

THE YESHIVA PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM PRESENTS:  
THE ROADMAP TO PRAYER PROJECT

# The Roadmap to Prayer

## Lesson 39

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# The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson

# 39

## Selichos: Getting Close to Hashem Again

*Dovid Hamelech* said: *Va'ani Kirvas Elokim Li Tov* (As for me, being close to Hashem is what's considered good). What King David (*Dovid Hamelech*) desired was only one thing; to be close with Hashem. In order to enjoy such a relationship, one must be deserving of it by doing such deeds that develop one's closeness to Hashem and by avoiding those transgressions that damage such a relationship. *Sur Me'ra Va'assei Tov* (Avoid evil and do what is good). Yet, even after doing things that damage one's relationship with Hashem, one can still do things to reestablish it and brings us close to Him again. Moses' (*Moshe Rabbeinu's*) prayer to Hashem after the sin of the Golden Calf (*Eigel Hazahav*) was "Please forgive the sin of this nation" (*Selach Nah La'avon Ha'am Hazeh*).

### Restoring the Closeness: A Formidable Task

*Selichos* is a set of prayers recited in a very specific fashion that we say on different occasions during the course of the year. We generally associate the exercise of reciting *Selichos* as part of the *Teshuvah* (repentance) process. In truth, although it is correctly associated with the process of *Teshuvah*, it can more accurately be defined as the process of reestablishing good favor with our Creator.

But, there's another aspect to this as well. We are expected to perfect ourselves to the best of our ability and strive to attain greater levels of spirituality in order to achieve the greatest degree of closeness with Hashem as possible. Attaining *Selicha* is not just to be forgiven; rather it is a process of mending a broken relationship and building it back up again. This can be compared to one who demolishes a perfectly functional and useful edifice. It's not sufficient for one just to remove the destruction and rubble one created; rather it is necessary also to reconstruct the edifice, a brick at a time. Only then can one begin to consider one's destructive action, as being rectified. Even after reconstructing its outer structure, the inside of the edifice, its tenants and vendors still need to be restored. Even with their restoration, it may be impossible to remedy the loss of revenue caused during the interim.

Likewise, one who committed a sin, not only must he distance himself from repeating it, he must also contemplate the damage that was caused and what it will take to restore all aspects and all the consequences of his sinful act. Besides for asking *Hashem's* forgiveness, one must seek ways to re-establish one's original relationship with *Hashem*.

The *Rambam* writes that the perfect situation of *Teshuvah* is if one would find himself in the very same situation again and avoids committing it again, then it is considered to have reached a level of perfection in one's *Teshuvah*. In order to attain a perfect *Teshuvah*, one must sincerely accept upon himself never to repeat the sin again. One must have regret and remorse for committing the sin to the point that G-d Himself bears witness that he would never commit the sin again.

### Perfection: An Expectation

One may think that it's to no avail to seek perfection in one's life when mediocrity would be far better than most people who follow a completely different set of ideals and morals? *Rav Moshe Chaim Luzatto* addresses this issue in his classic work *Messilas Yesharim* (The Path of the Just)<sup>2</sup>. He explains that people are basically lazy when they shrug off their duties and perform them haphazardly. Their excuse that what they do is sufficient even if it won't bring them great reward, at least what they do is noteworthy and better than what others do. He reminds them that in daily matters, we have a different outlook. When we see people honoring others whom we view less deserving than ourselves, we feel jealous and even angry at them for no real reason. If this is our reaction to temporal expressions of respect, how much more so will our feelings of despondency really matter to us when the true honor is displayed to others whom we viewed as less prominent than ourselves, in the World to Come (*Olam Haba*)? Therefore, people should realize that it is incumbent on them to do things wholeheartedly and to the best of their ability.

Accordingly, when one starts repenting for one's wrongdoings, one must seek ways to rectify them by repenting and confessing one's sins, begging *Hashem* for forgiveness and seek ways with which to reestablish his good standing with Him. In order to accomplish this, one needs to always focus on the mistakes that led to his misdeeds in order to ensure that they don't happen again and to show his true remorse for doing them in the first place. This then will lead one to a renewed

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<sup>1</sup> *Hilchos Teshuva* Perek 2 *Halacha* 1 & 2

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 4

effort and concentration in performing one's duties towards his Creator and finding favor in His eyes again. This process is what we know today as *Selichos*.

