להבין את התפלה

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THE CRUSADES AND THE RECITAL OF עלינו לשבח

One of the earliest references to the recital of עלינו לשבח as part of Jewish martyrdom is found in a קינה that was composed by Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn (1133-1196) commemorating the massacre of more than thirty Jews in Blois, France in 1171 and included in the Worms Machzor[1] (page 182) for recital on תשעה באב:

אוֹי לִי עַל שִׁבְרֵי נַחֲלָה מַכּתִי הַעֲצוּמָה, כְּפָעַר רָשָׁע יִמַּח (שְׁמוֹ) מֵאֲרָמָה לִשְׂרוֹף חֲסִדֵי עֶלְיוֹן מְלַמְּדֵי חָכְמָה, וְהִכְנִיסוּם לְבֵית הַמּוֹקֵד לִשְׂרוֹף שָׁמָּה, הֵמִירוּ כָּבוֹד בְּלֹא יוֹעִיל מְאוּמָה, פָּצוּ צַדִּיקִים סֵפֶר לְהֶחֱסָמָה: הַבְעָרָה וּבִשּׁוּל אֵינָהּ נִשְׁנָה שְׁלֵימָה כְּנֶגֶד שִׁינּוּן יִיחוּד הַיִּרְאָה הַתְּמִימָה, וְהִנְעִימוּ עָלֵינוּ לְשַׁבֵּחַ, ה' אֶחָד לְיַיחֲדָהּ.

A review of the comments made by חז"ל concerning עלינו לשבח provide clues that the recital of עלינו לשבח at the conclusion of תפילות began during the period of the Crusades. Initially it was intended that עלינו לשבח be recited out loud by the congregation:

ספר המנהגים (טירנא) הגהות המנהגים מנהג של יום חול אות (יד) ורגילין-(יד) ורגילין לאומרו בקול רם, לפי שנאמר גבי פסל וגבי ארור וענו (דברים כז, טו) שהוא לשון הרמת קול, רוקח (סי ר"ג). מזה נראה לי דנהגו בליל ניטל[2] לומר עלינו בקול רם, אף שאין נוהגין כן כל השנה מפני הסכנה, כן עיקר.

The justification given for reciting עלינו לשבח at the conclusion of תפילות was to firmly implant the concept of the unity of G-d in our minds.

שו"ת קול מבשר חלק ב', ס' לא'- והטעם שאומרים עלינו לשבח בסיום התפלה כתב הב"ח ריש סי' קל"ג שהוא כדי לתקוע בלבנו קודם שנפטרים לבתינו יחוד מלכות שמים וכו' ע"ש.

Its purpose was also to deter our being influenced by non-Jews in our dealings with them:

שו"ת קול מבשר חלק ב' סימן לא'- ולפי מה שמסיים הב"ח ר"ס קל"ג בטעם אמירת עלינו קודם שנפטרים לבתינו כדי שתתחזק האמונה בלבנו שאז גם כשיעסוק במשא ומתן עם העכו"ם לא נפנה לבבינו אל האלילים וכו' עיין שם אם כן בשבת דלא שייך האי טעמא כיון שאינו עוסק אז במשא ומתן אין לומר עלינו בשום תפלה, וכן נראה דעת הטור שלא הזכיר מענין אמירת עלינו רק בחול אחר שחרית.

Some saw a connection between קריאת שמע and עלינו לשבח and therefore, did not recite עלינו לשבח at the end of תפלת מנחה since תפלת מנחה did not include קריאת שמע:

שו"ת רדב"ז מכתב יד - אורח חיים, יורה דעה (חלק ח) סימן לג'-שאלת: ממני, איך ינהוג בענין עלינו לשבח בתפלת מנחה, לפי שראית כמה בני אדם אין אומרים אותו, ואומרים כיון שאין בה קריאת שמע[3] שהוא היחוד, שאין לומר בה עלינו לשבח שנתקן בסוד היחוד.

1. Available for viewing at the Jewish University Library; www.jnul.huji.ac.il/eng.
2. Xmas Eve.
3. Professsor Robert Chazan in his book: God, Humanity, and History: The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives, writes the

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תשובה: איני רואה לבטל ממני עול מלכות שמים אפילו שעה אחת, ושבח נאה כזה ראוי לאדם לומר אותו כמה פעמים ביום, וכל שכן בתפלת המנחה, ואדרבה מפני שאין באותה תפלה קריאת שמע, צריך לומר עלינו לשבח שהוא במקום קריאת שמע, והוא הייחוד הגמור. והרי בתפלת מוסף שאין בה קריאת שמע תקנו אותו מסדרי התפלות בראש השנה ויום הכפורים, וכן אמרו לי שנמצא בתשובות הגאונים ז"ל שצריך לאומרו, וכן אני נוהג כל ימי (עיין מג"א סימן קל"ב ס"ק א', ובכנה"ג סימן רל"ד בהגהות שעל הטור) ועוד אני רגיל לאומרו בעוד שאני מעוטף בציצית ותפילין בראשי, לפי שהוא במקום היחוד, ומזה הטעם אני אומרו אפילו בט' באב, אעפ"י שראיתי מי שכתב שאין לאומרו משום שנאמר גם כי תרבו תפלה אינני שומע (ישעי', א', ט"ו) בכף החיים סימן תקנ"ט סע"ק מ"ו הביא כן בשם ספר התניא וטעם זה חלוש, דכיון דאפילו ריבוי התפלה אינו שומע, כל שכן תפלה עצמה, ונמצאו ברכות לבטלה ואם כן לא נתפלל, גם כי נוסח זה אינו תפלה אלא יחודו של בורא עולם. והנראה לעניות דעתי כתבתי.

The rule that even if one has already recited עלינו לשבח at the conclusion of his תפלה, one is required to recite עלינו לשבח when joining a congregation that is reciting עלינו לשבח provides further evidence:

אליה רבה סימן רלז –ד– עלינו לשבח וכו'. שמעתי שנהג זקיני הגאון ז"ל שאמר עלינו עם הצבור אף שכבר אמר עלינו.

