

Selichot: Then and Now

Torah in Motion 2024

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יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹשַׁע בַּה' (יום ג' וגם [שלוש שורות ראשונות] בנעילה)

Rabbi Shefatiah ben Amitai, Italy, d. 866

יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹשַׁע בַּה' תְּשׁוּעַת עוֹלָמִים,

גַּם-הַיּוֹם יִנְשְׁעוּ מִפִּיךָ שׁוֹכְנֵי
מְרוֹמִים,

כִּי-אַתָּה רַב סְלִיחוֹת וּבַעַל
הַרְחָמִים:

שְׁעָרֶיךָ הֵם דּוֹפְקִים כְּעֲנִיִּים וְדָלִים,

צָקוֹן לְחֹשֶׁם קָשׁוּב-י-ה שׁוֹכֵן
מְעַלְיָם,

כִּי-אַתָּה רַב סְלִיחוֹת וּבַעַל
הַרְחָמִים:

Israel's rescue is in the Lord, an
everlasting rescue,

today, too, may Your word save them,
O Dweller of the heights

for You are abounding in forgiveness
and Master of mercy

At Your gate they knock, poor and
needy

hear their outpoured whispers, O
Lord, Dweller on high

for You are abounding in forgiveness
and Master of mercy

Isaiah 45:17

יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹשַׁע בַּה' תְּשׁוּעַת עוֹלָמִים
לֹא-תִבְשׁוּ וְלֹא-תִכְלְמוּ עַד-עוֹלָמֵי עַד:

פירוש שד"ל: נראה כי מלת נושע
בינוני, ולא עבר, והיה ראוי לנקד
השי"ן קמץ, לא פתח.

JPS translation: But Israel has won through the LORD triumph everlasting. You shall not be shamed or disgraced in all the ages to come!

Koren translation: But Yisra'el shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation: you shall not be ashamed nor confounded to all eternity.

Rabbi JJ Schachter's note on

ישראל נושע בה'

The Midrash (Midrash Tehillim Shoher Tov 31:1–2) writes that the Jewish people say to God, “Were we already not redeemed by Moses, by Joshua, by the Judges, and by the Kings? And yet we have once again been enslaved, and we are embarrassed as if we were never redeemed.’ Said to them the Holy One, Blessed-is-He, ‘In the past, because your redemption was at the hands of flesh and blood, who are here today and tomorrow in the grave, your redemption was a temporary one. But now, I myself will redeem you, I, Who am alive and exist forever. Therefore my redemption will be an eternal redemption, as it says, “Israel’s rescue is in the Lord, an everlasting rescue” (Isaiah 45:7)’.”

Midrash Shohar Tov 31

אָמְרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנָיו לֹא כָבַר נִגְאָלְנוּ עַל יְדֵי מַנְשָׁה וְכֵן עַל יְדֵי
יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְכֵן עַל יְדֵי הַשּׁוֹפְטִים וּמְלָכִים וְהֵיינוּ חוֹזְרִין וּמִשְׁתַּעֲבָדִין
וְהֵיינוּ בְּבוֹנְשָׁה כְּמִי נִשְׁלַא נִגְאָלוּ. אוֹמֵר לָהֶן הַקַּב"ה לְשַׁעֲבֵר לְפִי
שְׁגֵאֲלֵתְכֶם עַל יְדֵי בָּשָׂר וְדָם הַיּוֹם כָּאֵן וּמַחֲר בְּקֶבֶר לְפִיכֶךָ
גְּאֲלֵתְכֶם גְּאֲלֵת שְׁעָה. וְעַכְשָׁו אֲנִי גּוֹאֵל אֶתְכֶם עַל יְדֵי עֲצָמֵי
שְׂאֵנֵי חַי וְקַיִם לְעוֹלָם לְפִיכֶךָ גְּאֲלֵתִי גְּאֲלֵת עוֹלָם. שְׁנֵאָמַר
(יִשְׁעִיהַ מַה יִּז) יִשְׂרָאֵל נוֹשַׁע בְּה' תְּשׁוּעַת עוֹלָמִים. לְפִיכֶךָ לֹא
תִבְשׁוּ וְלֹא תִכְלְמוּ עַד עוֹלָמֵי עַד.