**Vayomer Hashem: “Salachti Kidvarecha”**  
And G-d said [to Moshe Rabbeinu] “I forgive [them] as you requested”<sup>3</sup>

## The Abundant Selicha Prayers

Now that we explained the meaning of *Selicha*, it is easier for us to understand and to appreciate the many days and weeks we spend reciting *Selichos* before *Rosh Hashanah* and beyond. The numerous days that we spend reciting *Selichos* prayers are meant to arouse us to examine our deeds and express our remorse for all our failings in fulfilling our duties in serving *Hashem*. Each of the *Selicha* prayers focuses on specific feelings of remorse and expressions of yearning of reestablishing our connection with *Hashem* our G-d. This is truly a lifelong process which *David Hamelech* himself expressed in many Psalms how he felt for just one transgression which he felt that he was guilty of, even though according to the teachings of our Sages it wasn't a true transgression.

## How Selichos Developed

It is interesting to note that the various customs regarding the recitation of *Selichos* during this time of year began sometime during the period of the *Ge'onim* as we will see in the following sources. From that time forward, additional *Piyutim* (prayers composed various styles of rhymes and refrains, were composed and added to the *Selichos* at different points in history by various authors who are referred to as *Paytanim*. The *Ben Ish Chai*<sup>4</sup> in his *Responsa Torah Lishma*<sup>5</sup> points out that the *Selichos* prayers were not set by the Men of the Great Assembly (*Anshei Knesses Hagedolah*) like *Shemoneh Esrei*. Rather, it evolved over time through *Paytanim* spanning generations. Although Sephardim say *Selichot* for a longer period of time, the Ashkenazic versions of *Selichos* contain a much greater array of different *Piyutim* of *Selichos* prayers. We will elaborate some more about the background of the *Selichos* prayers later on in these lessons.

<sup>3</sup> *Bamidbar* 14:20.

רש"י דברים פרק ט פסוק יח ואתנפל לפני ה' כראשונה ארבעים יום - שנאמר (שמות לב, ל) ועתה אעלה אל ה' אולי אכפרה. באותה עלייה נתעכבתי ארבעים יום. נמצאו כלים בכ"ט באב. שהוא עלה בשמונה עשר בתמוז, בו ביום נתרצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לישראל ואמר לו למשה (דברים י, א) פסל לך שני לוחות, עשה עוד ארבעים יום, נמצאו כלים ביום הכפורים. בו ביום נתרצה הקב"ה לישראל בשמחה ואמר לו למשה (במדבר יד, כ) סלחתי כדברך. לכן הוקבע למחילה ולסליחה. ומנין שנתרצה ברצון שלם. שנאמר בארבעים של לוחות אחרונות (דברים י, ז) ואנכי עמדתי בהר כימים הראשונים, מה הראשונים ברצון אף אחרונים ברצון. אמור מעתה אמצעייה היו בכעס:

<sup>4</sup> Rav Moshe Chaim zt"l, Sephardic leader in Baghdad

<sup>5</sup> *Simon* 49

## The Month of Elul:

### The Start of Selichos (Sephardim)

There are various *Minhagim* (customs) as to when we begin reciting *Selichos* during the *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur* season.

The *Tur* in *Orach Chaim Simon* 581 points out that in some communities *Selichos* begins at the beginning of the month of *Elul* and continues until *Yom Kippur*. This corresponds with the final 40-day period that *Moshe Rabbeinu* went up to the mountain (Mt. Sinai) to plead for the *Bnei Yisrael* to regain their good standing after their devastating sin by the *Eigel Hazahav* (the Golden Calf). That period culminated on *Yom Kippur* with *Moshe Rabbeinu* returning with G-d's forgiveness and the second set of *Luchos* (the Tablets bearing the 10 commandments).

