

## THE סליחות COMPOSED AFTER THE YEAR 1000 CE

The סליחות that were composed after the year 1000 CE are longer and more complex than the litanies that constituted the earlier סליחות. They further present themes not found in the litanies. Yaakov Rothschild in his article, סדר הסליחות, found on page 453 of the book: מאסף לעניני חינוך והוראה ט'–ימים נוראים ב', World Zionist Organization, 1968, portrays the change as follows:

מאסף לעניני חינוך והוראה ט'–מה הם הנושאים העיקריים שבהם דנות "הסליחות" הפיוטיות? כבר צונץ דיבר על "דגם של סליחה". כמובן הנושא העיקרי הוא ביטוי החטא והבעת חרטה ותשובה. כיון שהיום אין בית מקדש ואין קרבן לכפר, נמשכת המחשבה לתיאור הגלות והצרות הקשורות בה. אך תיאור הסבל והשמדות מחויב גם מתוך תחושת החטא, שהרי הוא גרם לצרות.

*Translation: What are the major themes of the liturgical poems that were labelled as "Selichos?" In his era, Zunz already spoke about a "model" Selicha. As you might expect, the major themes of the Selichos include admissions of sin, expressions of regret for having sinned and a commitment not to violate the same prohibitions again. Because of the absence of the Beis Hamikdash, a place where animal sacrifices were once brought to bring forth forgiveness, the Diaspora and the resultant difficulties that faced the Jewish People were incorporated as additional themes of the Selichos. This led to the Selichos including descriptions of the suffering and the massacres that befell the Jewish People because those events were seen as being linked to sin and the cause of the difficulties.*

נושא חשוב אחר הוא אפסות האדם לעומת גדלותו של ה'. בין תכונות ה' מודגשות בעיקר מידות החסד שלו, בריתו עם האבות ועם עמו, שאין דבר נסתר ממנו והכל ידוע לו.

*Translation: A second important theme that entered the Selichos was the worthlessness of man in comparison to the greatness of G-d. Among the traits of G-d that entered the Selichos include: G-d's compassion, His covenant with the Forefathers and the Jewish People, that no element of human life is hidden from G-d and that all is known to Him.*

עם כל המשותף בנושאי הסליחות בכל העדות, אפשר לקבוע הבדלים בין המגהגים. הסליחה הספרדית שמרה יותר על הנושא העיקרי והמקורי: מתן ביטוי לאדם החוטא לפני ה', תחושת שפלותו וכמיהתו לסליחה ולכפרה. לעומת זאת משתפות בסליחה האשכנזית יותר ויותר מוראות הגלות, הרדיפות והשמדות, ואף מעשי קידוש השם המרובים.

*Translation: Although the Selichos that were composed by different groups within Judaism shared many themes, some differences can be identified. The Selichos composed by Sephardim focused on the following central and major themes: the proper words to be expressed by those who sinned, the insignificance of Man and the formula by which to obtain forgiveness. On the other hand, the composers of the Selichos among Ashkenazim moved towards including more descriptions of the Diaspora, the persecutions and massacres and even references to the many who died martyrs' deaths.*

The סליחה that opens the first set of סליחות recited on מוצאי שבת as part of both מנהג and ליטא, איך נפתח פה לפניך, מנהג פולין, is a good example of a liturgical poem recited among Ashkenazim that portrays the difficulties that the Diaspora brought upon the Jewish People. The poem was composed by רבינו בנימין בן זרח, a Rabbinical authority in אשכנז, who many believe lived through the First Crusades:

## סליחה א

איך נפתח פה לפניך, דר מתוחים, באלו פנים נשפך שיחים . . .

*How do we dare open our mouths before You who dwells in Heaven . . .*

מאז ועד עתה אנחנו נדחים, נהרגים ונשחטים ונטבחים,

*Ever since, we have been dispersed, slain, slaughtered and butchered;*

שרדנו מתי מעט בין קוצים כסוחים, עינינו כלות בלי מצא רוחים.

