

We always say Selichos in the morning. The first Selichos it is customary to say at midnight. The reason we say it at midnight is that it should be close to the morning. It should belong to the morning. Before that it still belongs to the previous day. We still have the spirit of Shabbos. It does not really fall into the morning of the preceding day. In fact, there are certain communities that do not have this custom of getting up at midnight for the first Selichos. What they do is say Selichos early in the morning. Why, though, should we say Selichos early in the morning? Every morning between now and Yom Kippur we are going to get up at least a half an hour before to come to shul to say Selichos. Why should this be? After all, on Yom Kippur we say Selichos in Maariv, in the evening, at Shacharis in the morning, at Mussaf, at Mincha, at Neilah. Why is it that we say Selichos in the morning?

What's more, if we look at the main poem of this first Selichos it mentions Yitzchak.

It mentions the one who was bound and in its place a ram was given, but it does not mention Avraham and it does not mention Yaacov. Why should this be so? Finally, we know that one of the main keynotes of this Selichos is Adoshem Adoshem El Rachum V'Chanu. We are told to say, "G-d, G-d, Who is gracious and merciful..." and we learn that G-d told Moshe Rabbeinu to say this prayer to him whenever the Jewish people would sin and he would forgive the Jewish people. After the golden calf when G-d forgave the Jewish people He told Moshe that Moshe should say this prayer and that if he said this prayer the Jewish people would be forgiven. In fact, G-d says even more. G-d said, according to this Medrash, that you should wrap yourself up in a tallis and say this as a tzibur, and the rabbis in this Medrash say that G-d, Himself, showed Moshe how to do it by wrapping Himself up into a tallis and saying Himself, "Hashem Hashem El Rachum L'Chana." Of course, G-d has no physical form and this is just a Medrash, but why should the Medrash use this type of language in which G-d, Himself, donned a tallis and acted as the hazzan and said Adoshem Adoshem so Moshe would know how to do this? In fact, when the

Jewish people sinned at the time of the spies and G-d again was angry at the Jewish people and wanted to destroy them and make a new nation from Moshe and Moshe pleaded with G-d not to do it and Moshe did do as G-d had told him. He said, "Adoshem Adoshem..." and when G-d heard these words He said, "I forgive you according to your words." In fact, much of these words are found in our Yom Kippur service where it says, "Forgive, please, to the sin of this people out of the greatness of Your kindness that You have forgiven this people from Egypt until now," and G-d said, "I have forgiven you according to your words." But why did G-d have to don a tallis?

Perhaps the reason we say Selichos in the morning is because there are three mornings in Jewish existence. The Torah mentions Boker three times. It mentions Boker, "And it was in the morning when the Egyptians were pursuing the Jewish people and the Red Sea split in front of them and the Jewish people walked across and then the waters came cascading down upon the Egyptians." That was the morning which stood for physical survival. Many times Jews sin and we sin because we want to ensure our physical survival. We feel threatened by the people around us. We feel insecure and many times we may do things that are not really right but we feel we have to do them to ensure our physical survival. Then, of course, there is a second Boker. The second Boker happened when the manna came. Many Jews do things to ensure their financial survival. They feel that they must cut corners in business in order to ensure that their family will not starve and will be well taken care of. Of course, there is no end to this feeling of need for financial security. After all, why did Ivan Bosky have to do what he did? He was already a very wealthy man. Finally, we have the Boker and it was in the morning and the shofar sounded...which talks about the giving of the Ten Commandments and the Torah on Mount Sinai. Many times people feel that in order to protect Jewish values they have to violate certain norms. We know that, of course, when many people will go to great extents to try to save what they consider family. Of course,

family is a very great and important value in Judaism, perhaps the most important value, but it is not all there is to Judaism, and many times people sacrifice very important moral principles because they want to keep their families together. They say, "Well, why shouldn't I attend a wedding in a church if my son is going to get married? After all, I want to keep the family together." Or many times they will cheat and cut corners and do all sorts of things saying, "I am doing it for the children. I want them to get into this school." Or many times parents will not teach their children independence because they are afraid so, therefore, they will harm the children and harm themselves, or parents will come to me and say, "Oh, don't worry, I'll come to shul for my child. Don't worry, I'll give charity for him." They never teach him to be a responsible human being. They think they are doing something important, but they are not. How many times have people turned Judaism upside down because they did not want to lose their children? The Mafia believes in the family so much that they believe they are entitled to engage in all sorts of criminal activities in order to support their family, which, of course, we know is false. So we come in the morning because many times in order to ensure our physical survival we will many times lie and cheat and do all sorts of things that we really should not do. If we feel that we are threatened in our job many times we will cheat. That is wrong. In interpersonal relationships, too, if we feel we are going to lose our relationship, lose the good will of our boss or our spouse we will do all sorts of things we should not do. The same thing is true for our financial security. How many people have sold inferior goods, shorted on the weights, did all sorts of things because we want to have Parnoso. Others, in order to preserve certain Jewish values, even in synagogue politics they will engage in all sorts of bad behavior because they think they are fighting for Judaism. They are fighting for something that they, themselves, are not personally benefitting from but they resort to all sorts of bad tactics.