According to this custom, *Selichos* only begins the day after *Rosh Chodesh*, since on *Rosh Chodesh* itself, we do not recite *Selichos* as it is considered a minor holiday. Since *Selichos* speaks of sin and begging forgiveness, we refrain from reciting *Selichos* on Shabbos or *Yom Tov* which are meant to be joyous days.

The *Mechaber* writes that the prevalent custom in the communities he lived in was to start reciting *Selichos* from the beginning of *Elul*. Nowadays too, Sephardic communities around the world, herald in the holy days of the months of *Elul* and *Tishrei* with an entire month of *Selichot*<sup>6</sup>. During this entire period of *Selichot* prayers, the Sephardic custom is to recite the same *Selichot* every single day. During the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, some additional pieces are inserted into the regular daily order of *Selichot*; other than that, the *Selichot* are the same all the time. The *Selichot* are most commonly done with the *Chazzan* alternating with the congregants in reciting parts of each verse.

#### Starting Selichos during Aseres Yemei Teshuvah

The *Rambam*, the *Rosh* and the *Tur* cite that the custom of the *Two Yeshivos*<sup>7</sup> was to begin reciting *Selichos* during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*.

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<sup>6</sup> We will use this spelling when referring to the Sephardic version and the word *Selichos* when referring to the Ashkenaz version alone or when referring to both

<sup>7</sup> *Hilchos Teshuvah*

<sup>8</sup> *Sura and Pumpedusa* in ancient Babylon

## The Custom of Starting Selichos from the 15<sup>th</sup> of Elul and Other Customs

In the *Siddur* of *Rav Amram Gaon* it mentions a *Minhag* (custom) was to begin reciting *Selichos* from the fifteenth of *Elul* and on. This custom is also mentioned by *Abudraham*.

The *Ran* to the *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah*<sup>9</sup> cites the custom in Barcelona was to begin *Selichos* on the twenty-fifth day of *Elul*, corresponding to the day *Hashem* began Creation<sup>10</sup>. Even according to this reason, we always begin *Selichos* at the beginning of that week to keep things uniform so that people won't make a mistake when to start reciting *Selichos*<sup>11</sup>. Since *Rosh Hashanah* according to our calendar, cannot fall on Sundays, Wednesday and Fridays, when the twenty-fifth is on Sunday, we begin on that day giving us four days of *Selichos* up to *Rosh Hashanah* which is on Thursday, and the second day *Rosh Hashanah* will concur with the day that *Adam Harishon* sinned.

## The Custom of Ashkenazic Jewry

The final *minhag* (custom) is the prevailing custom amongst Ashkenazic Jewry today, which is to begin reciting *Selichos* on the Sunday right before *Rosh Hashanah*. This works out only when *Rosh Hashanah* begins on Thursday or Shabbos and there will be at least 4 days of *Selichos* before *Rosh Hashanah*. If however, *Rosh Hashanah* begins on a Monday or Tuesday, then *Selichos* begins the previous week on Sunday. According to our set calendar system, *Rosh Hashanah* never begins on a Sunday, Wednesday or Friday<sup>12</sup>.

## The Minhag of Barcelona and Ashkenaz

The *Ran* in his commentary to the *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah*<sup>13</sup> cites the custom in Barcelona was to begin *Selichos* on the twenty-fifth day of *Elul*, giving us 5 days of special prayers before *Rosh Hashanah*, the Day of Judgment. The twenty-fifth day of

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<sup>9</sup> *Daf*16a

<sup>10</sup> *Match Ephraim* cites another *minhag* that privately recited one section each day from the beginning of *Parshas Bereishis*, reading one day of Creation a day, until *Rosh Hashanah*.

<sup>11</sup> *Biur HaGra Simon* 581

<sup>12</sup> לא אד"ו ראש

<sup>13</sup> *Daf*16a

*Elul* corresponds to the day *Hashem* began Creation<sup>14</sup>, while *Rosh Hashanah*, the Day of Judgment corresponds to the day Adam was created.

