

The Days of Awe

In our studies of the Amidah we have seen that the weekday Amidah contains today nineteen blessings, whereas the Shabbos and Holy Day Amidahs consist of seven blessings. The Talmud¹ points out the significance of those numbers.

Rosh Hashanah

On Rosh Hashanah during Musaf we recite nine blessings. Thus we make a distinction between Rosh Hashanah and the other Holy Days. The Gemara quoted above explains that the nine blessings of Rosh Hashanah correspond to the nine times that Hannah mentioned the name of God in her prayer, which was accepted on Rosh Hashanah. The significance to us is that if Hannah's prayer was accepted and found mercy in God's eyes on Rosh Hashanah, we should follow the same pattern and hopefully also find mercy in His eyes.

The Talmud does not mention any difference between the Amidah of Musaf and the other Amidahs of that day. Logically, we may assume that the Talmud intends for the nine blessings to be said in all the services of the day. The commentary of the Rosh reveals uncertainty about how many blessings were said at Ma'ariv, Shacharit, and Minchah. In all communities today, however, we bless God with seven blessings in the Amidah on Rosh Hashanah, with the exception of Musaf, in which we recite nine blessings.

How did this change come about from nine blessings to seven? The Talmud² explains that Hallel is part of Shacharis,

¹ ברכות כח:כט. (*Brakhos* 28b, 29a)

² ראש השנה לב: (*Rosh Hashanah* 32b)

whereas blowing the shofar occurs in Musaf. The Talmud wonders about this difference. There is no doubt that Hallel belongs in Shacharis, since we follow the rule that the proper way to perform a commandment is at the first possible opportunity.

Should this same rule not apply to blowing the shofar? Blowing the shofar should also be carried out during Shacharis. Rashi explains that the Romans forbade the blowing of the shofar. They knew that the shofar was only blown during Shacharis, so the Jews displaced it to Musaf to fool the Romans.

The Tosafos offered a different explanation. Based on the Jerusalem Talmud, we conclude that for us, the shofar was the fulfillment of a commandment, whereas in the rest of the ancient world its blast was the clarion call to war. The Roman soldiers spent their evenings eating, drinking, gambling, and carousing, and went to sleep very late. At sunrise they were all fast asleep. The Jews at that time were on their way to shul. In those days every Jew brought a shofar to shul and the walls literally shook from the noise made by all of them. The sound of the shofar penetrated into the walls of the tents of the Roman soldiers. They did not know about the *mitzvah* of shofar, and they thought that the Jews were rebelling against them. They quickly ran into the streets and massacred the Jews.

The Rabbis, trying to prevent this kind of tragedy, postponed the *mitzvah* of shofar from Shacharis to Musaf. By that time the Roman soldiers were awake and saw the Jews in their Holy Day garments going to the synagogue. Even the Roman soldiers understood then that the blowing of the shofar was not a matter of rebellion but simply a matter of religious practice.

All the Amidahs of Rosh Hashanah originally contained nine blessings. After the Rabbis made the edict to postpone the shofar to Musaf, how were people going to know this? By changing the entire Amidah so that there were only seven blessings, there was no longer any moment at which to blow the shofar.

The opening blessings of Musaf are the same as any other Amidah. According to Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri, Malkiyos, the proclamation of God's kingdom, is part of the third blessing. The shofar is blown in the fourth blessing, which describes the special sanctity of the day; this is followed by Zikhronos, the fifth blessing, which shows that God remembers the covenant with the Jewish people, and Tekiyos, blowing the shofar. The sixth blessing is Shofrot, which speaks about God revealing Himself to His people, which took place and will take place again amid the sounding of the shofar. The seventh, eighth, and ninth blessings are the same three concluding blessings as in any other Amidah.

Rabbi Akiva believed that Malkiyos is part of the fourth blessing and that the shofar is blown for this blessing. Today we follow this view.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the third blessing, which refers to God's sanctity, has been enlarged to include the section **וּבִכְנֵן תֵּן פַּחַדְךָ** ("so put Your fear upon Your creatures"), which deals with eschatological issues: the acceptance of God's sovereignty as well as the place of the nation of Israel at that time.

In some places, these additional sections were said through the Ten Days of Repentance as well. These additions deal with God as the leader of the universe and all His creatures accepting His rule. This blessing proclaims, **וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כָלֶם אֶגוּדָה** ("And everyone will form one

assembly with which to perform Your will with complete hearts”).

In these addenda we also speak about the special role of the Jewish people, the righteous, and all those who are close to God. These important sentiments could be expressed every day; why do we associate them with the Days of Awe? The ideas we add to the Amidah on the Days of Awe about God’s kingdom were Rabbi Yochanan’s introduction to the Malkiyos of the third blessing. Since we follow Rabbi Akiva’s view, there is no place for Malkiyos in the third blessing. Nevertheless, Rabbi Yochanan’s introduction to Malkiyos was so sublime that we incorporate it into the third blessing. So although we follow Rabbi Akiva, we still have a reminder of Rabbi Yochanan’s prayer.

Each of the three extra blessings of the Rosh Hashanah Musaf contains three sections. The first section interprets the idea of each blessing. The middle section contains the core of Malkiyos, Zikhronos, and Shofros. The third section pleads with God to make those ideas come true.

Originally, every person could phrase the introduction to each blessing. The introductions that we have for those sections today were developed by Rav of the Gemara, who was a master of liturgical compositions. His introduction to Malkiyos, the Alenu, has become so beloved that we recite it each time we finish a prayer service.

Malkiyos, Zikhronos, and Shofros each consist of ten verses: three from the Torah, three from Psalms, and three from the Prophets, in that order, followed by an additional verse from the Torah.