יִשְׂרָאֵל נוֹשַׁע בְּה'

(שֵׁעִיר וְחוֹתְנֹו)

פְּחוּדִים הֵם מְכַל-צָרוֹת מִמְּחַרְפֵּיהֶם
וּמִמְגַדְפֵּיהֶם,
נָא אַל-תַּעֲזֹבֵם ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם,

כִּי-אַתָּה רַב סְלִיחוֹת וּבַעַל הַרְחָמִים: . . .

יִנְשְׁעוּ לְעֵין-כָּל וְאֵל-יִמְשְׁלוּ בָם רְשָׁעִים,

כִּלְהַ שֵׁעִיר וְחוֹתְנֹו וַיַּעֲלוּ לְצִיּוֹן מוֹשִׁיעִים,
כִּי אַתָּה רַב סְלִיחוֹת וּבַעַל הַרְחָמִים:

They are terrified by troubles from the hands of their taunters and oppressors

please do not forsake them, O Lord, God of their ancestors

for You are abounding in forgiveness and Master of mercy. . .

Let them be saved in sight of all, and let the wicked rule over them no more

wipe out **Se'ir and his father-in-law**, and let saviours ascend to Zion

for You are abounding in forgiveness and Master of mercy

Rabbi JJ Schachter's note on שֵׁעִיר וְחֹתֵנוּ

Seir is a reference to Esau. . . . Esau's father-in-law was Ishmael as the verse (Genesis 28:9) states, "Esau went to Ishmael and took Maḥalat, the daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to his wives, as a wife for himself." In his commentary on the verse in Zechariah 5:11, Rashi cites a passage from Midrash Tehillim Shoḥer Tov that the nations who subjugate the Jewish people come in pairs and that one pair is Edom and Ishmael. These two nations appear together in Psalms 83:7.

In subsequent Jewish tradition, Edom is identified with Christianity, and Ishmael with Islam.

Daniel Goldschmidt's note (1970) on

כִּלְהַ שְׂעִיר וְחֹתָנוּ וַיַּעֲלוּ לְצִיּוֹן מוֹשִׁיעִים

ע"פ עובדיה כא ועלו מושיעים
בהר ציון לשפוט את הר עשיו,
שהוא הר שעיר, והכוונה אל
הנוצרים ואל מלכות רומי.
המחבר חי באיטליה ויש לו עניין
עם נוצרים. ולכן נראית המילה
"וְחֹתָנוּ", שהיא יתרה על מספר
המילים הקבוע כאן ואין לה סמך
בפסוק הנרמז כהוספה מאוחרת.

Alluding to Obad 21 "Saviours shall go up to Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esav," which is Mount Seir. The reference is to Christians and to the Roman Empire. The author lived in Italy and Christians are the ones he encountered. Accordingly, the word וְחֹתָנוּ (his father-in-law) appears to be a later addition, as it is an extra word in the poetic line and there is no reference [to Ishmael] in the verse alluded to.

יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹשַׁע בְּה' (שֵׁעִיר וְחֹתָנוּ)

פְּחוּדִים הֵם מְכַל-צָרוֹת מִמְּחַרְפֵּיהֶם
וּמִמְּגַדְפֵּיהֶם,
נָא אֶל-תַּעֲזָבֵם ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם,

כִּי-אַתָּה רַב סְלִיחוֹת וּבַעַל הַרְחָמִים: . . .

וַיִּשְׁעוּ לְעֵין-כָּל וְאֶל-יִמְשְׁלוּ בָם רָשָׁעִים,

כִּלְהַ שֵׁעִיר וְחֹתָנוּ וַיַּעֲלוּ לְצִיּוֹן מוֹשִׁיעִים,
כִּי-אַתָּה רַב סְלִיחוֹת וּבַעַל הַרְחָמִים:

They are terrified by troubles from the hands of their taunters and oppressors

please do not forsake them, O Lord, God of their ancestors

for You are abounding in forgiveness and Master of mercy. . .