*We remain a mere few in number among piercing thorns; our eyes are strained as we search for relief.*

Professor Daniel Goldschmidt on page 12 of his introduction to his book: סדר הסליחות, Mossad Ha'Rav Kook, 1965, describes one additional theme that entered the סליחות among Ashkenazim as a result of the difficulties of the Diaspora: i.e התקפות על נצרות, attacks against Christianity and Islam:

סדר הסליחות-בתקופות של גזירות ורדיפות שופך הפייטן את שיחו לפני קונו על כל הצרות הבאות על עמו. תוך תיאורים כאלה-בעיקר בפיוט הקדום יותר-יוצא הפייטן לפעמים בקללות נמרצות נגד רודפיו. זוהי תגובה פרימיטיבית אך טבעית על היסורים הנוראים שבאו על העם מידי אומות העולם. קללות אלה לא הזיקו מעולם לאיש ולא היו אלא ביטוי לכאב על הדם הנקי שנשפך. הפייטן מקלל את אדום וישמעאל על מעשיהם. בתגובה דומה יוצאים הפייטנים נגד הנוצרים שניסו לנצר את היהודים, וכך נוצרו ביטויי שנאה חריפים ביותר כנגד הדת הנוצרית: היא נמשלת-לא באוביקטיביות רבה-לעבודת אלילים. אין צורך לכסות על עובדות אלה. הצנזורה הפנימית המאוחרת של יהודי התפוצות ניסתה להחליק ולטשטש ביטויי שנאה אלה, ולפעמים שינו מלים בטקסטים (מבלי להתחשב בצורת הפיוטים). בדפוסים יש במקומות כאלה שינויי נוסחאות, אך אין לזה קשר לכוונתם המקורית של הפייטנים.

*Translation: During periods of anti-Jewish proclamations and religious persecution, the poet spills his heart out to His creator, portraying the suffering that His nation is experiencing. Within such descriptions-particularly in the earliest poems-the author on occasion inserts significant curses against his tormentors. This represents a primitive practice, but not an unusual reaction, to the severe difficulties that the other nations of the world were inflicting upon the Jewish People. Those forms of curses never resulted in harm to anyone but were an avenue by which to express pain over the spilling of innocent blood. The authors curse Rome and Islam for their activities. In a similar manner, some composers lashed out against Christians who were actively attempting to convert Jews. These poems developed into pointed expressions of hatred against the Christian religion. Christianity is compared-not objectively-to idolatry; a fact that need*

# להבין את התפלה

*not be hidden. The self censorship that later developed within Jewish circles looked to soften and to blur these expressions of hatred by occasionally replacing words within the text (without considering the literary style of the poem). In some editions of the Selichos we find such changes in the text but it is obvious that the substitute text lacks any connection with the original message of the authors.*

In his footnotes, Professor Goldschmidt points to the following as an example of a statement in opposition to Islam:

## סליחה ז

ישראל נושע בה' תשועת עולמים . . .

*Israel that is saved by G-d with everlasting salvation . . .*

יושעו לעין כל, ואל ימשלו בם רשעים,

*Let the Jewish People be rescued within the sight of all, and let not the wicked rule over them;*

כלה שעיר וחותנו, ויעלו לציון מושיעים,

*Halt the tyranny of Esau and his father-in-law, Yishmael, and let the saviors go up to Tzion;*

כי אתה רב סליחות ובעל הרחמים.

*Because You are the Lord of forgiveness and Master of Compassion;*

And he points to the following as an example of a statement in opposition to Christianity:

## סליחה א

איך נפתח פה לפניך, דר מתוחים, באלו פנים נשפך שיחים . . .

*How do we dare open our mouths before You who dwells in Heaven;*

פורכי עמך אשר למת' (נ"א לבל) שוחחים, צפר וערב למה מצליחים,

*The oppressors of Your people who bow to a dead person (in some versions: to Baal-a form of idolatry), why are they allowed to prosper morning and night?*

קמים למולך נאצות שוחחים, רצוצים, במה אתם בוטחים.

