set of *Luchos* (Tablets containing the 10 Commandments) - to beseech *Hashem* in supplication to forgive our past sins, and to grant us a good new year.

Keil Melech Yoshev

In the Sephardic version of *Selichot*, *Keil Melech Yoshev al Kissei Rachamim* (O G-d, King, Who sits upon the throne of mercy) prefaces the first recitation of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* as well as each subsequent recitation of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*. The prayer *Keil Erech Apayim Atta* (O G-d You are slow to anger) is not found in most Sephardic versions of the *Selichot*, except for the Spanish-Portuguese version which places *Keil Erech Apayim* before the final recitation of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*.

An Additional Recitation of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

According to Sephardim, there is an additional recitation of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*, which is said prior to the next *Selicha* and without the usual preface of *Keil Melech Yoshev*. It comes after a prayer which is in Aramaic, *Rachmana Idkar Lan* (O Merciful One! Recall for us...) which lists various merits in our favor. The prayer concludes with the refrain *B'dil "Vayaavor"* (On account of our reciting "And He passed ...") which refers to *Hashem* passing in front of *Moshe Rabbeinu* teaching him

⁶ This is in contrast to the Ashkenazic custom of saying *Keil Erech Apayim* before the first recital of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*

the order of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*. This refrain is repeated throughout this entire prayer. Immediately after this prayer the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* said.

Other Distinctions in the Selichot Versions

It is important to note that both in the Sephardic version of *Selichot*, as well as in the Ashkenaz version, there are differences in the specific selection of *Piyutim* that are recited. Unlike the Sephardic *Selichot* where the same exact *Selichot* are recited throughout the entire month of *Elul* with some additions inserted during *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, the Ashkenazim vary daily as to what *Selicha* is said. In the Nusach of Poland there are 70 different *Selicha* prayers while in the Lithuanian version there are 100 different *Selicha* prayers. Even in the Sephardic *Selichot* where they say the same set of *Selichot* every day, there are different versions in different communities as to which stanzas are recited⁷.

Keil Erech Apayim/ Keil Melech Yoshev (Ashkenaz)

The general order for all *Selichos* is to preface the first time we recite the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* with the *Keil Erech Apayim* (O G-d Almighty - You are slow to anger) prayer. After the *Bnei Yisrael's* (Children of Israel's) sin with the *Eigel Hazaḥav* (Golden Calf), *Hashem* made it a point to show *Moshe Rabbeinu* that even when He is angry at the *Bnei Yisrael* (the Children of Israel), to the point that He is willing to destroy them, He still awaits their prayer asking for forgiveness. For this reason, *Hashem* personally taught *Moshe Rabbeinu* the special prayer of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*, assuring *Moshe* of its effectiveness in time of need. Since *Hashem* taught us this method of stilling His anger against us, we preface this prayer with the *Keil Erech Apayim* (O G-d, You are slow to anger) prayer, to acknowledge that *Hashem's* anger is our own fault, not His; since *Hashem* is slow to anger and even then, He is ready to accept our special prayers and forgive us our sins.

The Framework of Selichos

The basic framework of *Selichos* (Ashkenaz and its variants) is constant. Each day it begins with the same basic set of opening prayers and ends with another set of closing prayers. The opening prayers are prefaced with *Asbrei* and *Chatzi Kaddish* (Half-Kaddish). They consist of prayers like *Lecha Hashem Hatzedaka*, *Shome'ah Tefilla Adecha Kol Bassar Yavo'u*, *Keil Erech Apayim* and the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*. At the end of the *Selichos* we say a standard set of prayers that include the *Al Tizkor*, *Zechor Lanu Bris*, *Shema Koleinu*, *Viduy* (Confession) of *Ashamnu*, *Tachanun* and *Machnisei Rachamim*.

⁷ Such as *Yashen Al Teradam*, *Ben Adam Mah Lecha Nirdam*, *Kum Kera Betachannim* and others

The daily *Selichos* prayers are always inserted into the middle section of this framework. It consists of at least 3 *Selichos* prayers, with the last one a *Pizmon* where the congregation and *Chazzen* recite each stanza one after the other.

On certain occasions the *Selichos* are a little longer, like on the first night of the *Selichos*, and during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* (the 10 days of Repentance starting with *Rosh Hashana* and ending with *Yom Kippur*). On *Erev* (eve of) *Rosh Hashanah* the *Selichos* are especially long, while on *Erev* (eve of) *Yom Kippur* it is especially short.

After each of the *Selichos* we recite the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*. After the first *Selicha* we add an additional set of verses (*Pesukim*), which is the foundation of the next *Selicha*. This is not done before the last *Selicha*, which is a *Pizmon*.

The *Sefer Chassidim* mentions this point⁸. He emphasizes that it is at least as important, if not more, that the verses (*Pesukim*), which preface the *Selichos*, be recited in a slow melodious tune just as the *Selichos* themselves, so not to make the *Selichos* more significant than verses (*Pesukim*) which were composed through *Ruach Hakodesh* (Heavenly inspiration). For the same token, the verses (*Pesukim*) recited in the opening prayers of the daily *Selichos* should be said also in this manner⁹.

