

THE PIRCHEI SHOSHANIM ROADMAP TO PRAYER PROJECT

The Roadmap to Prayer

Lesson 22

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Tachanun - Nefilas Apayim

Fervent Prayer with one's Face Down

After *Chazoras Hashatz* (the repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei*) we proceed with a very unique prayer called *Tachanun* (fervent prayer) or *Nefilas Apayim* (with one's face down).

Originally, *Nefilas Apayim* consisted of placing one's face all the way down to the ground. This was accomplished through a unique maneuver called *Kidah* which was bending over and touching the ground with one's face without prostrating the rest of one's body¹. The *Aruch Hashulchan*² writes from the Rambam³ that originally *Nefilas Apayim* did consist of prostrating oneself completely to the ground and that some people bowed completely to the ground while others did *Kidah*.

The Ashkenazic Way

The prayer of *Tachanun* is comprised of a prayer from *Tehillim* in chapter 6⁴ where King David (*Dovid Hamelech*) finds himself bed-ridden with a terrible illness. He sees this as a sign to repent for his sin⁵ with Bas Sheva⁶ who was destined to be his wife in the future.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch *zt"l* notes that after reciting *Shemoneh Esrei* which is a prayer on behalf of all our brethren, this particular prayer brings us to focus on our personal failings and to examine our deeds so that we can repent and rectify them. Just as *Dovid Hamelech* introspected into his behavior and sought out *Hashem's*

¹ *Mishna Berura* 131: 3

² *Simon* 131: 4

³ *Hilchos Tefilla* Chapter 5

⁴ Sephardim recite Chapter 25 as discussed further in this lesson

⁵ See a discussion in the *Gemara* Shabbos daf 56a that *Dovid Hamelech* did not transgress any Torah prohibition

⁶ See Book of Shmuel chapter 24

forgiveness, so too we are compelled to do the same and we fall on our faces to seek out *Hashem's* forgiveness.

In this prayer we beseech *Hashem* to protect us from harm and retribution for sinning against Him. We ask for total forgiveness and atonement.

After we finish this portion of *Tehillim*, we lift our heads and remain sitting while saying the final stanzas of *Shomer Yisrael* etc. Then, when we reach *Va'anachnu lo nedah mah na'aseh* (and we do not know what else to do), we stand up again, gesturing that we now do not know any longer what to do if our prayers are not accepted.

The Significance of the Tachanun Prayer

The *Gemara* in Tractate *Ta'anis*⁷ states that someone who is a distinguished Torah scholar should avoid reciting *Tachanun* on the public's behalf if he is unsure whether his prayers will be accepted. This is to say that if people see that such a great prayer from such a distinguished individual is not readily accepted by *Hashem* it will cause a desecration to *Hashem's* Holy Name, that this scholar is not really as distinguished as we originally thought.

The *Gemara* cites *Yehoshua ben Nun*⁸ as an example of a distinguished individual who said a prayer while falling to his face to the ground. This episode took place after *Yehoshua* and the *B'nei Yisrael* were routed in their first attempt to take the city of *Ai* in their conquest of the Land of Israel. *Yehoshua* had prostrated himself in prayer to intercede on behalf of the nation, but *Hashem* told him to get up and stop his prayer. *Rashi* in *Megillah*⁹ explains this to mean that *Hashem* was reprimanding *Yehoshua* for prostrating himself in public assuming that G-d would answer his request.

Moshe Rabbeinu Falls to His Face in Prayer

When the Jewish Nation sinned in the desert with the *Golden Calf (Eigel Hazahav)*, *Hashem* anger burned and He was ready to destroy them. *Moshe Rabbeinu* was determined to save the *B'nei Yisrael* from this terrible fate and started to daven fervently on their behalf. *Moshe Rabbeinu* himself describes this prayer later in the

