SELICHOS 1990
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In a few moments we will be saying Selichos. We begin the Selichos with Ashray. "Happy are they who dwell in My house, forever they shall praise Thee. Happy is the people who rest there. Happy is the people whose G-d is eternal." These two opening sentences are appended to the 145th Psalm. We say the 145th Psalm with these two sentences three times a day. The rabbis say that if a person say this Psalm three times a day he is worthy of the world to come. Of course, we do not mean that just saying it makes you worthy of the world to come but implementing its teachings. The main teaching of this Psalm is that we are to imitate G-d. Just as G-d clothes the naked and feeds the hungry and upholds those who fall, so should we do the same thing. But why is it that we read the Ashray before Selichos? Why did the rabbis see fit to have us read Ashray as the first prayer of the Selichos? What's more, if we look at the Selichos we will see that the Selichos are always said at night, that the first Selichos is always said on Motzei Shabbos, on the night after Shabbos. Why should this be so? We know that we have to say Selichos at least four days before Rosh Hashonna because the sacrifice that was offered in the Temple had to be inspected for four consecutive days before it could be accepted as a sacrifice for the Temple, and we know that when it deals with Rosh Hashonna it says, "You shall make a Korban, a sacrifice," while on all the other holidays it says, "And you should offer a Koran," which means that on Rosh Hashonna we, ourselves, are the sacrifice. We, ourselves, have to offer ourselves to Hashen like Yitzchak did at the Akedah, like YItzchak did when he bound up to be sacrificed, although we know that G-d does not actually want us to sacrifice ourselves but He wants us to live sacrificial lives, and we have to examine ourselves to make sure we are truly worthy of being G-d's partner in creation, but why is it that we start Motzei Shabbos? Why don't we just start four days before Rosh Hashonna whenever it occurs?

The keynote to this holiday is also Adoshem Adoshem El Rachum, where we say "The Lord, the Eternal, is a merciful and gracious G-d, slow to anger and abounding

in loving kindness and truth, giving mercy for thousands of generations, forgiving iniquity, trangression, and sin and acquitting all those who truly repent." What's more, the main Peezmon, the main hymn of the Selichos service this very first night is the hymn whose refrain is to "listen to the joy and to the prayer". We say, "By means of Thy power perform on our behalf deeds of might for the sake of Isaac who was willing to be bound on the altar at Moriah and in whose stead a ram was sacrificed, shield His descendants we implore Thee this night. Hear our joy and prayer." What is this about joy? "We tremble at the approach of Thy judgement awaiting Thy verdict. We suffer pains like a woman in childbirth, cleanse all this stain of our guilt that Thou may sing of Thy wondrous deeds. Hear our joy and prayer." What do we mention joy for? What does joy have to do with Selichos?

Finally, on the second most important in the Selichos, the Shma Kolaynu, "Hear our cry, Lord our G-d, and have mercy upon us and receive with compassion our prayer." In the Shma Kolaynu we say, "Don't cast us out from before You. Your Holy Spirit do not take from us." Immediately after we say, "Don't cast us out at a time of old age. When our strength fails, do not desert us." Why do we have to repeat, "Don't cast us out at a time of old age. When our strength fails us, do not leave us"? We have already said, "Don't cast us out before You. Your Holy Spirit do not take from us."

It seems to me that the answer to all these questions revolves around another person who got up at night. We learn about Dovid Amelech, how Dovid Amelech got up every night to study Torah and do deeds of Torah. We learn how he had a harp that was hung over his bed, that this harp had ten strings and when the wind blew out of the desert the wind twanged the strings of this harp and David woke up at midnight and he began studying Torah and doing deeds of Torah. In fact, the rabbis tell us that David was a man who when he died came before

Gabriel and Gabriel said, "What are your good deeds?" David said, "I learned Torah. I gave charity. I visited the sick. I attended funerals. I went to the synagogue." Gabriel wanted to know what gate of heaven David should go in. Therefore, we have in the Psalms, "Open to me the gates of righteousness," because David had done all these things, and because he did all these things he was really to enter into all the gates of righteousness. The rabbis ask, what are really these ten strings of the harp that twanged which aroused DAvid to do Torah? They say these were really the ten things that were mentioned in the Mishnah in Peah and also in the Shabbos where it says that "these are things that have no measure, the corners of the field which you give to charity, the first fruits, the special sacrifice that you brought every time you came to the Temple, the giving of loans, and the study of Torah." Then the rabbis go on to say, "These are things that a man eats the fruit in this year but the principal remains for him in the world to come. And these are they: honoring your parents, again, giving of free loans, coming to shul morning and evening, entertaining guests, visiting the sick, dowering the bride, attending funerals, praying with devotion, bringing peace between man and his fellow man, and studying Torah." These are ten things. These are the ten ways that the harp of David played. These were the ten strings.

The reason we read Ashray as the very beginning of the Selichos service is to tell G-d that we are trying to live a life according to this psalm. We recognize that the prime purpose of man is to imitate in this world, and just as G-d is kind and compassionate so should we be kind and compassionate, that just as G-d helps the poor and feeds the hungry and clothes the naked and upholds those who fall so we are trying to do the same thing. We do not always succeed. Many times we fail, but we try. That, of course, is the mark of a good man. That's why we say that it is not important enough just to say good things. We must act well also. "The neshoma is yours and the body is also Your work."

"The soul is yours and the body is Yours, too." When we come before G-d we come before G-d saying we have tried our best to do the right thing.

