

HALOCHOSCOPE TOPI

Someone finishes *Mincha Shemone Esrei* at the same time that the rest of the congregation is ready to say *Aleinu*. Should he join them in *Aleinu*, or should he first recite *Tachanun*?

The issues:

(A) *Tachanun*; not interrupting between *Shemone Esrei* and *Tachanun*

(B) *Aleinu*; reciting *Aleinu* when the rest of the congregation does

(A) *Tachanun*

The roots of the Hebrew *Tachanun* are grace or being gracious, conferring favor and giving a free, undeserved gift. Prayers are a plea for undeserved but needed help and sustenance. The Talmud says that Tefila is not meant to be felt as an obligation or a burden, but as a plea for one's own personal good. Furthermore, the Talmud discusses adding personal *Tachanunim* at the end of one's recital of the formal Tefila of *Shemone Esrei*.

Tachanun as we know it is viewed according to most Poskim as an extension of *Shemone Esrei*. Some cite the aforementioned Talmudic discussion as the source, while others cite the reason given for the *Tachanun* itself. At the end of *Tachanun* we turn to Hashem saying "we do not know what to do ..." I.e.: "We do not deserve anything we ask of You, but know no other way to get it. We have presented our Tefilos in three ways, as did Moshe Rabeinu, sitting, standing, and prostrated on the ground." This is the source for *Nefilas Apayim*, prostration. Nowadays, people are not assured of their prayers being answered in the way that they were requested. Therefore, one may not prostrate himself. The object of prostration is to express submission and unworthiness before Hashem. Thus one sits down and covers his face. The Tefila is a *Mizmor* of *Tehilim*, which varies according to custom (*Sefard* or *Ashkenaz*) reflecting this theme.

As an extension of *Shemone Esrei*, one may not interrupt *Tachanun* even to answer *Amein*. Many Poskim maintain that it has the severity of *Shema* rather than that of *Shemone Esrei*. *Shema* may be interrupted, for a *Davar Shebike-dusha* such as *Kedusha* and *Kaddish* with varying degrees of importance at varying junctures, for certain responses. Between the end of *Shemone Esrei* and

the beginning of Tachanun, one may also not interrupt. In keeping with the view that considers Tachanun a part of Shemone Esrei, this restriction is as stringent as not interrupting during recital of Tachanun. However, the Poskim agree that at this juncture one is permitted to respond Amein and the like.

A story in the Talmud illustrates the power of interruption to disrupt the potency of Tachanun. In a debate, Rabi Eliezer stood by his convictions and refused to retract his position. Rabi Gamliel, the prince, placed a ban of excommunication on Rabi Eliezer, who was thus forbidden to attend shul and davened at home. His wife, who was the sister of Rabi Gamliel, used to prevent him from reciting Nefilas Apayim except on days when no Tachanun is recited. [Most Poskim maintain that she interrupted him in a way that he had no choice but to speak. He would then say Tachanun, but the potency was reduced.] One day she thought it was the second day Rosh Chodesh and declined to interrupt him. As soon as he said Tachanun the Heavenly court took up his cause and made Rabi Gamliel pay with his life. [See Va'eschanan 3:23, Yirmiyah 38:26 42:2 9, Daniel 9:3. Brochos 13a 16b-17a 21a-b 29b Taanis 14b Megillah 22b Baba Metzia 59b, Poskim. Tur, Shulchan Aruch 119:1 122 131:1 etc., commentaries. Otzar Tefilos. Baruch She'amar.]

(B) Aleinu

According to tradition, Aleinu was composed by Yehoshua bin Nun. Some say that upon entering Eretz Yisroel he found the inhabitants worshipping idols, by contrast to the Jews. He raised his hands in praise to Hashem for making Jews different. Others say he composed this very Tefilah when besieging *Yericho*. He recited it seven times forwards and backwards as he encircled the walls, and it was this that brought the walls down. [Some have the practice to say it seven times every day.] The name of *Hosheia*, the "small" name of Yehoshua, is included in the Tefillah as an acrostic of the first letters of the different "verses" of the Tefilah. Yet another version maintains that the first three words of the second section form the acrostic of *Achan*. He was the one who took forbidden spoils of *Yericho*, bringing punishment on the entire nation. When he confessed his sins he accepted *Malchus Shamayim*, the kingship of Hashem, with this Tefilah.