The Gemara gives us three reasons why there are ten verses per section. First, ten corresponds to the ten praises of God that

David invokes in Psalm 150. Second, the number of verses corresponds to the Ten Commandments. Third, the number of verses corresponds to the ten utterances by which God created the universe.

Why are the verses not stated in biblical order: Torah, Prophets, and Writings? Instead they are in the sequence: Torah, Writings, and Prophets. We list the verses in chronological order: The verses from Writings are all taken from Psalms, and King David, the author of the Psalms, lived before the other prophets.

Why do we split the verses from the Torah into two sections (three and one)? Could we not have said all four verses from the Torah at once? To understand this we have to realize that the first nine verses are statements of fact. God is our King. God remembers the covenant. The tenth verse is not a statement of fact. It is a request that we make, directed at God. This last verse in the blessing of Malkiyos, however, is the very basis of our faith, the Shma.

But the Shma also seems to be a statement and not a request! Obviously, the Rabbis interpreted the Shma differently. They translated it as follows: "Hear, O Israel! God is only recognized by the Jewish people. We pray and hope that soon He will be the only God recognized by every human being." Rashi also adopts this interpretation of the verse. Thus the Shma is also a request and a fitting end to the blessing.

Another reason for using the Shma is that since there are only three direct verses in the Torah with the theme of God's sovereignty, we have to take a verse with an indirect theme for the fourth Torah verse.

As we further compare the blessings of Malkiyos, Zikhronos, and Shofros, we notice that the last verse from the

Torah in the blessings of Zikhronos and Shofros do not immediately follow the other nine verses, while in the blessing of Malkiyos they do. Why is there this difference? The tenth verse gets a paragraph of its own when it contains a request rather than a simple statement.

The different function of this tenth verse means that we must explain the new theme before reciting it. In the blessing of Malkiyos this is not so simple. As we have seen, the third blessing, which precedes the blessing of Malkiyos, already contains a combination of Malkiyos and a reference to God's sanctity. Therefore, another paragraph discussing this theme could be redundant. Indeed, the fourth blessing proceeds to describe the special sanctity of the holiday and thus concludes immediately after the ten verses have been quoted with the ideas of the sanctity of the day. There is no opportunity to quote the tenth verse in a paragraph of its own, since we must conclude with a paragraph about the sanctity of the day rather than one about Malkiyos.

Actually, the idea of having a separate paragraph for the last verse from the Torah, as is done in most shuls, is not universally accepted. There are Rabbis who maintain that even in the blessings of Zikhronos and Shofros, the last verse should follow immediately after the first nine.

In Rav Soloveitchik's shul it is done both ways. At first the tenth verse is said right after the ninth verse. Then the last verse is quoted again in the framework of a new paragraph. In the blessing of Shofros, Rav Soloveitchik had us recite the verse, לא הביט און ביעקב ולא ראה עמל בישראל ה' אלקיו עמו ותרועת מלך בו ("God sees no wrongdoing in Jacob nor any offense in Israel. Hashem their God is with them and the trumpeting

[friendship] of the King is with them”),³ as the tenth verse immediately following the others. According to the Gemara, this verse could be considered either one of the selections for the blessing of Malkiyos or as one of the selections for the blessing of Shofros, because both elements (“King” and “trumpeting”) are mentioned in it.

In other words, we utilize this verse twice: once as the second verse from the Torah in the blessing of Malkiyos, and again as the tenth verse of the blessing of Shofros, following immediately the other nine verses. As the last verse of Shofros it stands as a paragraph of its own. Then we recite **וביום שמחתכם ובמועדיכם ובראשי חדשכם ותקעתם בחצצרת על עלתיכם ועל זבחי שלמיכם והיו לכם לזכרון לפני אלקיכם אני ה' אלקיכם** (“and on the days of your festivals and your Holy Days of assembly and your New Moons, you will blow the horn over your burnt offerings and over your peace offerings, and these occasions will serve for you as a remembrance before your God. I am Hashem your God”)⁴ as the last biblical verse of the blessing of Shofros.

If we look at the number of verses in the blessing of Shofros, we will find that there are actually four verses instead of three from Psalms, in other words, that there are eleven instead of ten biblical verses. We are, naturally, permitted to add to the number of verses; that is not problematic. But why did the Rabbis choose to add an additional verse for no special reason? The extra verse is from Psalm 150, in which we are instructed ten times to give praise to God. As we explained before, this is one of the reasons that we have ten verses at all.

³ במדבר כג:כא (Num. 23:21)

⁴ במדבר י:י (Num. 10:10)

By quoting this extra verse, the Rabbis wanted to explain to us why we had ten verses.

In the blessing of Zikhronos, we have a problem with the verses from Psalms as well. The first verse is זכר עשה ה' לנפלאותיו חנון ורחום ה' ("He has made a memorial for His wonders. God is gracious and merciful").⁵ Is this verse suitable for the topic of Zikhronos? The point of Zikhronos is that God remembers the covenant with the Jewish people and this is not mentioned in this verse at all. Furthermore, the very next verse continues with the words טרף נתן ליראיו יזכר לעולם בריתו ("He provides food for those who fear him. He remembers the covenant forever"). These two verses are obviously one unit and between them mention the covenant between God and Israel only once.

Now we are short one verse. Rav Soloveitchik solves this problem by quoting another verse ויזכר להם בריתו וינחם כרב חסדיו ("He remembered His covenant for them and He relented in accordance with His abundant kindness")⁶ as the first verse of the Zikhronos Writings section while counting both verses (Psalms 4 and 5) together as one quotation.

On every American coin it says *e pluribus unum* ("from many [people], one [nation]"). Blowing the shofar, the opposite is true. The Torah only speaks about one shofar blast on Rosh Hashanah, and we end up with 100. How does that happen?

