

**TACHANUN & TANACH BY RABBI ALLEN SCHWARTZ**

Dear Friends,

Today we resumed a crucial if unpopular section of the daily davening, known as Tachanun.

Its omission points to a holiday, a bris, or the presence of a groom, so when it is skipped we consider it perforce, a reason to rejoice. As far as Tachanun is concerned, the entire month of Nissan which just ended, is on par with all the celebratory events above.

The Tur Shulchan Aruch suggests that we use Tachanun to fulfill the daily rabbinic dictum to momentarily imagine that this day is our last.

We fulfill this at the beginning of Tachanun when we say: Tehillim 6:6

For there is no praise of You among the dead;  
In the netherworld, who can acclaim You?

So we stake our claim to deserve another day. After this verse, we perk up with the knowledge that this is not our last day. Our backs are not to the Red Sea facing charging Egyptian chariots and archers. The theme of Tehillim chapter 6 is self improvement with the help of God. Without God we languish, we are feeble, our bones shudder and we are stricken with terror. No wonder this chapter was chosen for the term for Tachanun, known as “Nefillat Apayim”, Falling on the face. We say this bent over, the way Yehoshua prayed (Yehoshua 7:6) after suffering his first military losses. Because Yehoshua prayed before the Aron, the custom has proliferated that we only bend over the arm in the presence of a Torah.

Many customs precede Tachanun with vidui, a daily confession. This confession is in plural and includes sins the vast majority of us never violate, but we're all covering for one another. If we're all limbs of the same body then we all confess together.

Although the custom of the Ari and the Vilna Gaon was to omit this verse most versions of Tachanun open with Shmuel Bet 24:14 :

David said to Gad, “I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for His compassion is great; and let me not fall into the hands of men.”

The background of this chapter is a horrific 3 day pestilence that was to sweep through Jerusalem. The sword of the Haggadah references this story. The silent, invisible destroyer that had decimated Jerusalem was finally put down by God after only a few hours.

A larger version of Tachanun is said on Monday and Thursday in order to connect to the final 40 days Moshe spent at Mount Sinai. He ascended on a Thursday and descended on a Monday with the news of the atonement of Israel for the golden calf. We also add what amounts to a historical review of our pain and suffering through the ages, referencing a refrain of Moshe’s prayer of forgiveness at the mountain. Through all this travail, Jews have continued to turn to God.

We conclude with examples of how we have done so by saying “Shema Yisroel”, “God is One”, and “God is Holy”.

We do this every day in 3 positions. First bent over, as Moshe assumed that position at the mountain, (Devarim 9:18). Then sitting, as Moshe sat at the mountain, (Devarim 9:9). Then standing, as Moshe stood at the mountain as well. (Devarim 10:10). Tachanun replicates a number of historical events to harness the power of our greatest prophet and greatest king to help with our own travails.

We all experienced an unprecedented Nissan which is traditionally a month of rejoicing. Iyar, which has for centuries, been punctuated by mourning for Rabbi Akiva’s students, is now upon us. In more recent memory, this month has witnessed the return of our land and of a Jerusalem. Let us continue on this trajectory.

May we harness the mercies of God to shorten our own travails and help us return to a semblance of normalcy,

Rabbi Allen Schwartz