

The Conclusion of the Prayer, First meeting, *Tahanun*

She'erit Ha-Atzilut

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

This section of the service, which immediately follows the *Amida* prayer, includes various different passages: Confession; the recitation of the thirteen attributes of mercy; falling on one's face; and the supplicatory *Tahanun* prayer. What all these have in common is their focus on highly personal matters. In Kabbalistic terminology, this section is called *She'erit Ha-Atzilut* ["the remnant of *Atzilut*"], as it is a direct continuation of the *Amida* prayer, which corresponds to the world of *Atzilut*. After one has stood in prayer and thereby been granted a hearing in the inner chamber of the King, in close proximity, an opportunity is given to add a few more things of a private nature, as though whispering a secret. The Confession, in which a person lists his sins, is a matter between him and his Maker alone. The revelation of the thirteen attributes of mercy is likewise relevant to each person in accordance with his spiritual level and standing. Similarly, falling on one's face is a position through which a person can articulate the very personal matters that are at the heart of the *Tahanun* prayer of supplication, which is spoken in the intimate manner of a child crying on his mother's lap.

Confession:

It is the custom for someone reciting the Confession to strike his chest gently with a clenched fist over the place of the heart as he pronounces each item of the Confession.

אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ. תְּבוֹא לִפְנֵיךָ תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ וְאַל תִּתְעַלֵּם מִתְחִנָּתֵנוּ. שְׂאִין אָנוּ עֲדֵי פָנִים וְקִשִּׁי עֶרֶף לֹאמַר
לִפְנֵיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ צְדִיקִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְלֹא חָטָאנוּ. אֲבָל אֲנַחְנוּ וְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ חָטָאנוּ: אֲשָׁמנוּ. בָּגַדְנוּ.
גָּזַלְנוּ. דִּבַּרְנוּ דֹּפִי. הִעָוִינוּ. וְהִרְשָׁענוּ. זָדְנוּ. חִמְסְנוּ. טָפְלְנוּ שָׁקַר. יַעֲצֵנוּ רָע. כָּזַבְנוּ. לָצְנוּ. מִרְדְּנוּ. נֶאֱצָנוּ.
סָרְרָנוּ. עָוִינוּ. פָּשַׁעְנוּ. צָרְרָנוּ. קִשִּׁינוּ עֶרֶף. רָשָׁעְנוּ. שָׁחַתְנוּ. תַּעֲבָנוּ. תַּעֲרֵנוּ. תַּעֲתָעְנוּ: סָרְנוּ מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ
וּמִמְשַׁפְּטֶיךָ הַטּוֹבִים וְלֹא שׁוּה לָנוּ. וְאַתָּה צְדִיק עַל כָּל הַבָּא עָלֵינוּ. כִּי אָמַת עָשִׂיתָ. וְאֲנַחְנוּ הִרְשָׁעְנוּ:

Our God and God of our fathers, let our prayer come before you and do not ignore our supplication. For we are not so brazen-faced and stiff-necked to say to you, Lord, our God, and

God of our fathers: We are righteous and have not sinned. But, indeed, we and our fathers have sinned.

We have trespassed; we have betrayed; we have stolen; we have slandered. We have caused others to sin; we have caused others to commit sins for which they are called wicked; we have sinned with malicious intent; we have forcibly taken others' possessions; we have added falsehood upon falsehood; we have joined with evil individuals or groups. We have given harmful advice; we have deceived; we have mocked; we have rebelled; we have caused God to be angry with us; we have turned away; we have sinned deliberately; we have been negligent in our performance of the commandments; we have caused grief; we have been stiff-necked; we have committed sins for which we are called wicked; we have committed sins which are the result of moral corruption; we have committed abominations; we have gone astray; we have led others astray.

We have turned away from Your commandments and from Your good laws, and we have gained nothing from it. And You are righteous in all that has come upon us; for You have acted truthfully and we have acted wickedly.