So too the fact that the practice of reciting עלינו לשבח at the conclusion of תפילות was reported only by those who resided in geographic areas that were touched by the Crusades[4].

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following in a footnote to page 10: The highlighting of the prayer '*Alenu le-shabeah'* as recited by the martyrs is most innovative and interesting. In the extensive First Crusade narratives, the prayer on the lips of dying martyrs was invariably the *shema,* the brief formula of Deut. 6:4. Three considerations suggest themselves for the introduction of the '*Alenu le-shabeah':*

1. The first is that of altered circumstances. In 1096, the setting was one of popular assault, with little time for Jewish response; in 1171, the setting was one of protracted Jewish preparedness for martyrdom, with the Jews chanting the longer prayer (*Alenu le-shabeah)* on their way to the pyre.

2. While the monotheistic message of Deut. 6:4 surely implied, from the Jewish perspective, criticism of Christianity, the contrast between Judaism and other faiths is lavishly depicted in the '*Alenu le-shabeah'.* For a late-twelfth-century version of the prayer with extensive castigation of other faiths (i.e., Christianity), see Yisrael Ta-Shma, "The Source and Place of the Prayer '*Alenu le-shabeah' (Hebrew), in The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume,* ed. Barry Walfish, 2 vols. (Haifa, 1993), 1, Heb. sect., 90.

3. Given the original placement of the '*Alenu le-shabeah'* in the liturgy of the Day of Atonement, the atonement motif, to be discussed shortly, is reinforced through this prayer. In his "Source and Place of the Prayer, " 85–98, Ta-Shma discusses the evolution of the '*Alenu leshabeah'* and a number of other prayers into the concluding section of the daily services, a development that Ta-Shma traces to the second half of the twelfth century. Ta-Shma argues convincingly for the internal dynamics of liturgical change as the basis for this development, which again goes far beyond the '*Alenu* prayer. I would tentatively suggest that the liturgical developments traced by Ta-Shma and the issues treated in my analysis probably reinforce each other. That is to say, the liturgical changes enhanced awareness among the Jews of the late twelfth century of the '*Alenu'* prayer, while a growing Jewish concern with the contrast between the Jewish and Christian visions and an enhanced awareness of the centrality of sacrifice and atonement influenced the desire to project the '*Alenu'* prayer into greater prominence in the liturgy.

4. רוקח- born in Magentzia, subsequently moved to Metz, moved to Shpera and settled in Worms. כלבו-France and Spain; טור- fled with all of his family from Cologne to Barcelona.

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TRANSLATION OF SOURCES

אוֹי לִי עַל שִׁבְרִי נַחֲלָה- Woe unto me for my tragedy! My wound is fatal! When the wicked one—may his name be blotted out from the earth— ordered the burning of the pious of the Lord, so full of wisdom, He brought them to the place of burning, to be burned there. They [the Christians] said: "Exchange the Divine Glory for one who effects nothing!" The righteous spoke out in defiance, to put dust in their [the Christians'] mouths: "Burning and boiling are not convincing argument against proclaiming the unity of the Awesome and Pure. " They sang out the prayer '*Alenu le-shabeah'* in order to declare the unity of the one Lord[5].

ספר המנהגים (טירנא) הגהות המנהגים מנהג של יום חול אות (יד) ורגילין-It is customary to recite Aleinu L'Shabeach out loud. This action is based on the word: V'Anu (answer) found in Devarim 27, 15 which teaches how to respond to idolatry and other accursed activities. In that context the word: V'Anu (answer) represents the act of responding out loud, Rokeach, 203. That is the reason to recite Aleinu L'Shabeach out loud on Xmas Eve even though it is not done in that manner during the remainder of the year out of fear of reprisal.

שו"ת קול מבשר חלק ב', ס' לא'-The Bach wrote in Siman 133 that we recite Aleinu L'Shabeach at the end of each prayer service in order to impress upon our hearts before we leave the synagogue the unity of G-d.

שו"ת קול מבשר חלק ב' סימן לא'- When the Bach said that we recite Aleinu L'Shabeach at the end of each prayer service in order to impress upon our hearts before we leave the synagogue the unity of G-d, he meant to remind us that when we do business with non-Jews our hearts should not be attracted to their gods. We can conclude from that rule that it is not necessary to recite Aleinu L'Shabeach on Shabbos during any of the Tephilos since on Shabbos we are not involved in business. That appears to have the practice of the Tur since he does not refer to reciting Aleinu L'Shabeach at any time other than during weekdays after Tephilas Schacharis.

שו"ת רדב"ז מכתב יד – אורח חיים, יורה דעה (חלק ח) סימן לג'-You asked a question: what is the proper practice to follow concerning reciting Aleinu L'Shabeach after Tephilas Mincha? I saw that some people do not recite Aleinu L'Shabeach after Tephilas Mincha. They told me that the reason for that custom is that in Tephilas Mincha they do not recite

5. Reproduced from *God, Humanity, and History The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives* by Robert Chazan, University of California Press, 2000, page 6.

