SELIHOT: Training for a Marathon day

From the second day of the month of Elul (today!) until Yom Kippur, the Sephardic custom is to recite the Selihot prayer.Selihot is a special Tefila which inspires us to reflect on our actions and ask forgiveness from our peers and from the Almighty for our mistakes and wrongdoings. Selihot is traditionally said before the morning prayer (Shaharit), although technically, Selihot could be said also during nighttime (after midnight) or even during the day.The Ashkenazi Minhag is to start Selihot services the last Sunday before Rosh haShana. However, when Rosh haShana falls on a Monday or Tuesday (it can never fall on a Sunday) Selihot will begin two Sundays before Rosh haShana.

Also, during the entire month of Elul the Ashkenazim and many Sephardim (Moroccans, Persians, etc. but not Syrians) have the custom to blow the Shofar. The goal of Selihot and the blowing of the Shofar is to inspire us to begin the process of Teshuba. Teshuba consists of introspection and repentance. But ultimately it means coming back or closer to God (depending on one's point of departure). This high spiritual goal cannot be achieved overnight or just by making a decision to change. It demands a serious and patient course of actions in which we revisit our deeds and particularly our values. We reexamine our goals and the distractions that have driven us away from those goals. This intense spiritual intellectual process begins today and culminates during Yom Kippur. Think of Yom Kippur as a spiritual marathon: a whole day consecrated exclusively to appealing to HaShem, begging His forgiveness and committing ourselves to major changes in our lives. No one will run a marathon without a previous training. Similarly, to be in good shape for Yom Kippur we make an intense forty-days training of which Selihot is a most essential part.

Dedicated to baby Yosef Bitton, son of Jacob and Rivkah.