

SELICHOT



CONGREGATION MICKVE ISRAEL

Order of Service

1. Candle Lighting Service
2. Shofar Service
3. Changing the Torah Covers to High Holy Days White
4. Silent Prayer
5. Teshuvah - Uncovering Our Past Year
6. Teshuvah - Turning and Returning
7. Concluding Prayer

Dear Reader:

For more than a thousand years, Jews have held Selichot services on the Saturday night immediately preceding the High Holy Days. The service provides occasion for worship and soul-searching. It marks the beginning of Yamim Nora-im, the Days of Awe.

In the broadest definition, selichot are penitential prayers said before and during the High Holy Days and other fast days throughout the year. In Hebrew, selichot translates to “forgiveness,” and indeed there is an emphasis in these prayers on the merciful attributes with which God is said to govern the world. In many ways, the prayers which make up the Selichot service mirror what we find on the Day of Atonement which follows soon after.

Solemnly do we approach this service, aware of great challenges before us. We are bearers of a grand heritage that sets before us the demand to strive for greater perfection: “Ye shall be holy, for I the Eternal your God am holy.” This is the theme of the Yamim Nora-im: We are called to re-evaluate our goals and purposes. Acknowledging our shortcomings, we reach out for a nobler life in the New Year.

Not For Ourselves

Not for ourselves alone do we pray,
Not for ourselves alone,
But for all people.

Knowing our failings,
Let us be patient with those of others.
Knowing our will to goodness,
May we see in others a dignity that is human,
A beauty inviolate forever.
Every soul is precious;
And every life is Your gift to us.
Yet one stands poised to strike the next;
Armies uproot vines and fig trees,
As war and war's alarms make all afraid.

Not for ourselves alone, therefore,
Nor for ourselves alone,
But for all people
Do we seek reconciliation and peace.

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Candle Lighting Service

Now, only one great light burns before us; it is the Ner Tamid. “As God spoke to Moses: Command the children of Israel that they bring to You pure olive oil beaten for the light, to cause a lamp to burn continually...It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations.” (Lev. 24:2-3)

So it is set forth in the Book of Leviticus; so it has been across the centuries: this Eternal Light burning bright in the Sanctuary and in the heart, sending forth the golden shafts of justice and righteousness to illuminate the habitations of humankind.

The Ner Tamid brings light to an all too darkened world. It beckons to us to keep alive our values “in spite of everything” and to hearken to the ancient call to be “a light unto the nations.” The Ner Tamid is the guardian of the Torah which sustains us in all our generations. It is a tree of life to those who cleave to it. It renews us and fortifies us, and by its word we are preserved. By His word, we are instructed to tikun olam, to repairing our world - - our personal worlds, and the world around us.

We kindle the light of hope. We kindle the light of Teshuvah, of Repentance. The world outside will yield only after there has been victory in the world within. There will be peace among people when there is peace in every heart. There will be respect in the world when all people respect themselves. There will be honor in the world when each of us is true to our own highest self. We shall have peace and respect and honor only when we repent of the evil of war, of the transgression of another's integrity, of the destruction of another person's dignity.

Let the light of Repentance, O God, burn brightly.

We light the second candle, the light of Tefilah, of Prayer. Prayer is the ladder which links earth and heaven. Prayer is the shuttle which weaves the strands of life and gives them pattern. Prayer is the cup into which we pour our aspirations. Prayer is the flower born from the seed of faith. Prayer is the wings on which our spirit soars. Prayer is the littleness of each of us seeking the greatness of God.

Let the light of Prayer, O God, burn brightly.

We light the third candle, the light of Tzedakah, of Righteousness. You have commanded us, O God, by the mouth of the prophet: “To loose the fetters of wickedness; to undo the bands of the yoke; and let the oppressed go free. To share our bread with the hungry, and to bring into our homes the poor that are cast out, to cover the naked and not to hide ourselves...”

Let the light of Righteousness, O God, burn brightly.

