

The Minhag to say Selichos

Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz

I. Introduction.

During the month of אלול, all Jews look forward to the upcoming ימים נוראים with a certain degree of excitement and anxiety. Our mood is immediately reflected beginning ראש חודש אלול by the blasting of the שופר each morning and the recitation of לדוד twice daily. Many also have the custom of reciting סליחות beginning ראש חודש אלול, while others wait until later in the month to begin.

We find the concept of reciting סליחות to God as early as the times of the נביאים (see עזרא פרק ט' פסוקים ה' - ט"ו). In our times, it has become the common custom amongst the Jewish people to recite סליחות immediately preceding and during the time period of the ימים נוראים. In this essay we will discuss various elements of this custom including which parts are most important, the controversy over the various פיוטים that are recited, the proper time to say סליחות, the tone that the סליחות should take, issues pertaining to the שליח ציבור, and those סליחות that many have the custom not to say because the text directly involves angels in the prayers.

II. The importance of saying סליחות.

- A. **The origin of the custom.** The גמרא relates to the concept of reciting סליחות on fast days (מגילה דף ל'; תענית דף טו.). However, we do not find that the גמרא ever mentions the idea of organized סליחות during the ימים נוראים. The earliest record of a custom to recite organized סליחות is during the times of the תשובות הגאונים (גרש ירחים ימים נוראים שמ"ה). The records that the custom of the two great ישיבות (סורא ופומפדיתא) עשרת ימי תשובה was to recite סליחות during the night. adds that some have the custom to begin reciting סליחות on ראש חודש אלול because that is the day that משה רבינו went up again to receive the second set of לוחות (which he brought down on יום הכיפורים). The רמב"ם (הלכות תשובה פרק ג' הלכה ד') writes that we all have the custom to arise during the night during the עשרת ימי תשובה to go to shul and recite תחנונים until daylight.

B. **Balancing שליחות with לימוד התורה**. The סדר היום (עמוד 7) warns that a wise man should not avoid reciting שליחות with the argument that his time is better spent learning than praying. Although תורה learning is absolutely crucial to the Jewish soul, there are times when we need learning and other times when we need davening. A well-balanced spiritual diet includes a healthy dose of each at their proper time. The מטה אפרים (תקפא סעיף יא) also stresses that one who is extremely dedicated to his תורה learning should stop his learning in order to join the ציבור in the recitation of the שליחות. Indeed, the רמ"א (דרכי משה סימן 107) says that any תלמיד חכם who has יראת שמים should be sure to recite the שליחות prior to ראש השנה.

II. **The text of the שליחות.**

There is a common misconception that the most important element of the שליחות is the recitation of the פיוטים. People often focus their attention on the פיוטים and speed through the גידול and the פסוקים. In reality, though, the recitation of פיוטים only began as a result of persecution. רב יהודה בר ברזילי הברצלוני, a contemporary of the רי"ף, explained that when there were decrees against the study of תורה, the rabbis began to compose prayers that included many הלכות of each טוב יום in order to educate the masses about how to properly observe the holidays. Subsequently, many more פיוטים were composed that made their way in to our תפילות (ספר העיתים עמוד 252). A similar presentation of the history of פיוטים is recorded by רש"י in ספר הפרדס סימן קעד. In fact, the מחזור ויטרי writes the proper order of the שליחות, and leaves out any mention of reciting פיוטים. Additionally, רש"י (תענית דף יד. ד"ה רב יהודה) strongly implies that reciting ענגו at the end of the שליחות is a very important element of the שליחות and should not be rushed in any way. For this reason the פוסקים warn us to recite the introductory פסוקים to the פיוטים and the ענגו at the end slowly and with concentration (מגן אברהם סימן סח, מחצית השקל שם, ברכי יוסף שם).

A. **The validity of פיוטים**. A significant portion of the שליחות consists of פיוטים that are recited. The שליחות, though, are not the only part of our liturgy which includes many פיוטים. During the חזרת הש"ץ for ימים נוראים, we find many different

communities that say varying amounts of פיוטים. There has been extensive discussion amongst the ראשונים and אחרונים relating to the viability of these פיוטים in general. What follows is a brief outline of the major issues involved and the arguments for and against the recitation of פיוטים.

