

מנהג פולין / מנהג אשכנז

It may surprise many Ashkenazim to learn that the סידורים and the מחזורים from which they recite their prayers, whether edited by Dr. Philip Birnbaum or published by Artscroll or Koren, follow מנהג פולין, the customs of the Jews of Poland, and not מנהג אשכנז, the customs of the Jews from Germany. The difference between the two is most evident when examining the סליחות that are recited as part of תפלת ערבית for יום כיפור.

מנהג אשכנז

יְעֹלָה הַחֲנוּנִינִי מִעֶרֶב. וַיָּבֹא
שׁוֹעֲתָנוּ מִבְּקָר. וַיִּרְאָה
רִנּוֹנָנוּ עַד עֶרֶב:
פְּסוּקֵי דְרַחְמֵי

י' שומע תפילה עדיף כל בשר יבוא * י' יבא כל בשר
להשתחוות לפניך י' : י' יבואו וישתחוו לפניך

י' אלהי דאבות וישובה רבנים: י' פטית שוב פנים שובבים:
י' גשוןאלי פדברים ערבים: י' דרשני ודיו ימים
רבים: י' דלא דברך לעולם נצבים: י' ובסאנו נשענים ונקרבים:

י"ג מידות

סלח נא אֵימֹת ופִשְׁעֵי
לְאַמֶּה. לַעֲזֹן בְּנִיךָ. בַּל
יִהְיֶה זַעֲמֶךָ:

י"ג מידות

עקרה אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו
המחית צורים וחסדים תזכור לניני מולדם: י' שבתם בנתיא
מפתחים שפטים פרוע מעבדם: י' רשעאם סרח ורוותם

י"ג מידות

י' אלהינו להאריך אפך לרעים ולטובים
והיא תהלתך:
י"ג מידות

מנהג פולין

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סלח נא אֵימֹת ופִשְׁעֵי
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יִהְיֶה זַעֲמֶךָ:

י"ג מידות

אָמֵנָם כֵּן. יֵצֵר סוֹכֵן.
בְּנוּ. בָּךְ לְהַצְדֵּק. רַב
צָדֵק. וְנִגְנֵנוּ.

י"ג מידות

כִּי הִנֵּה פֶחֱמֶךָ בִּיד
הַיֵּצֵר. בְּרָצוֹתוֹ מְרִיב
וּבְרָצוֹתוֹ מְקַצֵּר. כֵּן
אֲנַחְנוּ בְּיָדְךָ חֶסֶד נוֹצֵר.
לְפָרִית הַפֶּסֶט וְאֵל תִּפְּן
לַיֵּצֵר: כִּי הִנֵּה

י"ג מידות

Two points are worth noting about the both selections of סליחות. The פסוקים that are recited after the פיוט of יעלה תחנונינו were said alternatively by the קהל and חזן, a practice many no longer follow. Second, מנהג אשכנז includes an עקידה, a פיוט whose theme is עקידת יצחק. מנהג פולין does not. It is worth asking why מנהג פולין does not include an עקידה since we incorporate an עקידה in all the other סליחות services beginning with the ראש השנה סליחות that are recited after ראש השנה.

What led to the development of מנהג פולין and why did it become so popular? Stefan C. Reif, in his book, *Judaism and Jewish Prayer*, Cambridge, 1995, page 180, presents a historical overview of the circumstances that led to the development of מנהג פולין:

The overall picture would, however, appear to support the idea that the victory achieved by the legal traditions and the standardized liturgy of the Babylonian geonim was not total among the Ashkenazim. They found ways of maintaining some of their proto-Ashkenazi communal customs in both areas and ensured that the distinctive flavours of western European religiosity remained identifiable among the medley of pungent dishes they had adopted from the Orient. Before this latter, spiritual cuisine receives some further attention, it is necessary to note the bifurcation of the Ashkenazi custom itself into a number of sub-divisions as the major areas of Jewish settlement made their way towards Poland and Russia. If one draws an imaginary line southwards from Hamburg on the Elbe to Saltzburg at the edge of the Alps, the communities to the west continued to refer to their rite as that of Ashkenaz or the Rhine (*Raynus*), while those to the east characterized their liturgical customs as those of *Ostraykh*, *Polin*, *Pibem*, *Merrn*, *Lita* and *Raysen*. Expressed in more contemporary political geographic terms, the former covered the territories of today's western Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Belgium and North France while the latter currently approximate to eastern Germany, Austria, Hungary, Rumania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Belorussia. The differences between the two and within each were minor and concerned which liturgical poetry was recited on what occasions, the particular order of the same prayers and synagogal custom. It is possible that such differences existed from an earlier period of eastern settlement but lack of any documentary evidence prevents their being dated earlier than the fourteenth century. Whenever their origins, the distinctions were not meaningful in the period being covered in this chapter since the dominant rite became the more eastern one after the expulsions and persecutions of the German, French and English centres, in the course of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, considerably reduced the importance of these communities. It was only at a later date, as will be chronicled in the final chapters of this volume, that the two rites met on equal terms in free communities and had to vie for synagogal preference.