Kriyas Shema which represents the unity of G-d. As a result, they do not recite Aleinu L'Shabeach which also represents the unity of G-d. Answer: In my opinion, it is not appropriate to set aside thoughts about the unity of G-d for even one minute. A prayer of praise as beautiful as Aleinu L'Shabeach is worthy of being recited several times a day. Since we do not recite Kriyas Shema, which is the prayer of the Unity of G-d par excellence, during Tephilas Mincha it is particularly important that during Tephilas Mincha we should recite it. Consider further that Aleinu L'Shabeach was made a part of the Shemona Esrei of Tephilas Mussaf on Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur, prayer services in which Kriyas Shema is not recited. I have also been told that the issue appears in the Teshuvos Ha'Gaonim[6] and that it was resolved that Aleinu L'Shabeach should be recited in Tephilas Mincha and that is what I have practiced all my life. I further maintain the practice of wearing Talis and Tephilin while reciting Aleinu L'Shabeach because the prayer of Aleinu L'Shabeach represents a statement concerning the unity of G-d. For that reason, I also recite Aleinu L'Shabeach on Tisha B'Av even though I found it written that we should not recite it on Tisha B'Av because of the verse: even if you increase your prayer, I will not listen to it (Yeshayahu 1, 15). In the book Kaf Ha'Chayim Siman 559 he relates that position in the name of the Sefer Ha'Tanya. But that basis for not reciting Aleinu L'Shabeach on Tisha B'Av is weak. If G-d will not listen to an increase in prayer on Tisha B'Av, then G-d will not listen to any prayers; so why pray at all on Tisha B'Av. In addition, Aleinu L'Shabeach is not that type of prayer but is an affirmation of our belief in the unity of G-d. I have written what I conclude to be the correct practice based on my understanding.

אליה רבה סימן רלז–ד'-I heard that my grandfather, the Gaon, zt'l, would recite Aleinu L'Shabeach with the congregation even if he had already recited Aleinu L'Shabeach in a corresponding prayer service.

6. It is not clear that there is such a teshuva.

SUPPLEMENT

THE MASSACRE OF THE JEWS IN BLOIS FRANCE IN 1171

An Excerpt from God, Humanity, and History The Hebrew First Crusade Narratives by Robert Chazan, University of California Press, 2000

PROLOGUE The Time-Bound and the Timeless in Medieval Ashkenazic Narrative

Medieval Ashkenazic (northern European) Jews were relatively recent immigrants. Beginning in the late tenth century, southern European Jews moved northward, settling in the towns that were at the heart of the remarkable efflorescence of northern European civilization. These immigrant Jews made their way into an environment that was simultaneously supportive of and resistant to their settlement. The support came largely from far-sighted political leaders, who were convinced that the Jewish immigrants would provide useful stimulation to the economy of their domains. The resistance was widespread, rooted in both the realities of Jewish life and the legacy of Christian tradition. The Jews were newcomers and had to endure the hostility and suspicion that is the normal lot of immigrants. They were, moreover, newcomers to an area in which they constituted the only dissenting religious minority and were hence viewed with special concern and animosity. The fact that the immigrants were Jewish and the host society was Christian added further complications. The Jewish immigrants were seen as the descendants of ancestors who had rejected Jesus, the promised Messiah, and had indeed done him to death. This negative legacy much intensified the normal societal distaste for newcomers and dissidents so widely attested in all eras. The resistance to Jewish immigration, based on both tenth- and eleventh-century realities and preexistent tradition, erected barriers to socialization, imposed limits on economic activity, and created the potential for occasional violence.

The Christian environment of northern Europe limited and challenged its Jewish immigrants on the material plane, and it posed a profound spiritual challenge as well. Christianity represented an assault on the basic belief structure of these Jews (just as Judaism represented a parallel challenge to the basic belief structure of the Christian majority). Particularly troubling were the obvious signs of Christian ascendancy and Jewish degradation. For Christians living in a rapidly developing and increasingly powerful society, the indices of Jewish weakness—exile, minority status, and difficult circumstances—constituted decisive proof of the truth of Christianity and the nullity of Judaism. A potent and proud northern European Christendom at once attracted adventuresome Jews, limited them, and raised troubling questions for Jewish faith. The

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immigrant Jews had, at one and the same time, to remain vigilant in the protection of their material interests and creative in their response to the spiritual challenge posed by the Christian environment.

Since the social, economic, and political circumstances of early Ashkenazic Jewry coupled with the powerful anti-Jewish themes of traditional Christian teaching exposed the Jewish newcomers to considerable hostility and danger, these immigrants could hardly afford to remain oblivious to developments in majority society and to their potential impact on Jewish life. Of necessity, the early Ashkenazic Jews had to communicate regularly among themselves with respect to these developments. Not surprisingly, these time-bound communications have only rarely survived. Given their association with evanescent circumstances, such communications were not intended to be preserved and in fact rarely were. They were written for the present and quickly relegated to the scrap heap. Occasionally—but only occasionally—happenstance has resulted in the preservation of such materials.

Let us look briefly at one set of such time-bound communications, three letters composed in the wake of the Blois tragedy of 1171. The incident was connected to one of a series of late-twelfth-century accusations that Jews groundlessly murder their Christian neighbors. Events were set in motion by an allegation that a Jew had been seen disposing of the body of a Christian youngster in the Loire River. This claim was quickly picked up by a number of Christians profoundly resentful of the amorous relationship between their ruler and a Blois Jewess. Although the accusation that Jews murder Christian youngsters had been circulating for a number of decades by 1171, events in Blois diverged from the normal pattern, deeply threatening northern European Jewry in its entirety. While the authorities regularly repudiated the groundless murder charge, the special constellation of circumstances in Blois resulted in comital support for the murder allegation, eventuating in the death of more than thirty Jewish residents of the town. Given the stature of Count Theobald of Blois, his decision to execute these Jews by burning represented a potentially disastrous blow to northern European Jewry: it was a powerful reinforcement for the growing popular perception that the Jews were internal enemies, lodged within Christian society.

The Blois incident was sufficiently significant to leave numerous traces in both the Christian and Jewish literature of the time. The most significant of these sources was an epistle written in the neighboring Jewish community of Orleans that was intended to depict the Blois tragedy in some detail, to honor the memory of the Jewish martyrs, and to offer a compelling message with respect to the tragedy—all of which it did most effectively. It was written for both the moment and posterity. While its contents were in many ways time-bound, there was enough of the timeless in it to insure its preservation and, simultaneously, the preservation of three other time-bound letters that on their own would not have survived the vicissitudes of time.