At first glance, it appears that the above custom does not concur with the custom of Ashkenaz cited by the *Rama*. The *Gra* however, explains that this *minhag* is the basis for the Ashkenaz custom of starting *Selichos* on the Sunday before *Rosh Hashanah*. He explains that the *Ran* mentioned that according to this custom, we always begin *Selichos* at the beginning of the week, to keep things uniform so that people won't make a mistake when to start reciting *Selichos*.

Accordingly, when *Rosh Hashanah* is on Thursday<sup>15</sup>, the twenty-fifth is on Sunday, we begin on that day, giving us 5 days of special prayer corresponding to the five days until Adam's creation on the 6<sup>th</sup> day. 4 days of *Selichos* up to *Rosh Hashanah* plus the first day *Rosh Hashanah* itself which is on Thursday; gives us 5 days in total until the second day of *Rosh Hashanah* which will correspond to the day that Adam was created, which was Friday<sup>16</sup>. However, when *Rosh Hashanah* is on Monday or Tuesday, we start Sunday the week before in order to have at least 5 days of special prayers before *Rosh Hashanah*. This is the explanation of the custom of Ashkenaz that the *Rama* cites.

#### The Custom to Fast

The *Rama*<sup>17</sup> mentions that it was common for pious individuals to fast a total of 10 days up until and including *Yom Kippur*<sup>18</sup>. Since 4 of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* days are either Shabbos, *Yom Tov* or *Erev Yom Kippur*, days on which one is not allowed to fast, we begin reciting *Selichos* at least 4 days in advance of *Rosh Hashanah* to make up for the 4 missing days out of 10 days of fasting corresponding to the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*.

Another custom was that whoever was the *Shali'ach Tzibbur* for *Selichos* prayers should also be the *Shali'ach Tzibbur* for the rest of the day's prayers (*tefillos*). This was

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<sup>14</sup> *Mateh Ephraim* cites another *minhag* that privately recited one section each day from the beginning of *Parshas Bereishis*, reading one day of Creation a day, until *Rosh Hashanah*.

<sup>15</sup> According to our calendar, *Rosh Hashanah* cannot begin on a Sunday, Wednesday or Friday

<sup>16</sup> *Biur HaGra Simon* 581

<sup>17</sup> *Simon* 580

<sup>18</sup> *Rama* 581:2

mainly because the one who was the *Chazzan* for *Selichos* itself would be fasting all day<sup>19</sup>.

Nowadays, most people do not have the *minhag* (custom) to fast because of the weaker stamina of our generation when it comes to fasting. Nonetheless, since the main reason to fast is to examine our deeds and better our ways, one should at least begin introspecting and examine how to be better one's service of G-d (*Avodas Hashem*) during these 4 days before *Rosh Hashanah*.

Like a Korban - Sacrifice

Another explanation why *Selichos* is always a minimum of 4 days before *Rosh Hashanah* is for the following reason. In general, the Torah uses the verb *Vehikravtem* (and you will bring close i.e. offer a sacrifice) for *Korbanos*. On *Rosh Hashanah* the Torah uses the verb *Va'asisem* (and you shall make). In Hebrew this means that one should imagine himself as a *Korban* (sacrifice), to become humbled and remorseful for any sin or iniquity. Following this thought, one should recite *Selichos* to focus on the upcoming *Day of Judgment* for a period of at least 4 days just like the daily animal offerings were checked for blemishes, 4 days prior to their being brought as a *Korban*. By shifting one's focus to prepare oneself for *Rosh Hashanah*, one will be better prepared for the upcoming Ten Days of Repentance (*Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*) to merit another year of life devoted to G-d and His Torah.

A Hint in the Parsha for the Start of Selichos (Ashkenaz)

*Attem Nitzavim Hayome* (You're standing today). These words are the opening words that *Moshe Rabbeinu* used to address *Bnei Yisrael* towards the end of his life, at the beginning of *Parshas Netzavim*. The numerical value of the words *Attem Nitzavim Hayome* (You're standing today) in Hebrew has the same numerical value as *Laamod LiSelichos* (Arise to *Selichos*) (694). When *Rosh Hashanah* falls on a Thursday or Shabbos then *Parshas* (Torah Portion of) *Nitzavim* is read on the Shabbos in the morning before the start of *Selichos*; its opening words serve us a reminder to recite *Selichos* right after Shabbos. However, when *Rosh Hashanah* falls on a Monday or Tuesday, then *Parshas Nitzavim* will be read on the Shabbos in middle of *Selichos*. Still *Parshas Nitzavim* is read in part for the first time on the previous Shabbos by *Mincha* in the afternoon which comes right before *Selichos*, reminding us to get up for *Selichos*.