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

The recitation of the Confession is a natural reaction to standing before God at the *Amida* prayer. After ascending and remaining awhile in the sacred chambers of the *Amida*, one stands once again before the Holy One, blessed be He, and is drawn to self-contemplation: how flawed and deficient he is, "like a broken shard" (from the *Netaneh Tokef* prayer, Yom Kippur service). The sense of shame that comes from looking at one's flaws leads to an inner need to confess and repent. The detailing of sins in the Confession is not for God, as everything is revealed and known to Him; rather it is for the person himself. In order to uproot all the evil within oneself so that he can amend his ways, he must recognize his undesirable patterns of behavior – those transgressions and sins he has committed, whether on purpose or unwittingly. The Confession also includes errors, offenses and distortions that a person has acquired from his environment or inherited from his ancestors. Although these are sometimes particularly difficult to change, everyone must do their best to rectify them.

The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy:

אֵל אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם אֱתָהּ וּבָעַל הַרְחָמִים נִקְרָאת. וְדָרָךְ תְּשׁוּבָה הוּרִית. גְּדֻלַּת רַחֲמֶיךָ וְחֶסֶדְךָ תִּזְכּוֹר הַיּוֹם וּבְכָל יוֹם לְזֵרַע יִדְּיָךְ. תִּפֶּן אֱלֵינוּ בְּרַחֲמִים. כִּי אֱתָהּ הוּא בָּעַל הַרְחָמִים. בְּתַחֲנוּן וּבִתְפִּילָה פָּנֶיךָ נִקְדָּם. כְּהוֹדֵעַת

לָעֵנּוּ מִקֶּדֶם. מִחֲרוֹן אַפָּיךָ שׁוּב. כְּמוֹ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ כָּתוּב. וּבְצִל כְּנָפֶיךָ נִחְסֶה וְנִתְלוֹנָן. כִּיּוֹם וַיֵּרֶד ה' בְּעָנָן. תִּעֲבֹר עַל פְּשַׁע וְתִמְחֶה אִשָּׁם. כִּיּוֹם וַיִּתְּצֵב עִמּוֹ שָׁם. תִּאֲזִין שׁוֹעֲתֵנוּ וְתִקְשִׁיב מִנוּ מֵאֲמַר. כִּיּוֹם וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה' וְשָׁם נֶאֱמַר: וַיַּעֲבֹר ה' עַל פְּנֵיו וַיִּקְרָא:
ה'. ה'. אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנוּן. אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת: נִצֵּר חֶסֶד לְאֱלֹפִים. נָשָׂא עוֹן וּפְשַׁע וְחִטָּאָה. וְנִקָּה:
וְסִלַּחַת לַעֲוֹנֵנוּ וְלִחֲטָאֵתָנוּ וְנִחַלְתָּנוּ: סִלַּח לָנוּ אֲבִינוּ כִּי חֲטָאנוּ. מַחֵל לָנוּ מִלְכָּנוּ כִּי פָשַׁעְנוּ. כִּי אָתָּה אֲדֹנָי טוֹב וְסִלַּח וְרַב חֶסֶד לְכֹל קִרְאִיךָ:

You are Almighty, Slow to anger, Lord of Mercy, You are called, and the way of repentance You have taught us. The greatness of Your mercy and kindness, remember this day and every day for the descendants of Your loved ones. Turn to us with compassion, for You are the Lord of Mercy. With supplication and prayer we approach Your Presence, as You made known to [Moses], the modest one of old. From Your fierce anger turn, as is written in Your Torah. In the shadow of Your wings, may we be sheltered and lodged, as on the day [of which it is stated]: “And the Lord descended in a cloud.” Remove our transgression, and blot out our iniquity, as on the day [of which it is stated]: “And He stood with him there.” Give ear to our cry and listen to our speech, as on the day [of which it is stated]: “And proclaimed the Name of the Lord” [Exodus 34:5], and there it is stated:

“And the Lord passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed:

The Lord, the Lord, God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and who clears” [Exodus 34:6–7].

And pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Your inheritance [Exodus 34:9]. Pardon us, our Father, for we have sinned, forgive us, our King, for we have transgressed. For You, my Master, are good and forgiving, and abounding in kindness to all who call upon You.

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

The thirteen attributes of mercy form a response to the request for forgiveness. These attributes, through which the Holy One, blessed be He, revealed Himself to Moses in the cleft of the rock [see Exodus 33:17–23; 34:5–7], illustrate the abundant mercies of God, who absolves and forgives us for everything – from the lightest of sins to the severest of crimes. The attribute of mercy is the noblest root of reality. In the language of the Kabbalah it is the *sefira* of *Keter*, which is above even the world of *Atzilut*. In this place, which is the level that precedes the formation of the world, all the flaws of the world are inconsequential; everything is granted atonement there, and even the past itself can change. The possibility of repentance stems from this lofty source – not only can we amend past actions, but they can even be erased as though

they never happened. This transition to the request for forgiveness and absolution, which is part of the thirteen attributes of mercy, is to a large extent the climax of this prayer. When we recite the thirteen attributes of mercy, we are fundamentally trying to attain the revelation that Moses achieved: To see the ways of God, the secret that hovers above everything, until the revelation of God's essence.

Falling on one's face:

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

Originally, falling on one's face involved bowing down and spreading out one's hands and feet, as was performed in the Temple. Nowadays, however, for various reasons we perform only a quasi-"falling on the face." The custom, based on the Kabbalists, is to sit and rest one's face on his left arm (if he is wearing *Tefillin* on his left arm, he should lean on his right arm).

The act of falling of one's face in prayer is very ancient. It is mentioned in the Torah itself, in the context of chanting words of Torah from the bottom of one's heart, and similarly in connection to requests and personal supplications. It is considered an extremely lofty form of prayer, even more so than the *Amida* and the thirteen attributes of mercy, which are recited while standing, a position that to a certain extent is representative of man's very nature. In contrast, by falling on his face, one collapses in complete self-nullification. Here, the falling on the face is a reaction to the revelation of the thirteen attributes of mercy, which cause one to bend the knees and bow (similar to Moses, regarding whom it states, immediately after the revelation: "and he bowed his head toward the earth, and prostrated" [Exodus 34:8]). The psalm one recites while falling on his face is an adoring response to the revelation.

Psalm 25:

It is the custom of Sephardim and Chabad Chassidim to recite, when falling on the face:

לְדֹד אֱלֹהֵי ה' נַפְשִׁי אֶשָּׂא: אֱלֹהֵי בֶךְ בְּטַחְתִּי אֶל אֲבוֹשָׁה אֶל יַעֲלֶצוּ אֵיבֵי לִי: גַּם כָּל קִיָּיִךְ לֹא יִבְשׁוּ יְבִשׁוּ
הַבּוֹגְדִים רִיקָם. דִּרְכֶּיךָ ה' הוֹדִיעֵנִי אַרְחוֹתֶיךָ לְמַדְנִי. הִדְרִיכֵנִי בְּאַמְתְּךָ וְלִמְדֵנִי כִּי אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹתְךָ קִוִּיתִי
כָּל הַיּוֹם. זָכֹר רַחֲמֶיךָ ה' וְחַסְדֶּיךָ כִּי מַעֲוֹלָם הָמָּה. חַטָּאוֹת נַעֲוִירִי וּפְשָׁעֵי אֵל תִּזְכֹּר כְּחַסְדְּךָ זָכֹר לִי אַתָּה לְמַעַן
טוֹבֶךָ ה'. טוֹב וַיִּשָּׂר ה' עַל כֵּן יוֹרָה חַטָּאִים בְּדַרְךָ. יְדִרְךָ עֲנֻיִם בְּמִשְׁפָּט וְיִלְמַד עֲנֻיִם דְּרָכֶךָ. כָּל אַרְחוֹת ה' חֶסֶד

