

# Selichot Fast Facts

## *Internal Housekeeping: A Clean Sweep for the Soul*

- Selichot are recited the Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah to direct the worshipper's mind toward the process of Tshuvah (repentance)
- It is a time of deep introspection- to look back on our past year and analyze our own behavior
- We seek forgiveness from God and begin asking our friends and family to forgive us for any possible wrongdoings or hurt feelings we may have caused
- Selichot are recited for the 10 days before Yom Kippur and usually begin at night on the first day
- The first night of Selichot is different from the other days. It is customary to say Selichot the first night before going to sleep, and, since the first part of the night is considered a time of *din*, judgment, the Selichot are not recited on the first night until midnight.
- A fundamental part of the Selichot service is reciting the 13 Attributes of God told to Moshe following the incident with the Golden Calf in the book of Shemot (34:6-7)
- *Selichot* refers to the service itself as well as the piyutim (poetic verses) recited as part of the service
- The *Vidui* (confession) is said three times after *S'lichot* corresponding to our improper thoughts, speech and actions (*machshavot, dibbur, ma'aseh*)

### Categories of Selichot:

- **Selicha** (החילס) — "forgiveness". This is the core component of the Selichot service.
- **Pizmon** (פזמון) — "chorus." A chorus is repeated after each Selicha stanza.
- **Akeidah** (הדיקע) — "binding", reminding us of the Binding of Isaac and God's merit for answering our prayers.
- **Chatanu** (ונאטח) — "we have sinned." Starting on the evening before Rosh Hashanah and continuing through Yom Kippur, this selicha is said after the final recitation of the Thirteen Attributes of God and before the *Vidui* confession. It contains as its refrain, "ונרצוי ונל חלס ונרוצ ונאטח", "We have sinned, our Rock, forgive us, our Creator".
- **Tachinah** (הניחת) — "petition." This selicha is said on the eve of Rosh Hashanah in the Tachanun section, at the very end of the Selichot service.

### Selichot Introspection: Housekeeping for the Soul

3 steps:

→ begin to look back at our past actions - evaluate

→ ask for forgiveness from God, begin to ask family and friends for forgiveness – express regret/remorse

→ make promises to improve our behavior and become better individuals – *Tshuva*-return to Godliness

## *Selichot: Internal Housekeeping – a Clean Sweep for the Soul*

### **Teacher/Leader Instructions:**

- Each participant should be given a tea light or candle, a pen and piece of paper. The flame represents the soul.
- Find a quiet place to sit by yourself
- Read through the text on the themes of sin and forgiveness. Next, read through the Vidui chart try and think about your own actions this past year as honestly as possible (you only cheat yourself if you're not honest and no one else will know your thoughts)
- consider which statement:
  - a) helped you think about your relationship to God (ben Adam l'makom)
  - b) which one will lead to change for yourself (ben adam l'atzmoh)
  - c) which one will lead to change/influence your relationship with others (friends, family, teachers- ben Adam l'chavero)

Carefully consider your behavior from the past year. Did you treat yourself fairly? Were you always kind to your siblings? Teachers? Parents?

Think about the most important relationships in your life. Consider one of the above three relationships and apply one or two of the relevant confessionals. Who would you ask for forgiveness and for what? Which relationship would you like to improve? Were you fair to yourself? Were you always kind to your best friend? Did you struggle or have doubts about God?

On the paper provided, compose a letter that will be read by the person (or God) you may have hurt (sinned against, caused pain) or with whom you hope to improve relations. Imagine they will receive this letter. What would you want to say? What behavior and attitude changes can help you improve this relationship? What promises can you make that you can actually keep? At the top of the page, indicate which confessional you are applying to your letter to connect it with the liturgy.

Please give this exercise a chance. You may feel weird doing this at first, but remember, none of us is perfect and Selichot gives us an opportunity to acknowledge this and commit to self- improvement.

### **Summary/Wrap up**

Give them time to reflect and write in silence. Reassemble as a group and ask them to share their thoughts/feelings on the experience or even excerpts or themes of their letters. Was it challenging, helpful, difficult, strange? What emotions or thoughts went through your mind? Did it help you put your actions and experiences this year into perspective? Did it motivate you to seek forgiveness from others or change your behavior at all? Do you think repentance and forgiveness is "chicken soup (healing) for the soul? What can holding grudges or feeling guilt do and how does Selichot help alleviate this?

Handout

Taking Inventory: Vudui (Confessional)

Texts: The theme of Selichot reminds us that it is human nature not to be perfect. We recognize that even though we make mistakes, God (and we hope our friends and family as well) is forgiving and we can begin this period of introspection and repentance.

לֵאדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, הַרְחֵמֵנוּ וְהַסְלִיחוּת: כִּי מָרַדְנוּ, בּוֹ. 9 To the Lord our God belong compassions and forgivenesses; for we have rebelled against Him; -Daniel 9:9

דְּכִי-עִמָּךְ הַסְלִיחָה-- 4 For with Thee there is forgiveness, that Thou mayest be feared. Tehilim/Psalms 130:4  
לְמַעַן, תִּזְרָא.

Check off the ones that apply to you or that you significantly relate to:

Ashamnu: We have been guilty of... [selected “sins”]

___ Bagadnu: We have betrayed our friends or family members	___ I have fought with my parents way too much ___ I betrayed a friend or wasn't always loyal to the special people in my life ___ I bullied someone or made someone feel awful or made someone cry
___ Gazalnu: We have stolen- stolen an item or someone's time, energy, etc.	___ I'm always late and make people wait for me ___ I leave my room a mess forcing my dad/ mom to make my bed when they don't have time
___ Debarnu Dofi- we haven't spoken truthfully	___ I spread a rumor or lied about something
___ He'evinu: We have caused others to sin- peer pressure!	___ I have pressured someone to do something not so good
___ Zadnu: We have had evil hearts – we haven't been so kind to those around us	___ I was horrible to my brother/sister. We were constantly fighting this year
___ Chamasnu: We have become violent- in speech or action	___ I got into screaming matches with my parent (s)
___ Tafalnu Sheker: We have started rumors or lies	___ Gossip or Lashon Hara
___ Maradnu: We have rebelled	___ who hasn't rebelled as a teenager?
___ Ni'atznu: We have angered others	___ I have really upset my parent at times

___ <i>Sararnu: We have been disobedient</i>	___ I broke the rules a few times too many
___ <i>Tzararnu: We have persecuted</i>	___ I have bullied, teased or made someone feel badly
___ <i>Titanu- we have allowed ourselves to be led astray</i>	___ I have not always made the best choices and been influenced by others
___ <i>Sarnu- we have turned away from Mitzvot</i>	___ I didn't make good Jewish decisions or got lazy on my commitment to Jewish living

## Bedtime Reading Learning to Forgive: A Story

### HOW HEAVY IS YOUR BAG?

One of my teachers had each one of us bring a clear plastic bag and a sack of potatoes. For every person we'd refuse to forgive in our life, we were told to choose a potato, write on it the name and date, and put it in the plastic bag. Some of our bags, as you can imagine, were quite heavy. We were then told to carry this bag with us everywhere for one week, putting it beside our bed at night, on the car seat when driving, next to our desk at work.

The hassle of lugging this around with us made it clear what a weight we were carrying spiritually, and how we had to pay attention to it all the time to not forget, and keep leaving it in embarrassing places.

Naturally, the condition of the potatoes deteriorated to a nasty slime. This was a great metaphor for the price we pay for keeping our pain and heavy negativity!

Too often we think of forgiveness as a gift to the other person, and while that's true, it clearly is also a gift for ourselves! Both asking for and granting forgiveness helps improve our relationships and become better people.

#### *Vidui Dr. Suess Style* – Eliezer Segal/Uncle Eli's Machzor

I **a**te all the cake Mom saved for our guests.  
 I **b**roke her blue vase and I left a big mess.  
 I **c**ried, kicked and screamed till I got my own way  
 I **d**idn't clean up my old clothes for twelve days.  
 I **g**ossiped and told tales I knew weren't true.  
 I **h**appened to fill Suzie's slippers with goo.  
 I **i**gnored the advice of my parents and teachers.  
 I **j**umped on the bed like some wild, crazy creature.  
 I **k**new it was wrong, but it seemed like such fun.  
 I **l**ied *just a bit* when they asked what I'd done.  
 I **m**isbehaved terribly during the year.  
 I **n**agged at my parents and drove them to tears.

I **o**rganized protests to close down the school.  
 I **p**ushed when they told me quite clearly to pull.  
 I **q**uacked like a duck while the teacher was talking.  
 I **r**anted and raved with cacophonous squawking.  
 I **s**aid I would do things but never did do 'em.  
 I **t**old tales of lost homework and dog that chew 'em.  
 I **u**sed Tammy's stuff that she said not to touch.  
 I **v**anished before I could help very much.  
 I **w**alked, uninvited, through Mrs. Katz' courtyard.  
 I **x**-ed out the "F"s from my last year's report card.

I **y**elled till I made all the neighbors' ears  
sore.

I **z**oomed on my bike 'cross the fresh-  
painted floor.

*I did it! I'm Sorry!  
Next year I'll be good.  
I'll try to be better,  
and do what I should.*

*There's no one to blame.  
The fault was all mine.  
Forgive me,  
I won't do the same things next time.*