

SELICHOS 1985
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Selichos inaugurates the High Holiday season. We all come today to ask G-d to forgive us for our sins and to allow us to start the new year clean. The question can be asked, why are the prayers today called Selichos? Why aren't they called Mechilos or Kaporas? There are three words in Hebrew for forgiveness: one is Slach, one is Mechal, and one is Kaper. Why should these prayers be called Selichos/ Why not the other two words for forgiveness? Also, why is the word plural? Why don't we use the word Slach for forgiveness? Why Selichos which mean forgiveness in the plural? What's more, why in the special Pizmon, or poem, that we say on the first of Selichos do we say, "Lishmoa El Harina Veel Hatfila - to listen to the joy and to the prayer?" Why don't we say "to listen to the weeping and to the prayer?" Why do we say "to the joy" in our prayer? It does not seem to fit in to the mood of Selichos.

The answers to these questions, I believe, can be found in the Talmud when it speaks about the two different types of Teshuva, or repentance. There is one type of Teshuva which is called Teshuva Me'era, repentance from fear, and the other is called Teshuva Me'Ahava, repentance from love. What is the difference between repentance from fear and repentance from love? The difference is this: repentance from fear means that you will not do a certain thing, not because you believe it is wrong to do this thing, but because you do not want to be punished. Some external force compels you to do the right thing. For example, today we are now told that we have to wear seat belts, that if we do not wear seat belts we are going to be given a ticket and as of December 1 we will also be fined. A person who does the right thing because he does not want to be punished, his Teshuva is accepted by g-d but it is not on the same level as the person who does Teshuva because he thinks that the thing he did before was wrong, and he never wants to do it again.

The Teshuva Me'era has this drawback: what happens when the external force is removed? Will the person then revert to his old ways? We know many people who, because of outside pressures, stick to the straight and narrow, but when these pressures are removed many of them do things they normally would not do. Conventioneers

especially are known for this. In their own hometown they are upstanding, sober people, but when they go to a convention they are out for a good time. G-d accepts Teshuva Me'era, out of fear, but the best Teshuva is the Teshuva Me'Ahava, the Teshuva that comes out of conviction, the Teshuva that is based on an inner awareness that we have to do the right thing because it is the right thing. There are three words for forgiveness in Jewish life because there are really three different aspects of Teshuva. One aspect is Kapora, which means that we want our sin covered. We do not want to suffer because of our sin. This is the Teshuva Me'era, from fear, the Teshuva that comes from calculations. This is what people do in business when they calculate whether they should break the zoning laws or other laws and pay the fine later because their profits will be good. This is what people do when they take their chances. We know people in business who use sharp business practices. They calculate whether or not they should obey regulations based on how high the fine is, etc. These people achieve only Kaporas. They cover their transgressions..

In the Selichos tonight we do not even mention Kaporas because that is not what we want. We want to feel pure, to feel clean. That's why we first ask G-d to "forgive us, our Father, because in the greatness of our folly we have erred" and then we say "Mechal Lanu - to pardon us, our King, because great are our iniquities." We ask G-d to also forgo punishment. Mechal, though, is a lower form of Teshuva. We say, "G-d if You cannot make us pure, at least do not punish us." In the laws of Teshuva seems to be a contradiction. We say that if a person does Teshuva, immediately he is forgiven. In fact, we say, quoting Isaiah, "and I will wipe out like a cloud your sins. Return to Me because I will redeem you." All we have to do is do Teshuva and we will immediately be transformed. We will not only have our punishment foregone, but we will feel pure inside.

Rabbi Soleveitchik, when he speaks about the two categories of Teshuva, calls the Teshuva from fear the Teshuva Kapora, and he calls the Teshuva Me'era the Teshuva from love, the Teshuva of Geula. In the laws of Teshuva we also learn, though, that

if a person violates a positive commandment that does not have excision from heaven and he does Teshuva, he is immediately forgiven. If he violates a negative commandment that does not have excision or the death penalty and does Teshuva, his Teshuva stands suspended until Yom Kippur and problems wipe it clean. If a person deserved the death penalty or desecrated G-d's name in public, neither Teshuva or problems alone atone, but they, together with his death, atone. How could we have such a statement made when we just learned before that Teshuva immediately brings atonement?

The answer, of course, is that there are two types of Teshuva. The Teshuva Me'era^{Alah}, the Teshuva that comes from conviction, that is the Teshuva which brings immediate forgiveness and inner purity. The Teshuva that comes because of outside forces does not bring immediate atonement. On this day we ask G-d to forgive us and make us pure, to listen to the joy and to the prayer because we are going to do Teshuva Me'era^{Alah} from conviction, not from fear. Our happiness is that we know we can start clean and pure. We are not just doing Teshuva because we are afraid of punishment.

That's why also in our prayers we make the statement, "We are more guilty than other people. We are more bowed down by shame than any other generation." How is this possible? We did not make the concentration camps or the Crusades. What we mean is that we are more conscious of things that can cause guilt. We are more sensitive to sins. We do not want to do something just because we can get away with it. We want to do things only if they are right. Why, though, is this called Selichos, plural? Because we have two responsibilities: one to man and one to G-d. Those who are very punctilious in observing all the commandments between man and G-d but who do despicable things to other man cannot be pure. Those Jews in New York who are supposedly pious but who drove other people out of the apartment building because they wanted the apartment building for their own are not pure. They may claim they paid the fine so they did the Teshuva Kaporas, the Teshuva from fear, but their Teshuva is not complete. They cannot claim they are pure. Others observe the commandments between man and man, but they slight the commandments between man and G-d, promises to G-d to be better

people. They may not have broken any promises to other people, but they promise G-d to give more charity. They promise G-d to be better people. They promise G-d to do better for their children. They can only be pure if they stop their rationalizations if they admit that they made these promises to G-d. By covering up and claiming they did not make promises they cannot be pure.

Tonight we ask for Selichos, that G-d make us pure. This we can only have if we have Teshuva Me'Ahava, Teshuva from conviction in our dealings with man and our promises to G-d. May we all start the year pure, and may we, by so doing, have a healthy and good year.