⁷ Daf 14b and Megillah 22b

⁸ Primary disciple of *Moshe Rabbeinu*

⁹ See Book of Joshua Chapter 7

¹⁰ Daf 22b

Book of *Devarim*¹¹. He first recounts the days he spent atop Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. He said, *Va'eishev bahar arba'im yome etc.*¹² (and I sat on the mountain forty days). *Vo'esnapal lifnei Hashem*¹³ (and I fell before *Hashem*). It also says *Ve'anochi omadeti bahar etc.*¹⁴ (and I stood on the mountain). Since *Moshe Rabbeinu* beseeched *Hashem* to save the *B'nei Yisrael* from danger by sitting, standing and falling to his face in prayer, we too do the same. The *Tun*¹⁵ and the *Bach* explain that we too make a similar effort in our prayers by first sitting by the reading of Shema (*Krias She'ma*) and its blessings (*brochas*), and then we stand in prayer before G-d by *Shemoneh Esrei*. Finally we fall to our face in prayer by the prayer of *Tachanun*. We then conclude *Va'anachnu lo nedah mah na'aseh* וְאֵנָּחְנוּ לֹא נֹדַע מַה נַעֲשֶׂה (and we do not know what else to do) indicating that we have made every kind effort to emulate *Moshe Rabbeinu* (Moses our teacher) by praying in all the ways he did; sitting, standing and by laying down with our faces down towards the ground.

Giving up our Lives

The *Zohar* explains that falling to our faces (*Nefilas Apayim*) is showing our total devotion to *Hashem* to the point that we are ready to lay ourselves down and give up our lives. The *Ari zt"l* also writes about this in his *kabalistic* writings regarding *Tachanun*. He writes that this is the second time we demonstrate our full devotion to *Avodas Hashem* (G-d's service) to the end degree. The first time is when we recite the Shema we imagine ourselves serving G-d to the point of even dying for His Name's sake as we say *Ve'ahavtah eis Hashem Elokecha bechol le'vevecha uve'chol nafshecha* אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל לֵבְךָ וּבְכֹל נַפְשְׁךָ (and you shall love *Hashem* your G-d with all your heart and all your soul), which our Sages determine to mean even if it means giving up our soul for *Hashem's* sake. The difference between the two instances can be understood with the following comment by Rav Shlomo Alkabetz (author of the *Lecha Dodi*, Friday night prayer) as quoted by the *Shelah Hakadosh*, that when falling to one's face we demonstrate our willingness to die for some sins that cannot be atoned through any other means, such as the sin of *Chillul Hashem* (desecrating G-d's honor). In effect, falling to one's face (*Nefilas Apayim*) symbolically represents a punishment by death that brings atonement and closure to one's sin, while by the reading of Shema

¹¹ Chapters 9-10

¹² Devarim 9: 9

¹³ Ibid. 9:25

¹⁴ Ibid. 10:10

¹⁵ Orach Chaim Simon 131

(*Krias Shema*) the message is that we are so devoted in our *Avodas Hashem* (service of G-d) that we are even willing to give up our lives so not to transgress G-d's commands.

Alternatively, the *Tanya* and the *Yaavetz* write in their commentary to the Siddur (Prayer Book) that the basic difference between our willingness to die for G-d's sake and for the sake of his Torah by the reading of Shema and by falling to one's face (*Nefilas Apayim*) is that by the reading of Shema it is only theoretical, while by falling to one's face (*Nefilas Apayim*) it is actual. Although even by falling to one's face one isn't actually giving up his life; still one demonstrates the resolve to lie down and give up one's own life for *Hashem's* honor. When reciting these prayers with proper intent, one's thoughts will be considered as good as deeds.

The Symbolism of Falling to one's Face

Rabbeinu Bachaye gives three meanings to the concept of *Nefilas Apayim* as it is applied in the Torah:

- 1) It shows our fear and reverence of G-d where there is Divine Revelation. For this reason we recite this prayer while we hide our face, which shows respect and reverence.
- 2) It demonstrates our sincere remorse and humility for transgressing G-d's command. This is a fundamental of repentance (*Teshuvah*) which is crucial to *Hashem's* acceptance of our prayers (*tefilos*).
- 3) It exhibits our total devotion to G-d's will, by completely eliminating our own physical desires for the purpose of carrying out *Hashem's* commands.