We can attribute the popularity of **מנהג פולין** to the work of Rabbi Moses Isserles, the **רמ"א**, whose notes cited practices that followed **מנהג פולין** and not **מנהג אשכנז**. In the book: A History Of The Jewish People, edited by H.H. Sasson, Harvard University Press, Third Printing, 1976, H.H. Sasson, on pages 666-667, describes the work of both Rabbi Joseph Caro and Rabbi Moses Isserlin who were contemporaries:

R. Joseph Caro (1488-1575) acted with the deep sense of leadership and responsibility that he had acquired from his teacher R. Jacob Berab. He also had a singular mystical power. It was his belief that when he dreamed at night he was visited by 'the Soul of the Mishnah', which was his *maggid* or spiritual guide, transmitting instructions to him as from on high. Caro was an outstanding authority on halaka. In him we find, therefore, a mystic who was active and productive, a keen and widely versed halakhic and Talmudic thinker, and a religious leader who held that he bore the authority of those ancient and ordained scholars who had originally been seated in the Sanhedrin. While still living in Adrianople in the Balkan Peninsula, he had already headed a yeshiva and had begun to write a commentary of his own to the Sefer Haturim, which was called Bet Joseph ("The House Of Joseph"). In 1525 he settled in Safed where he was privileged thirteen years later to obtain ordination from R. Jacob Berab. This entitled him in his eyes to struggle together with his master for the establishment of the institution of semikhah. In 1542 he completed his own Bet Joseph at his Yeshiva in Safed. In 1555 he prepared a summary of his commentary as an independent work of halakhic authority-the Shulchan Aruch ("The Prepared Table"). It was arranged in the style of the Sefer Haturim, in brief paragraphs, each stating a specific halakha and its practical application. As a rule R. Joseph followed the halakhic principles and customs of the Sages of Spain and the practices of Sephardic Jewry.

In Poland at about the same time, R. Moses Isserles, the Rabbi of Cracow (known as "Rama", c. 1520-c. 1572), was preparing a commentary of his own on the Sefer Haturim, which he called Darkei Moshe ("The Ways of Moses"). This was a formulation of the halakha and customs of Ashkenazi Jewry. When R. Joseph Caro's work was published and reached Poland, R. Moses Isserles prepared a summary of all the differences between his halakhic decisions and those of R. Joseph, using the same form of paragraphs to comment on or disagree with those in the Shulchan Arukh. In this way he spread his Ashkenazi Mappah, or tablecloth on the Sephardi 'set table.' These two have merged in the printed editions of the Shulchan Arukh as it is recognized thereafter throughout Ashkenaz. Among the Sephardim, however, halakhic decisions follow only R. Joseph Caro.

Few recognize that if not for R. Moses Isserles adding his notes to the **שולחן ערוך**, the **שולחן ערוך** likely would not have been incorporated into Ashkenazic rabbinic literature. In the introduction to his book, Three Hundred Years Of Polish Jewish History, Dvir, 1945, pages 4-5, S.A. Horodsky explains why that was so:

Judaism in Poland grew over the centuries within the historic geographical boundaries of Poland; in Great Poland, with its center in the city of Pozna; Little Poland, with its center in the cities of Cracow and Lublin; Red Russia, with its center in the city of Lvov. Those four cities became the foundations of the Polish Jewish community in the years 5300-5400 (of the Jewish calendar-corresponding to 1542-1642 of the Gregorian calendar-ed.) and for the centuries that followed. These centers influenced not only the Jewish populations living in other cities within Poland and in neighboring countries, but also upon Safed in Israel, the home of the great Halachic scholar, R. Joseph Caro. Who knows what would have happened to his “Shulchan Aruch” after the sharp criticism that was levied against it by the great Sages of Poland if not for the fact that the Ramah added his notes to it. If not for the Ramah’s notes, it is not likely that the Shulchan Aruch would have been accepted in all corners of the Jewish Diaspora.

