

SELICHOS 1981
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Going to the Ashkenazic ritual we begin saying Selichos at least 4 days before Rosh Hashonna. When Rosh Hashonna comes early in the week like this year we start the Saturday night earlier so that we will have at least 4 days. We say Selichos before Rosh Hashonna and after Rosh Hashonna but we do not say it on Rosh Hashonna. The name of this service is Selichos. The question could be asked, why isn't it called Mechilas or Kapores since we ask G-d for Kapore and Mechila as well as Selicha. Four days before any holiday they used to examine the sacrifices for the Temple to make sure they were without blemish. We, too, look at ourselves at least 4 days before Rosh Hashonna to make sure we are without blemish. On all the other holidays it says that V'Hikravtem Oleh which means and you should offer a sacrifice. On Rosh Hashonna it says V'Aseesem Oleh and you should make a sacrifice which the Rabbis interpret to mean you should make yourself a sacrifice. We, too, are to be pure and without blemish on Rosh Hashonna as the sacrifice that was to be offered had to be. When we do evil things to others we not only must make restitution, not only do we want forgiveness from punishment, but we want to feel pure again inside. Kapore in Hebrew stands for restitution. Kapor means to cover up. Mechila in Hebrew means to forego punishment. When we ask G-d to accept our Kapore or restitution we also ask Him to forego our punishment. The word Mochol in Hebrew means to forego like Mochol Kavod which means to forego a privilege or honor that is due me. If I have a certain honor that is mine I can forego it if I want. G-d, too, can forego His honor and the punishments. A king, though, cannot forego his honor and on Rosh Hashonna G-d is declared king. We must be pure on Rosh Hashonna because G-d judges us as a king. But more than being free from punishment, we want to feel pure inside. We can escape punishment but still feel terrible inside because we are not pure. Therefore, we need Selichos, and we need to come on Rosh Hashonna before G-d pure and without blemish like the sacrifice. The prayers tonight are not called Selicha but Selichos (plural) because we need to feel pure in two senses. We need to be pure as an

individual and also as a member of the House of Israel. Every Jew has two kedushas, the kedusha for being an individual and the kedusha for being a member of the Jewish people. That's the reason why the Rabbis do not run after converts because it is not enough to intellectually or theologically agree with Judaism. You have to be willing to suffer the fate of the Jewish people. You have to be willing to commit yourself to a people and its faith. Many times Jews will be personally pious but they will not fulfill their obligations to the Jewish people. Other Jews, on the other hand, will give to every Jewish cause and support with their time and effort Jewish institutions but they will not be personally observant. They may even be dishonest and they try to beat out even the Shul. These people have only one kedusha and not two, and they need Selicho for the one they do not have. The Rambam says that Yom Kippur forgives (the day itself) all those offenses except those that have Koreis, or the death penalty because these penalties cut the person off from the people. Going to Shul and confirming your Jewishness can confirm your kedusha as a Jew. Your kedusha as a human being requires that you make restitution. Tonight each of us needs two Selichos, one as an individual and one as a member of the community of Israel. Those Jews in New York who consider themselves very pious but yet call for the destruction of Israel need Selicha for their kedusha as a Jew. When other Jews fail in their interpersonal relationships they need Selicha as individuals. As we come before Rosh Hashonna let us come pure. Let us come with both our kedushas pure and may we by our determination to do better as a Jew and a human being be worthy of being granted a good, healthy, and self-fulfilling new year.