These are not invitations to charity. They are commandments to Tzedakah, to righteousness and justice. They give us no choice! We must feed the hungry; we must care for the sick and clothe the naked, not because charity suggests it, but because righteousness demands it! Keep our hearts sensitive to all humanity and all living things, O God, and may the wells of our compassion and our humanity never run dry.

Let the lights burn brightly, O God, the lights of Repentance, of Prayer and of Righteousness. And may our hearts be illumined, O God, in this midnight hour of Selichot as we seek to prepare ourselves for the New Year and for all of life's possibilities and promises.

Shofar Service

The sound of the Shofar proclaimed the covenant at Mount Sinai which bound Israel to God as a holy people. Ever since that distant day, the voice of the Shofar has resounded through the communities of Israel, awakening allegiance to God and God's commandments. At the new moon, on joyous festivals, on solemn days of fasting and repentance, and on the jubilee year, our ancestors listened to the calls of the ram's horn. Their listening inspired them to recall their obligations to serve Adonai with all their heart and with all their strength.

Therefore do we, their children, listen now to the sound of the Shofar. May it summon us to struggle against the evil within our hearts and in the world. Let it arouse within us the will to righteousness and strengthen our trust in God's justice and love. May it direct our thoughts to the day when the Shofar will sound for the redemption of all humanity.

*The Shofar calls: **Tekiah***

Arise! Awake! Come from your beds, your homes to the blast that calls you, the siren that warns you: Seek shelter for your spirit. Enter now the opening gates.

*The ram's horn cries: **Shevarim***

Worship in truth, pray together in confidence and in trust, determined that promises shall be kept, oaths fulfilled, words spoken thoughtfully in honor and in truth.

*The shrill notes tremble: **Teruah***

Listen to the cries of people suffering. Sense their unbearable tears of oppression. Contemplate in reverence and sincerity how we can help those in anguish.

*Three times the great horn blows: **Tekiah, Shevarim, Teruah***

Return! Return to God Who made you, arise to prayer, awake to memory, achieve atonement. Return to God Who loves you.

*The Shofar blasts: **Tekiah Gedolah***

Remember! Recall the ages of our people; dwell on your own life in the year that has passed. Call up from the darkness the mistakes and errors, the deeds that now cast a shadow over you.

Ha-shi-vei-nu, A-do-nai, ei-le-cha
Ve-na-shu-va;
Cha-deish ya-mei-nu ke-ke-dem.

הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה. חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם.

Turn us to You, Adonai, and we will return. Renew our days as of old.

Changing the Torah Covers to High Holy Day White

Silent Prayer

This book of prayers I take into my hand, and to the God of my ancestors, Who from ages past has been their Rock and Refuge, I call.

In ancient words, seared with the pain of generations, I pour out my soul.
May these words that know the heavenly paths,
Ascend to bring God that which tongue cannot express,
That lies deep, hidden in my heart.
May these words speak for me before God, entreating mercy.
Perhaps the God who hearkened to my parents' prayers,
Who gave them courage and strength to hear all their sorrow,
Perhaps God will also hear my prayer and hearken to my cry,
And be to me a shield, for there is none to help or sustain me,
But God.

שְׁמַע קוֹלֵנוּ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, חוּס וְרַחֵם עָלֵינוּ, וְקַבֵּל
בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְרַצוֹן אֶת־תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ. הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְנִשׁוּבָה, חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ בְּקָדֶם.
אֲמַרְנוּ הָאֲזִינָה, יְיָ בִּינָה הִגִּיגְנוּ.
אֵל תִּשְׁלִיכֵנוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, וְרוּחַ קָדְשְׁךָ אֵל תִּקַּח מִמֶּנּוּ.
אֵל תִּשְׁלִיכֵנוּ לְעֵת זְקָנָה, בְּכָלוֹת כֹּחֵנוּ אֵל תַּעֲזֹבֵנוּ.
אֵל תַּעֲזֹבֵנוּ, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אֵל תִּרְחַק מִמֶּנּוּ.
כִּי לָךְ, יְיָ, הוֹחַלְנוּ; אַתָּה תַּעֲזֶנָּה, אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ.