On Motzei Shabbos

*The Leket Yosher* adds that the *Sefer Terumas Hadeshen* writes that we particularly want to begin reciting the first *Selichos* on Motzei Shabbos in order to reap the benefit of

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<sup>19</sup> *Elya Rabba* 581

the emotional joy and serenity we gained in our observance of Shabbos, from its inherent sanctity and the increased Torah study we put forth. This allows us to benefit best from our closeness to *Hashem* on Shabbos, which we wish to develop further through our *Selichos* prayers.

For this reason too, it's best to wait at least until after *Chatzos* (*Halachic* midnight) to recite *Selichos* according to the *Sefer Hamussar*<sup>20</sup>. He writes that during the first part of the night, a person is usually not feeling well because of the change of diet of Shabbos. By the time it is *Chatzos* (*Halachic* midnight), one is more refreshed, relaxed and better capable of concentrating on the *Selichos* prayers. *Chatzos Layla* (*Halachic* midnight) is also the time that *Dovid Hamelech* chose to arise each night and sing the praises of *Tehillim* to *Hashem*. Anytime one arises at *Chatzos* (*Halachic* midnight) to pray (*daven*) to *Hashem*, his *Tefillos* are sure to be answered.

### The Proper Time of Day to Recite Selichos

The *Halacha* regarding the proper time for *Selichos* each day varies amongst the Rabbinical Authorities (*Poskim*). An optimal time for reciting *Selichos* is during the last three hours of the night<sup>21</sup>. This is the time that *Hashem* flies around this world<sup>22</sup> (i.e. so to speak, He makes himself available). It is preferable to recite it close to Dawn (*Alos Hashachar*) so that one reaches *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Shacharis* at sunrise (*HaNeitz Hachamah*). When *Selichos* started before Dawn (*Alos Hashachar*), there is no issue reciting the *Pizmon* which mentions our crying out to *Hashem* when it's still night<sup>23</sup>, since some of the prayers were recited during the nighttime before Dawn (*Alos*)<sup>24</sup>. Otherwise, one must be careful not to say a lie, and one must change the language of that prayer to reflect that *Selichos* only began in the morning. Still, anyone that cannot recite *Selichos* at these times should still recite the *Selichos* at a later time that morning. If necessary, one should recite *Selichos* even after *Chatzos* of the day (*Halachic* noon), until *Mincha* time in the evening<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Circa 5300 (presently we are in 5766)

<sup>21</sup> *Mateh Ephraim* 581:11

<sup>22</sup> *Gemara Avodah Zara Daf* 3b

<sup>23</sup> First day *Selichos* prayers

<sup>24</sup> *Elef Lamateh* 581:11

<sup>25</sup> *Yalkut Yosef Hilchos Selichos se'if* 2

## Earliest Time for Selichos

*Selichos* may be said as early as midnight but not any earlier since one may not recite the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* before that time. The *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* are required to be recited at a time that is considered desirable to *Hashem* which is after *Chatzos* (*Halachic* midnight). Reciting it at *Chatzos* (*Halachic* midnight) is also considered an optimal time for reciting *Selichos*. Some opinions allow reciting *Selichos* even before *Chatzos* (*Halachic* midnight) if there is a pressing need. This leniency is only if one begins reciting the *Selichos* at the point when the second third of the night begins, which is the start of the middle *Ashmora*<sup>26</sup> (watch). Therefore, when necessary, one may recite the entire order of *Selichos* about two hours before *Chatzos* (*Halachic* midnight)<sup>27</sup>. However, on Motzei Shabbos there is an additional restriction not to recite any of the *Selichos* prayers, because the sanctity of Shabbos lingers until after *Chatzos* (*Halachic* midnight)<sup>28</sup>. Similarly, *Sephardim* who begin reciting *Selichos* from the beginning of the month of *Elul*, only begin the day after *Rosh Chodesh* because we refrain from reciting *Selichos* on any festive day and *Rosh Chodesh* is such a day.