1. **The opposition to the פיוטים.** The אבן עזרא (קהלת) writes that when a person prays he should realize that he is standing in front of the all powerful God who can give us life or death, and we may therefore not include in our prayers any פיוטים whose explanations we don't understand. The אבן עזרא writes that he couldn't possibly list all of the thousands of errors that the פייטנים made, but the essence of his criticism boils down to the following four issues:
 - a. Many of the פיוטים are composed with allegories whose connection to the תפילות are not readily understandable. For instance God is compared to a lion (see הושע יא:י), but we would never dream of reciting a ברכה with the words "ברוך אתה אריה". Why don't we take a cue from שלמה המלך who was the wisest of all men, but whose תפילות are readily understood by anybody who can speak לשון הקודש.
 - b. Many of the פיוטים composed by ר' אלעזר הקליר are written in Aramaic. The אבן עזרא argues that traditionally Jewish prayers are recited in לשון הקודש. Why should we bring other languages into our holy prayers?
 - c. The Hebrew employed by ר' אלעזר הקליר knew no boundaries and did not follow the accepted laws of דקדוק. For instance, the פיוט refers to a "שושן עמק איומה" even though the word "שושנה" is a feminine word and should never be corrupted to read "שושן". The אבן עזרא argues that this would be similar to taking the word תפילה and turning it into תפל.

- d. Finally, אבן עזרא argues, תפילות are supposed to be straightforward, as opposed to the common style of פיוטים which employ many esoteric comments of מדרשי חז"ל. The רד"ק also criticizes the composers of פיוטים for this reason, stating that these compositions are "a great sin" (השרשים ערך עתר).
2. Many great תורה leaders defended the composition and recitation of the פיוטים against the attacks of the אבן עזרא. Rabbi Akiva Eiger writes that the אבן עזרא acted improperly in criticizing הקליר ר' אלעזר, who the תנא (כתבי רא"ש and תוספות) claim was a great man (רע"א מכתב ג'). The רשב"א actually prays that God should forgive the אבן עזרא for this great mistake in criticizing such a holy man. Addressing each issue individually the defense of the פיוטים run as follows:
- a. The מהר"ל (נתיבות עולם נתיב העבודה פרק יב) distinguishes between תפילות which certainly must be recited with proper דקדוק, and personal songs of praise to God, which are best expressed in the same way that people speak, even if it may veer from the laws of דקדוק. The מהר"ל stresses that the אבן עזרא clearly did not understand the stature of the people that he chose to criticize. All who understand the wisdom of the early rabbinic leaders who composed many of the פיוטים, and know that all that they did was done with wisdom and understanding, will surely pay no attention to the comments of the אבן עזרא. In terms of the אבן עזרא's comment that the style of the פיוטים is no different than saying "ברוך אתה אריה", the ספר זכור לאברהם (סימן יג) writes that we never find any reference to God with such poetic language in the פיוטים. The פייטנים are careful to only refer to other entities (the heavens, etc.) with poetic references, but would never refer to God with such language.

- b. In terms of the claim that the prayers should only be composed in Hebrew, it could easily be argued that the only objection to prayers in other languages is when they are used to *substitute* for accepted Hebrew prayers. To compose *additional* prayers in other languages may not be nearly as objectionable (מועדים) (לשמחה סימן א' עמוד יב).
- c. To counter the criticism that the פייטנים do not use proper דקדוק (סימן סח), the ערוך השולחן (סימן סח) ר' אלעזר הקליר ורבינו ר' אריה לייב פייטן writes that ר' אריה לייב פייטן wrote with רוח הקודש הגדול. Whenever they seem to break from the laws of grammar, there are deep secrets that they are expressing to us, which can only be understood by the discerning reader. Clearly, they are more equipped to judge the proper usage of the Hebrew language than the אבן עזרא is.
- d. Many אחרונים point to a תשובת הרדב"ז to address the issue of the פיוטים incorrectly shifting words from the masculine to the feminine form and vice versa. The רדב"ז writes that any word that represents something that is not alive may be expressed in either masculine or feminine form (תשובת הרדב"ז חלק ב' סימן שלו).