וְאָמַת לְנִצְרֵי בְרִיתוֹ וְעַדְתָּיו. לְמַעַן שְׁמַךְ ה' וְסִלְחָתָ לְעוֹנֵי כִי רַב הוּא. מִי זֶה הָאִישׁ יִרְאֵה ה' יוֹרְנוּ בְּדֶרֶךְ יִבְחָר. נִפְשׁוּ בְטוֹב תִּלִּין וְזָרְעוּ יִירֶשׁ אֶרֶץ. סוּד ה' לִירְאָיו וּבְרִיתוֹ לְהוֹדִיעֵם. עֵינֵי תַמִּיד אֶל ה' כִּי הוּא יוֹצִיא מִרְשֶׁת רִגְלִי. פָּנֶה אֵלַי וְחַנּוּנִי כִי יַחֲדִיד וְעָנִי אָנִי. צָרוֹת לִבִּי הִרְחִיבוּ מִמְצוּקוֹתַי הוֹצִיאֵנִי. רְאֵה עָנִי וְעַמְלִי וְשֵׂא לְכָל חַטָּאוֹתַי. רְאֵה אוֹיְבֵי כִי רַבּוּ וְשִׁנְאַת חֶמֶס שְׁנֵאוֹנִי. שְׁמֶרָה נִפְשִׁי וְהַצִּילֵנִי אֶל אֲבוֹשׁ כִּי חֲסִיתִי בָךְ. תָּם וְיֶשֶׁר יִצְרוֹנִי כִי קִוִּיתִיךָ. פְּדֵה אֱלֹהִים אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל צָרוֹתָיו.

“Of David. To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in You have I trusted, let me not be ashamed; let my enemies not triumph over me. None that wait for You shall be ashamed; they shall be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause. Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Guide me in Your truth, and teach me; for You are the God of my salvation; for You I wait all the day. Remember, O Lord, Your compassions and Your mercies; for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to Your mercy remember me, for Your goodness’ sake, O Lord. Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He guides the humble in justice; and He teaches the humble His way. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to they who keep His covenant and His testimonies. For Your name’s sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great. What man is he who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way that he should choose. His soul shall abide in prosperity; and his seed shall inherit the land. The counsel of the Lord is with they who fear Him; and His covenant, to make them know it. My eyes are ever toward the Lord; for He will bring my feet out of the net. Turn to me, and be gracious to me; for I am solitary and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. See my affliction and my travail, and forgive all my sins. Consider how many are my enemies, and the cruel hatred with which they hate me. Keep my soul, and deliver me; let me not be ashamed, for I have taken refuge in You. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, because I wait for You. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.”

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

This psalm is a request for closeness and the establishment of a bond with the Holy One, blessed be He. Since God is the source of all goodness, when one merits to cleave to Him, good is revealed in the world and sorrows disappear. Although the psalm also mentions forgiveness, its main focus is the desire for an attachment with God, to rise up above and beyond reality, to a place where flaws, sins and foes do not exist. This why the psalm is recited when falling on one’s face, as a continuation of the thirteen attributes of mercy.

There is a danger in the recitation of this psalm, for it includes a declaration that one is willing to dedicate his soul to God, on account of which it is stated in the *Zohar* that one who recites this psalm without paying attention to what he is saying is liable to die. For this reason, the

custom of Ashkenazim is to recite a different psalm of supplication when falling on one's face [Psalm 6].

“Merciful and Compassionate One”

וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל גָּד, צַר לִי מְאֹד, נִפְלָה נָא בְיַד ה', כִּי רַבִּים רַחֲמָיו, וּבְיַד אָדָם אֵל אֶפְלָה:

