

Guidelines for Shortening *Selihat* - *Yamim Noraim* 5782¹

Prepared by The Halakha Committee of the
Rabbi Jacob Berman Community Center – Tiferet Moshe Synagogue

Structure of the *Selihat*

Around the year 872 CE, Babylonian Rosh Yeshiva Rav Amram Gaon (810-875) wrote down one of the first complete *siddurei Tefilla*, called “Seder Rav Amram Gaon”, at the request of the growing Jewish community of Spain. From Spain his *siddur* circulated in France and Germany. In this *siddur*, he refers to the custom of reciting *Selihat* which he describes as

“מעמד שיש בו ריצוי וסליחה” – a service to appease G-d and obtain his forgiveness. Other sources refer to “רחמים וסליחה” – mercy and forgiveness. Hence *Selihat* has two major functions: (1) to appease G-d’s anger and arouse his mercy; (2) to inspire Man to acknowledge his transgression(s) and repent – in an attempt to have Hashem mercifully forgive his sin(s).

In order to attain these two major goals *Selihat* incorporates two central prayers. The first is the י"ג מידות or 13 Attributes of Divine Mercy which are repeated several times (four or more) throughout the *Selihat* Service. This is based on the Talmudic statement in RH 17b:

ויעבר ה' על פניו ויקרא...אמר לו [הקב"ה למשה]: כל זמן שישאל חוטאין - יעשו לפני כסדר הזה, ואני מוחל להם.

R. Moshe Alshikh explains that the use of the word “יעשו” (instead of יאמרו) is a call to **us** to repent and adopt the Divine merciful traits in our lives! In the *Selihat* service these י"ג מידות are as a rule introduced by the piyyut יושב מלך but sometimes [קל ארך אפיים].

The second central formula in *Selihat* is the וידוי זוטא or short confession of sins beginning alphabetically with אשמנו בגדנו. [The list of על חטא is the “long confession.”] Confession of our sins and regret for their performance is a prerequisite for repentance.

Chains of themed פסוקים and various *piyyutim* - form the introduction, transition and conclusion sections of the *Selihat*.

Proposal for Shortening the *Selihat*

As we see, the custom of reciting *selihat* is a long standing custom going back much more than a millennium. Nevertheless, the Corona pandemic has forced us to temporarily change the format of our *Yamim Noraim* prayers, in order to minimize the possibility of contagion. Heat considerations and a desire to minimize the duration of physical contact, have generated a need to shorten the length of the *davening*. Based on a variety of *pesakim* of *Gedolei Torah*, The Halakha Committee of the “Berman Shul” has submitted guidelines for shortening the *davening* on *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur*. In this spirit and based on the

¹. Revision and updating of the Guidelines from 5781 (2020) by AAF.

above discussions of the Halakha Committee, we have been asked to propose a model for shortening the *Selihat* recited in *Elul* and the *Aseret Yemei Teshuva*.

We note that the *ידיו* of [קל מלך יושב] or [קל מלך יושב] preceded by *אשרי* and the *אשמנו בגדנו* are the two central elements of the *selihot* and need to be preserved in any attempt to abbreviate the service. How does one go about shortening the other elements?

We had before us two precedents:

(1) The first is the abbreviated *Selihat* service recited on *Erev Yom Kippur*. Here, tradition itself substantially shortened the *Selihat* service because of the many preparations needed before the fast. Following the pagination in the *Rinat Yisrael Selihat* – Ashkenaz (Minhag Polin), the main changes are:

(A) Following *אשרי* and *קדיש*, the introductory chain of verses *ה' הצדקה* is shortened to one paragraph (p. 391) versus several (p. 29) and skipping to the *ידיו*.

(B) After the final recitation of the *ידיו* (p. 399), we transition towards *Selihat* with the chain of verses *זכור לנו ברית* and *זכור רחמיך* ending with *הארץ אזכור* and then skipping to *שמע קולנו*.

(C) *שמע קולנו* is followed by *ידיו* which is recited until *ואנחנו הרשענו*. Skip to the paragraph *משיח* and say until *צדקך אמר לפניך* "משיח". Skip the subsequent *piyyutim* and Aramaic prayers but recite the usual *תחנון* and *שומר ישראל* and conclude with *Kaddish Titkabel*.

(2) To further shorten the *Selihat*, we propose relying on a *pesak* of Rav Hershel (Zvi) Schachter *shlit"a*. In a recorded Question and Answer Session with the members of the Rabbinical Council of America (on July 2, 2020),² Rav Schachter indicated that the *Selihat* can be abbreviated by reciting the 13 *Middot* after a verse or a few lines of the *piyyut*. He indicated that this was often the practice of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik *zt"l*. **We suggest saying the opening and closing verses of each *piyyut*.**

We trust that we have supplied The Board with sufficient information to approach the issues raised wisely and effectively. We remain willing to assist the Board in its future deliberations.

Be-Khavod Rav,

Rabbi Yehezkel Babkoff

Rabbi Mordechai Goldreich

Rabbi Aryeh A. Frimer

Timed Duration: ca. 10 min.

². <https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=ZMT4Wq1OCCc&app=desktop>