Sh'ma Koleinu, Adonai Eloheinu. Chus V'rachem, Aleinu,
V'kabel B'rachamim, B'rachamim, Uv'ratzon Et T'ilateinu.
Hashiveinu Adonai Elecha, V'nashuva: Chadesh Yameinu K'kedem.
Amarreinu Ha'azina, Adonai; Bina Hagigeinu.
Al tashlicheinu milfanecha, Veruach Kadshecha Al Tikach Mimenu.
Al Tashlicheinu L'et Ziknah Kichlot Kocheinu, Al Ta'azveinu.
Al Ta'azvein, Adonai Eloheinu, Al Tirchak Mimenu.
Ke Lecha, Adonai, HoChalnu; Atah Ta'ane, Adonai Eloheinu.

Hear our voice, Adonai our God. Have compassion upon us, and with that compassion, accept our prayer. Help us to return to You, Adonai, and then shall we return. Renew our days as in the past. Consider our words, Adonai, look into our inmost thoughts. Do not cast us away when we are old; as our strength diminishes, do not abandon us. Do not abandon us, Adonai our God, do not be far from us. For You, Adonai, do we wait, and You, Adonai, will answer.

Teshuvah

Uncovering Our Past Year

Our God, we call to You from the depths of our being. We know our own pain and acknowledge our own sin. We cry out our own need. Each of us is alone in thought, each one solitary in prayer during this hour of Selichot.

And yet we are not alone. Each of us is part of a people; and so the one becomes the many. The pain of a single individual becomes Israel's pain. The solitary cry finds sanctuary in the heart of Israel, wherever Israel dwells, even to the ends of the earth.

Help us, Adonai, to be ever grateful for this shared destiny: for the strength that pours in to fortify our weakness, for the courage that the centuries of stubborn resistance to evil have stored up, for the soaring trust that You are our support and sustainer. Let us feel Your presence, O God. May the spirit of each one who worships here become part of the larger eternal spirit of Your people Israel.

Guardians of Israel, guard the remnant of Israel, so those of Israel who say "Shema Yisrael" will never perish.

Guardian of our united people, guard our nation, so the one people that says "Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad" will never perish.

Adonai, whom our people addressed as Elohai Selichot – God of Forgiveness – we pray that in the calm and solemnity of prayer we may find new understanding and new direction.

On this night of Selichot may all of our misdeeds and shortcomings become known to us so that before the New Year we will be able to make amends in thought, feeling, and action.

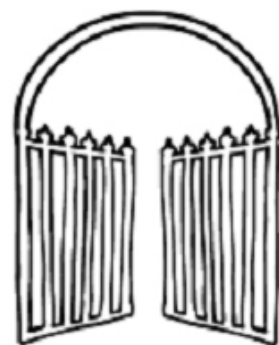
This is how the Rabbis used to speak of repentance.

Great is repentance,
For it brings healing to the world.

Great is repentance,
Because it brings about redemption.

Great is repentance,
For because of it, premeditated sins are accounted as errors.

Great is repentance,
Because it prolongs the years of humanity.



Gates of Repentance

יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ רַחוּם וְחַנוּן, אֶרְךְ אַפַּיִם, וְרַב חַסֵּד וְאֱמֶת: נִצֵּר
חַסֵּד לְאֲלֵפִים, נִשָּׂא עֲוֹן וּפְשָׁע וְחַטָּאת, וְנִקָּה:

Adonai, Adonai our God is merciful and gracious, endlessly patient, loving and true,
showing loving kindness for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, transgressions and sin, and
granting pardon. (Exodus 34: 6-7)

עַל חַטָּא שְׁחַטְאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּאִנּוּס וּבְרְצוֹן,

For the sin we have committed against You under duress or by choice.

וְעַל חַטָּא שְׁחַטְאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּזֵדוֹן וּבְשִׁגְגָה.