III. סליחות **When to begin reciting**

- A. **עשרת ימי תשובה**. The גאונים who record the custom to recite סליחות all refer to the custom as one that is limited to עשרת ימי תשובה.
- B. **ר"ח אלול**. Of all of the גאונים cited in the תשובות, only רב האי גאון concedes that "we have heard that there are some places where they begin reciting סליחות on ר"ח אלול because that is when Moshe went up the

mountain to receive the second set of לוחות, and it is certainly meritorious to spend more time asking for God's mercy." The ספר המנהיג (הל' ר"ה א:כה) reports the custom in similar terms. The ר"ן in the first פרק of ר"ה writes that many have the practice to begin on ראש חודש אלול and the (חיבור התשובה עמ' רז) מאירי recommends beginning then. The מאירי explains that the recitation of 30 סליחות before ראש השנה is a partial fulfillment of the obligation to learn the הלכות of each holiday 30 days in advance of the holiday. The שו"ע (תקפ"א סעיף א') rules in accordance with this opinion.

- C. **The middle of אלול.** The (סדר תפילת ר"ה ופירושה) אבודרהם writes that because ראש השנה is a day of judgment, the custom has developed to start סליחות on the 15th day of אלול and continuing until יום כיפור.
- D. **כ"ה אלול.** The ר"ן, in discussing the מחלוקת about when the world was created (either תשרי or ניסן) writes that man was actually created on ראש השנה, but the creation of the world began on כ"ה אלול, and some therefore have the custom to arise early for extra prayers beginning כ"ה אלול.
- E. **The ראש השנה before מוצאי שבת.** The רמ"א records our custom to recite סליחות beginning on the מוצאי שבת before ראש השנה, or if ראש השנה is before Wednesday, on the מוצאי שבת before that. While this is clearly the prevalent custom amongst Ashkenazic Jews, it certainly requires clarification. We can well understand that there would be a certain minimum amount of days necessary to prepare for ראש השנה (see מימ' ברורה סימן תקפ"א ס"ק ו' who relates the four day minimum to the four days during the עשרת ימי תשובה that one may not fast, and to the four days necessary to check a קרבן for a blemish prior to offering it), but why should the preparation always begin specifically on מוצאי שבת? What is the connection between מוצאי שבת and ראש השנה? A number of אחרונים have worked to address this question:

1. The תרומת הדשן cites his rebbe, the author of לקט יושר who explained that prior to a major event

three days of preparation are necessary. We know this to be the case from the preparation required prior to מתן תורה. Considering that people spend a lot of time learning on shabbos, people are generally in a state that is more conducive to experiencing God's closer presence immediately after שבת. That is why the פייט was careful to compose the words "במוצאי מנוחה" – for after our day of rest we are more prepared to begin סליחות.

2. Rabbi Ephraim Greenblatt cites the ספר אור גדליהו who explains that שבת often serves as a catalyst to תשובה. This is evident from the comment of חז"ל that we may read the verse מזמור "טוב להתוודות לה'" as שיר ליום השבת טוב להודות לה' (it is an opportune time to confess to God). Additionally the very word שבת is etymologically similar to the word תשובה. Finally, חז"ל tell us that even an עם הארץ is respectful and fearful of שבת (and therefore he wouldn't lie on shabbos), indicating that שבת provides a person with the proper perspective so that he may do תשובה. (שו"ת רבבות אפרים חלק ד' סימן קמד אות ב')
3. The Vilna Gaon writes that in reality the intended custom was to begin סליחות on the anniversary of the beginning of the creation of the world. However, it would be very confusing for people to begin סליחות every year (because it falls on a different day of the week each year). Rather, instead of beginning סליחות on the calendar day of the beginning of creation, we begin on the anniversary of the day of the week that creation began.

IV. The proper time to say סליחות.

One of the most difficult aspects of commencing the recitation of סליחות, is finding the proper time to say them. In our already busy lives it is difficult to find time to add more תפילות into our schedules. These considerations often lead people to recite the

סליחות at a time that is not the most ideal for this תפילה. We will outline the different possible time frames to recite the סליחות in order of preference.