It was at a later point in Jewish history that Poland became a center of Jewish learning. In earlier times, the two great centers of Jewish life in the Diaspora were concentrated in France and the Rhineland (about whom it was said in the Middle Ages: **בי מצרפת תצא תורה ודבר ה' מאשכנז** -From France Torah is issued while G-d’s word emanates from the Rhineland), an era in which the Jews of Poland were considered uneducated and primitive. However, soon thereafter, Poland emerged as a great center for Jews throughout the Diaspora. Its birth can be traced to about the year 5300 and to the Jewish communities of the four cities referred to above. Leading its development was R. Jacob Falk (who died approximately in the year 1530) in Cracow; his student, R. Shalom Shechna (who died approximately in the year 1559) in Lublin; R. Moshe Mintz (1474) in Pozna, and R. Kalman Vermayza in Lvov (who died approximately in the year 1560). Their influence on the many students who studied in their Yeshivos was substantial and many of them became important Halachic decisors. The most famous of those Yeshivos was the Yeshiva in Cracow which was headed by R. Jacob Falk and the Yeshiva in Lublin which was headed by R. Shalom Shechna. The strength of those two Jewish leaders lay in their ability to teach and their dissemination of their oral law-they did not leave behind any written publications.

The birth of Rabbinic literature in Poland can be traced to the 5400’s. In that century a great generation of scholars trained in Poland blossomed including such luminaries as R. Sholom Luria; R. Moshe Isserles (Ramah); R. Mordechai Yaffe author of the Levush; R. Yehoshua Falk, author of the book: Sefer M’Eiras Ainayim; R. Shmuel Eidels, author of the Talmudic commentary known as the Maharsha; R. Yeshaya Horowitz, author of the Shnei Luchos Ha’ris, the Sh’lah; R. Joel Sirkes, author of the Bayis Chodosh (Bach); R. Yehoshua son of R. Yosef author of the book Moginei Shlomo and the book of responsa known as the Pnei Yehoshua; R. Yom Tov Lippman Heller author of the Tosafos Yom Tov; and R. Heschel, author of the book: Chidushei Halachos, and many others equally as important.

At that same time, the Jewish centers in France and the Rhineland were dwindling because of the expulsions and the decrees that were issued on an almost daily basis against Jews in those areas. While Polish Jewry was growing in strength and its religious leaders and lay leaders were creating a centralized Rabbinic authority and were enacting rules within their communities that helped create a unified, strong and dependable core, the Jewish areas of France and the Rhineland were falling apart and their residents scattering. As a consequence, the eyes of the Jewish communities in the Diaspora began focusing their attention upon the new center-Poland.

But not for nothing had the great scholars, heads of the Yeshivos and the Rabbinic leaders in France and the Rhineland toiled. The new centers in Poland continued the work of the Jewish religious leaders of France and the Rhineland but in a new location. The new institutions closely guarded the treasures that the two earlier centers created. Those who stood at the heads of the new institutions recognized that their beliefs, their thought processes and their customs were essentially a continuation of the earlier generations and that one spirit united and encompassed them. When anyone attempted to challenge the work of the prior centers, the heads of the Polish Yeshivos viewed the challenge as an attack on their own institutions.

The current version of **מנהג פולין** is not without its critics. In the introduction to his **מנהג פולין**; the omission of the recital of **סליחות** during **מוסף**, **תפלת שחרית**, **מחזור ליום כיפור** and **מנחה** on **יום כיפור**:

מאידך גיסא מתמיה המנהג שנתפשת במאה האחרונה בקהלות פולין וליטא, לדלג על כל סדר הסליחות בתפלות שחרית מוסף ומנחה של יום כפור. דילוג זה אינו מוקדם ממחצית המאה הי"ט⁸, ומבחינת תולדות הליטורגיה אינו מוצדק כלל וכלל. ייתכן שנגרם הליקוי ע"י המדפיסים שבגלל שינויי המנהגים המקומיים לא הכניסו את הסליחות למחזוריים אלא הסתפקו בהערה "ואומרים סליחות כמנהג המקום", וייתכן ג"כ שעם התפתחות אמנות החזנות בתקופה האחרונה האריכו החזנים בתפלתם עד שלא נשאר פנאי לאמירת הסליחות⁹. מ"מ דורש הענין עיון ותיקון.

Translation: On the other hand, it is surprising that the practice to omit the order of Selichos for Tefilas Shacharis, Mussaf and Mincha of Yom Kippur began in the 19th century in the communities of Poland and Lita. This omission cannot be traced to any earlier than the second half of the 19th Century. From the viewpoint of liturgical history, it is a change that cannot be defended. It appears that this shortcoming was caused by book publishers who because of the variety of customs that were prevalent failed to include the actual Selichos in their Machzorim but instead provided the following instruction: "recite the Selichos that are customarily said in your location." It further appears that with the growth of cantorial music in the last few generations, cantors extended their musical compositions to the point that little time was left to also include Selichos.