The rabbis also explain that Boker here has another meaning, that Boker refers to Abigail, who was the wife of Naval. Naval in Hebrew actually means a fool. Naval

was a person who had hired King David to watch his flocks against marauders. David at this time had been chased out of Israel, basically, by King Sol who was looking for him. David existed with a few of his warrior friends at the edge of Israeli society and here he was to guard Naval's flock against marauders who would come from Philistia or Moab or Ammon, and he did a fine job. No marauders attacked the flock. Then when he came to ask for his pay Naval demurred and said, "No, I am not going to pay you because there were no marauders anyway." Of course, the reason there were no marauders was because they respected David's great fighting ability. That night when he got drunk and was filled with wine then David came to Abigail and told her, "You tell Naval that I am going to take what is mine by force if he is not going to give it to me, because it is mine, and I will attack the encampment." Abigail did not tell Naval until the morning when he was sober. Then, of course, when she told him he became panic stricken. This, of course, is a simile which refers to sin, that many times when we are all filled with headiness over the fact that we are doing certain things and seem to be getting away with it, when our minds are still intoxicated with the sins that we are doing we do not realize that there is a piper to pay in the morning, that when we wake up, when we sober up things are going to be different. Of course, we see that here in America where for 12 years we just borrowed instead of taxing ourselves. We borrowed and borrowed to maintain the standard of living and services that we want. There comes a day of reckoning. We are going to wake up in the morning and these things have to be paid. The bills have to be paid. The same thing, too, is true that many times people feel that emotionally they have to tell people off but then comes the morning. You have to face your boss again, your wife again, the people again. Many times people are filled with all sorts of emotions and they get carried away with their passions and then the morning comes. What are you going to do in the morning? That, of course, is a big problem. That is why we come in the morning when we recognize that we have done things that are wrong.

In Judaism the word is sin. People do not like to use the word sin today. They like to say they made a mistake or erred but a sin is more than just making a mistake because a sin besmirches us. We know that a sin not only makes us liable for punishment, because we know that if we insulted a friend in public, rest assured, that person is just waiting for an opportunity to pay us back, that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. We know that sin not only obligates us for punishment, but sin also makes us feel impure. It makes us feel not good with ourselves. It makes us feel ashamed of ourselves. It makes us feel guilty, and people cannot stand to feel this guilt. They want to feel pure. Therefore, many times people go to psychiatrists to get rid of this feeling of guilt and many times they will come even to me to discuss their problems, but most of the time I tell them that they should really feel guilty for the things that they have done. If they have abandoned parents, if they have not treated their children right, if they have hurt their spouses they should feel guilty for these things, and they should correct them. So when you wake up in the morning it is not just that Naval feared David's retribution but he knew that he had acted wrong. He knew he could not really look at himself in the mirror. That's why we have the different words here for forgiveness. We have Slach, "Lord, please forgive." We also have the word Michal and the word Chaper, too. What is the difference between them? Slach means that G-d, You should forgive us so we feel pure with ourselves. Michal means that G-d, forego punishment, and Kaper means, G-d, if You have to punish us, punish us as little as possible, but we do not want anymore for our sins to grab ahold of us. Of course, because of our sins we do not like to admit them. One of the big problems with sin is that one sin brings another in its wake. If we tell one lie we have to tell another lie to cover the first lie. There is no end to it. Look what happened to one of the candidates here in Texas who claimed she was a college graduate and it turned out she was not and then she made matters worse by saying she just missed a few credits and did not realize she did not graduate. When her record was checked she was missing many credits and have failed courses. We see that one

lie brings in its wake another lie, and, therefore, we should be very careful what we are doing.

We know that there are also three types of sins that mentioned here. Chait means to miss the mark, that a person who does not really mean to sin. He did not really mean to say that comment and he hurt another person terribly. How did he know that his brother had just died? How did he know that that person was so sensitive about that particular subject? You miss the mark. Then you have the sin of Avon where you did the wrong thing. You meant to do it but you were weak. You know you were wrong, but the girl was just too pretty or the food was just too tempting or the money was just too easy to take. You know you did wrong. Then you have Peshah where a person on principle violates a law. He knows that he has done the wrong thing but he does not think it is the wrong thing. He thinks it is the right thing. Therefore, it is like many of those people who rebelled against Judaism at the turn of the century and who would purposefully chazer on Yom Kippur in front of a shul. This is the sin of rebellion, and that, of course, is the hardest of all sins and the worst of all sins. We ask on this day of Selichos that G-d should forgive our Peshah and allow us to be forgiven for it. Yes, we did rebel but we really did not know enough. We were really acting foolishly. Because of our great foolishness we acted this way, but now, G-d, we know better.