Vidui (Confession)

In addition to reciting the above-mentioned chapter in *Tehillim*, many people have the custom to preface it with the recitation of *Vidui* (confession) of *Ashamnu*, *bagadnu* etc. which enumerates according to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, various sins we may have committed. The custom is to gently strike the left side of his breast by the heart for each word of the *Aleph Beis* sequence.

In addition to confession (*Vidui*), we also recite the 13 Attributes of Mercy. All this is recited to fervently request forgiveness from *Hashem*. This combination of confession (*Vidui*) with the *13 Attributes of Mercy* serve as the foundation of our *Selichos Prayers* that we recite during the Month of *Elul* (the Hebrew calendar month immediately prior to

the start of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* as well as on other occasions such as public fasts.

According to the explanation that falling to one's face (*Nefilas Apayim*) demonstrates our willingness to die to attain atonement for our sins, it makes sense that we first recite the *Ashamnu* confession (*Vidui*). Every person that dies¹⁶ should recite *Vidui* (Confession) before expiring so that one returns his soul to his Creator in a state of purity by repenting along with a verbal confession (*Vidui*). However, according to the other explanation that falling to one's face (*Nefilas Apayim*) is just another form of prayer emulating *Moshe Rabbeinu's* efforts in prayer on behalf of the *B'nei Yisrael*, it doesn't seem necessary to insert a confession (*Vidui*) prayer beforehand¹⁷.

When falling on one's face, one should not place it into the palm of the hand since a person's sins are written on one's palm.¹⁸

The Placement of Tachanun after Shemoneh Esrei

Although *Tachanun* may be recited at any time, its proper placement is right after the prayer of *Shemoneh Esrei*. This fits in according to the explanation that this prayer is recited in order to emulate the different methods that *Moshe Rabbeinu* utilized in his prayers (*tefilos*). In the *Gemara* in *Bava Metzia*¹⁹ it relates that the full potential of *Tachanun* is realized only when it is said without interruption between it and *Shemoneh Esrei*. The *Gemara* tells us how *Rebbe Elazar's* wife *Imma Shalom*, would always cause her husband to have some form of interruption between *Shemoneh Esrei* and *Tachanun*. She did so because she feared that the power of her husband's *Tachanun* would cause her brother *Rabban Gamliel* to die because *Rebbe Elazar* became upset with him. By reciting *Tachanun*, which closes with the verses dealing with King David's²⁰ (*Dovid Hamelech's*) prayer that *Hashem* do away with his enemies, she was concerned that something would happen to her brother as well. Indeed, the *Gemara* relates that one

¹⁶ If on account of suggesting to an individual that he should recite *Vidui* because his condition is worsening it will add stress which will adversely affect him, one should refrain from suggesting it.

¹⁷ *Likutei Maharich* on the *Tachanun* Prayer

¹⁸ *Me'am Lo'ez* – Shemos - 34:6

¹⁹ *Daf 59b*

²⁰ This is according to the verse recited by *Nusach Sefard* and *Nusach Ashkenaz*. However, there is no reference in the *Gemara* to which *Psalm* is recited for *Tachanun*.

day *Imma Shalom* was delayed and *Rebbe Elazar* said *Tachanun* immediately after *Shemoneh Esrei* without any interruption; *Rabban Gamliel* his brother in law died shortly afterwards.

From this we see the importance of reciting *Tachanun* immediately after *Shemoneh Esrei* without interruption and the tremendous power this prayer (*tefilla*) possesses when it is said with the proper concentration, intention, and order.

Additionally, it is appropriate for it to be recited right after *Shemoneh Esrei* since we are emulating *Moshe* who davened in three different manners. We first daven sitting during the reading of Shema (*She'ma (Krias She'ma)*) and its blessings, then standing during *Shemoneh Esrei*, and finally now with our faces towards the ground.

