



D'VAR TORAH

Office of The  
CHIEF RABBI

## *D'var Torah ahead of midnight Selichot*

### **Our tradition demands hope**

Our mood on Saturday night is influenced by the Shabbat that precedes it. This is certainly the case when it comes to the Saturday night marking the commencement of Selichot in Ashkenazi circles. In Sephardi circles, of course, Selichot starts at the beginning of Elul. But in Ashkenazi circles, we begin Selichot this Saturday night, and they continue until Yom Kippur.

But why do we start on Saturday night?

We follow the view of the Rama in the *Shulchan Aruch*, who teaches that we should always have at least four days of Selichot before Rosh Hashanah. The start time needs to be standardised so that everyone will remember when they begin.

The *Terumat HaDeshen* explains that we start on a Saturday night so that the *Oneg Shabbat* — the pleasure and happiness of our Shabbat experience — can influence a positive mood when we recite Selichot.

I find this absolutely extraordinary because of the name “Selichot.” *Selichot* means “forgiveness.” We come into these prayers, perhaps full of dread. After all, is God going to accept our prayers? And yet, we already declare the outcome: *Selichot* — God will grant us forgiveness!

Why do we do this? Because we're in a happy mood, we have a positive disposition, and we're already anticipating a favourable outcome. This is also the reason for the name *Yom Kippurim* — the Day of Atonement. It is the ultimate *Yom HaDin*, the Day of Judgment, when our fate for the coming year will be sealed. Nonetheless, we're already expecting a positive result.

I believe this message of optimism is so fitting right now, as we enter the new year, 5785. We do so with a lot of dread and trepidation, keeping in mind what we, as a people, have experienced in Israel and around the world over the past year.

But our tradition demands that we have *Tikva* — that we should be full of hope and, please God, anticipate a new year that will be much better than the last. And in this spirit, may Hashem bless us all with a *Ketivah Vechatima Tovah* — we should be written and sealed in the Book of Life.

May you all have a *Shana Tovah*, a wonderful new year, please God, filled with blessings, prosperity, and, most importantly, with peace.

This is a transcript of a video, which is available to view via [chiefrabbi.org/dvar-torah](http://chiefrabbi.org/dvar-torah)