- A. **Last part of the night.** Most of the classical sources point to the early morning hours (before it is light outside) as the ideal time for סליחות. This is based on a גמרא עבודה זרה that states that God traverses eighteen worlds throughout the night, and during the last three hours he is closest to עולם הזה. It is most opportune to recite סליחות when God is closest. (ספרי מנהגים של מהרא"ק, מהרי"ל, מהרי"א והובא במגן אברהם ס"ק א' בשם הגמ"נ)
- B. **After midnight.** Many Chassidic masters had the custom to recite the סליחות immediately after חצות. This custom is based on the מגן אברהם סימן א' ס"ק ד' who states that the מקובלים spoke at length about the special power of prayers that are offered immediately after חצות. Rav Moshe Feinstein also sanctioned saying the סליחות after midnight when one cannot say them during the waning moments of the night (שו"ת אגרות משה או"ח חלק ב' סימן קה).
- C. **Morning after sunrise.** The אלף המגן (תקפ"א ס"ק כד) writes that we may recite סליחות even after עלות השחר (even though it is not known as a particularly auspicious time) because the entire time period between ראש חודש אלול and יום כיפור is a time of Divine mercy. It is evident from the text of many of the סליחות that they were not intended for daylight recitation (as many of them contain references to nighttime). In fact, the ערוך השולחן (סימן ערוך השולחן) writes that when we do recite the סליחות during the daylight hours we must be careful to omit the words that refer to night in order to avoid uttering false statements.
- D. **Prior to midnight.** The מגן אברהם (סימן תקס"ה ס"ק ה') rules that one may never recite סליחות or the יג מדות before חצות הלילה. This seems to be the accepted view amongst the פוסקים. The ברכי יוסף (תקפ"ח:ד') writes that even if one is sitting in a shul that is saying the יג מדות at that time, he should not say it along with them. Rather, he

should sit there silently as they recite the יג מדות (see שו"ת פט who discusses if there is ever a requirement to recite the יג מדות along with a ציבור that happens to be saying them). Rav Moshe Feinstein was asked whether a community may have a מנין for סליחות before חצות when it is likely that people would not say סליחות altogether without such a מנין. Rav Feinstein rules that if the other option is not saying סליחות at all, we can allow such a minyan on a temporary basis, provided that "they publicize and let it be known that this is only a temporary ruling because of the difficult circumstances only for this year, and that next year the סליחות will again be recited in their proper time". (שו"ת אגרות משה או"ח חלק. Rabbi Maurice Lamm has informed me that Rav Soloveitchik issued a similar ruling to Rav Feinstein regarding early evening recitation of the סליחות. Although Rav Feinstein's ruling is accepted as הלכה by most of Ashkenazic Jewry, there are other segments of Jewry who have different practices:

1. **The lenient approach.** It should be noted that a number of Chassidic פוסקים rule that in cases of difficulty one may recite סליחות prior to חצות. The ספר מחשבות בעצה (קונטרס פרפראות לחכמה סימן ח') writes that minimally people should wait until it is in חצות הלילה, at which point it may be a time of mercy for the entire world. The Sefer Mishmeres Shalom states that the בעל התניא would allow people to recite סליחות up to two hours before חצות if it was very difficult for them to stay awake until חצות.
2. Rav Ovadiah Yosef (שו"ת יחוה דעת חלק א' סימן מו) writes that even if one would otherwise not say סליחות at all, it is best not to say סליחות at night prior to חצות. While not saying סליחות at all is passing up on an opportunity for extremely productive תפילה, saying them at night is actually a destructive תפילה. Instead, Rav Yosef suggests, one who cannot recite סליחות during the second half of the night should recite them before מנחה.

Although the זוהר (פרשת לך לך חיי שרה ויתרו) considers מנחה time to be a time of strict judgment, the practice has already developed in many circles to recite וידוי and the יג מדות during מנחה. In fact, Rav Yosef reports that he is personally aware of many outstanding צדיקים who would recite סליחות prior to מנחה.