For the moment, let us focus on the three time-bound letters. These three

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communications—a letter by the leadership of Paris Jewry, a letter by the leadership of Troyes Jewry, and a private letter by Nathan ben Meshullam—all transmit information that was critical in the post-Blois ambiance. Let us note the most strikingof the three letters, the communal letter composed by the leaders of the Jewish community of Paris.

> Today is a day of glad tidings, to be broadcast to his people Israel by the Great King, who has inclined the heart of flesh and blood in our favor. We journeyed to the king at Poissy to fall before his feet concerning this matter. When we saw that he extended greetings, we indicated that we would like to speak to him privately. He responded: "To the contrary, speak openly!" Then he himself called forth all his ministers stationed in the fortress and said to them: "Listen all of you to what Count Theobald has done—may he and his descendants be uprooted for the entire year! If he has acted properly, then well and good; but if he has behaved improperly, may he be punished. For I too am frightened over what he has done. Now then, you Jews of my land, you have no cause for alarm over what that oppressor has done in his domain. For the folk have alleged against those [Jews] in the town of Pontoise and those in the town of Janville that they did this thing [murder a Christian youngster]. However, when the matter was brought before me, it [the allegation] was found utterly false…. Therefore be assured, all you Jews in my land, that I harbor no such suspicions in this regard. Even if Christians find a slain Christian in the city or in the countryside, I shall say nothing to the Jews as a result. Therefore be not frightened over this matter. "

This letter reports a major development in the post-Blois effort of northern French Jewry to protect itself. The letter is suffused with a strong sense of the importance of the meeting with King Louis VII. Yet despite this sense of significance and despite the vividness of the portrayal, there remains here a failure to project this event onto the broader canvas of Jewish history, a failure to make this an occasion for rumination on the historic fate of the Jewish people. Significant, intense, and vivid though it clearly is, this letter remains in the domain of time-bound dissemination of valuable information. Without its connection to the elegy written by the Jewish community of Orleans over the martyrs of Blois, which is a different kind of composition, the Paris letter—along with those of Troyes Jewry and Nathan ben Meshullam—would surely have been consigned to oblivion.

It seems perfectly obvious that we have at our disposal only the merest fraction of the informational narratives composed by medieval Ashkenazic Jews. While in all medieval cultures the survival of such timebound communications was minimal, the recurring upheavals in Jewish life and the attendant uprooting of large segments of medieval Ashkenazic Jewry diminished the already limited likelihood that such materials would be preserved. The lack of such written narratives should certainly not be read as indicative of Jewish estrangement from historical circumstances, as a sign of Jewish denigration of the immediate and the worldly. Jews were profoundly immersed in the real world in which they lived. As an endangered minority community, the Jews would not have been able to survive

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without exquisite sensitivity to that real world, its economic opportunities, and its political entanglements. The immersion of the Jews in their constantly shifting environment means that communication of important information, largely in prose narrative, had to be a staple of Jewish existence.

The Paris letter of 1171, the Troyes letter of 1171, and the personal letter of Nathan bar Meshullam all provide indispensable information on Jewish negotiations in the wake of the Blois episode. As already noted, however, Christian society did more than threaten its Jewish minority in physical terms: it profoundly challenged its Jews spiritually as well. One of the central thrusts of Christian doctrine concerning the Jews involved the hoary conviction that Jewish behavior toward Jesus had constituted a breath taking historic sin and that divine punishment was swift. Defeat in the war against Rome, loss of political independence, destruction of the Second Temple, and exile to the four corners of the world were all viewed by Christians as elements of the punishment that the Jews richly deserved. Indeed, Christians explained all subsequent persecutions suffered by Jews as further marks of divine opprobrium. For the Jews themselves, this Christian doctrine heightened significantly the challenge normally presented by catastrophe. While human communities are regularly moved by tragedy to intense self-scrutiny, Jews in the Christian orbit were particularly sensitive to disaster since their neighbors were so certain of the meaning of such events. Jews thus had to wrestle incessantly with persecution and suffering, so as to erect strong barriers against absorbing the negative conclusions of their Christian neighbors. Little wonder then that Jews recurrently struggled with the meaning of setbacks both large and small.

Since we have begun this discussion with the Blois incident of 1171 and have seen post-Blois materials that address only time-bound aspects of the event, let us note that the destruction of much of Blois Jewry gave rise also to a number of poems that are utterly timeless in their concerns. Were these the only materials available, we would be unable to reconstruct accurately the events of 1171, since the Jewish poets were hardly interested in the immediate outlines of the happenings that so badly shook twelfth-century Ashkenazic Jewry. Their eyes were focused rather on the timeless meaning of the Blois incident—on the import of the death of thirty-some Jews, not on its details. Let us note a portion of one of these poetic dirges.

> Woe unto us, for we have been despoiled!
>
> The comeliest and most delicate—the lovely community of Blois, destined for prominence in both Torah and authority—has been delivered to the flames.
>
> How has burning conferred distinction—and destruction!
>
> Enemies disseminated calumnies deceitfully.
>
> "You have killed a Christian in the river and drowned him. "

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They [the Christians] brought them [the Jews] into confinement and chains to torture them.

They tormented them and beat them, that they might surrender their faith and their deity.

They [the Jews], however, withstood the trial, the test, and the burning flames.

This is the ritual for the burnt offering, the burnt offering on the site of immolation.

Woe unto the wicked one, may his memory be effaced.

He schemed evilly, his plot was the plot of the wicked, by immersing a man in water in order to clarify the matter.

Thus they exonerated the wicked and convicted the innocent, in order to uproot him.

Then the ruler Theobald—may his soul rot and his curse render him accursed—heeding the lie, refused ransom, prohibiting any mention of it.

No amount of wealth could annul the day of wrath.

He ordered that the children of the bound one [Isaac] be brought for binding.

This is the ritual of the burnt offering, the burnt offering on the site of immolation.

Woe unto me for my tragedy! My wound is fatal!