A Sample of the Selichos Prayer's Framework

The first day of *Selichos* (according to Ashenazic custom)

- I. *Ashrei* followed by *Chatzi-Kaddish*
- II. *Lecha Hashem Hatzedaka* (Yours Hashem is righteousness)
- III. ***Selicha* (#1)¹⁰ *Pesicha* - *Eich Niftach Peh* etc.** according to *Aleph Beis* authored by *Rabbeinu Binyamin ben Zerach* (his name *Binyamin* is encoded in last stanza ***Benora*'os *Yemincha* - *BenYemin***)

This *Selicha* follows the *Aleph Beis*. It is difficult to define this as a particular type of *Selicha* such as a *Sheniyah* or a *Shlishiya* since every phrase ends in a

⁸ *Simon* 256, cited by *Magen Avraham Orach Chaim Simon* 68

⁹ *Magen Avraham* Ibid. and *Machtzis Hashekel* commentary

¹⁰ Explained in detail at the end of this lesson

single rhyme. The author's name is encoded at the end of the *Selicha* after completing the entire order of the *Aleph Beis*.

The Psicha Prayer

The *Psicha* prayer that is recited by Ashkenazim before the first recital of the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* is not recited every day of *Selichos*. Rather, it is reserved for special times such as the first day of *Selichos*, *Erev Rosh Hashana*, and throughout *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*.

- IV. *Keil Erech Apayim* introduction to *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*
- V. The *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* followed by a selection of a few *pesukim* (Torah verses) that are an introduction to the next *Selicha*. This followed by *Kerachem Av al Banim* (like a father has mercy on children). Then come additional verses (*Pesukim*) of *Moshe Rabbeinu's* plea on behalf of the *Bnei Yisrael* after the sin of the Spies, starting with *Selach Na La'avon Ha'am Hazeh*¹¹ ending with *Hashem's* response of *Salachti Kidvarecha*¹²
- VI. ***Selicha (#2)***¹³ ***Ein Mi Yikra Betzeddek etc.*** according to *Aleph Beis* authored by *Rabbeinu Shlomo HaBavli* (his name is encoded in the first letters in the last phrases in the last stanza)

This *Selicha* is a *Sheniyah* as each set of two ends in a single rhyme. In addition, this *Selicha* follows the order of the *Aleph Beis* at the beginning of each phrase. The author encodes his name after completing the *Aleph Beis* order.

- VII. *Keil Melech Yoshev* introduction to the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*
- VIII. The *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* followed by a selection of a few *pesukim* (Torah verses) that are an introduction to the next *Selicha*. This followed by *Kerachem Av al Banim* (like a father has mercy on children). Then come additional *pesukim* of *Moshe Rabbeinu's* plea on behalf of the *Bnei Yisrael* after the sin of the Spies, starting

¹¹ *Bamidbar* 14:19

¹² *Ibid.* v. 20

¹³ Explained in detail at the end of this lesson

with *Selach Na La'avon Ha'am Hazeh*¹⁴ ending with *Hashem's* response of *Salachti Kidvarecha*¹⁵

- IX. *Selicha* (#3) *Tavo Lefanecha Shavas Chinun etc.* according to *Aleph Beis* in order from last letter back to the first letter; authored by *Rabbeinu Shlomo HaBavli* (his name is encoded in the first letters in the last phrases in the last stanza)

This *Selicha* is also a *Sheniyah* as each set of two ends in a single rhyme. In addition, this *Selicha* follows the order of the *Aleph Beis* at the beginning of each phrase except backwards (*Tashrak*¹⁶). The author encodes his name after completing the *Aleph Beis* order. In addition, he adds a reference of *Kattan* after his name to infer the common way of signing one's name in humility, *Shlomo Hakattan* (Solomon the lowly)

- X. *Keil Melech Yoshev* introduction to the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*
- XI. The *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*

The introductory set of *pesukim* with additional *pesukim* of *Moshe Rabbeinu's* plea on behalf of the *Bnei Yisrael* after the sin of the Spies, starting with *Hashem's* response of *Salachti Kidvarecha*¹⁷ are not recited at this point before the final *Selicha*, which is a *Pizmon*

- XII. *Selicha* (#4) *Pizmon*, according to order of *Aleph Beis* in sets of three phrases

This *Pizmon* is a *Shelishiyah* as mentioned. It has a refrain *Lishmo'ah El Harina Ve'el Hatefilla* (listen to the song and to the prayer). There is no author's name encoded. In addition to following the order of the *Aleph Beis*, this particular *Selicha* begins with the phrase of *Bemotza'ei Menucha* (As the day of rest departs) as it is customarily recited on *Motzei Shabbos* in most congregations as it starts the *Selichos* season in *Ashkenazic* communities, on *Motzei Shabbos*.