The *book (sefer) Roke'ach*²¹ writes concerning when King Solomon (*Shlomo Hamelech*) inaugurated the *Beis Hamikdash*, there is verse (*pasuk*) that describes how he finished reciting his prayer and beseeching *Hashem*. In Hebrew, this is described as follows: *Vaye'hee kechalos Shlomo le'hispalleil el Hashem es kol Hatefilla ve'hatechina hazose* יהי ככלות ויהי ככלות הזאת (I *Melachim* 8:54). We see in this verse that King Solomon (*Shlomo Hamelech*) first recited a prayer (*tefilla*) תפלה - *Shemoneh Esrei*, and then a *Techina* תחינה. That is why we too recite *Tachanun* following *Shemoneh Esrei*.

*Rav Moshe Feinstein*²² ז"ל writes that the reason we do not recite *Kaddish* after *Shemoneh Esrei* before reciting *Tachanun* is because *Tachanun* is considered a continuum of *Shemoneh Esrei* which is why we should not interrupt between *Shemoneh Esrei* and *Tachanun*²³.

Laws דינים

- § *Tachanun* is recited with one's face towards the ground while leaning one's head on one's arms.
- § It is preferable to recite *Tachanun* while sitting down. However, if one cannot sit down because someone is standing and davening *Shemoneh Esrei* behind him, then one should recite *Tachanun* while standing and leaning on one's arm.

²¹ Simon 324

²² Volume 3:81

²³ See further on for the exact meaning of this *Halacha*.

On the Left or on the Right?

There is a discussion amongst the authorities on Jewish Law (*Poskim*) on how one should lean on one's face (*Nefilas Apayim*). As mentioned earlier, it was performed originally by prostrating oneself onto the ground. Nowadays we do not practice this custom for various reasons²⁴. However, the custom remains that we lay with our heads tilted to one of the sides. Some opinions maintain to lean on the right arm while others maintain to lean on the left arm. The prevalent custom to lean to the right side by *Shacharis* since one don's *Tefillin* on the left arm. Other times, when we do not don *Tefillin*, we lean to the left²⁵. The *Gra* maintains that one should always lean to the left. He explains that we do so since *Tachanun* completes the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer. Since during *Shemoneh Esrei* we are considered being in the presence of the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) which is to our right as the *Shibalei Haleket*²⁶ points out, it is appropriate to face the Divine Presence by leaning on our left side. Even when one is wearing *Tefillin* straps on the left arm, it is not considered shaming one's *Tefillin*, since lying like that actually pushes one's *Tefillin* opposite one's heart, fulfilling the verse that *Tefillin* should be opposite one's heart²⁷.

Another reason for leaning on one's arm is to show humility and modesty, which is accomplished by leaning to either side. Except for when we are wearing *Tefillin*, we do it on the left, which is the preferred way according to *Kabbalah* as noted by *Rabbeinu Bachay*²⁸.

The *Shibalei Haleket* cites another reason from *Rav Hai Gaon*. The reason for lying on one's left side is because the custom used to be that people of royalty would lay on their left side while partaking in a meal. We do this on Passover (*Pesach*) by the Seder, when we lean on our left sides while eating the *Matzah* and drinking the four cups of wine. By falling to one's face, we demonstrate our willingness to forgo our custom of acting as men of royalty; instead we devote ourselves totally to the service of *Hashem*.

²⁴ See Magen Avraham 131: 3 that there is a Torah prohibition on stone floors which applies also to other surfaces and by Rabbinic extension it is always avoided, Therefore we lay with our heads tilted onto our arms.

²⁵ The Levush 131: 1 also mentions this compromise

²⁶ Quoted further on in this lesson

²⁷ From Tanya Rabbasi Simon 5

²⁸ Rama in Simon 131: 1

When leaning on one's arm, there should be a garment²⁹ that covers one's face with. The purpose of the garment according to the *Magen Avraham* is in order to avoid bowing one's face to the ground on a stone floor. It is a Torah prohibition to actually put one's face all the way to the ground. Accordingly, one would be allowed to lean over a table when learning at a stand (*stender*)³⁰.

The *Levush* states that for the same reason we must lean a little to the side and not face directly down.