*They rise against You and blaspheme You by asking us: You crushed and broken people, why do you maintain your trust in G-d?*

The persecution of Jews in the Middle Ages also led to the composition a new type of פיוט known as the עקידה. Professor Rothschild introduces this type of פיוט as follows:

סוג אחר של סליחות – "העקידה" – אשר נושאה בכל המנהגים הוא תיאור פיוטי של עקידת יצחק, אימצה לעצמה במנהג אשכנז נושא נוסף שזכה לטיפול רב ונוגע ללב: העקידות של קידוש השם בגזירות תתנ"ו ואילך. דוגמאות לאלה הן "עקידות" לפי מנהג אשכנז-מערב אירופה: "א-להים אל דמי לדמי" של דוד בן משולם הקטן (בער: הסליחות לפי מנהג האשכנזים, מ"ט, לערב ר"ה. וגם לשחרית של יוה"כ). "את הקול קול יעקב נוהם" (שם, ג',

1. This is an example of the self-censorship referred to by Professor Goldschmidt. The original word was "מת" a reference to Jesus. The word was changed to "בל" so as to not appear offensive to Christians.

לערב ר"ה וגם לשחרית של יוה"כ).

*Translation: Another type of Selicha-the Akeida-whose theme in all Jewish communities included a description of Akeidas Yitzchok, the binding of Isaac, in poetic form, went a step further within Minbag Ashkenaz. They added an element that became popular and aroused great emotion; i.e. a description of those who died as martyrs during the Crusades. Examples of those type of Akeida poems in Minbag Ashkenaz of Western Europe include: Elokim Al Dami L'Dami written by Dovid son of Meshulam, the Small One (Baer: The Selichos According To Minbag Ashkenaz, 49, for the day before Rosh Hashonah and also for Shacharis on Yom Kippur); Es Ha'Kol Kol Yaakov No'Haim (ibid., 50, for the day before Rosh Hashonah and also for Shacharis on Yom Kippur).*

Robert Chazan, in pages 94-96 of his book: In the Year 1096-The First Crusade and the Jews, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia • Jerusalem 1996, portrays the image that עקידת יצחק projected to Jews who were affected by the Crusades:

Imagery of the Temple led ineluctably to a second set of potent symbols. In Jewish thinking, the *akedah*, the near sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham, was more than simply one of the most moving tales in the Bible; it represented the highest manifestation of human acceptance of G-d's will and the source of subsequent divine commitment to and blessing of the offsprings of Abraham and Isaac, the Jewish people; it likewise served as paradigm for the later sacrificial cult which was purportedly located at precisely the place hallowed by Abraham's devotion. The connection between Abraham's actions and the later sacrificial cult was in fact spelled out in the biblical account itself, when G-d supplied an animal surrogate for the beloved son whom he had demanded but eventually spared. The sacrificial cult, modeled after Abraham's willingness to offer up his son, was intended to have the same beneficial results as the earlier paradigmatic act: It was intended to serve as a source of blessing for the people that expressed its acceptance of G-d's will through that cult. Given the tendency to see the acts of martyrdom as a reenactment of the sacrificial cult and given the intrinsic parallels between Abraham's behaviors and those of the Rhineland martyrs, it was inevitable that the imagery of the biblical forefather prepared to offer up his beloved son at divine behest occupy a central place in the Jewish symbolism of 1096.

The most straightforward example of *akedah* imagery comes from the second assault on Worms Jewry. After describing the attack in broad strokes, the author of the Mainz Anonymous proceeds to recount a number of specific stories, the first and most striking of which is that of Meshullam ben Isaac and his family.

There was a certain young man, named Meshullam ben Isaac. He called out loudly to all those standing there and to Zipporah his helpmate: "Listen to me both great and small. This son G-d gave me. My wife Zipporah bore him in her old age and his name is Isaac. Now I shall offer him up as did our

ancestor Abraham with his son Isaac." Zipporah replied: "My lord, my lord. Wait a bit. Do not stretch forth your hand against the lad whom I have raised and brought up and whom I bore in my old age. Slaughter me first, so that I not witness the death of the child." He then replied: "I shall not delay even a moment. He who gave him to us will take him as his portion. He will place him in the bosom of Abraham our ancestor." He then bound Isaac his son and took in his hand the knife with which to slaughter his son and made the benediction for slaughtering. The lad answered amen. He then slaughtered the lad. He took his screaming wife. The two of them departed together from the chamber and the crusaders killed them.

