SELICHOT 2001
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Selichot is based on the incident which we read about in the Torah portion, Ki Sovo. We learn how the Jewish people sinned by the golden calf. We learn how after this sin, G-d tells Moshe Rabbeinu that if he will say the prayer, "Hashem Hashem, G-d, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in kindness and truth...." He will forgive the Jewish people. The rabbis even say that G-d donned a tallis, so to speak, to tell Moshe how to say this prayer. This prayer is the central prayer of the Selichot. When the Jewish people did sin at the incident of the spies, Moshe said this prayer, and G-d forgave them. What does this prayer actually mean, and why do we say it? We say Hashem Hashem because G-d is with us before we sin, and G-d is with us after we sin. Heaven is when man is close to G-d, and hell is when man is far from G-d. We say Selichot at least four days before Rosh Hashonna. We always start on a Saturday night, so this year we say it more than four days, and we say Selichot until Yom Kippur is over. On Rosh Hashonna we do not say it. The Sephardim say Selichot during the whole month of Elul because this is when Moshe Rabbeinu went up the mountain to receive the second set of tablets. When Moshe Rabbeinu received the second set of the Ten Commandments that proved conclusively that the Jewish

people were forgiven for the sin of the golden calf. Moshe came down on Yom Kippur with the second tablets. This showed the people that they were forgiven, and that day became a day of forgiveness for all time.

Rosh Hashonna is not just a holiday for the Jewish people. It is a holiday which celebrates the creation of Adam not, as is commonly understood, the day of the creation of the world. Adam was created on this day, he sinned on this day, and he was forgiven on this day. After Adam sinned, the Torahs says, "And Adam and Eve heard the voice of G-d Mees Halech walking in the garden." The rabbis explain that the word Mees Halech means just not walking. There is another word for that. It means walking away. G-d and man were close, but after Adam sinned, G-d withdrew to the first heaven. There were sinful generations between Adam and Abraham. Each time one of the generations made a new sin, G-d retreated to another heaven until eventually He was at the seventh heaven far from man. When Abraham came onto the scene, G-d descended from the seventh heaven to the six heaven, and when Isaac came, He went down to the fifth heaven, and when Yaacov came, He went down to the fourth heaven, and when Levi came, He went down to the third heaven, and when Koschohas came, He went down to the second heaven, and when Amnon came, He went down to the first heaven, and than

at the giving of the Ten Commandments, He walked again among the Jewish people. When the Jewish people sinned with the golden calf, He immediately went back up to the first heaven.

The prayer of Selichot was meant to bring G-d down back to us, to let us establish a close relationship between ourselves and G-d. We all need this spiritual relationship. We all need to feel G-d's closeness so that we have the strength to overcome our problems and to continue on. By saying our Selichot prayer, we are telling G-d that we want Him to be close to us, not to be far from us. We want Him to be part of our lives. We want to help Him perfect this world. Saying Selichot is a way of demonstrating to G-d that we need His presence, we need His help, and that if He will give us His strength, we will be able to overcome all our problems, and make this a better world.

We hope and pray that G-d will give us the strength to overcome our problems, to choose the good over the evil, to choose unselfishness over the selfish, to choose loving kindness over cruelty, to be who we know we can be so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.