Let them be saved in sight of all, and let the wicked rule over them no more

wipe out **Se'ir and his father-in-law**, and and let saviours ascend to Zion

for You are abounding in forgiveness and Master of mercy

אברהם פרנקל תרביץ תשעז

צירוף הכינויים 'שעיר וחותנו' רומז
כמובן לעשו ולישמעאל. ר' שפטיה,
איש בארי, חי סביב אמצע המאה
התשיעית. בשנת 842 לסה"נ לכדו
המוסלמים את בארי. הביטוי 'כלה
שעיר וחותנו' הוא כללי למדי, ואין בו
אזכור לפרעות או לפשיטות
מסוימות. למרות זאת מקובל לפרש
טור זה על רקע סבלם של היהודים
בעקבות פשיטות המוסלמים לדרום
איטליה.

The combination “Seir and his father-in-law” of course refers to Esav and Yishmael. Rabbi Shefatiah, who was from Bari, lived in the middle of the 9th century. In 842, Muslims captured Bari. The phrase “wipe out Seir and his father-in-law” is rather general; it doesn’t allude to any specific riots or attacks. Nevertheless, this line is standardly seen as referring to the suffering of Jews because of the Muslim attacks in Southern Italy.

אֵיךְ אֹכֵל לָבֹא עִדְיָךְ (ב/ג עשי"ת)

Italy 9th century?

אֵיךְ אֹכֵל לָבֹא עִדְיָךְ. וְעוֹבְדֵי
זוֹלָתְךָ לֹא-עֲזָבוּנִי לְעַבְדְּךָ.
וְהִמָּה בְקִשׁוֹ לְהַפְרִידֵי מִמֶּךָ.
וְאֲנִי לֹא-עֲזַבְתִּי פִקְדֹיךָ: . . .

אֵיךְ טָרְפָה מַלְכוּת מִמְּלֻכַת
עַם-סִגְלָה. וְאַרְכָּה מְלוּכָה
לְמַלְכֵי בְנֵי עוֹלָה. וְהִמָּה יוֹשְׁבֵי
לְבַטָּח בְּשִׂמְחָה וְגִילָה. וְאֲנִי
בְּתוֹךְ-הַגּוֹלָה: . . .

How can I come to You when those who worship others won't let Your servant worship You? They seek to separate me from You, but as for me – I never abandoned Your precepts.

How is it that the kingdom of Your treasured people's reign has been ravaged, while the kingship of evil people's kings lingers on? They dwell in security, in joy and delight, but as for me – I am in exile.

אֵיךְ אֹכֵל לֶבֶן עֲדִיךָ (ב/ג עשי"ת)

Italy 9th century?

אֵיךְ מְחַצְנִי אֱלֹהִי, וּמְכַאוֹבִי
לֹא-חֲבַשׁ. וּמְעִיל תְּפָאֲרָתִי
לְבָנֵי-אֲדוֹם הַלְבָּשׁ. וְהֵמָּה נֹפֵת
אוֹכְלִים חֶלֶב וְדָבַשׁ. וְאֲנִי כְעֵשֶׂב
אִיבֶשׁ:

אֵיךְ סָבְבוּנִי קְדָר כְּתָרוּנִי
דְּדָן וְשֶׁבָא. הַקּוֹרְאִים נְבִיא לְאִישׁ
מֵעוֹלָם לֹא-נָבָא. וְהֵמָּה עוֹשִׂים
חֵיל גְּדוּד וְצָבָא. וְאֲנִי אָנֹכִי
אֲנִי-בָא:

How has my God crushed me
without binding up my wounds,
while clothing Edom's children in
my robes of glory; they feast on
nectar, milk, and honey, but as for
me – I wither away like grass.

How Kedar have surrounded me,
Dedan and Sheba closed in on me,
those who call a man a prophet,
though he never prophesied; they
build forces, troops, and armies,
but as for me – where can I turn?

Rashi

אָז טָרָם נִמְתָּחוּ (צוֹם גְּדֻלְיָהּ)

אָז טָרָם נִמְתָּחוּ נִבְלֵי שְׂכָבִים.