The *Mishna Berura*³¹ writes that the reason we cover our face with a garment is an act of humility. Putting one's face directly over one's arm doesn't show humility since one's own flesh is not a covering for his face. If a person does not have a garment one should not recite *Tachanun* while leaning on one's arm. Likewise, leaning one's head over a table doesn't accomplish this nor does placing a tissue over one's arm accomplish this.

Confession (Vidui) and the 13 Attributes of Mercy

Nusach Sefard recites confession (*Vidui*) and the 13 *Attributes of Mercy* before falling to one's face (*Nefilas Apayim*). They are both recited only while standing.

Background מקורות

The 13 Attributes of Mercy are a powerful form of *Tefilla* that G-d Himself revealed to *Moshe Rabbeinu* atop Mt. Sinai. The verse (*pasuk*) in Parshas *Ki Sissa*³² relates how *Moshe Rabbeinu* was told by G-d to go up onto the mountain (Mt. Sinai) with two tablets of stone. After *Moshe Rabbeinu* went up to the mountain as G-d commanded him, *Hashem's* Divine Presence descended upon the mountain and *Moshe Rabbeinu* called the Name of *Hashem*. What happened next is something the *Gemara* says one really cannot say it were it not openly recorded in the Torah in the manner it was. It is as if G-d wrapped Himself as a leader of a congregation (*Shali'ach Tzibbur*) and recited the 13 Attributes of Mercy, teaching *Moshe Rabbeinu* that whenever there is a terrible decree facing the Jewish Nation, one should follow this procedure and one will be

²⁹ I.e. The sleeve of a jacket or shirt

³⁰ See Sefer Avnei Yoshfeh Orach Chaim Volume 1:21

³¹ Simon 131: 3

³² Shemos 34:6-9

granted mercy. Reciting these attributes properly has the unique ability to arouse the attribute of mercy from *Hashem* to save us from tragedy.

Laws דינים

- § The 13 Attributes of Mercy are considered a *Davar she'bikdusha* (A matter of sanctification) which may only be recited by a *minyan* of adult Jewish males.
- § If there is no *minyan*, the 13 Attributes of Mercy may be recited by an individual who sings it by the tune (*trop*) it is sung when reading it from the Torah. In this case, the entire verse is read until the end which is more than the usual amount recited by the congregation (*tzibbur*).
- § It may be recited by night but only after midnight.

Mondays and Thursdays

On Mondays and Thursdays we add numerous prayers to *Tachanun* beginning with *Ve'Hu Rachum* והוא רחום. This section is recited while standing. There are various customs related to the placement of *Tachanun* on these days.

The Custom of Sephardim

The custom of *Sephardim* when it comes to *Tachanun* is completely different than the custom of *Ashkenazim*. *Sephardim* do not fall to their faces at all, nor do *Sephardim* recite the 6th chapter of *Tehillim*. *Sephardim* recite an entirely different chapter of *Tehillim*, *Le'David eilecha Hashem nafshi essa*³³ לְדָוִד אֵלֶיךָ הַשֵּׁם נַפְשִׁי אֵשָׁא (To David, to You Hashem I lift up my soul). The custom of *Sephardim* is to begin with *Vidui* and the 13 *Attributes of Mercy* while standing and then proceed to recite *Le'David eilecha Hashem nafshi essa* while sitting.

The reason why *Sephardim* do not recite the chapter of *Tehillim* that *Ashkenazim* recite for *Tachanun* writes the *Ben Ish Chai*³⁴, the *Zohar*³⁵ writes that saying the chapter of *Tehillim* of *Rachum Ve'chanun*³⁶ without proper concentration is not only not beneficial, but it can be spiritually harmful. Therefore, since we are prone to reciting the

³³ Tehillim 25

³⁴ Parshas Ki Sissa

³⁵ See Magen Avraham 131: 5 citing Zohar (Volume 3 page 120b)

³⁶ Chapter 6

Tachanun prayers without proper concentration, it is better for us not to recite it at all. *Sephardim* do not put their heads down either when reciting *Le'David eilecha Hashem nafshi essa* but do recite these verses sitting down.