- XIII. *Keil Melech Yoshev* introduction to the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*
- XIV. The *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*

¹⁴ *Bamidbar* 14:19

¹⁵ *Ibid.* v. 20

¹⁶ This order is referred to as *Tashruk* (i.e. **T**af, **S**hin, **R**eish, **K**uf - **TaShRaK** - תשר"ק)

¹⁷ *Ibid.* v. 20

The introductory set of verses (*Pesukim*) with additional *pesukim* of *Moshe Rabbeinu's* plea on behalf of the *Bnei Yisrael* after the sin of the Spies, starting with *Hashem's* response of *Salachti Kidvarecha*¹⁸ are not recited at this point before the next part of *Selichos*, which is the standard daily text of the final phase of *Selichos*

- XV. Final phase of *Selichos* begins with a set of standard prayers said at the conclusion of the daily *Selichos* prayers, which are called *Techina*.

They are:

Al Tizkor, *Zechor Lanu*, *Shema Koleinu* (recited in unison), *Ashamnu* (confession prayer), other standard verses and recitals until *Tachanun*, more standard prayers, *Machnisei Rachamim* prayer¹⁹ standard *Shomer Yisrael* prayer that is always recited after *Tachanun* at any daily prayer and finally *Kaddish Tiskabel*.

A Brief Outline of the First Two Selichos of the First Day (Ashkenaz)

Selicha 1

We have no premise to beg Your forgiveness for we have sinned terribly.

We followed false prophets, and we were stubborn and brazen; this led to the destruction of two Temples.

Our *Kohanim* were exiled from their service and we did not accept the rebuke from our prophets.

From then until now we're downtrodden and beaten. We find no solace.

Idolaters work us hard; O why do they succeed so; defamers of the Living G-d.

Hashem Who dwells on high, see our shame; have pity on Your nation that trusts in You.

Selicha 2

There's no individual amongst us worthy to plead on our behalf.

¹⁸ Ibid. v. 20

¹⁹ This particular prayer is a matter of controversy amongst early commentaries whether it's an inappropriate expression of prayer through intermediary *Malachim*

We suffer from our own sins, a nation without direction.

We continue to fuel G-d's anger with even more sins.

We fear even to approach Him in prayer; we who lack so much in deeds.

You are good to those who call out to You sincerely; include us too when answering their call.

See our broken heart and respond mercifully.

Our needs are so great we cannot even express them. You know our needs; please provide for us.

We are alone like a single tree on a mountaintop; answer us please, let no one go lost.

Let no one hit us; please G-d, protect us.

You, Whose voice is great and loud, Your friends call to You with sorrow; find pleasure in their prayer.

They fast continuously to humble their hearts; protect them from Your strict judgment.

O G-d, Who prides Himself in desiring His nation's salvation; let us live and enlighten our eyes from the darkness of exile.

This gives us a basic feel of the theme of most of the *Selichos* prayers. There are some other prayers, which refer specifically to a particular tragedy or evil decree that occurred at a certain point in history.

Questions:

- 1) What are a *Sheniya* and a *Shlishiyah*?
- 2) Give a brief outline of the *Selichos* prayers.
- 3) How many sets of *Selicha* prayers are commonly said each day in the Ashkenaz version?
- 4) Which days have the longest and shortest *Selichos*? (Ashkenaz)
- 5) At which point do we add a few *pesukim* (Torah verses) as an introduction?
- 6) What point does the *Sefer Chassidim* emphasize?
- 7) Which kind of *Kaddish* do we recite at the beginning of *Selichos* and which kind do we recite at its completion?
- 8) Where does *Keil Erech Apayim* (O G-d Almighty - You are slow to anger) prayer appear?
- 9) What does it mean when a *Selicha* follows the *Alef Beis* or *Tashrak* order?
- 10) According to which custom do we find the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* recited without it being prefaced by *Keil Erech Apayim* or by *Keil Melech Yoshev*?

Answers:

- 1) There is a standard opening set of prayers with a standard closing set of prayers. Inserted between these two parts are the *Selicha* prayers of each day with the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*.
- 2) At least 3 *Selicha* prayers are said daily; sometimes more.
- 3) *Erev Rosh Hashanah* has the longest *Selichos* and *Erev Yom Kippur* has the shortest.
- 4) After the first *Selicha* before *Kerachem Av al Banim* we say a few *pesukim* as an introduction to the next *Selicha*. This however, is not done before the first *Selicha* or the last *Selicha*, which is a *Pizmon*.
- 5) The *Sefer Chassidim* emphasizes that one should recite the *pesukim* with at least as much concentration as one has when reciting the *Selicha* prayers which are done with patience and in a melody.
- 6) At the beginning of *Selichos* we recite *Ashrei* and then *Chatzi Kaddish* (Half-Kaddish). At the end of *Selichos* we recite *Kaddish Tiskabel*.
- 7) At the beginning of *Selichos* we recite *Chatzi-Kaddish*, and by the end *Kaddish Tiskabel*.
- 8) It appears in the Ashkenaz *Selichos* right before the first time we recite the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*.
- 9) It means that the stanzas follow the order of the *Alef Beis* according to its order. *Tasbrak* means the stanzas follow the *Alef Beis*, but in order from last to first.
- 10) In the Sephardic *Selichot* the second time the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* is mentioned it comes after a *Selicha* with the refrain *B'dil Vayaavor*.