In Parshas Pinchas⁷ it says, ובחדש השביעי באחד לאחד יום תרועה מקרא קדש יהיה לכם. כל מלאכת עבדה לא תעשו. יום תרועה

⁵ תהלים קיא:ד (Psalm 111:4)

⁶ תהלים קו:מה (Psalm 106:45)

⁷ במדבר כט:א (Num. 29:1)

לכם יהיה לכם ("The first day of the seventh month will be established as a Holy Day for you. On it you should not perform any creative work. It should be for you a day of sounding the horn"). This is the only reference we have to the direct commandment of blowing the shofar in the Torah.

In Parshas Emor it says, דבר אל בני ישראל לאמר בחדש השביעי באחד לחדש יהיה לכם שבתון זכרון תרועה מקרא קדש ("Speak to the children of Israel to say, the first day of the seventh month shall be a day of rest for you. It is a Holy Day for remembering the shofar sound").⁸ The Rabbis take this verse to refer to Rosh Hashanah on Shabbos, when no actual shofar blowing takes place because of the cautionary restriction, גזרה שמא יטלנה בידו וילך אצל בקי ללמד ויעבירונו, ארבע אמות ברשות הרבים ("lest he carry it to someone who can teach him how to use it, thereby violating the restriction of carrying on Shabbos a distance of four cubits in the public domain").⁹

A third time the shofar is mentioned is found in Parshas Behar: והעברת שופר תרועה בחדש השביעי בעשור לחדש ביום הכפרים תעבירו שופר בכל ארצכם ("You shall promulgate a shofar blast on the tenth day of the seventh month. On Yom Kippur you will promulgate this shofar sound throughout your land").¹⁰ This verse teaches us that during the Jubilee year there was a commandment to blow the shofar on Yom Kippur. In each verse we have the phrase בחדש השביעי ("the seventh month"). The Gemara¹¹ discusses those verses and quotes a

⁸ ויקרא כג:כד (Lev. 23:24)

⁹ סוכה מג. (Sukkah 43a)

¹⁰ ויקרא כה:ט (Lev. 25:9)

¹¹ ר"ה לג. (Rosh Hashanah 33b)

beraisa that derives that the blowing of the shofar in the month of Tishre is considered one unit. Because we have three verses on the topic, whenever we are asked to blow the shofar, we must blow three sounds. Our obligation on Rosh Hashanah therefore is to blow three *truah* sounds.

The abovementioned *beraisa* also teaches us that each *truah* must be accompanied by a simpler sound, known as a *tekiah* before and after each *truah*. So in order to fulfill the *mitzvah*, nine sounds must be blown: *tekiah, truah, tekiah*, three times.

Tekiah is a simple unbroken sound. How do we blow the *truah*? The Talmud invokes Onkelos' translation of the verse **יום תרועה יהיה לכם** ("It should be for you a day of sounding the horn"), **יום יבוא יהי לכון** ("it should be a day of *yevava* for you").

And how does a *yevava* sound? We read in the Book of Judges: **וּתִיבַב אִם סִיסְרָא** ("Sisera's mother bewailed [the death of her son]").¹² One opinion¹³ is that she bewailed him with a groaning sound. The other opinion describes it as *yeluli yelil*, which sounds like weeping.

We now have two possibilities of how to sound a *truah*: like groaning or like weeping. The Gemara continues with even a third possibility: *Truah* might be a combination of moaning and weeping. Nowadays we refer to the groaning sound as a *shevarim* and to the weeping sound as the *truah*.

In order to fulfill the commandment of the Torah correctly, we need to blow at least thirty sounds: *tekiah shevarim truah*

¹² שופטים ה:כח (Judg. 5:28)

¹³ ר"ה לג: (Rosh Hashanah 33b)

tekiah three times; *tekiah shevarim tekiah* three times; and *tekiah truah tekiah* three times. There is no doubt that a person who heard those thirty sounds fulfills the commandment properly. For instance, if we have to blow the shofar for a hospital patient who cannot go to shul, all we have to do is blow those thirty shofar blasts for him or her. There is no need for anything additional.

Why, then, do we blow 100 sounds in shul? Originally, those thirty sounds were blown in combination with the three special blessings (Malkiyos, Zikhronos, and Shofros) of Musaf. Over time it was noticed that many people, such as the elderly or the sick, had a hard time fulfilling the commandment of blowing the shofar because they could not stay in shul that long. Therefore, people began to blow the basic thirty sounds immediately after the public reading of the Torah, after which the elderly and sick could go home. We call those additional shofar blasts “sitting-down tekiahs.”

According to Maimonides this could actually take place while sitting down, but the more common explanation of “sitting down” is that it occurs at a time when we theoretically could sit, such as when we are not in the middle of the Amidah. But we do stand.

The Talmud¹⁴ provides another reason for the additional thirty shofar blasts. Those sounds were meant to confuse the *satan* (prosecuting angel) so that the *satan* would not be able to accuse the Jewish people (to God) while the “real” shofar blasts are blown. In short, we usually have sixty shofar blasts: thirty after the public Torah reading and thirty additional blasts, which are integrated into the three Musaf blessings, thereby

¹⁴ ר"ה טז: (Rosh Hashanah 16b)

has given us a second chance. We, like Sisera's mother, must change our way of life.

Earlier we mentioned the idea that we are unsure about the one true sound of the *truah* and therefore we have to sound all possibilities. Rav Hai Gaon states that on the contrary, all *truah* possibilities are correct. In some communities we sounded the *truah* in one way, in some communities we sounded the *truah* in a different way. Rabbi Avahu of the Gemara believed that we should all blow the same uniform shofar sounds, and he introduced the custom to sound all three possibilities of the *truah*. But no matter how we blow the shofar, we fulfill our obligation.