V. סליחות during Crying.

The tone that one is supposed to use in prayer, and specifically during סליחות, is the subject of a disagreement amongst the פוסקים:

- A. **The subdued approach.** The חיד"א (מורה באצבע סימן ח') writes that one should recite the סליחות in a low voice and in a clear manner so that he may understand what he is saying. He warns not to cry out "like a fool who stands in the street and does not understand what he is saying". Further, he laments the waste of energy of those who make the effort to get out of bed extra early just to waste their time in shul with excessive crying, rather than meaningful סליחות. In general, during the course of our regular תפילות פרי מגדים suggests we should not raise our voices too high (הו"ד במשנה ברורה סימן קא ס"ק ז').
- B. **The hysterical approach.** Rabbi Chaim Paladgi (מועד לכל) writes that those who cry and scream during the סליחות are acting properly because חז"ל tell us that one of the things that tears up a person's negative decree is צעקה (crying out). He points out that the זוהר expresses the value of צעקה as something that can rule over מדת הדין and can help a person obtain a better life in both this world and the next world, and is closer to God than any other kind of prayer. The only word of caution that Rabbi Paladgi offers, though, is that one should remain focused through his cries and not become lightheaded and distracted. While the אליה רבה (סימן קא) initially expressed skepticism at those who pray loudly, after seeing how the רמב"ן (פ' בא) encourages loud

davening, he acknowledged that there is ample precedent for such a style.

VI. שליח ציבור.

It should go without saying that the person chosen as the שליח ציבור for the סליחות should be a worthy representative of the congregation, and should understand the texts that he recites (see רמ"א סימן תקפא (סליחות שליח ציבור) for further requirements of a שליח ציבור). We will focus our attention on two additional halachic points that relate specifically to the שליח ציבור.

- A. **Wearing a טלית**. The מהרי"ל (הל' ימים הנוראים סעיף ד') cites a custom for the שליח ציבור to wear a טלית for סליחות even when they are recited at night. The reason for this is that the ראש השנה דף יז) describes that when God taught משה the הרחמים, He "wrapped himself in ציצית like a שליח ציבור", clearly indicating that a שליח ציבור is expected to be wrapped in ציצית. In general, the ראשונים debate whether one who puts on a טלית at night has to recite a ברכה on the טלית (see בית יוסף סימן י"ח ומחבר ורמ"א שם). The רמב"ם maintains that any garment worn at night (even if it is usually worn during the day) is exempt from a ברכה on the ציצית. The רא"ש, on the other hand, maintains that the determining factor of whether or not a ברכה is required is not when one wears the garment, but what type of garment it is. If it is a nighttime garment one never recites a ברכה on it (even when wearing it during the day). If it is a daytime garment, one always recites a ברכה on it (even when wearing it at night). The רמ"א (סימן יח סעיף א') rules that because we have a situation of doubt when wearing a טלית at night, the ברכה should not be recited. Ideally, one would not wear a טלית at night in order to avoid the halachic question of whether or not to make a ברכה. However, considering the strong source to wear a טלית for סליחות, the פוסקים are divided on what the proper course of action is:

1. The לבוש (סימן תקפא הו"ד בט"ז שם ס"ק ב') writes that the שליח ציבור should wear the טלית without

reciting a ברכה, keeping with the rule of ספק ברכות להקל.

2. The ט"ז (סימן תקפ"א ס"ק ב') disagrees with the ruling of the לבוש on the grounds that one should never unnecessarily enter into a situation of ספק. Instead, he suggests, one should borrow a טלית from a friend which would not require a ברכה. It should be noted that the ט"ז specifically recommends borrowing a טלית from a friend, as opposed to using a shul טלית. When one uses a shul טלית, the שו"ע (סימן יד ובמג"א שם ובמ"ב ס"ק י"א) implies that one would have to recite a ברכה. Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (מקראי קודש) ימים נוראים סימן א' explains that when one borrows a טלית from a friend, he has no ownership whatsoever of the טלית. Yet, when one uses a shul טלית, he takes the sole rights of ownership on that טלית for the time that he wears it. He proves this analysis to be correct from the comment of the רשב"ם (בבא בתרא) who states that when a community buys an אתרוג (as the practice used to be before there was ample supply for each Jew to own their own אתרוגים) everybody is presumed to give his portion of the אתרוג as a gift to the person who is currently using it for the מצוה. By extension, argues Rabbi Frank, all communally owned property that is used by one individual at a time, is assumed to belong to that individual for the duration of the time that he uses the item. (See נטעי גבראל חדש יח who disagrees with Rabbi Frank's comparison.)