והוא רחום - Ve'Hu Rachum

The *Zohar* writes that the prayer of *Ve'Hu Rachum* is an especially powerful prayer. Through this prayer, G-d's attribute of Mercy is aroused to prevent the spiritual forces of impurity from preventing our prayers from reaching Him. Thus, this prayer is a significant addition to *Tachanun* and should be recited with fervent concentration.

מקורות Background

The *Levush* as well as others bring the following story regarding the choice of prayers which are added to the Monday/Thursday *Tachanun* prayers. It is a story of three individuals who left *Yerushalayim* with the exile and went to live in a certain city. They were given an ultimatum by the governor to convert or be thrown into a fiery furnace to be killed similar to the attempt on the lives of *Chanania, Misha'el and Azariah* in the days of *Nebuchadnezzar*. The Governor wanted to test them to see if they also would come out alive just as their fellow Jews did before them. They then asked for a 30 day reprieve in which they fasted. Among them was someone who was an extremely righteous person but he was not so well learned. On the 30th day this man had a dream in which he saw a certain verse. In it the word "when" repeated twice and the word "not" appeared three times. Among the 3 was also a wise man who understood that it alluded to the following verses in *Isaiah/ Yeshaya 43:2*.

The Prophet (*Navi*) *Isaiah* prophesized: *And now, thus says Hashem your Creator, O Jacob; the One who fashioned you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by Name; you are Mine. When you pass through water I am with you; through rivers, they will not wash you away; when you walk through fire, you will not be singed and the flames will not burn you.*³⁷

Upon hearing these prophetic words, the wise man said to the righteous man that you will surely be saved. The governor proceeded with his plan and staged a very large fire for the men to be put through. A miracle happened and all three passed through the fire and came out unharmed. The Three came out unharmed. The first of them recited the prayer of *Ve'Hu Rachum* ("He, the Merciful One") until *Ana melech Rachum ve'chanun* ("For you, God, are a merciful and compassionate King"). The second one recited the next portion until *Ein kamocha* ("There is none like you") and the third

³⁷ *Yeshaya 43: 1, 2*

recited the next portion until the end. It was such a miraculous event that it was decreed that these verses be said every Monday and Thursday which are days that our prayers are more readily accepted³⁸.

Each segment begins with the word *Rachum* (mercy) and ends with the word *Rachum*. Each segment contains 18 times the mention of *Hashem's Name*. For this reason, we always recite it while standing like the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer which is originally a prayer of 18 blessings. The *Rama*³⁹ says that it should be recited quietly like *Shemoneh Esrei* as well. However, the *Elya Rabba* says that the custom is to recite it out loud. According to *Halacha*, saying it while standing is imperative, while saying out loud is not.

The *Tur*⁴⁰ writes that Mondays and Thursdays are particularly good days for prayers to be readily accepted as when *Moshe Rabbeinu* went up to receive the second set of tablets, the (*Luchos Sheniyos*) לוחות שנייות, he ascended the mountain on a Thursday and he came back down with the Tablets (*Luchos*) on Yom Kippur of that year which was on a Monday.

They are also days of judgment as both the Heavenly court and the *Batei Din* (Jewish courts) convene on Mondays and Thursdays⁴¹.

Both *Sephardim* and *Ashkenazim* recite the *Ve'Hu Rachum* prayer except that there are some variances in the text as well as the order of the prayers. Likewise, the text of *Ve'Hu Rachum* of *Nusach Sefard* varies from that of *Nusach Ashkenaz*.

The Closing of Tachanun

In *Nusach Ashkenaz* as well as *Nusach Sefard*, we close the *Tachanun* prayer with the stanzas of *Shomer Yisrael etc.* (Guardian of Israel) and then with the stanza beginning *Va'anachnu lo neda mah na'aseh* (And we know not what more to do). *Sephardim* do not recite the stanzas of *Shomer Yisrael etc.* Instead they say a stanza beginning with *Ve'Hu yifdeh es Yisrael mikole avonosav etc.* (And He will redeem Israel from all its iniquities. Following this, *Sephardim* recite *Va'anachnu lo neda mah na'aseh* (And we know not what more to do).

