

SELICHOS 1982
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It is customary among the Ashkenazie to begin Selichos at least four days before Rosh Hashonna. This is because it says when referring to Rosh Hashonna the "Vaseesem Oleh" "and you shall make a sacrifice". Usually it uses the word "Vaheekravteem" "you shall offer a sacrifice". That is the expression for the other holidays. A sacrifice had to be examined for four days before it was brought. We, therefore, are to examine ourselves. The Sephardim begin saying Selichos on the first of the month of Elul. They do it because Moshe went up to get the second tablets of the Ten Commandments and he came down on Yom Kippur with them. This showed that the people were forgiven for the sin of the golden calf on this day and that's why Yom Kippur became forever the Day of Forgiveness. We Ashkenazim begin on the first of Elul to say a special Psalm, Psalm 27, which begins "the Lord is my light and my salvation" and it continues by saying "one thing I ask from G-d that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life". The Rabbis explain that this Psalm refers to Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur as well as later on in the Psalm to Succos. "My light" refers to Rosh Hashonna and "my salvation" refers to Yom Kippur. The Rabbis teach us that what we are asking for G-d in this Psalm is "G-d, make me one so that I can sit in Your House". A human being is composed of many warring parts. We believe that each of us has a piece of G-d in us. That's what our soul is, that this piece of G-d is found in the temple of our minds and in the temple of our hearts, that when we sin we become estranged from ourselves, that we become innerly unhappy, that we feel depressed. Depression, of course, can have physical causes, but many times we know we are on the wrong track. We do not always know why but we know things are not right. The Medrash expresses this this way: "Wisdom asks what is a sinner's punishment? It tells them sinners, let them be pursued by their own evil". Man is composed of an intellect but the intellect is not always the driving force in man. How many of us know cigarette smoking causes cancer but how many of us are willing to stop smoking? In America all you have to do is believe in certain values. You do not have to practice them. A person is considered religious if he belongs to a synagogue, but that many times really is no determinant of whether he is religious. Ardent Zionists have a fit when their kids decide to go to Israel.

Another aspect of man is dreams. "They ask prophecy, what is the sinner's punishment? It told them, the soul that sins it shall die". Many times we have foolish dreams which can only end in killing us, like drugs, alcohol, etc. Many times youngsters especially college age students feel that they can do all sorts of things and it will not hurt them. "They ask Torah, what is the sinner's punishment? It told them, let them bring a guilt offering and gain atonement". All of us have the urge for sacrifice, but many times we sacrifice for the wrong things. We in America have a tendency to honor sacrifice no matter what a person is sacrificing for. The Nazi stormtroopers also sacrificed, but that did not make them right. "They ask the Holy One, Blessed be He, what is a sinner's punishment? He told them, let him repent and gain atonement". Let him reply to life's challenges. Before Rosh Hashonna during Selichos we ask G-d to make us one so that we can meet life's challenges. On Rosh Hashonna we do not say Selichos. On Rosh Hashonna we concentrate on the tasks ahead, but we are not able to concentrate on the tasks ahead unless we are one. On Rosh Hashonna we ask G-d to give us another chance so we can attack the tasks ahead. On Selichos we say, "G-d, our soul is yours, our body is yours. You know what we are made us. Let us be one. Give us the strength to be one so we can concentrate on the tasks ahead and make this a better world."