For the sin we have committed against You consciously or unconsciously.

וְעַל חַטָּא שְׁחַטְאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּנָלוּי וּבִסְתֵּר.

For the sin we have committed against You openly or secretly.

וְעַל חַטָּא שְׁחַטְאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּשִׂנְאָת חֵנָם.

For the sin we have committed against You by hating without cause.

עַל חַטָּא שְׁחַטְאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּמִשְׁא וּבְמִתָּן,

For the sin we have committed against You in business.

עַל חַטָּא שְׁחַטְאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּהוֹנָאת רֵעַ,

For the sin we have committed against You by hurting others in any way.

Ve-al ku-lam, E-lo-hai

Se-li-chot, se-lach la-nu,

Me-chal la-nu, ka-per - la-nu!

וְעַל כָּלֵם, אֵלֹהֵי סְלִיחוֹת, סְלַח לָנוּ מַחֵל לָנוּ כְּפָר-לָנוּ.

For all these, Elohai Selichot, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement!

We have sinned against life by failing to work for peace.

We have sinned against life by keeping silent in the face of injustice.

We have sinned against life by ignoring those who suffer in distant lands.

We have sinned against life by forgetting the poor in our midst.

We have failed to respect the image of God in every human being.

We have withheld our love from those who depend on us.

We have engaged in gossip and slander.

We have distorted the truth for our own advantage.

We have conformed to fashion and not to conscience.

We have indulged in despair and trafficked with cynics.

We have given little support to our Houses of Study.

We have neglected our heritage of learning.

We have sinned against ourselves and paid scant heed to the life of the spirit.

8 *We have sinned against ourselves and have not risen to fulfill the best that is in us.*

Ve-al ku-lam, E-lo-hai
Se-li-chot, se-lach la-nu,
Me-chal la-nu, ka-per - la-nu!

וְעַל כָּל־אֵלֶּה, אֱלֹהֵי סְלִיחוֹת, סְלַח לָנוּ, מְחַל לָנוּ כַּפֹּר-לָנוּ.

For all these, Elohai Selichot, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement!

For our failure to labor earnestly to make all people free within our community, we ask Your forgiveness.

For our failure to make our voices heard on behalf of peace among the nations and the survival of humanity, we ask Your forgiveness.

For not making real in our daily lives the insight of our tradition that every human being is created in Your image, we ask Your forgiveness.

For our neglecting to feed the hungry while we are sated, failing to house the poor while we live in security, forgetting to clothe the naked while we dress in fine clothing, we ask your forgiveness.

For concealing the beautiful spirit of humanity which is the reflection of Your spirit, we ask Your forgiveness.

For our lack of sensitivity to the anguish of others who reach out to us for understanding and help, we ask Your forgiveness.

For our failure to serve You in work and in deed, for our failure to sanctify life in every situation and every human encounter, we ask Your forgiveness.

In all these shortcomings and in those failures of which we are ashamed to speak - in humility we ask Your forgiveness.

Ve-al ku-lam, E-lo-hai
Se-li-chot, se-lach la-nu,
Me-chal la-nu, ka-per - la-nu!

וְעַל כָּל־אֵלֶּה, אֱלֹהֵי סְלִיחוֹת, סְלַח לָנוּ, מְחַל לָנוּ כַּפֹּר-לָנוּ.

For all these, Elohai Selichot, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement!

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Teshuvah Turning and Returning

Adonai, Our God, how magnificent is Your name through all the earth!
Your majesty is exalted above the heavens!
Out of the mouths of babes and nurslings praise ascends to You
and baffles Your enemies, subduing the foe and the rebel.

Ki a-nu a-me-cha, ve-a-ta Mal-kei-nu.
A-nu va-ne-cha, ve-a-ta A-vi-nu.
A-nu na-cha-la-te-cha, ve-a-ta Go-ra-lei-nu.
A-nu tzo-ne-cha, ve-a-ta Ro-ei-nu.
A-nu kar-me-cha, ve-a-ta No-te-rei-nu.
A-nu ra-ya-te-cha, ve-a-ta Do-dei-nu.

