

“Adon HaSelichot” is one of the oldest known piyutim in the canon of High Holiday prayers. In Sephardic communities, the piyut is at the center of the Selichot service, recited daily, besides Shabbat, from the 2nd day of Elul until after Yom Kippur. The piyut has become well known across the Jewish communities of Israel, and is sung in most synagogues, with melodies coming from Turkey, Morocco, and Ottoman-era Palestine, among others. The poem, written in acrostic form, focuses on God's omniscience and awareness of the sins and failings of every human. Despite this, we ask for God to have mercy on us, despite our various shortcomings.

The Video illustrates the preparation process for Yom Kippur, and is performed by Efrat Apter, a member of Zion, a Masorti congregation in Jerusalem, and accompanied by members of the Noam Youth Movement. The singers chose to perform the piece in a style that is much slower and melancholy than how the prayer is typically sung in an attempt to emphasize the soul-searching and humility that accompanies this period of self-reflection and repentance.

Questions for Discussion:

1. The heroine of our video prepares for Yom Kippur by delivering apologies to people she may have hurt, and only then prepares for the ritual aspect of the holiday, removing her leather shoes and grabbing her tallit. How do you spiritually prepare for the High Holidays?
2. Having the ability to recognize where you have wronged somebody and asking for forgiveness is one of the biggest challenges of the holiday season. How do you overcome this challenge and seek forgiveness from those you have hurt?
3. How do you experience the process of asking forgiveness from others, from God, and from yourself differently?
4. Do the rituals of Yom Kippur help in your ability to ask forgiveness? In your ability to grant it to others?
5. This piyut is often song to a fast and joyous tempo? Which interpretation better fits the words?