Even before the firmament was stretched above

בְּאֶרֶץ עַד לֹא דִבְקוּ רֶגְבִים.

And the soil was joined together on the earth

גִּבְרָה שִׁבְעָה דְבָרִים הָיוּ מִגִּבְבִּים.

Seven things were already gathered before you

דַּת וְכִסֵּי וְרִטְוֵית בְּנִים שׁוֹבְבִים.

The Law, the Throne, the Acceptance of the Penitent

Pesachim 54a

שִׁבְעָה דְּבָרִים נִבְרָאוּ קֹדָם
שֶׁנִּבְרָא הָעוֹלָם, וְאֵלוּ הֵן:
תּוֹרָה, וּתְשׁוּבָה, וְגַן עֵדֶן,
וְגִיהֵנוֹם, וְכִסֵּא הַכְּבוֹד, וּבֵית
הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, וְשֵׁמוֹ שֶׁל מָשִׁיחַ.

Seven items were created before the world was created, and they are: Torah, and repentance, and the Garden of Eden, and Gehenna, and the Throne of Glory, and the Temple, and the name of Messiah.

The Name of the messiah (Sanhedrin 98b)

מה שמו דבי רבי שילא אמרי
שילה שמו שנאמר (בראשית
מט, י) עד כי יבא שילה

What is his name? The school of Rabbi Sheila says: Shiloh is his name, as it is stated: “Until Shiloh shall come.”

דבי רבי ינאי אמרי ינון שמו
שנאמר (תהלים עב, יז) יהי
שמו לעולם לפני שמש ינון
שמו

The school of Rabbi Yannai says: Yinnon is his name, as it is stated: “May his name endure forever; may his name continue [*yinnon*] as long as the sun.”

דבי רבי חנינה אמר חנינה
שמו

The school of Rabbi Ḥanina says: Ḥanina is his name,

Rashi

אֶז טַרְם נְמַתְחוּ (צוּם גְדֻלְיָה)

הוֹד גַּן עֵדֶן וְעֵלֶק הַבְּהֵבִים. The beauty of Paradise, the flames of Hell

וּמְקוֹם כְּפָרָה עַל יְדֵי מִקְרִיבִים. A place of atonement with offerings

זֶהָר שָׁם יִנּוֹן מְחַלֵּל מַחֲבִים. And the dazzling radiance of the name, Yinon, **suffering from our sins**

חוּבְרוּ אֶלְפִים קָדָם בְּרִיאַת יִשׁוּבִים. [all these] were prepared before the habitable earth was created.

Rashi

אֵז טָרַם נִמְתָּחוּ (צוּם גְּדֻלְיָה)

הִרְק שֶׁמֶן הַטּוֹב עַל רֹאשׁ שׁוֹבִיִּים.

Pour forth oil on the heads of those repenting

בְּכֵן אֶתְּאֲנוּ לָךְ עַלְמִים וְשׁוֹבִיִּים. . . .

Accordingly, we have come before you, young and old...

חֲטָאֵינוּ הִצְלֵל בְּקִרְקַע נְטָפִי מִרְזָבִים.

Cause our sins to drown in the nethermost depths

קִרְבָּנוּ אֵלֶיךָ בְּרַחֲמֵיפֶת רַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּיִּים:

Bring us near to You, under the wings of Your great mercy.

Isaiah 52-53

הִנֵּה יִשְׁכָּל עַבְדִּי יְרוּם
וְנִשָּׂא וְגִבָּה מְאֹד.

כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמְמוּ עָלָיו רַבִּים
כֵּן מִשְׁחַת מֵאִישׁ מֵרְאֵהוּ
וְתָאָרוּ מִבְּנֵי אָדָם . . .

Indeed, My servant shall prosper, be exalted and raised to great heights.

Just as the many were appalled at him—so marred was his appearance, unlike that of a person, his form, beyond human semblance . . .