- B. **Serving as the שליח ציבור for the entire day.** The רמ"א (תקפ"א:א) writes that there are places where the custom is that the שליח ציבור שליחות leads the other prayers of the day as well. The פוסקים debate how strong this מנהג is in relation to the other חיובים that we find to lead a תפילה. The מגן אברהם believes that the שליח ציבור שליחות even takes precedence over somebody who has יאר-צייט and an אבל. The רבה, however, deduces from the mild

wording of the רמ"א ("ויש נוהגין...") that this is not such a strong custom that must be followed in all places. There are a number of explanations offered to explain this custom:

1. The מגן אברהם (שם ס"ק ז') explains that the logic for this custom is that it keeps with the rule of המתחיל במצוה אומרים לו גמור - one who begins a מצוה is encouraged to complete the מצוה. Rav שלמה הכהן in his ספר בנין שלמה מוילנא asks a very sharp question on this explanation of the מגן אברהם. In general, the concept of כל המתחיל במצוה אומרים לו גמור applies to the performance of a single מצוה, indicating that one should never abandon a מצוה halfway through. We do not find, however, that one who davens שחרית must also daven מוסף due to this concept. The reason that this concept does not apply to שחרית and מוסף is that these are not a single מצוה, but two separate מצוות that are unrelated to each other. Why then does one who serves as שליח ציבור for סליחות encouraged to serve as שליח ציבור for the other תפילות as these seem to be completely separate מצוות? Rav Soloveitchik pointed out that the underlying assumption of this question is incorrect. We must not look at סליחות as a separate תפילה of the day, completely unrelated to the other תפילות היום. In reality, סליחות are a sort of introduction to the other תפילות היום. סליחות are our chance to ask God to accept the other תפילות that we will offer that day. Rav Soloveitchik maintained that if one davens סליחות, but does not daven the other תפילות היום, he has not even fulfilled the custom to recite סליחות because the introduction is meaningless if one does not follow it up with the other תפילות. Rav Soloveitchik explained that יום הכיפורים on תפילת נעילה has a similar function to that of the סליות. The רמב"ם, in describing the obligation to recite נעילה, writes: תקנו תפילה אחת אחר תפילת מנחה סמוך לשקיעת החמה ביום התענית בלבד כדי להוסיף תחנה ובקשה מפני התענית ("the rabbis instituted a single prayer after מנחה

close to sunset on the fast day in order to add supplication and request in honor of the fast day”). The רמב”ם simply could have said that we recite five תפילות on the fast day. The language employed of “adding extra supplication” suggests that נעילה is a final request of God to accept the rest of our prayers. Therefore, one who only has enough strength to attend a single תפילה on יום הכיפורים should not attend נעילה because reciting נעילה without the other תפילות is useless.

2. The לבוש suggests that the custom used to be that the שליח ציבור for the סליחות would fast the entire day. It was therefore considered most appropriate for the person who is fasting that day to represent the entire ציבור for all of the תפילות of the day.
3. Rav בנין שלמה (סימן לז) in his ספר מוילנא suggests the reason for this custom based on a גמרא יומא (דף כב) which points out that the person who would perform the תרומת הדשן in the בית (סידור המקדש would also perform other tasks (סידור תרומת הדשן because the המערכה וסידור שני גזרי עצים) was not considered to be a particularly honorable job. One who was willing to do the “dirty work” deserved the reward of having the opportunity to perform the more honorable jobs as well. Similarly, argues בנין שלמה, one who agrees to lead the congregation in סליחות, which is considered a less important תפילה, should also have the right to lead the congregation in the more important תפילות. The בנין שלמה explains that this was only considered to be a less important, and more tedious תפילה to lead because one person would read the entire סליחות to be מוציא the entire congregation. The congregation themselves would not actually say the סליחות. Nowadays, however, that we all say the entire סליחות and the role of the שליח ציבור is simply to read the last line of each paragraph, we no longer have the custom to have the שליח ציבור for תפילות lead the rest of the days סליחות.