כִּי אֲנוּ עַמְּךָ, וְאַתָּה מַלְכֵנוּ;
אֲנוּ בְנֶיךָ וְאַתָּה אֲבִינוּ.
אֲנוּ נַחֲלֶתְךָ, וְאַתָּה גּוֹרְלֵנוּ;
אֲנוּ צֹאנְךָ, וְאַתָּה רוֹעֵנוּ.
אֲנוּ כֶרֶםְךָ, וְאַתָּה נוֹטְרֵנוּ;
אֲנוּ רְעִיתְךָ, וְאַתָּה דּוֹדֵנוּ;

*We are Your people, You are our Ruler.
We are Your children, You are our Parent.
We are Your possession, You are our Portion.
We are Your flock, You are our Shepherd.
We are Your vineyard, You are our Keeper.
We are Your beloved, You are our Friend.*

Adonai has two dwelling places in each human being, two temples. One is the temple of the emotions, a holy of holies from which issue human sentiments such as sympathy, astonishment, mercy, reverence, happiness, sadness, amazement. The other temple is that of the mind. In a human being's thoughts, as he or she studies the Torah and refines the intellect, there too resides Adonai. One house of God is in the heart of a human being and other is in the human brain; one is the emotions, the other in the mind.

We have been created with minds able to dwell upon good thoughts and good intentions.

We have been created with eyes, the blessing of sight, to see the world's beauty and holiness.

We have been created with ears to hear sacred words, to hear the sounds of wisdom, beauty, and love.

We have been created with mouths and tongues. The gift of speech God gave to no other creature. With words we try to pray. With words we speak of love, to God and to human beings.

We have been created with hands, the ability to sense creation through touch, the capacity to transmit tenderness.

We have been given legs to walk in God's path, and to move us to help those around us.

We have been blessed with the ability to regenerate life, and to share joy in love fulfilled.

Adonai, help us to use the wholeness of our being: Make us one with our own hearts; make us one with each other, at last to find ourselves at one with You.

Adonai, You have called us to peace, for You are Peace itself. May we have the vision to see that each of us, in some measure, can help to realize our important tasks in this world.

Where we find ignorance and superstition,

Let us teach enlightenment and knowledge.

Where there are prejudice and hatred,

Let us show acceptance and love.

Where we see fear and doubt,

Let us demonstrate confidence and trust.

Where there are tyranny and oppression,

Let us work toward freedom and justice.

Where there are poverty and disease,

Let us help to create prosperity and health.

Where there are strife and discord,

Let us strive for harmony and peace.

A-vi-nu Mal-kei-nu, cho-nei-nu
va-a-nei-nu, ki ein ba-nu
ma-a-sim, a-sei i-ma-nu
tse-da-ka va-che-sed
ve-ho-shi-ei-nu.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ! חַנּוּנוּ וְעֲנָנוּ, כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים,
עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ.

Avinu Malkeinu, answer us though we have no deeds to plead our cause; save us with mercy and loving kindness.

Concluding Prayer

This is my prayer to You, my God:
Let me not swerve from my life's path,
Let not my spirit wither and shrivel
In its thirst for You
And lose the dew
With which You sprinkled it
When I was young.

Keep my heart open
To every broken thing.
To orphaned life,
To every stumbler
Wandering unknown
And groping in the shadow.

Bless my eyes, purify me to see
Humanity's beauty rise in the world,
And my people's grandeur
In its land redeemed,
Scattering its scent
Over all the earth.

Deepen and broaden my senses
To absorb a fresh
Green, flowering world,
To take from it the secret
Of blossoming in silence.

Grant strength to yield fine fruits,
Quintessence of my life,
Steeped in my very being
Without expectation of reward.

And when my time comes –
Let me slip into the night
Demanding nothing, God, of humanity
Or of You.