### Calculating Chatzos Layla

In order to calculate when *Chatzos Layla* (*Halachic* midnight) will be, one must first determine when sunrise (*Neitz Hachama*) and sunset (*Shekiah*) in one's location. After determining this, *Rav Ovadiah Yosef shlita* has a simple calculation for *Chatzos Layla* (*Halachic* midnight). All one has to do is to figure out what time is *Halachic Noon* and add 12 hours to that.

Although the best time for *Selichos* is during the latter part of the night, one who can't say it then should still say it during the daytime. Although it is best to recite *Selichos* and the *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy* during the latter part of the night, it is still acceptable to recite *Selichos* during the daytime since this time of year, starting from the beginning of *Elul* until after *Yom Kippur* is a time that *Hashem* desires our prayers (*tefillos*) and accepts them willingly.

<sup>26</sup> The *Gemara* in *Berachos* states that the night is divided into three *Mishmoros* (Three watches). During the first *Mishmor*

<sup>27</sup> *Mishmeros Shalom* 41:4 (Koidenov), *Iggras Moshe Orach Chaim* Volume 2:105. *Rav Ovadiah Yosef shlita*'a disagrees with this ruling.

<sup>28</sup> 581:1

## Torah Study, Tikkun Chatzos and Selichos

The *Sha'arei Teshuvah*<sup>29</sup> writes that one who wishes to utilize the time for *Selichos* for Torah study instead, disassociates himself from the Congregation (*Tzibbur*), and is doing something wrong and sinful<sup>30</sup>. The *Birchei Yosef* attests that he knew great Talmudic scholars, and prolific writers of *novellae*, who gave up their precious time to devote time to reciting prayers and entreaties<sup>31</sup>.

One, who is accustomed to recite *Tikkun Chatzos*<sup>32</sup> daily, should continue to do so even if this will cause him to miss reciting *Selichos* with a *Minyan*, or even completely<sup>33</sup>.

It is important for us to recognize the magnitude of the *Selichos* prayers. We see that even *Talmidei Chachamim* (Talmudic scholars) take time out from their precious learning schedules to recite *Selichos*. The *Sefer* (book) *Seder Hayom* emphasizes that although the importance of Torah study generally exceeds all other *Mitzvos*, one is still required to recite *Selichos* during this time of the year for it has great influence. "The time for Torah is set aside and the time for prayer is set aside". The *Talmid Chacham* is doubly obligated since he can use his power of Torah to enhance his power of Prayer to intercede on the behalf of his brethren to merit a good, healthy, and productive year, in spirit and in body.

On the other hand, *Rav Ovadiah Yosef shlita* rules that if getting up each day of *Selichot* during the entire month of *Elul* will cause a tremendous strain on a rebbe (teacher of Torah) or a student in a yeshiva, causing him to lose out on his teaching or learning abilities, he shouldn't do it. Likewise an employee who finds that the long early *Selichos* schedule interferes with his work obligations to his employer, he too should minimize the amount of times he wakes up early for *Selichot*. Since reciting *Selichot* during *Elul* is only a *minhag* (custom) amongst some *Sephardim*, one should minimize the amount of times one arises for *Selichot* in order not to interfere with his other obligations. However, during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, from the day after *Rosh Hashanah* until *Yom Kippur*, one should definitely go to *Selichos* then, since that is agreed by all to be the main time for reciting *Selichot*. In addition one should also

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> *Mateh Ephraim* ibid.

<sup>31</sup> *Be'er Heitev* 581:1

<sup>32</sup> This is a special prayer that is said at about midnight during the course of the year lamenting the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

try to get up for *Selichot* on Mondays and Thursdays during the month of *Elul*, since they are the days of the week that are generally good for prayers, just like during the year we recite the additional *Ve'Hu Rachum* prayer on Mondays and Thursdays after *Chazoras Hashatz* (the *Chazzan's* repeat of *Shemoneh Esrei*) of *Shacharis*.