When the wicked one—may his name be blotted out from the earth— ordered the burning of the pious of the Lord, so full of wisdom,

He brought them to the place of burning, to be burned there.

They [the Christians] said: "Exchange the Divine Glory for one who effects nothing!"

The righteous spoke out in defiance, to put dust in their [the Christians'] mouths:

"Burning and boiling are not convincing argument against proclaimingthe unity of the Awesome and Pure. "

They sangout the prayer '*Alenu le-shabeah'* in order to declare the unity of the one Lord.

This is the ritual of the burnt offering, the burnt offering on the site of immolation.

Woe unto me, mother, that you bore me for such pain. It's as though the people of Sodom were gathered about the place to encompass it,

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Those poisonous serpents with their bundles of twigs to fan [the blaze].

Thirty-two burnt offerings were consumed as a sacrificial gift.

New mothers ran about, exceeding one another in defiance.

They offered up their children as a free-will burnt offering, As a suckling lamb intended as a free-will burnt offering, Denoted on the fourth day of the week, on the twentieth of Sivan.

Profound was the shame of that day, to be recalled eternally as a day of fast and shock by a suffering people.

O God! Recall it on my behalf as a blessing, For death does separate me from you.

This is the ritual of the burnt offering, the burnt offering on the site of immolation[7].

The differences between this poem and the informational letters cited above are patent. Perhaps the most important is the contrasting audiences to which these pieces were directed. In the three Blois letters, the audience was contemporary Jews for whom the data included in the missives were critical. These contemporary Jews needed to know, for example, that the king of France had repudiated the allegation of malicious murder and that such a charge would not be accepted in a royal court. In the poem, the audience was G-d, the present generation of Jews, and future generations of Jews as well. Crucial to this poem and others like it was its meaning, not the relatively irrelevant details of the event in question. This event was one more link in the chain of persecution suffered by the Jewish people; it represented the willingness of this martyred people to offer themselves up voluntarily to the God of Israel: "This is the ritual of the burnt offering, the very burnt offering on the site of immolation. "

The time-bound letters addressed themselves to the immediate problems of the 1170s, to the physical challenge posed by Christian society; the timeless poems addressed themselves to the spiritual challenge posed by the Christian majority. The timeless poems rebutted the notion that such persecutions as that of 1171 represented yet one more manifestation of divine wrath with the errant people of Israel; to the contrary, the poets argued, such persecutions represented Israel's heroic reaction to the divine demand for sacrifice.

That the vehicle for time-bound messages would be prose while the vehicle for the timeless would be poetry is hardly surprising. There is of course something inherently prosaic about prose, just as the medium of poetry has its intrinsic appropriateness for the timeless. On occasion, however, the time-bound and the timeless could be fused in prose narrative, so that both sets of audiences were simultaneously addressed and both sets of objectives were simultaneously pursued. I have already noted the Orleans letter that provided the occasion

7. This קינה can be found on page 182 of the Worms Mahzor at the Jewish University Library; www.jnul.huji.ac.il/eng.

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for the preservation of the three post-Blois informational communications. This Orleans

letter provides a superb example of the time-bound and the timeless integrated into one composition.

The Orleans letter is a complex composition that in effect moves from the exalted to the increasingly mundane. It begins with a prologue that spells out the reluctance of Orleans Jewry to shoulder the burden of memorializing the heroic martyrs of neighboring Blois. As painful as the task is, there can be no avoiding it, for it has been enjoined upon Orleans Jewry by the king and the distinguished leader of northern French Jewry, Rabbi Jacob Tam. The epistle opens with a focus on the death of the Blois martyrs. This depiction is, at one and the same time, poetic in tone and rich in detail. Midway through the letter, the focus shifts strikingly to the background of the catastrophe. Here the tone becomes thoroughly prosaic, with an emphasis on the precise details of the allegation, the trial, and the complex circumstances in the town of Blois, thus providing the requisite background for understanding the strange and distressing events that transpired there.

We have noted already the emergence of the accusation of malicious and baseless murder leveled against the Jews of northern Europe during the middle decades of the twelfth century and the importance of the post-Blois negotiations in combating the potentially disastrous impact of the Blois executions on that burgeoning allegation. That a political figure of the stature of Count Theobald of Blois would dignify the slander by bringing Jews to trial and then by executing so many of them represented a shattering precedent. We have seen the effort of the leadership of Paris Jewry to counteract the danger by approaching the king of France and the success of this effort, of which all northern European Jews had to be made aware. Beyond this, of course, northern European Jews had to be informed of the details of the events in Blois, so that they might effectively counter any suggestion that the Blois incident proved the truth of the new calumny. It is for this reason that the Orleans letter had to be so thorough, detailed, and trustworthy.

The first objective of much of the detail in the Orleans letter was to provide Jewish readers with requisite information for refuting the groundless murder allegation. Thus, for example, it was important for Jews to know that the witness who set in motion the whole chain of events really saw nothing: it was merely his horse that had bolted at the sight and smell of a Jew washing animal pelts in the Loire River. Similarly, it was important to know that the witness's nonevidence was brought into an environment seething with anti-Jewish hostility brought on by the romantic liaison between the count and a Jewess named Polcelina. It was the cooling of this relationship that encouraged many of the townsmen to strike at the overbearing Jewess—and her coreligionists. Moreover, it was useful for Jews to be aware that an Augustinian canon had played a harmful role in proposing the strange trial method utilized by Count Theobald of Blois, a trial method based on long-outdated notions of ferreting out the truth by ordeal. Finally, the Jews of Blois made a fatal miscalculation, offering the count far too small a bribe. Yet one further factor played a role in the complex chain of events that led to the execution of utterly innocent Jews, and that was an incident

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in neighboring Loches, where a marriage dispute led to denunciation of the Jews by a

distressed coreligionist. Precisely what the denunciation was we do not know, only that it may have further fanned the flames of the count's antipathy. Thus, the Orleans letter amassed considerable detail to show that thoroughly innocent Jews were declared guilty of murder through a concatenation of unfortunate circumstances. Almost incredibly, thirty-some Jews were burned alive as a result of this unhappy chain of events. Anyone provided with the details of this set of developments, however, could clearly see that the execution of these Jews could by no means be taken to prove the new allegation of murder.