According to Nachmonides we fulfill our obligation with the thirty shofar sounds of the sitting-down tekiahs. The ten shofar sounds from the Musaf Amidah, then, cannot be the fulfillment of the commandment of blowing the shofar. The shofar blasts in Musaf represent a different medium of prayer.

Sometimes in prayer we can organize our thoughts well and present our requests to God in a logical manner. Sometimes we are so upset that we cannot organize our thoughts at all, and we just shed tears. This is what the tekiahs from the Amidah of Musaf are, according to Nachmanides.

The Mishna¹⁵ discusses the nature of the sounds of the *tekiah* and the *truah*. It states that the *tekiah* sound is as long as three *truah* sounds. A *truah* is as long as three yevavas. According to Rashi, yevavas are medium-length blasts, making the *truah* nine very short blasts. Rabbi Avahu suggests otherwise: that we do not really know what the *truah* is. It might be as long as a sigh or even as long as yevavas and a

¹⁵: ר"ה לג: (Rosh Hashanah 33b)

sigh. Each interpretation would influence the length of a *tekiah*, which has to be relative to the *truah*. If a *truah* is as long as three yevavas, and a *yevava* is three short sobbing sounds, the *truah* is nine short sounds (this is what we refer to today as a *truah*). Then the *tekiah* is a relatively short sound. If the *truah* is a sighing sound, it is what we today call *shevarim*. The *shevarim* is somewhat longer than the *truah*, and the *tekiah* before or after a sound as long as a sigh would be longer than the *tekiah* of the *truah* series. If the *truah* is a combination of a *truah* and a *shevarim*, the *tekiah* would be even longer.

The Tosafos¹⁶ point out that we have to be careful not to stretch out the sound of the *shevarim* because each blast of it would then become a short *tekiah*. Rav Soloveitchik used to follow the Tosafos' suggestion to add on a fourth or fifth short blast of the *shevarim* sound to lengthen the total range of the *shevarim* in order to make it longer. This results in a longer *tekiah* sound for the *shevarim*, so there is no danger in invalidating the *shevarim* by having them accidentally become *tekiah* sounds.

On Rosh Hashanah morning when we make Kiddush we quote the verse תקעו בחדש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו כי חק לישראל יעקב (Blow the shofar at the moon's renewal, at the time appointed for our festive day, because it is a decree for Israel a judgment day for the God of Jacob).¹⁷ We also recite this Psalm every Thursday morning as the Psalm of the day. There are several interpretations for the term בכסה ("at the moon's renewal"). One of those interpretations tells us that from this verse (כסה taken to mean "hide") we derive the

¹⁶ ר"ה לג: (Rosh Hashanah 33b)

¹⁷ תהלים פא:ד,ה (Psalm 81:4-5)

giving us a higher and a more meaningful understanding of the commandment.

In some communities, the shofar is blown twice during Musaf, once during the silent Amidah and once during the repetition of the Amidah. Rav Soloveitchik adopted that custom for his *minyan* at Maimonides School. The Rabbis mention the custom of blowing 100 shofar blasts corresponding to the 100 sobbings of Sisera's mother. To live up to this *minhag*, in most communities we listen to an additional forty blasts at the end of the service. In the Maimonides minyan, there is only a need to add another ten, since the shofar was blown twice thirty times during Musaf (once in the silent Amidah and once in the repetition).

Why is a connection made between the sobbing of Sisera's mother and the commandment of blowing the shofar? Rav Soloveitchik explained it in the following way: Sisera's mother was a cruel woman who took great delight in her son's military exploits, success, and cruelty toward his victims. On that day she waited for her victorious son to return from battle, but he never did. As she waited anxiously, she started questioning her son's way of life, his involvement with death, destruction, and innumerable foes. She asked herself, "Couldn't my son have used his talents for constructive purposes and helped the downtrodden and the poor?" Waiting countless hours, she suddenly realized that she had brought up her son the wrong way. Her sobs were sobs of regret. She wished she could live her life over again and train her son for nobler purposes. The long wait for her son on that day awakened thoughts of repentance in her heart. Suddenly she understood how wrong she had been. This is what we should feel while listening to the sound of the shofar. We should feel like Sisera's mother, that we could have done better, but that for us it is not too late. God

practice of not mentioning (i.e., hiding) the Musaf sacrifice of Rosh Chodesh in the Musaf service of Rosh Hashanah, even though Rosh Hashanah itself occurs on the new moon of Tishre.

The Gemara and the Tosafos discuss this problem. In the Musaf for Rosh Hashanah, the section of the Amidah in which we customarily mention the sacrifices does not reference the Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. Since Rosh Hashanah falls on the first day of Tishre, this is very strange. There is a hint, however, that Rosh Hashanah is also a Rosh Chodesh, because in describing the sacrifices of the day, the Musaf prayers mention “the burnt offering that is offered up each month with its meal offering.”

The sacrifices of Rosh Hashanah and Rosh Chodesh are different. Those of Rosh Chodesh consist of a burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs with their meal offerings and libations. The law also required an additional male goat for a sin offering and two daily sacrifices.

The Rosh Hashanah sacrifices consisted of a burnt offering of one young bull, one ram, and seven male lambs with their meal offerings and libations. The law also required two male goats for a sin offering and two daily sacrifices. This is all in addition to “the burnt offering each month with its meal offering.”

You might ask why the Torah keeps it a secret that Rosh Hashanah is also Rosh Chodesh Tishre. Rav Soloveitchik once explained that Rosh Hashanah and Rosh Chodesh represent contradictory ideas and therefore cannot be mentioned together. Rosh Chodesh represents the imperfect world that we have today. According to the Rabbis, the Almighty “sinned” by making the moon a lesser light when it aspired to take the place

of the sun.¹⁸ Rosh Hashanah, however, represents the perfect world that we desire and for which we pray.