³⁸ As mentioned by the *Tur* quoted further along in this lesson

³⁹ *Simon* 134: 1

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Aruch Hashulchan* 134: 1

Intimation - רמז

The *Roke'ach* brings a hint (רמז) from the verse in *Isaiah*⁴² which we read for the *Haftorah* (Verses read from scriptures after the public reading from the Torah scroll) of fast-days. The verse reads *Dirshu Hashem be'himotz'oh* בהמצאו דרשו השם (Seek G-d when he is "close by"). The Hebrew word *be'himotz'oh* ב'ה'מצאו, the letter *Beis* ב and the letter ה represent the numeral 2 and 5, the second day of the week which is Monday and the fifth day of the week which is Thursday. Accordingly this means on Mondays and Thursdays is when *Hashem* is, so to speak, "close by".

In some places that follow *Nusach Ashkenaz*, they recite the Confession (*Vidui*) and the 13 *Attributes of Mercy* on Mondays and Thursdays before adding the numerous prayers to *Tachanun*. Other places that daven *Nusach Ashkenaz* add the prayers of *Ve'Hu Rachum* immediately after *Shemoneh Esrei*. They do the falling to the face (*Nefilas Apayim*) towards the end of the additions and they do not recite confession (*Vidui*) and the 13 *Attributes of Mercy*.

Others do *Nefilas Apayim* after *Shemoneh Esrei* and before the prayers of *Ve'Hu Rachum*, without confession (*Vidui*) and the 13 *Attributes*.

Laws דינים

There are many details to the laws of when *Tachanun* is recited and when it is omitted entirely or when it is recited but without falling to one's face⁴³.

Tachanun is recited while putting one's head down only if there is a sefer Torah in the building. It should be recited while seated, if possible.

If there is no sefer Torah present, then the verses are still recited but without putting one's face down. According to some opinions, even if there are other *sefarim* present in the room, one should recite it but not put his face down. Others allow falling to one's face (*Nefilas Apayim*) if there are sefarim in the room.

One should not interrupt between *Shemoneh Esrei* and *Tachanun* with an interruption that distracts one from his prayers⁴⁴.

⁴² 55: 6

⁴³ See *Orach Chaim Simon* 131

The custom is not to recite *Tachanun* when it is nighttime. However, during *Bein Hashemashos* (Halachic twilight) one still recites *Tachanun*.

On Shabbos and Yom Tov we omit *Tachanun* entirely.

Additionally, we omit *Tachanun* on:

Rosh Chodesh, the entire month of *Nissan*, *Pesach Sheni* (14th of *Iyar*), *Lag Be'omer*, from *Rosh Chodesh Sivan* until and including the day after *Shavuot*, (according to others until but not including the thirteenth of *Sivan*), *Tish'a B'Av*, fifteenth of *Av*, from *Yom Kippur* until after *Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan*, The eight days of *Chanukah*, the fifteenth of *Shevat*, the minor *Purim* both days⁴⁵, the major *Purim* both days⁴⁶.

All these days we omit *Tachanun* starting at the *Mincha* prayer of the day before.

The custom is not to recite it in the house of mourners⁴⁷. However, in a case where the mourner is in the synagogue, only the mourner himself does not recite *Tachanun*; everyone else does.

It is also not recited in the synagogue where there will be a circumcision (*Bris Milah*) taking place or if the *Mohel* (the person who performs the circumcision) or *Sandak* (the person who holds the baby during the circumcision) is present at that *Minyan* even when the circumcision itself is held at another location.

We do not recite *Tachanun* in the presence of a *Chassan* (see below).

A *Chassan* חתן (bride's groom) is exempt and he also exempts the entire *shul* (synagogue) even in adjacent rooms (provided they are not equipped with their own *Sefer Torah* and Holy Ark). This exemption is even on the wedding day prior to the

⁴⁴ *Magen Avraham* 131: 1. The Aruch Hashulchan disagrees. He says that there is no specific prohibition to interrupt as the entire prayer is an optional prayer which eventually became standard practice. Rather, any interruption will diminish the effectiveness of the *Tachanun* prayer as we find in the story of *Imma Shalom*.