VII. Praying to angels.

One of the most difficult theological questions that comes up in the recitation of סליחות relates to the fact that many of the סליחות (most famously "מכניסי רחמים") are prayers that are addressed to angels rather than to God Himself. The ראשונים and אחרונים debate the viability of such prayers and many have the custom of omitting these סליחות entirely. We will present a brief analysis of the issues and outline the opinions of the leading פוסקים on this issue.

A. The argument against reciting פיוטים to angels:

1. The תלמוד ירושלמי (ברכות פרק ט' הלכה א') contrasts one who makes a request of a powerful person with one who makes a request of God. When visiting a powerful person, one first must contend with servants who will screen all visitors before a meeting with the person can be arranged. However, when one has a request of God "he does not cry to מיכאל or גבריאל, but to God Himself, and God immediately responds". The clear implication of the ירושלמי is that we do not pray to angels, but to God directly.
2. The רמב"ם (פירוש המשניות ריש פרק חלק) writes, in explaining the fifth of the thirteen האמונה עיקרי that "only God Himself is worthy of our prayers... and we do not do so to anything that is beneath Him (including) the angels, stars, and constellations... because they have no free choice other than to do the will of God, and we do not use them as intermediaries to reach Him...". (See also מועדים לשמחה עמוד מב for an extensive list of ראשונים who concur with the view of the רמב"ם).
3. The רמב"ן (פרשת יתרו) writes "the third עבודה זרה includes those who worship the angels... or believe them to have abilities, or treat them as intermediaries between [people] and God... and it

appears that it is forbidden to pray to them in this way”.

4. More specifically, מועדים לשמחה (עמוד מג) cites the מהר"ם מרוטנבורג who specified that one should cease the custom of saying רחמים because we do not find that any of the Avos or the נביאים composed תפילות geared to angels.

B. The arguments for reciting prayers to angels:

1. The מהר"ם רוטנבורג (הו"ד במועדים לשמחה עמוד מג) points out that the blessing of המלאך composed by יעקב אבינו seems to address מלאכים. (He explains, however, that the prayer is to the one who sent the angel, not to the angel itself.)
2. The גמרא (שבת דף יב) suggests that one should not pray in ארמי because the angels do not understand that language, and will be unable to bring the prayers to God, implying that the angels are needed as intermediaries in bringing our prayers to God. (See, however, אליה רבה סוף סימן סב, cites earlier sources that explain this גמרא as not really referring to angels at all, but to proper כונה during davening.)
3. In the introduction to the סידור אוצר התפילות (פרק ג' רב אריה לייב גאדאן, דף י' הו"ד במועדים לשמחה דף מה) writes that since many גאונים have prayed in this style, we are not on a level to question them.
4. The גמרא (סנהדאין דף מד) states that one should pray that the angels should aid in his תפילות (translation of this גמרא is based on רש"י, and is not agreed to by all ראשונים), implying that the angels do play a crucial role in our תפילות.

C. Practical opinions.

1. The מהר"ל (נתיבות עולם נתיב העבודה פרק יב) states that we do not pray to angels at all. Even though we allow one to ask another person to pray for them, we do not allow the same for the angels. The פוסקים explain this distinction in three ways:
 - a. The חתם סופר (שו"ת או"ח סימן קסו) explains the distinction by pointing out that the Jewish people are actually closer to God than the angels are, and it would therefore be counterintuitive to ask the angels for help in approaching God.
 - b. The מבי"ט (בית אלקים שער התפילה פרק יב) writes that it is unlikely that one will attribute Godlike powers and abilities to people, but the danger of attributing such abilities to angels is much greater.
 - c. The מהר"ם שיק (שו"ת או"ח סימן רצ"ג) explains that the idea of asking other people to pray for you has nothing to do with attribution of special abilities to those people. Rather, God is just and will only punish those who deserve it. If a צדיק joins in a person's צרה and is truly pained by it, God would not allow that צרה to continue unless the צדיק truly deserves the pain it brings him.

VIII. Conclusion.

We have thoroughly explored many of the issues that relate to the recitation of סליחות during the period of the ימים נוראים. The majority of the sources and organization of this article were taken from the ספר מועדים לשמחה אלול-תשרי סימן א. As with all areas of Jewish life, our increased understanding of the סליחות should aid us in fulfilling this custom with more effectiveness, ensuring a מחילה ככלל ישראל for us, and all of ישראל.