In the Torah portion that we read this morning, Vayelech, we learn how it says "Vayelech Moshe - and Moshe went". Nowhere does it say where Moshe went. Some rabbis explain it means that Moshe went into the heart and mind of all the Jewish people, and Moshe was going to be beloved from then on. Other rabbis explain that now that Moshe handed over power to Yehoshua that the people were not coming to him anymore because he could not do anything for them anymore, so Moshe had to go to them. It is strange what Rashi says. Rashi just quotes the words, "Vayelech Moshe", and makes no comment. That is very strange because when Rashi brings down a text from the Torah he immediately has a comment after it, otherwise why bring it down, but here he says nothing. People explain that this means, "Vayelech Moshe", that Moshe went. He did exactly what he said he was going to do. Throughout the Torah we always read, "And Moshe said", but now we learn "Vayelech Moshe - Moshe went". Moshe did whatever he said. It was not just "Moshe said" but also "and Moshe did". The same thing was said about David. David got up in the middle of the night and he implemented the teachings of the Torah. The ten strings of the harp stood for the ten wonderful mitzvahs that David performed.

When we come before G-d, too, on this night of Selichos we listen to the joy and to the prayer. G-d, we are bringing you not just our prayers, our good intentions, but also our joy because the rabbis teach us that when we do these mitzvahs, when we dower the bride, when we help one another, when we give free loans, etc. we should do it with joy because that is our greatest joy. Our greatest joy is to assume responsibility for the world, and that is what the rabbis say is the mark of a Jew. The mark of a Jew is a person who realizes that the thing that gives life meaning is assuming responsibility. That's

why the greatest joy in Jewish life is marriage because when a person gets married he assumes responsibility for another human being. Each spouse assumes responsibility for the other. If within a marriage one of the spouses does not want to assume responsibility for the other, then the marriage is doomed. When one of the spouses feel that the other one is not out for their best interests, is trying to use them, etc. then, of course, the marriage, too, will falter and fail. Assuming responsibility for yourself and for others and for the world is a basic Jewish view of how you are happy. Wear yourself out in a good cause is a good Jewish saying. We all know that we are needed and are counted and we count because we are counted on. Therefore, that is our joy. Our joy is to be involved with the community and to honor our parents, to give free loans, to visit the sick, to dower the bride, to bring peace between man and his friend, to study Torah. We say, "G-d, listen to our joy. Listen that we are not just bringing our prayers but our joy, too, our deeds." It is true that our deeds are really insufficient. It is true that we could all do more. It is true that as human beings we have failed to meet all the challenges of life. That is why we have to do Teshuva, but we say, "G-d, You are a gracious G-d. G-d, You are filled with kindness and are long on forebearing and you guard the kindness to the thousands of generations, and You forgive sin and iniquity." That is why we say the 13 Meenes here because those quality in G-d that we are called upon to emulate we know we are trying to emulate and because we are trying to emulate them we know that G-d will forgive us. Therefore, we say in the Shma Kolaynu, "G-d, do not cast us out at the time of our old age. When it finishes our power, do not desert us," because the worst possible thing in the world to a Jew is to be rejected, and, of course, that is really what the beginning of the Torah is about when we learn about Adam and Eve. It is many times the way of a human being that when he feels he is going to be rejected he says, "I am going to reject you before you reject me." That

is, of course, what Adam and Eve did after they sinned. They went and they hid and G-d had to look for them, and He said, "Where are you?" G-d knew where they were but G-d wanted to tell Adam and Eve He did not reject them. He rejected their evil ways but He would never reject them. The same thing happened with Cain and Abel. Cain felt very rejected by G-d because G-d did not accept his sacrifice the way He had accepted Abel's sacrifice, but it was Cain's fault. He failed to give the proper sacrifice, but G-d told Cain, too, "I will never completely reject you," although he killed his brother. At the time he did not know he could even kill his brother. After all, it was the first murder. Although at the beginning Cain denied his guilt and he said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Later he said, "My sin is too great to bear." In other words, he did Teshuva. He was even better than Adam. He admitted his sin. The mark of Cain in the Jewish tradition is a sign of G-d's reconciliation to Cain, not a punishment. His punishment was to wander.

We have the same incident in the story of the Tower of Babel where the people thought they were going to be rejected because G-d had seemingly rejected the generation of the flood, but G-d did not reject them. He saved Noah, but these people did not want to look in their hearts and see what was wrong with them. They just wanted to make sure they were not rejected or they could reject G-d before G-d could reject them. But G-d tells us, "I am never going to reject you. You do not have to worry about that. What you have to do is do your best. Bring Me your good intentions, your tefila, and bring Me your deeds and that is all I ask of you." Therefore, we say, "Do not cast us off at the time of old age. When it finishes our power, do not desert us." When people get older they cannot do as much as they did before, but as long as they do their best that is all that G-d asks of us. It does not refer to old age but the time of old age, which means that there are many young people who are sick

or suffer from all sorts of problems and they cannot do as much as they would like in order to meet the challenges of the world, in order to assume responsibility for themselves, for the world, and for their family, but G-d says, "Don't worry about it." When our strength ebbs away, do not desert us. G-d will never desert us as long as we try our best, as long as we do not give up. We should never give up but do our best.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a young man who suffered from polio and he was paralyzed over most of his body. He went to college and there one of his classmates looked at him and said, "Isn't this too hard for you? Isn't this too difficult for you? Why did you come to college?" The man replied, "It is my body that is paralyzed, not my heart." We are all called upon to be courageous, to do the best we can. We know that if we bring our joy, our deeds of responsibility, and our good intentions to G-d even though they may not be as much as they were when we were in full possession of all our physical and mental strength that G-d will never reject them and will never reject us as long as we do our best. May we all do our best so we will be truly worhty of a Shana Tova MeSuka, of a good and sweet year. May we all know only good heatlh and good things in the coming year, and may the Mashiach come soon, and may there be peace in the world. Amen.