

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

נפילת אפים

Humble Before G-d

**MEANING:** The simple translation of the prayer

And [King] David said to [the prophet] Gad, 'I am exceedingly distressed. Let us fall into Hashem's hand for His mercies are abundant ... I have sinned before You. Hashem, Who is full of mercy, have mercy on me and accept my supplications. Hashem, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chastise me in Your rage...

ויאמר דוד אל גֹּד, עֵד לִי  
מֵאֵד, נִפְלֵה נָא בְיַד ה',  
כִּי רַבִּים רַחֲמָיו... חֲטָאתִי  
לִפְנֵיךָ. ה' מֵלֵא רַחֲמִים,  
רַחֵם עָלַי וּקְבַל תַּחֲנוּנֵי.  
ה' אֵל בְּאִפְךָ תּוֹכִיחַנִּי,  
וְאֵל בְּחַמְתְּךָ תִּסְרְנֵי...

**WORD TO THE WISE:** Meaning within the word



We request of Hashem ואל בהמתך Hashem, do not chastise me in Your rage. When G-d punishes for sin it is not because G-d is "offended" by the individual's wrongdoing and is "taking it out on the sinner on account of His rage". Rather, the purpose of punishment of sin is to demonstrate to the

sinner the area in which he erred. The essence of punishment is rebuke, telling the sinner, "This is your error; correct it." Hashem does not punish out of "inner rage" but from love, in order to help the sinner mend his ways (*Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Volume 1, page 21). As the verse (*Mishlei 3:12*) dealing with punishment teaches us: "For the L-rd chastises the one He loves, as a father placates a son."

**THEME:**

An essential concept of the prayer

*An Exercise in Humility*

"Falling on one's face" before G-d is an act of submission and humility which opens a path for our prayers.

**INSIGHT:**

Deeper meanings of the theme

*Stirring Compassion*

What is the purpose of the *Tachanun* prayer, in which we throw ourselves upon G-d's compassion? The function of *Tachanun*, or "נפילת אפים," (literally, falling on one's face) is to seek Hashem's forgiveness. The *Zohar* (*Parshas Korach*) teaches that the concept of "נפילת אפים" is one of *mesiras nefesh*; that one falls in front of Hashem to demonstrate that he submits himself to the King and His mercy (*Siddur Ha'Shla*).

*Tachanun* also demonstrates our sincere humility and remorse for transgressing G-d's commandments – a prerequisite for Hashem

to accept our prayers. *RamChal* (*Derech Hashem*, Volume 4, Chapter 6, Os 15) writes that the high degree of submission to Hashem that is expressed in נפילת אפים has the power to appease the Attribute of Justice and stir up great compassion. This results in Hashem's outpouring of sustenance to mankind (See *Shiar ha'Kavanos*, *Inyan Nefilas Apayim 2*, page 302).

*Tachanun* should preferably be said together with a *minyan* (Rambam; Tur). The *Gemara* (*Bava Metzia 59b*) states that its impact is maximized when it is recited after *Shemoneh Esrei*, without any verbal interruptions.

**VISUALIZE:**

Images that bring the prayer to life

*A Sign of Love*

From the day he was born, Reuven had a "short fuse." He couldn't tolerate frustration, obey instructions, finish a task or exercise any patience with friends or siblings. He was on the fast track to a life of conflict and failure. His parents knew they should try to instill some discipline in him, but they feared setting off another explosion of temper, so they



gave into his every whim.

Thirty years, two divorces and five therapists later, Reuven confronted his parents. "You didn't love me," he accused them. "You never tried to stop me from all my craziness. You just left me to do whatever I wanted!"

Unlike Reuven's parents, Hashem is an attentive Father who is willing to endure our anger and disappointment if that is what we need to grow and follow a straight path. He does not ignore our flaws; He sees them and lets us know, through suffering we endure in life, that we are on the wrong track. He prods us, sometimes painfully, to do what we must and be who we should be, and when we see our troubles in that light, we are able to accept them as our Father's acts of love.

**Try This!**

Before saying this prayer which is meant to stir humility before Hashem, think for a moment of how very difficult it is to do just one mitzvah perfectly; to hold onto one's concentration in prayer for more than a few moments; to consistently react to other people with patience and wisdom. Our constant battles against imperfection provide a powerful contrast to G-d's perfection, setting the right mood for "נפילת אפים".

**Did You Know**

► *Appealing for Mercy*

The prayer of *Tachanun* is comprised of verses of Tehillim (6:2-11) which begin with the words ה' אל באפך תוכיחני Hashem, do not rebuke me in Your anger. However, two verses, ויאמר דוד אל גֹּד and רחום ורחון, חטאתי לפניך, both of which reflect the theme of *Tachanun*, are inserted as an introduction.

King David had sinned by taking a census of the Jews in a manner contrary to that prescribed in the Torah (*Shemos 30:12*). G-d, through the agency of the prophet Gad, gave King David a choice of three punishments as atonement for his sin. The choices were: seven years of hunger; three months of defeat in battle; or a three-day death plague. King David chose the last one because that one would be inflicted directly by G-d, Whose mercy is ever-present, even when His wrath is aroused. King David's choice proved the correct one when G-d mercifully halted the plague after only half a day. Similarly, in *Tachanun*, we cast ourselves upon G-d's compassion (Adapted from *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, Page 129).