Yom Kippur and Vidui

Once during a drought, after many remedies had been attempted, Rabbi Akiva, as *chazzan*, recited the prayer אבינו מלכנו ("Our Father, our King") for rain. His prayer was answered, and rain came. The Gemara relates this incident in order to show us the power of that prayer. אבינו מלכנו ("Our Father, our King") was established to be recited on Yom Kippur. Also central to this day is the recitation of the confessional prayer known as the Vidui.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is observed on the tenth day of Tishre. The significance of this day goes back to Israel's history in the desert. Moshe ascended Mount Sinai to reside with God for forty days and learn all of the Torah. When Moshe came down from the mountain on 17 Tammuz, he was shocked to see the depravity of the Jewish people as they danced around the golden calf. If it had not been for Moshe's fervent pleas, God would have destroyed the Jewish people. Moshe therefore ascended Mount Sinai a second time, imploring the Almighty not to reject the Jews as His nation. When the third period of forty days started on Rosh Chodesh Elul, God's mercy triumphed, and at the end of the third period of forty days, on the tenth day of Tishre, Moshe heard the redeeming words, וסלחתי ("I forgive them"). Ever since, that day has been the Day of Atonement.

¹⁸ רש"י בראשית א:טז (Rashi on Gen. 1:16)

Maimonides explains that it is a commandment from the Torah to recite Vidui for our sins: "and they should confess their sins."¹⁹ This commandment of Vidui applies all year round, not just on Yom Kippur, but whenever Jews realize that they have deviated from the Torah, they must take all the steps necessary for repentance, including the recitation of Vidui. On Yom Kippur, we are obliged to go a step further. We have to reflect upon all of our actions in the past year and discover all the possible iniquities we may have committed. Vidui therefore has become the outstanding feature of our dialogue with God on Yom Kippur.

We actually start reciting Vidui on the day before Yom Kippur. The first Vidui is said during Minchah, which must take place before the last meal before the fast. The Rabbis introduced this pre-Yom Kippur Vidui in case a person chokes during the meal and dies before having confessed his or her sins. Therefore we confess our sins before the meal.

The Gemara²⁰ quotes a *beraisa* which says that one should recite Vidui before one eats and then after one eats as well, in case one backslides during the meal. Even after having recited Vidui during Ma'ariv of Yom Kippur, one should also recite Vidui during Shacharis, Minchah, and Ne'ilah. In the Minchah before Yom Kippur we simply say the ordinary Amidah for Minchah, and at the end of the Amidah we add Vidui. It is recommended that before Vidui one say the verse, "May the words of my mouth and the intention of my heart be acceptable," indicating that the Amidah has been finished.

¹⁹ במדבר ה:ז (Num. 5:7)

²⁰ יומא פז: (Yoma 87b)

When the *beraisa* speaks about Vidui before Minchah, the expression used is שמא תטרף דעתו בסעודה, which literally means “his mind will be torn away during the meal.” Rashi comments that this means we might get drunk. Maimonides explains it as we might choke during the meal before we have had an opportunity to recite Vidui. Rashi’s and Maimonides’ different explanations reflect the eating and drinking habits of their cultures.

In France (Rashi), no meal was completed without wine. In Spain (Maimonides), wine at a meal was a rarity. Thus Maimonides assumed a different kind of danger might arise during a meal. Often people come to shul just before the start of Yom Kippur without having had an opportunity to pray Minchah. They quickly rise to say Minchah, including Vidui, before Kol Nidre. Their actions do not make any sense. They have eaten their meal so there is no logical reason why they should add this Vidui to their Amidah.

The *beraisa* also tells us that the proper way to accomplish this commandment of Vidui on Erev Yom Kippur is עם השכה. Rashi interprets עם השכה as after one has eaten and has already begun the observance of the fast day. This means that there should be another Vidui when Erev Yom Kippur becomes Yom Kippur, as the Torah says כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה' תטהרו (“because on that day you will receive atonement to become absolved from all your sins; you will be pure before God”).²¹ The verse has been interpreted to mean that we ought to start the day of Yom Kippur in purity.

It has been the custom of many Jews, as they prepare for Kol Nidre, to say a prayer that contains all the ingredients of

²¹ ויקרא טז:ל (Lev. 16:30)

Vidui. In recent years this custom has been forgotten because many Machzorim (Holy Day prayer books) did not print it. For this reason Rav Soloveitchik required that before Kol Nidre the congregation rise to recite Vidui together. This is done to carry out the obligation of Vidui after one has eaten and already begun the observance of the fast day. Now Machzorim are again including it. Each Jew can prepare himself for the sanctity of Yom Kippur by expressing the important sentiments brought out in this prayer.

The Gemara²² tells us that the individual says Vidui after the Amidah while the *chazzan* says Vidui during the middle of the Amidah in the blessing of the sanctity of the day. The Talmud does not explain the reason for this change. Rav Soloveitchik once explained it the following way: An individual who is very sincere about saying Vidui and about repenting may be so embarrassed and ashamed and upset by former actions that he or she will break down and never finish the prayers. Therefore, it's best for the individual to say Vidui after finishing the Amidah. The *chazzan*, on the other hand, is our representative before God. He is not personally involved. He certainly can finish the Amidah. Therefore he says Vidui in the place where it belongs, in the blessing mentioning the special sanctity of the day.

An ancient custom on Yom Kippur has two members of the congregation stand on either side of the *chazzan*. They may represent the assistant *kohen* and the head of the *kohen's* family group, who accompanied the high priest throughout the Temple service. They also may represent Aharon and Chur, who assisted Moshe in pleading with God to help His people.