That is why here, too, we mention only Yitzchak here in the main Pismo. Yitzchak was a person who dedicated himself wholly to the Jewish people. He was willing to sacrifice himself for the Jewish people. He was a man who did not personify any Peshah at all. He did not rebel at all against G-d. When Moshe and Avraham brought him to the Akedah he willingly came. After all, he was not a little boy; he was 37 years old at this time. Many times we refer to this as the test of Abraham. It is true it was a test of Abraham because Abraham could not understand how G-d commanded him such a thing. This flew in the face of everything G-d had told him before and, besides,

G-d had promised Abraham that from his seed would come the future Jewish people. Yitzchak was his seed. How could there be any Jewish people if Yitzchak was killed? Yitzchak was a person who accepted life and accepted G-d's way and he did not have any Peshah in him at all. He was a man who would try to sacrifice for the Jewish people. He was willing to sacrifice for the Jewish people. He was a man who perhaps sacrificed too much for the Jewish people, the rabbis say. He became a little bit too passive. It is true G-d does not want us to sacrifice our children. We abhor human sacrifice, but He wants us to teach our children how to sacrifice. Our children have to know how to sacrifice. If Judaism is to survive we cannot say that everything that our children do is good and we have to change the religion to suit our children. The children have to learn to sacrifice. The children have to learn how to sacrifice and even if they fall in love with a non-Jew they have to remember that they have to marry a Jew, that they have to sacrifice their means and their time in order to help Judaism progress. Yitzchak was a symbol of this sacrifice. Therefore, on this morning of Selichos we remember Yitzchak because we remember that we, too, have to sacrifice for Judaism, that we, too, should not get on our high horse and be rebellious. We, too, if we sin it should be because we missed the mark, because we are weak, but we should never be active in Peshah. We ask G-d to remember Yitzchak because even our Peshah, even our rebellions are not really rebellions but only a result of foolishness.

Finally we have the image of G-d dressed in a tallis saying, "Adoshem Adoshem El Rachum." Many times we sin, too, in our community responsibilities. Many times, too, we give the wrong advice. Look what happened in Europe where many religious leaders told the Jewish people not to leave Europe but to stay there. The ground was burning under their feet but these people thought that communism and Naziism was a passing phase. It was a passing phase. It is gone now, but in the meantime it will do terrible harm. It is true America was a treif land. It is true Israel was not the most religious country but the people's lives would have been saved and they could have become good Jews now, but they got their religious values mixed up. They forgot about the Kuach

Nefesh. But G-d said, "Put a tallis over your head. Act as a Sliach Tziba." What does a tallis represent? A tallis represents human activity and G-d's inspiration. The blue stands for G-d's help and the white stands for human activity. G-d said, "I know that as long as you are sincere, as long as you are sincere in your activities I will forgive you." The spies, too, were sincere. They thought it would be wrong for the Jewish people to go into the land of Israel because the Jewish people would be confronted by all sorts of pagan ideas and many Jews would succumb. They would rather stay in the desert and learn Torah. Let them live on the manna and water G-d would provide. But that is not what G-d wants. G-d wants us to enter the world and sanctify the world and make it a holy place. So G-d said, "Put a tallis on your head." The tallis shows the cooperation of man's efforts and of G-d's efforts and that together we will make a good world. Yes, many times you have been misled. Yes, many times you have done the wrong thing, but I will forgive you if your motives are pure and you really mean it. So here, too, in this morning when we gather together to say Selichos let us all hope and pray that when we work for the Jewish physical and when we work to preserve Jewish values that we will not be involved in sin, that we will not be involved in Chait or Avon or Peshah. Let us always remember, too, that we have to sacrifice for our religion, that we cannot have a religion unless we are willing to sacrifice for it, and that it is not appropriate for us to rebel. That does us no good. G-d in His great mercy will even forgive our rebellion as He forgave the sins of the spies in the desert if we really rebel only out of good motives because we want to save the Jewish people and help the Jewish people. Let us all hope and pray that all of us will look into our hearts and will try to, in this coming year, expunge all those things that were wrong, that we will do true Teshuva so that we will feel good, so that we will truly benefit from Selichos, that G-d will truly make us pure and that G-d will truly forgive us for our sins so that we can start off in the new year fresh and whole so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day.

Amen.