Beyond the very important objective of providing requisite data for rebutting the malicious-murder allegation, the Orleans epistle set itself a second task—giving its Jewish readers a sense of the complications of the incident. Among the factors that led to the Blois tragedy were the amorous liaison between Polcelina and Count Theobald, dangerously offensive in its own right; the arrogant behavior of the Jewess, which further embittered many Christians in the town; the incitement of the Augustinian canon; the harshness of Count Theobald; and the misassessment of the level of danger by the Jews of Blois. Clarification of these elements in the tragedy was intended to provide Jewish readers with an understanding that would enable them to behave more intelligently in the future. While some of these factors—like the incitement of the Augustinian canon and the harshness of Count Theobald—could hardly be controlled by the Jews, a better grasp of circumstances could result in earlier and more effective defensive steps.

In addition to providing enough information to rebut the groundless murder accusation and to guide Jewish readers in their behavior, the Orleans letter was intended to memorialize properly a group of Jews that its author (or authors) viewed as martyrs. The key element in this Jewish martyrdom involved the Christian effort to exploit the threat of death as a vehicle for bringing the convicted Jews to baptism and the resolute refusal of these Jews to submit. The letter's depiction of Jewish resoluteness proceeds through a number of stages. Early on, Count Theobald is portrayed as urging conversion, which the convicted Jews unanimously reject. The Christians are then depicted as hoping that a few Jewish victims might weaken on the way to execution, but this hope quickly evaporates. The Jews of Blois are portrayed as greeting the flames with joyous chanting of the '*Alenu* prayer, a prayer that highlights the distinction between Jews and others and between Judaism and other faiths. This prayer calls upon Jews to "bend the knee, bow, and offer thanks to the King who reigns over all kings, who spread forth the heavens and established the earth…. It is he who is G-d; there is none other. Our King is the true one; there is none other beside him. " Armed with that conviction, the Jews of Blois meet their death as a group, with enthusiasm. Indeed, after the description of group martyrdom, the author provides a more personalized sense of heroism by focusing on three individual Jews who escaped the blaze and might have yet saved themselves through conversion, but who rejected that option and chose—a second time, as it were—death as martyrs.

While the crown of martyrdom was often awarded rather haphazardly, the Orleans letter is

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highly detailed in its depiction so as to convince all readers that these particular Jews truly

deserved the title of martyr, for they had steadfastly chosen death over conversion. The author is anxious to provide the sources of his evidence in order to quell all doubts. Thus, in depicting the joyous acceptance of death with the chanting of the '*Alenu,* he tells us:

> The gentiles came and told us, saying to us: "What is that song of yours, which was so sweet? We have never heard anythingso sweet. " For at the outset the sound was low, but at the conclusion they [the Jewish martyrs] raised their voices mightily and called out together "'*Alenu le-shabeah"* Then the fire raged.

The concern of the author to cite his sources is yet more strikingly repeated shortly thereafter, at the close of his extensive description of the martyrdom of Blois Jewry.

> Our fellow townsmen and acquaintances [Christian burghers from Orleans], who were there at the event, told us these things. But we are not dependent upon them for verification of all these things. For Baruch ben R. David *hacohen* was there at the time of the conflagration. With his own eyes he saw and with his own ears he heard. Only the conflagration itself he did not see, lest he be swallowed up by the mob that gathered there, outside the town, at the place of the fire. Subsequently, when the folk had calmed from its excitement, when the fire had been quelled, on that day he immediately fled to Orle´ans.

The Jews of Blois were true martyrs, as proven by the evidence of both Christian and Jewish observers of their execution.

There was yet a further proof of their martyrdom, the fact that their bodies remained intact, with only their souls expiring. Once more, this assertion is grounded in firm testimony.

> They wickedly burned the pious of the Almighty by scorching the soul, leaving the body intact. Indeed, all the uncircumcised testify that their bodies were not consumed. Only their detractors said that their bodies were burned, and it seems that they said this only out of their hostility.

Multiple accounts evidenced the genuine martyrdom of the thirty-some Jews of Blois.

The three objectives upon which we have focused are all in the realm of the time-bound, although the establishment of the martyrdom of the Jews of Blois in and of itself offered elements of meaning and consolation to Jewish readers. In a striking way, however, the Orleans letter managed to provide both time-bound information and a timeless perspective on the events it depicted.

How was this timelessness achieved? What was the meaning of the Blois tragedy to the author of the Orleans letter? The Orleans letter clearly projects the Jewish martyrs of Blois onto the stage of "real" Jewish history, that set of great events that mark the distinctive

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trajectory of Jewish experience. The author of the Orleans letter, so caught up in the

historical realities of Count Theobald, the Jewess Polcelina, and the witness and his horse by the river's edge, proclaims at the same time that the event he must depict extends far beyond the town or principality of Blois, far beyond the immediacy of Count Theobald or Polcelina. The martyrs of Blois are elevated to the level of the historic, associated with the great events and institutions of the Jewish past. A timeline is created that stretches back from Blois in 1171 through peak moments of the Jewish past, indeed back into critical junctures of preIsraelite universal human history.

Immediately at the outset of the narrative, the burning at Blois is linked to the destruction of the Second Temple: "From the time he [the Lord] gave over his people to destruction and set fire to our Temple, holy ones such as these have not been offered up on the pyre. " The Blois incident is thus linked to the destruction of the Second Temple; indeed, since that conflagration (over a thousand years earlier), there have been no greater martyrs at the pyre than the thirty-one (or thirtytwo) Jews of Blois.