Although we mentioned that a *Talmid Chacham* is obligated to give up from his learning in order to recite *Selichos* that is only when the time that is lost is limited to the amount of time spent on *Selichos*. However, in the case we are discussing, the early *Selichos* takes its toll and causes countless additional time to be lost the rest of the day from one's teaching or learning. In this case it is better to minimize the amount of *Selichos* one will say.

## Questions:

- 1) What should one focus on accomplishing by reciting *Selichos*?
- 2) What does *Rav Moshe Chaim Luzatto* write about people who are satisfied with mediocrity in their level of service to *Hashem*?
- 3) How does the *Rambam* describe the perfect *Teshuvah*?
- 4) Why do we recite so many *Selichos*?
- 5) When did the custom of reciting *Selichos* originate?
- 6) What is the reason for starting *Selichot* at the beginning of the month of *Elul*?  
When does *Selichos* start according to this custom?
- 7) Who follows this custom nowadays and how are the *Selichos* divided amongst the days of the month?
- 8) What is the next most common custom for beginning *Selichos* and who follows that custom?
- 9) Where do we find a hint in the Torah for this custom?
- 10) What was the common custom of fasting during this time of the year?
- 11) If one needs to choose between reciting *Tikkun Chatzos* or *Selichos*, which is more important for him to say?
- 12) When would we allow one to refrain from reciting *Selichot* with the *tzibbur* if it interferes with one's Torah study schedule?

## Answers:

- 1) Besides for attaining forgiveness one should focus on building up one's relationship with *Hashem* and gaining favor in *Hashem's* eyes through fulfilling the His Torah and *Mitzvos*.
- 2) He shows that people who are satisfied with mediocrity in Service of G-d (*Avodas Hashem*) are generally not satisfied with the same in material possessions and honor.
- 3) The *Rambam* writes that the perfect *Teshuvah* is when one has remorse and regret for doing a sin to the point that if the opportunity to sin presents itself again in the exact same manner, one wouldn't repeat it. This resolve must be so strong that *Hashem* testifies that this person wouldn't repeat the sin again.
- 4) We recite many *Selichos* for many days to arouse ourselves to improve our Service of G-d (*Avodas Hashem*).
- 5) It originated in the time of the *Ge'onim* and developed over a long period of time with different *Paytanim* adding pieces to the *Selichos*.
- 6) The reason to start *Selichot* from the beginning of *Elul* is because that is when *Moshe Rabbeinu* ascended onto Mt. Sinai to receive the second *Luchos* and atonement for the Sin of the Golden Calf (*Chet HaEigel Hazhav*).
- 7) Sephardim follow this custom nowadays. They begin reciting *Selichot* the day after *Rosh Chodesh Elul*. The same *Selichot* are repeated daily throughout the entire month of *Elul*, with just a few pieces added into the existing *Selichos* during *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*.
- 8) The next most common custom is to start reciting *Selichos* on the Sunday before *Rosh Hashanah*, when there are at least four days until *Rosh Hashanah*. This is the prevalent custom of Ashkenazic Jewry.
- 9) In *Parshas Netzavim* the Torah Portion of the week coinciding with the beginning of *Selichos* according to Ashkenaz, the portion begins with the words *Attem Nitzavim Hayome* (You're standing today) which hash the same numerical value as *Laamod LiSelichos* (Arise to *Selichos*) (694).
- 10) It was common to fast 10 days during the time of *Selichos* corresponding to *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*.

- 11) It is more important that he say *Tikkun Chatzos*.
- 12) One who finds it too difficult to get up for *Selichos* during the entire *Elul* and it would cause him to diminish the amount of time he has for Torah study outside of the time spent on praying *Selichot* itself, is allowed to skip *Selichot*. He should however try to at least recite *Selichot* on Mondays and Thursdays. During *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* itself he must recite the *Selichot* regardless.