²² יומא פז: (Yoma 87b)

As the *chazzan*, representing Moshe, prepares to say Vidui, he mentions many reasons why God should forgive His people. Since he is representing the community he may do so. He has to find excuses for the misbehavior of the Jewish people. Therefore the *chazzan* says the Vidui and the blessing, מחל הזה לעונותינו ביום הכפורים הזה ("forgive our sins on this Day of Atonement"). This prayer indicates that the Jews really are not evil at heart, and the Almighty should therefore pardon their sins.

If the individual were also to say Vidui in the blessing of the sanctity of the day, he or she would follow it up with "forgive our sins on this Day of Atonement." The *chazzan* may make this declaration since he represents the community. The individual, however, must not minimize his or her sins or justify evil actions. Therefore, the individual must say Vidui after the Amidah, where there is no request for forgiveness mitigating the impact of the confession.

Vidui consists of two parts: the short Vidui, Ashamnu ("we have sinned") and the long Vidui, Al Chet ("for the sin [that we have committed]"). What is the difference between those two? Usually we assume that the short Vidui discusses sins in general without much detail, whereas the long Vidui lists specific, individual wrongdoings such as making fun of parents and teachers. But if you look carefully, you see that the long Vidui mentions many general terms for our sins, such as "willingly or against our will".

Rav Soloveitchik saw the distinction between the two Viduis as follows: one enumerates the sins of each individual, whereas the other speaks about the sins of the community. Sins of the individual include such acts as eating forbidden food. Sins of the community include such acts as not providing

proper supervision for food preparation. For this reason Rav Soloveitchik believed that two Viduis are needed.

We have five Amidahs on Yom Kippur: Ma'ariv, Shacharis, Musaf, Minchah, and Ne'ilah. In addition to the Vidui of Erev Yom Kippur, we recite Vidui on Yom Kippur itself ten times, in each service twice: once in the silent Amidah and once in the repetition of the Amidah by the *chazzan*. Although there is no repetition of the Amidah by the Chazzan in Kol Nidre (Ma'ariv), Vidui is said as part of Slichos afterward. In all cases, both the long and short Viduis are recited, with the exception of Ne'ilah at the end of Yom Kippur, at which time we only say the short Vidui.

The Maggid of Dubnov tells the following story to illustrate the reason for the lack of the second Vidui in Ne'ilah. A rich man built a special safe for his money in his home and hid the key. This way he was sure that no harm would come to his fortune. One day, as he took a walk, he noticed that everybody was running in the direction of his home, and smoke was rising from that direction above the whole neighborhood. His house was on fire and about to collapse at any moment. There was no time to look for the key and unlock the safe. So he quickly ran home and kicked the door of the safe in to get to his money. He grabbed the money and ran out of the burning house. Just after that the house collapsed completely. At Ne'ilah we do not have time to examine our sins. We have to take quick and decisive action to save ourselves. A short Vidui, forcefully said, could bring about divine forgiveness.

There is another reason why we recite Vidui ten times on Yom Kippur and that is the special significance of the number ten. On Yom Kippur the high priest in the Temple pronounced God's name ten times: three times in each Vidui that he

recited²³ and again when he determined by lot which goat was to be offered in the Temple and which would be sent off as the scapegoat. The people, hearing God's name, prostrated themselves in awe and trepidation.

The Sages see a connection between the ten Viduis and the tenfold recitation of God's name. The pronunciation of God's name invoked God's aspect of mercy, assuring us of His forgiveness no matter how deeply we had fallen.

The Vidui is formulated alphabetically, each letter of the Alef-Bais beginning another line of the prayer. King David also made ample use of acrostics in his prayers. Psalm 145, for example, follows the order of the Alef-Bais and Psalm 119 uses each letter of the Alef-Bais, sequentially, eight times to begin each verse. King David knew that no mortal human being can adequately and comprehensively recite God's praises. Therefore he took all the letters of the Alef-Bais to indicate that none of us can do justice to God's greatness: "We ask You, God, to take all the letters of the Alef-Bais and formulate Your own essence."

Similarly in the Vidui, we admit that we cannot possibly enumerate all our shortcomings. Consequently, by saying it in the order of the Alef-Bais we tell God, "You know all our shortcomings and failures. Take the letters of the Alef-Bais and consider it as if we had mentioned them all properly ourselves."

The Gemara tells us that anyone who publicly proclaims all of his sins is a brazen person, because the Bible (Psalm 32:1) teaches us that it is better to conceal our sins. This implies that if someone announces a list of his sins, he is not truly ashamed

²³ The first Vidui he recited for himself and his family; the second, for all the *kohanim*; and the third, for all of Israel.

of them but actually wants to brag about them. No one should know about your sins except you and God. The fact that in shul we say Vidui out loud together seems to contradict this dictum. However, what we say in shul together is our general shortcomings, of which we are all guilty. If we want to mention our individual sins, then we must do so softly.

Slichos

Slichos is part of the Piyyutim literature. Piyyutim are religious poems dealing with our history, our philosophy of life, our relationship to God, and halakhic or Aggadic problems. At the time the Talmud was concluded, our prayers were more or less the standard prayers we say today. But our ancestors were very eager to demonstrate their love of God, so they added more prayers for many different occasions. The authors of these prayers, the Paytanim, included the spiritual leaders of Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewry, such as Rabbi Yehudah Halevy or Shlomo ibn Gabirol. Of some we know absolutely nothing, such as Rabbi Hakalir. Among the authors of those Slichos were great Rabbis, such as Rabbenu Gershon Meir Hagalah, Rashi, and others spiritual giants.