Some cite a source saying that Raban Yochanan ben Zakai composed it. Many say Yehoshua composed it, and Raban Yochanan ben Zakai instituted its recital at the termination of the services. However, in many liturgies it does not appear at this point in the regular services. The commentaries cite a source saying that Rav, the great Talmudic sage, composed it. Some explain, he was responsible for its inclu-

sion in the authorized version of the Rosh Hashana *Musaf* Shemone Esrei (*Tekiasa Debei Rav*). In some liturgies, including those cited by the early Poskim, this is indeed the only time it is mentioned as a compulsory part of the services. In other early authorized versions of the Siddur it appears as a Tefilah to be recited at the close of services year round. [It must be borne in mind that until the days of Rav Amram Gaon the Siddur was not recorded in writing. It was memorized by heart. Those who did not memorize it listened to the Shliach Tzibbur's rendition to fulfill their obligation through *Shomei'a Ke'oneh*. It was considered wrong to record Brochos and Pesukim outside *Sifrei Kodesh*. See Shabbos 115b.]

There is debate on the need to recite it at *Mincha*. Some maintain that it is said after having services including Shema. This includes the Mitzvah of *Yichud Hashem*, to pronounce faith in the oneness of Hashem. [Many cite the fact that in the first Passuk of Shema the letters *Ayin* and *Dalet* are enlarged to symbolize the fact that by saying it one bears witness (Hebrew, *Ed*, *Ayin-Dalet*) to Hashem's oneness. The same two letters begin and end both paragraphs of Aleinu, according to authorized versions.] Shema is not included in *Mincha* service. Others maintain that there are more reasons to recite Aleinu, and that nothing is lost by saying it anyhow. [Moreover, one source cited that omits it at *Mincha* actually omits it at *Shacharis* too, and only mentions it on Rosh Hashana.] Others say that it is said at the close of the services. *Mincha* is recited right before *Maariv*. There is no need to recite it after both *Mincha* and *Maariv*. Nowadays, most Poskim maintain that it should be recited after both *Mincha* and *Maariv*. However, it would appear that if one falls behind the Tzibbur in davening, such as in our case, he need not make up for missing Aleinu at *Mincha* as he will say it at *Maariv*, based on this opinion.

The object of Aleinu is debated by the Poskim. One view is to end with a testimony (two witnesses) to affirm one's belief in the *Yichud Hashem* one said during davening, and to reaccept *Malchus Shamayim* as one prepares to leave shul. This leads to varying customs on when it is to be said with relation to other parts of the end of the services. In fact, a *Bris Milah* is meant to be performed before Aleinu is recited. Today, there remains a *Minhag* to recite Aleinu after a *Bris Milah*. Another view maintains that it is partly to show that having prayed for the downfall of the wicked, it is not meant as a prayer for their destruction as much as for the destruction of their evil. Thus, we pray that the wicked should repent and return to Hashem. Another reason is to express that the Tefilos that we have davened are in the Hands of Hashem alone, the Supreme Being in control of answering them. In addition, we say that due to our uniqueness as those who worship Hashem we are

guaranteed that our Tefilos will be accepted and answered.

Aleinu, laden with deep meaning, must be said with intense concentration and awe. It must be said standing. If one did not daven with the Tzibur, or even davened with them but has not yet finished personally, he must recite it with the Tzibur. He must repeat it when he does finish himself. The reason it is said with the Tzibur is twofold. First, since it includes Malchus Shamayim, one is obliged to join with a Tzibur for it, just as one must recite the first Passuk of Shema with them. Some maintain that to satisfy this reason it is sufficient to bow and say with them the words *Va'anachnu Kor'im* etc. This is because the main reason to participate is to avoid the appearance that he does not agree to what the Tzibur is doing. Second, it is considered a lack of *Derech Eretz*, common decency, to act differently from the people around one. This is in keeping with the Talmud dictum not to remain seated while others stand or vice versa.

However, one is not obliged to interrupt his davening at a point where he is not permitted to talk (even where he is permitted to respond Amein) to recite Shema with the Tzibur. He must place his hands over his eyes to give the appearance of joining with them. In our case, the person will need to sit down and cover his face while the Tzibur recites Aleinu standing. He will not be able to rise and bow while they do so. Should he interrupt, wait (bowing with them but not saying anything), or go ahead with his Tachanun anyhow?

Since it is considered so serious to interrupt before Tachanun, according to many Poskim part of Shemone Esrei and almost as serious as during Tachanun itself, the rule should be that one should not interrupt, regardless of appearances. Indeed this is the view taken by some Poskim. If he has not yet begun Tachanun, it would make sense to wait until he is able to bow with the Tzibur before beginning. Though it has been reported that others maintain that one should interrupt to recite Aleinu first, then go back to Tachanun, no credible source has been found for this ruling. Accordingly, it would seem that one should not interrupt for Aleinu. [See Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana 1:3 Avoda Zara 1:2. Avudraham Rosh Hashana Musaf. Tur, Sh. Ar. O.C. 65:2 133:2, commentaries. Aleinu: Iyun Tefilah, Sidur Gra, Yaabetz, Seder Hayom (& S"H Mincha, from where it has been erroneously misquoted.) Tefilah Kehilchasa 15:n1. Oral report in names of R. Yaakov Kamenetzky and R. Moshe Feinstein, zt"l.]