Isaiah 52-53

נְבֻזָה וְחָדַל אִישִׁים אִישׁ
מִכְּאֲבוֹת וַיְדוּעַ חֲלִי וְכִמְסִיתָר
פָּנִים מִמֶּנּוּ. נְבֻזָה וְלֹא
חֲשַׁבְנָהּוּ. אֲכֵן חֲלִינוּ. הוּא נָשָׂא
וּמִכְּאֲבֵינוּ. סִבְלָם וְאַנְחָנוּ.
חֲשַׁבְנָהּוּ. נָגוּעַ מִכָּה אֱלֹהִים
וּמִעֲנָה. וְהוּא מְחַלֵּל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ.
מִדְּכָא מִעֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ. מוֹסֵר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ.
עָלָיו וּבְחִבְרָתוֹ נִרְפָּא לָנוּ.

He was despised, shunned by others, a man of suffering, familiar with disease. As one who hid his face from us, he was despised, we held him of no account. We accounted him plagued, smitten and afflicted by God. Yet it was our sickness that he was bearing, our suffering that he endured. He was **wounded because of our sins**, crushed because of our iniquities. He bore the chastisement that made us whole, and by his bruises we were healed.

Rashi's commentary on Isaiah 52/53

הנה ישכיל עבדי – הנה באחרית
הימים יצליח עבדי יעקב, צדיקים
שבהם . . .

כן דרך הנביא הזה מזכיר כל ישראל
כאיש אחד: אל תירא עבדי
יעקב (ישעיהו מ"ד:ב'), ועתה שמע
יעקב עבדי (ישעיהו מ"ד:א'). ואף
הנה ישכיל עבדי (ישעיהו נ"ב:י"ג).
בבית יעקב אמר

My servant shall prosper: At the
end of days, My servant, Jacob,
i.e. the righteous among them,
shall prosper.

This prophet's style is to refer to
the Jewish people in the
singular: "be not afraid, my
Servant, Jacob," (Is. 44); "Listen,
Jacob, My servant" (Is. 44); here
also "My servant shall prosper"
[refers collectively to the Jewish
people]

Rashi's commentary on Isaiah 52/53

אנו רואים שלא מחמת
שפלותו בא לו, אלא מיוסר
היה בייסורים להיות כל
האומות מתכפרות בייסוריהם
של ישראל, חלי שהיה ראוי
לבא עלינו הוא נִשְׂאָו.
ואנחנו חשבנוהו – אנו היינו
סבורים שהיה שנוי למקום.

[The speakers, the nations of the world, say:] “We now see that it is not because of his lowliness that these [tragedies] befell them. Rather they are suffering because they are all the nations of the world achieve [vicarious] atonement through their suffering.

[“It was our sickness that he was bearing” means:] he was bearing the suffering that should have befallen us. “We accounted him [plagued]”; We thought that he was hated by God.

Rabbi JJ Schachter's Note

This verse was classically interpreted by Christians as a reference to Jesus, the “suffering servant” who suffered for the sins of humanity. Fully aware of this interpretation which was critically central to Christian theology, Jewish exegetes throughout the ages went out of their way to find alternative explanations for the identity of that “servant” as a counter to the Christian one, often expending much energy, and sometimes great ingenuity, to do so.



Two Issues

Israel or
Messiah

Vicarious
atonement

Why would Rashi be attracted to a vicarious atonement interpretation?

Joel Rembaum, Harvard Theological Review (1982):

[assumes Isaiah commentary after 1096 and makes a number of suggestions, but emphasizes] “the need to provide an explanation for the horrific experiences visited upon the communities of the Rhineland during the First Crusade.”

David Berger “Rashi on Isaiah 53: Exegetical Judgment or Response to the Crusade” (2023) disagrees

“It may be that his [Rashi’s] identification of the servant as Israel was driven by both textual and polemical considerations, but it is highly likely that his perception of the straightforward meaning, or peshat, played a critical role.”

Shanah tovah to one and all

לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה תִּכְתְּבוּ וְתִחַתְמוּ.

תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקָלְלוּתֶיהָ

תִּחַל שָׁנָה וּבִרְכוּתֶיהָ