Professor Goldschmidt provides two footnotes in support of his contentions:

8. בספר מטה אפרים לר' אפרים זלמן מרגליות שהופיע (קצת אחרי מות המחבר) בוולקווא תקצ"ט, ט"ז תר"ט סעיף מ"ד נותן המחבר הוראות מפורטות איך לנהוג באמירת סליחות, אף אם אין שהות ביום לאמרן כולן, וברור שאז נהגו עוד לאמרן בפולין. מהדורות הסליחות כמנהג פולין שהופיעו בתקופה זו, כגון קרוטושין תקצ"ט, וכמנהג ליטא, כגון אמשטרדם תקמ"ה. סלאוויטא הקפ"ד, כללו עוד את הסליחות ליום כפור, וכן נדפסו במחזור כל בו, וילנא תרע"א.

Translation: In section 619, paragraph 44 of the book Mateh Ephraim authored by Rabbi Ephraim Zalman Margolis which appeared (a little after the death of the author) in Zolkiew, Poland, 5599, the author provides detailed instructions on which Selichos to recite even if there is insufficient time to recite them all. It is clear that as of that time period, Selichos were still recited as part of the Shacharis, Mussaf and Mincha services on Yom Kippur by those who followed Minhag Polin. Other collections of Selichos that followed Minhag Polin published at that time in Krotoschin, 5599, and that followed Minhag Lita, such as Amsterdam, 5545, Slawuta, 5564, still included Selichos for all the prayer services of Yom Kippur. The Selichos were also included in the Machzor Kol Bo, Vilna, 5671.

9. וזה לשון ר' יחיאל מיכל אפשטיין בספרו הנודע 'ערוך השולחן' ס' תר"כ: ומה שתמיהני דהנה הרא"ש שלהי יומא והטור בסי' זה (תר"יג) הביאו בשם הגאונים לומר בשחרית ה' פעמים ויעבר, וי"א י"ג פעמים כנגד י"ג מדות, וי"א ז' פעמים, ובמוסף ז' פעמים, וכן במנחה, ע"ש. ואנחנו אין מוכיחין אפילו פעם אחת. ויש מנהגים שאין להם עיקר ונוהרים בהם, וזה שהוא מהגאונים ובהזכרת י"ג מדות ואין נוהרים בוה. וזה נצמח הכל מאריכות הניגונים עד שלא נשאר זמן לומר סליחות, ואמירת י"ג מדות א"א בלא אמירת סליחות. וכבר צווחו גאוני עולם על החוננים, אך אין כח בידינו למחות, וה' יכפר.

Translation: This is what R. Yechiel Epstein¹ wrote in his famous work, Aruch Ha'Shulchan, Section 220: What surprises me is that the Rosh in the end of Maseches Yuma and the Tur in this section, (section 613), cite from the Geonim the requirement that we say the Thirteen Attributes of G-d five times in Tefilas Shacharis, while some say they should be said thirteen times because there are thirteen attributes, and some say them seven times and in Mussaf, seven times, and so too during Tefilas Mincha of Yom Kippur. Yet, our current practice is to not refer to the Thirteen Attributes even once during those prayer services. That is a reflection of the fact that some practices within Judaism have no actual basis, yet they are carefully performed while customs like the practice of reciting Selichos as part of the Tefilos of Shacharis, Mussaf and Mincha and Yom Kippur which were provided for by the Geonim and which include the recital of the Thirteen Attributes of G-d, are not performed. This omission developed totally as a result of the extended musical compositions rendered by cantors that leave little time to recite Selichos and without reciting Selichos, the Thirteen Attributes of G-d cannot be enumerated. This omission is the basis of one of many complaints that our Rabbinic leadership has lodged against the conduct of Cantors but we, the clergy, have little power to stop them. May G-d forgive us.

1. Rabbi Yechiel Michel ben Rabbi Aaron HaLevi Epstein was born in 1829 in Bobroisk, Russia. From his childhood, he was known as a genius. He married the daughter of Rabbi Jacob Berlin of Mir (the father of the Netziv) and continued his studies in the yeshiva of Volozhin. He was appointed rabbi of Novardhok (Novogrodok), and headed the yeshiva there. He corresponded extensively on halachic matters; unfortunately, this responsa is no longer extant. His son, Rabbi Baruch Epstein, authored the Torah Temimah. His daughter married her uncle, the Netziv. Rabbi Yechiel Michel passed away in 1908. (Bar Ilan Digital Library)