At the end of the passage noted, a second decisive event from the past, this one linked to the destruction of the First Temple, is introduced: "The significance of this fast will exceed that of the fast of Gedaliah ben Ahikam. " Now, Gedaliah ben Ahikam's murder represents, as it were, the last death throes of the First Commonwealth, the final act in the drama that saw the end of the Judean polity, the exile of the people from their land, and the destruction of the First Temple. Indeed, the fast instituted in memory of this otherwise obscure figure was one of the four minor fast days specified in rabbinic law. For the author of the Orleans letter, the new fast on the twentieth of Sivan, proclaimed in recollection of the Blois martyrs, exceeds in religious significance the earlier fast, which had been observed by Jews for a millennium or more. This is a rather audacious claim, but one that reinforces the historic significance of the Blois event.

Continuing to move backward through the Jewish past, we note the following potent words at the outset of the Orleans letter: "The Lord is sanctified by those near to him. " For readers of the Hebrew text, this brief sentence is highly evocative. It calls to mind a tragic and opaque incident that befell the Israelites, or more precisely the Aaronide family, duringthe wilderness sojourn. The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, "offered before the Lord alien fire, which he had not enjoined upon them" and, as a result, were themselves consumed by fire. The basis for the tragic deaths is not at all clear. The uncertainty is compounded by the effort of Moses to console his grieving brother with the following:

> "This is what the Lord meant when he said: 'Through those near to me I shall be sanctified, And gain glory before all the people.'"

Now, the straight forward meaning of the three cryptic verses (Lev. 10: 1–3) seems to be that the sons of Aaron erred grievously and were accordingly punished.

While this straight forward reading makes sense of the entire three verse unit, it left some

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expositors, both early and late, uncomfortable, seemingly because of the note of

approbation for the deceased young priests in Moses's consolation of his brother Aaron. This led some to read the consolation in a radically different way:

> Moses came to him [Aaron] and consoled him. He said to him: "Aaron my brother, at Sinai it was said to me: 'I [God] shall in the future sanctify this sanctuary; I shall sanctify it through a great man.' I thought that the sanctuary would be sanctified either through me or through you. Now your sons have been shown to be greater than I or than you, for through them the sanctuary has been sanctified. "

The fiery death of the Jews of Blois, then, is presented in a positive sense as a recapitulation of the fiery death of the sons of Aaron, who were chosen for their fate, according to some interpreters, because of a greatness that exceeded even that of Aaron and Moses. One could hardly imagine a more distinguished niche on the plane of historic Jewish experience.

The connection of the Blois martyrs with the sons of Aaron—seen in highly positive terms—is in fact pushed yet one step further. As noted, toward the end of the Orleans letter the author insists on an important point with respect to the physical remains of the Blois martyrs: their souls were extinguished by the flames of the fire, but their bodies remained intact. While the imagery of the burning of the soul but not the body is not confined to Nadav and Avihu, such special circumstances of death are highlighted with respect to the sons of Aaron. It is clear that the author of the Orleans letter saw in this claim a continuation of the connection between the martyrs of his own day and the positively construed victims of an earlier divine fire.

Finally, in one more step backward in time, a decisive figure in preIsraelite human history is invoked. Maintaining the imagery of sacrifice, the authors absorb and embellish the language of Genesis 8, the narrative that shows Noah, in many senses the progenitor of all humanity, descending from the ark. Upon emerging from the ark,

> Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking of every clean animal and of every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar. The Lord smelled the pleasing odor, and the Lord said to himself: "Never again will I doom the earth because of man, since the devisings of man's mind are evil from his youth; nor will I ever again destroy every human being, as I have done. "

The language used in the Orleans letter—"and the Lord smelled the pleasing odor"—points unmistakably to the Noah scene. In a sense, then, the martyrs play a role in the drama of humanity in its totality, recapitulatingthe pure sacrifices offered by Noah and assuringall humanity of protection from divine wrath.

The martyrs of Blois, then, are projected onto the great canvas of Jewish and world history. While there is, on the one hand, full immersion in the immediate realities of the 1170s, there is, at the same time, a powerful sense of Blois as a link in a historic chain that

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stretches backward through the destruction of the two temples and the wilderness

wanderingall the way to the near destruction of all humanity during the days of Noah.

Indeed, the author projects the Blois incident, with its tragic and heroic elements, onto a plane beyond the historic plane of Jewish experience; it is in fact projected onto a cosmic plane as well. The author portrays the Blois incident as more than simply a continuation of the great moments of Jewish history. The martyrs are more than simply related to the destruction of the First and Second Temples; they are an innovative continuation of the cosmically significant ritual of those two sanctuaries. The martyrs are portrayed throughout the passage cited as sacrifices offered on the altar, as the sin offerings of the Jewish people. This theme is powerfully stated and restated throughout the Orleans letter. It is in fact for this reason that the fast of the twentieth of Sivan exceeds in importance the fast instituted in memory of Gedaliah ben Ahikam. The fast instituted on the twentieth of Sivan is projected by the author of the Orleans letter as "a veritable Day of Atonement. " Just as in days of yore, when Jews found acceptance in divine eyes through the sacrificial offerings brought at the sanctuary, Jews henceforth would find their atonement on the twentieth of Sivan through the sacrifice on the field outside the town of Blois.

More than a historic linkage is achieved with the institution of the new fast: the Jews of Blois take their place of importance on the celestial plane as well. In yet one further set of images, the Blois martyrs are projected into the celestial realms—they actually join the heavenly hosts. These Jews are angels, thirty-one angels. In a striking turn of phrase, the victims of the Blois pyre are identified as those *serafim* who are seen by Isaiah in his great vision as standing in service of the Divine. The *serufim* of Blois, those who were burned for their faith, are transformed into *serafim,* the heavenly figures who proclaim the sanctity of the Lord. Their proclamation shakes the foundation of the universe and fills the divine chamber with smoke, remindingus once again of their death by flames.