Outside Israel we have two days of observance for most Holy Days. The Amidah of the first day usually contains Piyyutim of Rabbi Hakalir. Those Piyyutim are very difficult to understand since Rabbi Hakalir manipulated the Hebrew language in a remarkable way, constantly alluding to the Midrash. We are not even always aware of his sources since they are often so obscure. On the second day, most of our Piyyutim are those composed by Rabbi Shimon Hagadol of Germany. Those Piyyutim are much easier to understand and they are written in much simpler language. Rabbi Hakalir did not write Piyyutim for the second day of the Holy Days

because, as most historians have concluded, he lived in Israel, where there is only one day of Yom Tov.

Slichos are special prayers, similar to the *kinot* (prayers of lamentations) recited on Tisha B'Av, and are said on fast days. Originally, they were part of the Amidah, included in the sixth blessing of the Amidah, סלח לנו ("Forgive us"). Today we say them following the Amidah, or we arise at night and recite them before sunrise. We should be very careful to be truthful in our Slichos prayers. We mention in Slichos that we have awoken in the middle of the night, a statement which is inappropriate when it is actually daytime. Yet they are still part of the Amidah, which we say in the mornings. This is also true of the Piyyutim that are said after the Amidah and are also considered part of it.²⁴

Another example of Slichos is the so-called long והוא רחום ("He is merciful") that we say on Monday and Thursday after the Amidah and before Tachanun. Monday and Thursday were days of mercy before God, so many of our ancestors used to fast almost every Monday and Thursday. We do not fast every Monday and Thursday today, but we still say the original Slichos that are associated with these days. This would explain why we stand for והוא רחום ("He is merciful") and sit down only for Tachanun itself. Slichos are recited while standing, since they are really part of the Amidah.

The Sages argued about whether it is proper to add these poetic compositions to our standard prayers. Our sages in all generations have argued about this issue. In the *Shulchan*

²⁴ Rav Soloveitchik said the Piyyutim after the repetition of the Amidah, before the concluding Kaddish. They were still considered within the framework of the Amidah.

*Arukh*²⁵ we find an example of this basic argument. Rav Soloveitchik introduced the following practice: In Ma'ariv of Yom Tov, poems called Ma'aravot were included. The exception was when Yom Tov occurred on Shabbos; we were afraid that because of the many unfamiliar words, someone might forget it is Shabbos and adjust the light to see better. Also, on Rosh Hashanah, when many Jews had fasted the day before, the addition of Ma'aravot would place an undue hardship on the worshippers by prolonging the fast.

The additions to the blessings of the Shma in Shacharis on Yom Tov are called Yotzros. At Maimonides School we skip them all. The additions to the repetition of the Amidah are called Krovetz. Krovos (from the root קרב, meaning "close") indicate that the *chazzan* comes near to God and represents the people to the Almighty. The singular of Krovos is Krovah. Why the strange plural form of Krovetz? According to some, the initials of the word stand for "the voice of joy and salvation is in the tents of the righteous." Others think it is a Hebrew word with a French plural.

In any case, at Maimonides School the Krovos were skipped while the Ma'aravot were recited. This seems to be contradictory: Are we permitted to have addenda in the benedictions of the Shma or not? Rav Soloveitchik explained it in the following way: We want to add to the festive mood of Yom Tov by reciting special Piyyutim. In Ma'ariv we add those Piyyutim to the blessings of the Shma since there is no other location for them. Even though it is improper to interrupt the blessings of the Shma, we have no other choice. In Shacharis there is no need for these interruptions. We simply add the

²⁵ אורח חיים סח (*Orach Chaim* 68)

The proper time for Slichos is shortly before daybreak. Slichos is to be followed immediately by Shacharis. In recent years the custom has developed to say Slichos right after midnight, when the holiness of Shabbos is still present and only gradually waning.

Just like Hallel, Slichos are similar in structure to the Amidah. In order to evoke the proper concentration, we begin the Slichos preceding Rosh Hashanah with Ashrei. Next we say a half-Kaddish, just as we would at Minchah. Following the model of the Amidah, which starts with praise of God, we start Slichos with many verses of praise of God. Slichos continues to parallel the structure of the Amidah and proceeds to a section of petitions consisting of the thirteen attributes of God and then Vidui.

It has become a practice to say Ashamnu, the short Vidui, three times. The reason is not clear. Rav Soloveitchik believed, as did the Gaon, that we should recite it only once.

In the Amidah, after the petitions we thank God. (הודאה). No part of Slichos seems to correspond to this section of thanksgiving. Yom Kippur, with (hopefully) complete forgiveness, is still many days away, so perhaps the thanks is postponed until then.

Furthermore, just as the Amidah is followed by Tachanun, Slichos is followed by pleas to God, which probably originate in the days of the Temple in Jerusalem. These are litanies which repeat the same refrain over and over again such as ענונו ("Answer us"). Like any Amidah, Slichos is followed by the concluding Kaddish of "Accept our prayers."

special Yom Tov prayers to the repetition of the Amidah. This does not cause an interruption.

Rav Soloveitchik pointed out that all the Piyyutim that are added to the Amidah are included before the Kedushah. Kedushah is the song of the angels praising God's omnipotence, and the Piyyutim are Israel's praise of God. Thus, once the angels have spoken, we humans must keep quiet. Our song is no match for the song of the angels.

There is another special group of Slichos. Those are the penitential prayers (Slichos) that we say before Rosh Hashanah. These Slichos are really another Amidah. The Sephardim say Slichos during the whole month of Elul, reflecting the forty days during which Moshe implored God to forgive the Jewish people, and they repeat the same Slichos every day.

