SELICHOT 2000
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All during Selichot, we refer to the fact that we want G-d to listen to our voice. Selichot is composed of two main parts: the Adoshem Adoshem, G-d, G-d, merciful and gracious..." We recite over and over again the thirteen attributes of mercy that G-d told us to say so that He will forgive us. When we finish the Adoshem Adoshem, we say, "G-d, in the morning hear our voice. Hear the voice of our supplications. Hear, G-d, our voice which we call and be gracious unto us and answer us." We also read, "G-d, listen to our voice and let Your ears be attentive to the voice of our supplications." The word "voice" here is really superfluous. We also say the very famous prayer that we say throughout the Selichot period and on Yom Kippur: "Hear our voice, Lord our G-d, have mercy upon us." We also have the famous poem which speaks about G-d listening to our joy and to our prayer. Leeshmoa El Hareena V'el Hatfilah. Why do we have to say listen to our joy and our prayer?

The word Kol is also found after Adam and Eve sinned. It mentions in the Torah that G-d called to Adam, and He said to him, "Where are you?" Adam said, "Your voice I heard in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid." We also learn about how G-d remonstrated with Cain after he killed his brother, and He said, "What have you done? The voice of the blood of

your brother is crying out to Me." Again, the word Kol is used. Why does this word Kol have to be used? It is completely superfluous. G-d could have just said, "The blood of your brother is calling out to Me," or, in our prayer we could have just said, "Listen to us, G-d," but the word Kol in Hebrew means spirituality. It means being attached to G-d. Adam felt naked because he was alienated from his source of being. He no longer could connect.

This is similar to the Psalm that we have been reading every day since the first day of Elul. This Psalm is, "G-d is my light and my salvation." It is difficult to understand why we read this Psalm every day until the end of Succot. It does not really say anything about the holidays. The rabbis learn out by inference when it says that the Lord is "my light," that it refers to Rosh Hashonna and "my salvation," to Yom Kippur, and it does mention the word Succah in it. It says, "He hid me in the succah in the day of trouble," but this is not clear that it refers to Succah. The rabbis tell us the reason we read this Psalm is because, especially on the High Holidays, we want to be close to G-d. We want to have a close relationship with G-d. That's why it says in this Psalm, "One thing I ask from G-d, one thing I desire that I may dwell in the

house of the Lord all the days of my life." It is this closeness we yearn for. It is this closeness which the word Kol represents.

In the Torah portion Ki Savo, we learn about the curses. We learn that there are three levels of curses if we do not obey G-d's commandments. The first level comes upon us when we do not do all the mitzvahs of Hashem, but the ones we do, we do joyfully. The second level of curses comes upon us when we observe all the commandments of Hashem, but do it grudgingly. We do it with respect but not joyfully. The third level of curses comes upon us when we do all the mitzvahs and do them joyfully but without respect. We are constantly belittling them even if we are doing them. This seems hard to understand. We would think that the opposite should be true, that we should be punished lightly if we observe the commandments joyfully but without respect, that we should be judged a little harsher if we did all the mitzvahs grudgingly but not joyfully at all, and, lastly, that we should be judged harshest if we only observe part of the mitzvahs even if we do them joyfully.

The Torah tells us that it is the opposite. We can understand this if we look at

a marriage between a man and woman, which is the paradigm of the relationship between G-d and man. If a man travels a lot and his hardly home, a wife will put up with him if he does some things he is supposed to do when he is home and does it joyfully. A woman may even put up with a husband who does everything he is supposed to do, but he does it grudgingly. On the other hand, a woman would probably get rid of a husband who does everything he should for her joyfully but always in a belittling manner, always making fun of her and their children. "G-d," we are saying on this day, "we want a relationship with You. Listen to our Kol, our yearning, our desire for this relationship, and, G-d, we want a relationship that is complete, that is joyful and based on respect." Therefore, we say, "Listen to our joy and to the prayer," which can mean also to the respect, because if we change the word Tefilah just a little, it means secondary, foolish. G-d, listen to our voice. We want to be close to You. We want to have meaning and purpose in our lives.

That's why in the Torah portion Nitzavim, which we read today, we read, "And you should turn to your heart," even before we read, "And you should turn to G-d." We first have to realize that we need to have this relationship. We need

meaning and purpose in our lives. It is essential for our well being. It is essential for our own happiness. We need to have G-d in our life. We need to have this relationship.

On this Selichot night, we ask and pray that G-d will allow us to have this relationship. We know He will if we will turn to Him with an open heart and with a desire to try to do the good and the right. Let us hope and pray that we will establish this relationship so we will have wonderful families and wonderful communities so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.