⁴⁵ 14th & 15th *Adar* I, when it is a Hebrew leap year

⁴⁶ 14th & 15th *Adar* of a regular calendar year. 14th & 15th *Adar* II, when it is a Hebrew leap year.

⁴⁷ See *Mishna Berura* 131:20 that in the house of a mourner we do not recite *Tachanun* just as we do not recite it at night since it can arouse the Attribute of Strict Judgment which is prevalent at night and in the house of a mourner. This explanation is based in *Kabalistic* literature.

wedding, according to the *Gra*. The *Mishna Berura* maintains that in this case, just the *Chassan* himself is exempt, not the congregation.

On the rest of the days of the seven-day period after the wedding, the *Chassan* exempts everyone. The *Mishna Berura* prefers that the *Chassan* not come to *shul* during the entire period. Rav *Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l* commented that this applies to all days except for the day after the wedding. This is because the *Rama* maintains that on the subsequent days, the *Chassan* doesn't exempt anyone (but himself) while the *Taz* rules that he does. Since the *Halacha* is disputed, it is preferable that the *Chassan* avoid praying with a *Minyan* on the rest of the seven-day period. However, on the morning immediately after the marriage, everyone would agree that he exempts everyone and he may therefore attend *shul* without hesitation.

Questions:

- 1) Which chapter of *Tehillim* is recited for the *Tachanun* prayer?
- 2) What is the lesson that we must take from the verses of the chapter of *Rachum Ve'chanun* which discusses *Dovid Hamelech* and his encounter with *Bas Sheva*?
- 3) What is the significance of the way *Ashkenazim* recite *Tachanun* which we allude to in the prayer of *Va'anachnu lo nedah mah na'aseh* (and we do not know what else to do)?
- 4) Why do we hide our faces according to *Ashkenazic* custom? (*Rabbeinu Bachaye* 1/3)
- 5) What is added before *Tachanun* according to some customs? How is this connected with the symbolism of falling to one's face as explained by the *Zohar*?
- 6) At what point of davening (prayer) do we recite *Tachanun*? What is the source for this? What should we be careful about?
- 7) What is the preferred position for reciting *Tachanun* according to all customs?
- 8) Onto which arm is the prevalent custom to lean?
- 9) On what days of the week is *Ve'Hu Rachum* recited and according to which customs? Why particularly on these days (*Tur*)?
- 10) When is *Tachanun* said without putting one's face down according to *Ashkenazic* custom?

Answers:

- 1) According to *Sephardim* the chapter beginning *Le'Dovid eilecha Hashem nafshi essa* is recited. According to *Ashkenazim* the chapter beginning *Rachum Ve'chanun* is recited.
- 2) It teaches us to introspect and repent for our sins and shortcomings.
- 3) *Ashkenazim* recite *Tachanun* while leaning with the face to ground which is another position that we beseech *Hashem* in prayer similar to the way *Moshe Rabbeinu* beseeched *Hashem* after the *Bnei Yisrael* sinned with the *Golden Calf (Eigel Hazhav)*.
- 4) 1) Out of respect 2) Out of humility 3) To show our total devotion.
- 5) *Vidui* and the 13 *Attributes of Mercy*. It is connected to the symbolism of *Tachanun* where we show our readiness to give up our life for *Hashem's* Torah. One who is ready to give up one's life should first repent and verbally confess his sins.
- 6) Right after *Shemoneh Esrei* like we find by *Shlomo Hamelech*. One should be careful not to interrupt between *Shemoneh Esrei* and *Tachanun* with an interruption that distracts one from his prayers.
- 7) Sitting down.
- 8) We generally lean on the left arm. Some opinions maintain that when one is wearing *Tefillin* on one's left are one should lean on the right arm.
- 9) According to all customs, *Ve'Hu Rachum* is recited on Mondays and Thursdays, the days of the week that *Moshe Rabbeinu* ascended and descended the mountain to receive the second set of Tablets (*Luchos Sheniyos*).
- 10) If there is no *Sefer Torah* or no *sefarim* (Torah books) present.