Ashkenazi Jews say them for at least four days before Rosh Hashanah, and they are different every day. What is the significance of four days? Our ancestors fasted on all of the Ten Days of Repentance, except for the two days of Rosh Hashanah, Shabbos, and Erev Yom Kippur. Therefore they declared four substitute fast days before Rosh Hashanah. Another explanation for the number four can be found in the laws of *bekhoros* (the firstborn). Any animal offered as a sacrifice to God in the Temple in Jerusalem had to be examined thoroughly for any physical blemish for four days prior to being sacrificed. We therefore must examine ourselves for any spiritual defects for four days before facing the Divine judgment on Rosh Hashanah.

We always start saying Slichos on a Sunday, because we are still under the influence of the sanctity of the Shabbos, when the Shekhinah is still in our midst.

At its very heart, Slichos consists of the thirteen attributes of God's mercy, which God revealed to Moshe. The Gemara²⁶ tells us that God revealed Himself in a prayer shawl like a *chazzan* and showed Moshe the prayers to be said. This is the basis of the leader of the Slichos service wearing a prayer shawl. God said to Moshe, "Whenever Israel sins, they shall recite before Me these prayers, and I will forgive them." The recitation of these prayers, of course, only helps if accompanied by repentance on the part of the individual.

The thirteen attributes are prayers containing special holiness, so we can say them only if summoned by the *chazzan*; we also must stand, and we must have a *minyan*. Whenever Slichos is said, the thirteen attributes are the foundation of the prayer. Slichos can be said if one is praying alone, but without its most important part – the thirteen attributes. Without a *minyan*, Slichos is an exercise in futility.

We recite the thirteen attributes more than once. During the Slichos preceding Rosh Hashanah we usually say them once as part of the introductory prayers and three times during the body of Slichos. On special days, such as Erev Rosh Hashanah, we say them more often. On Yom Kippur the Gaonim established a particular number of times that we say the thirteen attributes.²⁷

After the thirteen attributes, the introductory verses are the most sacred part of Slichos; therefore, they are placed before the Piyutim section. Verses from the Bible, naturally, have a

²⁶ ראש השנה יז: (Rosh Hashanah 17b)

²⁷ There is a custom to say the thirteen attributes on a Yom Tov before reading the Torah. This is a questionable practice, since nobody summons the congregation to do so, and it does not follow the format of a prayer of special holiness.

greater sanctity than our own compositions. These verses serve to explicate the theme of the Piyyutim. They should not be rattled off but should be said with concentration and understanding. Then we recite the litanies, which probably derive from the period of the Second Temple. Least holy are the Piyyutim by the medieval scholars and poets, which are beautiful but cannot be compared to the thirteen attributes or other biblical verses. We primarily need the Slichos Piyyutim as a vehicle for an additional recitation of the thirteen attributes.

The last of the Slichos prayers is always a prayer called a Pizmon, which means "beautiful poetry." Many Pizmonim rhyme and have beautiful melodies. Often Slichos are mumbled quickly without true understanding. On Erev Rosh Hashanah we increase the number of Slichos recited, while on Erev Yom Kippur Slichos is almost eliminated, because Erev Yom Kippur is a holy day and not a fast day.

Saying Slichos before Rosh Hashanah has the status of custom. We say Slichos on Yom Kippur during the Amidah for a very different reason. If we do not say them on Rosh Hashanah, our prayers are still worthwhile. But the Slichos of Yom Kippur are, in a sense, part of the sanctity of Yom Kippur itself, and any omission of these Slichos would render the prayer service incomplete.

The enigma is that in today's order of the services, we recite Slichos during the Amidah of Ne'ilah, the ending service, but not in the Amidahs of the other services. Rav Soloveitchik added Slichos to all the Amidahs. In ancient times we used to have two prayer books: one with the prayers of Yom Kippur and another with the Slichos of Yom Kippur. Somehow we neglected the second book and were eventually left without Slichos.

When we say Slichos in the Amidahs of Yom Kippur, such as in the Amidah of Ne'ilah, we do not start with an introductory praise of God like Ashrei. Since Slichos are already part of the Amidah, they need no introduction. At Kol Nidre, most shuls recite יעלה תחנונינו ("May our supplications ascend") immediately after the Amidah. Rav Soloveitchik does not start with this but with the other verses of praise that follow it. Since the Slichos of Kol Nidre are not part of the Amidah itself, (because there is no repetition of the Amidah by the *chazzan*), we should insist that praises of God precede the petitions.

The authors of the Piyutim freely utilized the Scriptures, and in doing so have changed many verses from the singular to the plural. This is a questionable procedure. Many Rabbis permitted it since we transform the verses into prayers for God's mercy. Although we permit ourselves this practice, it is still very difficult to understand. One example of this change from singular to plural is when we take the verse יהיו לרצון אמרי פי והגיון לבי לפניך ה' צורי וגואלי ("May the words of my mouth and the intentions of my heart be acceptable to You, my Source of strength and Redeemer"),²⁸ transposing it into the plural in the שמע קולנו ("Hear our voices") prayer of Slichos. What right do we have to change a biblical verse? Yet we do it consistently. Another example is וארפא הושיעני רפאני ה' וארפא ה' ואושעה כי תהלתי אתה ("Heal me, Hashem, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, because You are the one I praise"),²⁹ which was changed to the plural for the Amidah by the Men of the Great Assembly. Obviously the Men of the Great Assembly condoned this practice, and we follow in their

²⁸ תהלים יט:טו (Psalm 19:15)

²⁹ ירמיהו יז:יד (Jer. 17:14)

footsteps. Rav Soloveitchik, however, generally quoted the verses in the singular, the way they appear in the Bible. He did not wish to tamper with the words of God.

Some sections of Slichos address the angels or the divine attributes directly in prayer. Maimonides vehemently opposed this practice. He believed that we must only pray to God and not any intermediary. Rav Soloveitchik always omitted these prayers or reworded them.