What must be emphasized at this point is that the temporal and the atemporal are in no way detached from each other. To put the matter differently, the claims for historic, cosmic, and celestial significance are firmly grounded in the detailed depictions of the terrestrial behavior of the Blois martyrs. The greatness of these martyrs (or sacrifices, or angels), their historic and metahistoric significance, lies in their earthly steadfastness in the face of a potent combination of threat and blandishment.

In the process of tracking the author's projection of the Blois martyrs onto the planes of historic, cosmic, and celestial significance, we have in fact uncovered the letter's construction of the meaning of the Blois episode. We have noted repeated reference to the sacrificial and expiatory functions of the Blois martyrs, the sense that they have taken upon themselves the sins of the world and have offered themselves to the Lord in expiation of those sins. The letter is replete with references to the Jerusalem temples and their sacrificial system, and the suggestion that the twentieth of Sivan constitutes "a veritable Day of Atonement" is highly revealing. Thus, to the Christian challenge that Jewish suffering is a reflection of Jewish sin and divine rejection, the Jewish author of the Orleans missive

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replied that such was by no means the case. Rather, the Jews of Blois were a blameless group (in both the terrestrial and spiritual sense) that had been singled out to bear the sins of the world and to appease divine anger with others, and thus to redeem those others, by offering themselves in sacrifice. Clearly, in a Christian environment, all these themes resonated strongly. Early Jewish themes appropriated by nascent Christianity were reappropriated by northern European Jewry in the face of the medieval Christian challenge.

The Orleans letter is thus revealed as a complex composition, addressing simultaneously a number of audiences and a number of objectives. It achieves its multiple purposes through an artful combination of prosaic information and poetic hyperbole. It provided immediate information for the Jews of 1171 as they faced the aftermath of Count Theobald's harrowing and precedent-setting espousal of new anti-Jewish stereotypes. At the same time, this complex composition addressed perennial issues and spun out a picture of Blois and its Jews that transcended Count Theobald and the year 1171 and that addressed unremittingChristian challenges to Jewish faith.

The fortuitous combination of sources deriving from the Blois incident has enabled us to discern a spectrum of Jewish accounts of an important event in the history of early Ashkenazic Jewry, ranging from the rigorously time-bound to the free-floating and timeless. Special attention has been accorded to the possibility that some prose narratives could effectively combine time-bound and timeless concerns, eventuatingin compositions that were important and meaningful for the moment, yet retained interest and impact for future generations of readers.

Three-quarters of a century before the Blois crisis of 1171, early Ashkenazic Jewry had been wracked by a more spontaneous, more wide ranging, and deadlier persecution. The call of Pope Urban II in 1095 for Christians to retake the Holy Land had unleashed enthusiastic responses all across western Christendom, responses that far exceeded narrow papal expectations. One of the unanticipated spinoffs of the papal call was the coalescing of a wide variety of military forces, all pointed toward the reconquest of Jerusalem. A further unanticipated byproduct of the papal call was the emergence of an anti-Jewish ideology in limited segments of these diversified military bands. During the spring months of 1096, a number of major Jewish communities across northern Europe were threatened by violence. In most instances, the anti-Jewish hostility proved fairly weak and the forces of law and order strong. In a few cases, the anti-Jewish animus among allied burghers as well as crusaders was potent, and the forces committed to law and order proved ineffective. In such cases, the result was a stunning bloodbath, with a few of the most important Rhineland Jewish communities destroyed almost in their entirety.

The 1096 calamity surely attracted the kinds of attention we have discerned in the wake of the Blois episode. Unfortunately, wholly timebound Jewish responses have not been preserved, although clearly there were such. In the earliest of the extant Hebrew First Crusade narratives, we are told (quite accurately, as we shall see) of the eruption of the

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crusade in France, of perceptions of danger on the part of French Jews, and of letters forwarded to the great Jewish communities of the Rhineland.

> When the Jewish communities in northern France heard [of the development of crusading ardor], they were seized by consternation, fear, and trembling, and they reacted in time-honored ways. They wrote letters and sent emissaries to all the Jewish communities along the Rhine River, [asking] that they fast and seek mercy for them from him who dwells on high, so that they [the Jews] might be saved from their [the crusaders'] hands.

There is only cursory reference to the reply that Rhineland Jewish leaders gave this request. A similar reference occurs in a report on a wealthy Jew named Shmarya, who was successful in escaping with his wife and three of his sons from the refuge of Moers, where a group of Cologne Jews had ultimately been converted under duress. This Jewish family and their Christian protector wandered about until effective communication could be established with two of Shmarya's older sons in Speyer. Eventually such communication was established, money was sent from Speyer to the Christian protector, and then Shmarya, his wife, and his youngsons were abandoned by the scheming agent. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, rigorously time-bound materials have not survived from 1096.

By contrast, a substantial number of poems, with poetry's usual timeless quality, have survived. These poems wrestle with the meaning of the tragedy, paying scant attention to the details of the events of 1096. The poems, for example, tell us very little of the attackers or the circumstances of the attacks. They highlight, rather, the martyrological Jewish behaviors of 1096, the symbols current among the martyrs, and the meaningof the sanguinary events. Indeed, there is little interest in aspects of Jewish behavior beyond martyrdom.

The focus of this study is on three Hebrew prose narratives that attempt, like the Orleans letter of 1171, to fuse the time-bound and the timeless. These three narratives—in differing proportions—portray a variety of Christian attitudes and behaviors and diverse Jewish responses and symbols. Like the Orleans letter, the authors of these narratives addressed pressing immediate needs within the post-1096 Jewish communities of northern Europe and, at the same time, addressed the metahistoric meaning of the events depicted. Further, like the Orleans letter, they projected an audience of contemporary readers, of Jewish readers over the ages, and of God himself. It is this combination of the timebound and the timeless—I would argue—that has made these narratives so compelling to such a wide range of readers and has produced conflicting views of their objectives and techniques. Examining these prose narratives as simultaneously time-bound and timeless will, I believe, open up new perspectives on these fascinating compositions.

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