רַחוּם וְחַנוּן חֲטָאתִי לִפְנֵיךָ. ה' מָלֵא רַחֲמִים. רַחֵם עָלַי וְקַבֵּל תַּחֲנוּנִי: ה' אֵל בְּאֶפֶךָ תּוֹכִיחֵנִי. וְאַל בְּחִמָּתְךָ תִּסְרֹנֵי: חֲנּוּנִי ה'. כִּי אֲמַלֵּל אֲנִי. רִפְאֵנִי ה'. כִּי נִבְהָלוּ עֲצָמַי: וְנִפְשִׁי נִבְהָלָה מְאֹד. וְאַתָּה ה' עַד מָתַי: שׁוּבָה ה'. חֲלֹצָה נִפְשִׁי. הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי לְמַעַן חֲסֹדְךָ: כִּי אֵין בַּמּוֹת זִכְרְךָ. בְּשָׂאוֹל מִי יוֹדֶה לָּךְ: יִגְעַתִּי בְּאַנְחָתִי. אֲשַׁחָה בְּכָל לַיְלָה מִטָּתִי. בְּדַמְעָתִי עָרְשִׁי אֲמַסָּה: עֲשֻׁשָׁה מִכְעַס עֵינַי. עֲתִיקָה בְּכָל צוּרְךָ: סוּרוּ מִמֶּנִּי כָּל פְּעָלֵי אָוֶן. כִּי שָׁמַע ה' קוֹל בְּכִי: שָׁמַע ה' תַּחֲנוּנִי. ה' תִּפְלֹתַי יִקָּח: יִבְשׁוּ וַיִּבְהָלוּ מְאֹד כָּל אֵיבִי. יִשְׁבוּ יִבְשׁוּ רִגְעַ:

“And David said to Gad, I am greatly distressed; let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great, but into the hand of man let me not fall” [II Samuel 24:14].

Merciful and gracious One, I have sinned before You; Lord, full of mercy, have compassion upon me and accept my supplications.

Psalm 6: “O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your wrath. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I languish away; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are affrighted. My soul also is sore affrighted; and You, O Lord, how long? Return, O Lord, deliver my soul; save me for Your mercy’s sake. For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the nether-world who will give You thanks? I am weary with my groaning; every night I make my bed swim; I melt away my couch with my tears. My eye is dimmed because of vexation; it grows old because of all my adversaries. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord receives my prayer. All my enemies shall be ashamed and utterly terrified; they shall turn back, they shall be suddenly ashamed” [Psalms 6:2–11].

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

This is a psalm of weeping and entreaty for troubles and suffering, from both external and internal sources. Although suffering atones for sins, we have no wish for it, and we ask God to have mercy on us rather than punish us. Our request for salvation is not submitted in merit of our good deeds, but rather because sometimes the pain is too great to bear. In addition, we

cannot do anything useful after our deaths – we can evoke God and thank Him only while we are still alive.

On Mondays and Wednesdays, which are days of Divine favor, we recite extra supplications and a lengthier version of *Taḥanun*.

“And He is Merciful...”

* Excerpts below from the (soon to be published) commentary on the Siddur by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:

This is a supplicatory prayer that the exile should come to an end, in all its aspects: Our persistent troubles; the distancing from God; the feeling of loneliness and the deterioration of Israel’s status amongst the nations. The prolonging of the exile is a consequence of our sins and those of our ancestors, which delay the arrival of the redemption. Therefore, we recite here verses of confession and requests for forgiveness. On the other hand, these troubles themselves cause us to stumble and sin, and accordingly we ask for salvation from all our oppressors, as only the complete redemption will bring about a genuine change in our behavior. This passage is full of verses of hope and trust in the Holy One, blessed be He – in every situation we rely on Him alone, and we are confident that He will redeem us for the sake of His great name, in the merit of our forefathers who trusted in Him, in the merit of the Binding of Isaac and in fulfillment of the covenant that He enacted with our ancestors.

“Guardian of Israel”

This section, which concludes the daily *Taḥanun* prayer, is a request that God will watch over His people of Israel, in merit of their proclamation of His unique name in the world. The people of Israel are few in number, and this remnant needs God’s safeguarding and protection in order to survive. The verse “neither do we know what to do” [II Chronicles 20:12] serves as a kind of finale to the supplicatory passages: To this point, we have prayed and beseeched God from all positions – standing, sitting and falling on our faces. Now, the only thing left for us to do is to hope in the mercies of Heaven, that He will redeem us from our troubles.