The story is moving in its barest outlines. Its deeper meaning, however, is embedded in the central image of the *akedah* that plays throughout. Meshullam ben Isaac, caught up in the crisis of Worms Jewry, sees himself as a latter-day Abraham, enjoined once more to slaughter his beloved son. Identification with Abraham removes all doubts that might have been associated with the horrifying act of killing a child. This terrible deed is, as a result of the identification with Abraham, cloaked in majesty. The Worms act achieves a new level of significance; it is one of a very limited number of extraordinarily great acts in Jewish history. Indeed, Meshullam and his contemporaries went beyond the deed of Abraham. The martyrs and their chroniclers were well aware that Abraham merely intended to slaughter his son; the Rhineland Jews moved from intent to act. Their actions, so difficult in so many ways, were buttressed by the powerful symbol of the *akedah*, again interpreted in an audaciously novel manner.

The image of עקידת יצחק as seen during the Crusades left a permanent mark on the עקדה סליחה. That image includes incorporating into the wording the opinion some held that our forefather יצחק was in truth sacrificed during the עקדה and was then brought back to life. Here is how that view of עקידת יצחק is expressed in one late מדרש:

אוצר המדרשים (אייזנשטיין) תפלת שמונה עשרה עמוד 485—כשנעקד יצחק על גבי המזבח ונעשה דשן והיה אפרו מושלך על הר המוריה מיד הביא עליו הקדוש ברוך הוא טל והחיה אותו, לפיכך אמר דוד ע"ה (תהלים קלג, ג') כטל חרמון שיורד על הררי ציון כטל שהחיה הקדוש ברוך הוא בו את יצחק אבינו, מיד פתחו מלאכי השרת ואמרו בא"י מחיה המתים.

*Translation: When our forefather, Yitzchok, was bound to the alter and his body turned to ashes and his ashes were spread over Mount Moriah, G-d immediately arranged for dew to fall and to then bring Yitzchok back to life. Based on that event, King David wrote the verse: (Tehilim 133, 3): like the dew of Chermom that falls on the mountains of Tzion. King David was referring to the dew that G-d employed to bring Yitzchok back to life. Immediately thereafter, the angels opened and said: Baruch Ata Hashem Michayai Ha'Maisim.*

That view of עקידת יצחק is one justification parents gave for sacrificing their children during the Crusades. They expected their children to be brought back to life in the same manner as our forefather, יצחק, was brought back to life after he died during the עקידה. That view of the עקידה became incorporated within some סליחות:

עקדה-ערב ר"ה-סליחה למ  
מפלטי א-לי צורי סתרי ומגני . . .

*G-d my savior, my strength, and my protector . . .*

בקר כשרו וישרו וצדקו יליץ בעד עם אליך קרב,

*In the morning, remember the good deeds of Avrohom; allow his righteousness to advocate for the benefit of the Jewish People who seek to be close to You through prayer;*

ואפרו תמיד יראה לפניך לכבסם הרב,

*May You view the ashes of their forefather, Yitzchok, as a basis to cleanse away their sin;*

תנתן להם נפשם בשאלתם כי לך נכספה,

*Spare their lives when they ask that of You because it is to be close to You that they covet;*

ובערב היא באה ובבקר.

*Each day when they come before You in prayer during the evening and in the morning.*

The עקדה סליחה was also viewed as an opportunity to pray that G-d save the Jewish People from persecution:

סליחה סה

א-להינו ו-אלהי אבותינו:

אזרחי מעבר הנהר, אליך רץ ולא אחר . . .

*The native, Avrohom, from beyond the River Euphrates ran to You and did not delay.*

סלח ועבר על פשע, ומחל אשמה ורשע.

*Forgive and overlook our transgressions and pardon our guilt and wickedness;*

ענה היום כל מיחליך, כי עינינו נשואות אליך.

*Answer this day all those who put their hope in You, for our eyes are raised to You;*

פדנו מצרה וצוקה, ותעלנו משוחה עמקה.

*Deliver us from trouble and distress, and raise us from the deep abyss;*

צעקתנו היום תקבל, ותצילנו מידי מחבל.

*Accept our cries this day, and deliver us from the hands of those who would destroy us.*